

Leave of Absence

Friday, February 17, 2006

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, February 17, 2006

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members requesting leave of absence from today's sitting of the House: The Member of Parliament for Port of Spain South (Mr. Eric Williams) for the period February 14—19; the Member of Parliament for St. Joseph (Mr. Gerald Yetming); and also I got an indication from the Member of Parliament for Couva South (Mr. Kelvin Ramnath) who I am told is not well. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. The eightieth report of the Salaries Review Commission on a general review of salaries and other conditions of service of officers within the purview of the Commission. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]
2. Annual report of Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago for the year 2005. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

COPYRIGHT (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend the Copyright Act, 1997 [*The Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE

First Report—Part I

(Adoption)

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs (Hon. Edward Hart): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the First Report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament appointed to inquire into and report on Government Ministries with responsibility areas listed in Part I and on the Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises falling under those Ministries.

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Mr. Speaker, Members of your committee were appointed on November 15, 2002 and November 19, 2002 from the House of Representatives and the Senate respectively. The Members appointed were: Mr. Rawle Titus, Mr. Conrad Enill, Mr. Satish Ramroop, Mr. Wade Mark, Mr. Sadiq Baksh, Dr. Keith Rowley, Mr. Hedwige Bereaux, Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds, Mr. Ganga Singh, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Mrs. Eulalie James and Mrs. Parvatee Anmolsingh-Mahabir. Mr. Danny Montano replaced Mr. Conrad Enill on the committee with effect from May 27, 2003.

Your committee held its first meeting on November 29, 2002 and at that meeting Mrs. Parvatee Anmolsingh-Mahabir was elected chairman and Mr. Rawle Titus was elected vice-chairman.

The report of the joint select committee, Part I, on which this Motion is based, encompasses the period November 25, 2002 to May 31, 2004. This report covers the work of the Law Reform Commission of Trinidad and Tobago which falls under the aegis of the Ministry of the Attorney General. The report of the Law Reform Commission for the period 2000 to 2001 was laid in the House of Representatives on February 07, 2003 and in the Senate on February 11, 2003.

Section 66A of the Constitution provides this committee with its mandate, which is:

“to inquire into and report to Parliament on Government Ministries with responsibility areas listed in Part I of the Appendix and on the Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises which fall within the purview of such Ministries or which receive funding from the State of more than two-thirds of their total income in any one year on the administration, manner of exercise of their powers, methods of functioning and on any other criteria adopted by them in the exercise of their powers and functions.”

An important function of this committee is scrutiny, and under Standing Orders 79B of the House of Representatives and 71B of the Senate, the committee is empowered to study and report on all matters relating to its mandate which includes the management and operations of the ministry or body assigned to it by the Parliament. In consequence, the committee has the powers, inter alia:

- (a) To review and report on all matters relating to:
- the statute law relating to the Ministry/body assigned to it;
 - the programmes and policy objectives of the Ministry/body and its effectiveness in the implementation of same;

- other matters relating to the management, organization of the Ministry/body; and
- (b) In addition, the committee is also empowered inter alia to:
- send for persons, papers and records;
 - require the submission of written evidence and documents;
 - to examine witnesses.

Your committee represents the entire Parliament and acts as one.

Your committee, during its deliberations, made the following observations:

1. To facilitate the efficient operations of the joint select committee, a committee secretariat should be fully established with parliamentary staff dedicated only to the joint select committees.
2. To expedite the study of reports and other voluminous documents received by your committee, a team of professional research analyst personnel is necessary.

These requirements have been partially met. A secretariat has been established with offices for the chairmen and each chairman has been assigned a research assistant.

Although the committee was fortunate to have had a quorum for its meetings, full participation by all the Members in order to obtain a wider perspective on issues would have been appreciated. However, that did not deter the Members present from executing their parliamentary duties with dynamism and enthusiasm. A list of attendance of Members is attached at Appendix III of the report.

During the period under review, your committee examined the following:

1. Annual report of the Law Reform Commission of Trinidad and Tobago for 2000—2001.
2. Administrative review of the Ministry of the Environment—Programmes, Personnel and Operations, 2000.
3. Status report on the Ministry of the Environment dated December 10, 2001.
4. Status report of the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment, October 2002.

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Subsequent to these examinations, the chairman and members of the Law Reform Commission and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment were invited to appear before the committee to make oral submissions.

Your committee is continuing its deliberations on the reports of the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment and its findings would be reported in the committee's second report. On examination of the Law Reform Commission, your committee focused on the following issues:

1. Independence of the commission.
2. Inadequate physical accommodation and professional staff.
3. Merging of the Commission's library with that of the Attorney General's.
4. Lack of budgetary control.

The committee, in meeting with the officials from the Law Reform Commission, found:

1. That the Law Reform Commission was treated as a separate entity prior to 1990.
2. The space allocated in the Cabildo Chambers is inadequate.

Some of the major recommendations made by your committee for the efficient, effective and transparent operation of the Law Reform Commission are:

1. The Law Reform Commission should be a fully independent body.
2. The Law Reform Commission should have a building that meets the needs of the Commission.
3. The Law Reform Commission should be given the required financial and other resources to facilitate the process of public consultation on Bills to be drafted.

Your committee presented its first report to this august House on Wednesday, October 13, 2004 and in the other place on Tuesday, September 28, 2004. As required by the Standing Orders 71B and 79B of the Senate and the House of Representatives respectively:

“The Minister responsible for the Ministry/body under review shall, not later than sixty days after a report from a Joint Select Committee, relating to the Ministry/body, has been laid upon the Table, present a paper to the Senate responding to any recommendations/comments contained in the report which are addressed to it.”

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The response of the Attorney General, the Minister responsible for the Law Reform Commission, was subsequently laid in the Senate on Tuesday, March 22, 2005 and in the House of Representatives on Friday, April 15, 2005.

The committee studied the response of the Attorney General, took cognizance of it and agreed that a review should be conducted in the future to determine whether the recommendations of your committee, as well as those of the Attorney General, were implemented.

I beg to move.

Mrs. Persad-Bisessar: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to place on record that I had asked to be replaced on that committee and, therefore, my name appearing with it should not be entered without protest. I think Dr. Nanan replaced me on that committee.

Mr. Bereaux: Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the Motion and reserve my right to speak.

Motion seconded.

Question proposed.

Hon. E. Hart: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE
First Report
(Municipal Corporations and Service Commissions)
(Adoption)

Mr. Hedwige Bereaux (*La Brea*): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the First Report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament appointed to enquire into and report to Parliament on Municipal Corporations and Service Commissions with the exception of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the hon. Member for Tunapuna, has already elucidated on the origins of this particular committee and I shall only add to it by saying that this particular system of investigation by committees was so far unknown in Trinidad and Tobago under our law until Act No. 29 of 1999, by

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which the Constitution was amended to provide in section 66A of the Constitution, whereby the committee was mandated to enquire into municipal corporations and service commissions with the exception of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission; of course with good reason the Judicial and Legal Service Commission was excluded.

I shall only, therefore, go on to indicate the various areas in which the committee reported. The committee first held discussions with the Statutory Authorities Service Commission. It sought responses from the Statutory Authorities Service Commission on the following:

1. The independence of the Commission.

The committee was informed that the Statutory Authorities Service Commission functions independently but consults with the Prime Minister with respect to appointment of heads of departments. This is a conventional practice followed by the commission for the past 37 years. The committee requested the chairman of the Statutory Authorities Service Commission to submit correspondence which passed between the commission and the Prime Minister on Cabinet-appointed boards under its jurisdiction. To date, the commission has not furnished the information required.

With respect to judicial reviews, the committee noted that there are at present four matters before the courts against the Statutory Authorities Service Commission, one of which is in respect of procedure for consultation. By far the longest and most detailed investigation conducted by the committee was in respect of the Ministry of Education and the Teaching Service Commission. Discussions were held with respect to recruitment and vacancies, performance evaluation and promotion, discipline, school management and funding.

With respect to the Concordat, the committee had the following general recommendations:

1. that a comprehensive analysis of the Education Act be undertaken as a matter of priority, particularly in the area of student and teacher discipline, staff vacancies and promotion;
2. that promotion should not be determined solely by the interview mechanism but consideration must be given to the introduction of a supplemental multifaceted point system;
3. that the performance appraisal instrument be reviewed so as to improve its clarity and meaningfulness;
4. that a system be put in place to allow for an increase in efficiency;

5. that with immediate effect timelines be set for the delivery of certain services by the Ministry of Education, teaching service, denominational school boards and schools.

The Teaching Service Commission:

1. that the legalistic approach and bureaucratic framework within which the Teaching Service Commission operates be examined with special emphasis on securing greater effectiveness and fairness for teacher discipline, promotion and filling of vacancies;
2. that consideration be given to the full-time employment of members of the teaching service commission in order to facilitate the timely handling of matters and the increased volume of work;
3. that the current number of commissioners be increased to nine. The persons being appointed to the commission must possess specific knowledge and/or experience in certain disciplines related to the issues now seriously facing the education system and Teaching Service Commission;
4. that the number of disciplinary tribunals of the Teaching Service Commission be increased from three to five;
5. that the teaching service establish an investigative unit to investigate allegations of indiscipline, gather evidence and advise the commission. This recommendation is made in the light of the heavy administrative and investigative demands placed on the Teaching Service Commission;
6. that the Teaching Service Commission be provided with its own administrative staff similar to that of the other service commissions.

In respect of the Ministry of Education, there were several recommendations:

1. the committee strongly recommends that the process of decentralization be accelerated;
2. that principals be given more authority in managing their schools, but this must be done within a system whereby there is regular and continuous assessment of principals by supervisors;
3. that an immediate survey be conducted to identify the number of vacancies at the school supervisor level;
4. that additional training of principals and school supervisors be undertaken. There were also recommendations in respect of denominational schools and the teaching service in Tobago.

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To conclude, in this report the committee has focused upon the Teaching Service Commission and in so doing has been able to interact with the main players responsible for the education system in Trinidad and Tobago. It was gratifying to the committee, as legislators, to fulfil our constitutional mandate and to put forward recommendations which are intended to improve the education system, the benefits of which would redound to the present school population and future generations.

I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the Motion so ably raised by the Member for La Brea and reserve my right to speak later in the debate.

Motion seconded.

Mr. Speaker: Before I propose the question for debate, I understand that the police commissioner has given permission for certain members of the public to march around the Red House and, as such, that noise would probably disturb some of you; it is certainly disturbing me, and if you add to the noise, then it makes my job a little more difficult and it certainly makes the person who is on his feet presenting the Motion a little uncomfortable. So I would ask you, as far as possible, if you must converse, do so in soft tones.

Question proposed.

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (Fyzabad): Mr. Speaker, I was wondering if you would prefer to hear the noise from inside than outside. I am sure you would.

As I listened to both my colleagues, the Members for Tunapuna and La Brea, I could not help reflecting on the intent of this committee when it first came into being. One of the things was to really look at how the different commissions perform, including the corporations and, of course, the only exception was the Judicial and Legal Service Commission. This was a joint select committee and I do not have to explain what that means. But what is very interesting is that the composition of these committees from the early days to this present time always has a majority of Government Members. It was done so to make sure that the Government policies are noted at all times.

The first observation I wish to place on the record is that there seems to be a concerted effort by the Government to suffocate these committees; to prevent them from doing what they were intended to do. I want to qualify that statement by looking at the attendance of Members of this committee to the meetings. The only person who obtained 100 per cent attendance was the chairman of this

committee, Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosaran. The second highest attendance was that of the Member for Fyzabad and the lowest attendance, 21 per cent, came from a Member on the opposite side. I do not wish to identify the Member because the report is here. The second lowest was also from the other side; so was the third and fourth.

Why am I raising this? The Members for Tunapuna and La Brea made the point that attendance was an issue. But if the Government Members are the majority and they are not attending, what do you understand from that? It simply means that they have no interest in making sure these things happen. That has been so for many years under the PNM. In fact, that may have contributed in a large way to what is going to take place in Trinidad and Tobago on Sunday, when there is going to be the largest assembly of people who are going to be treating with the abuse of Government power. Here you are seeing the need for it. Many thousands would be going to a place in Central where there are no facilities.

The first meeting took place in November 2002. There were 19 meetings, and the last meeting took place on May 13, 2005. My friend, the Member for La Brea, identified some of the matters that were dealt with so I will not repeat those. But I first want to treat with some of the powers of the committee. One is to examine witnesses, and you have seen—because it has been published both in the print and electronic media—witnesses refusing to attend and, in many instances, refusing to give information.

“The committee can send for persons, papers and records.” There is always that challenge, because there is a tendency that once the PNM government is in power there is that lack of cooperation. Many persons think that the PNM would protect them and as a result they do not have to attend. In fact, there was a previous occasion with another committee appointed by this Parliament, where a witness said: “I do not have to”. And that was the end of it.

“Adjourned from place to place”: One of the challenges committees have is that this is the only meeting place. The days that the Parliament sits, you cannot sit on those days, so you have to restrict your time; plus it is the same staff that services the committee, although there is an adjoining Chamber that has been promised for the longest while. So to move from place to place is always a challenge because it is the staff of the Parliament who have to make the arrangements and accompany the committee. Of course, there is always that shortage of staff and the ability to move around. Funding for the committees is also a concern. I am sure in your capacity as Speaker it would have been drawn to

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your attention. So you want these committees to perform a very critical role for the country's development but they are being suffocated right here. And by whom? The Government. You have seen their attendance and their participation.

“Appoint specialist advisors either to supply information which is not otherwise readily available, or adjudicate on matters that may concern the committee.”

Again, a cost has to be incurred. The funding for that does not exist. So here it is, the Parliament sits and appoints a committee but does not give it the resources to do its work.

“Communicate with any committee of Parliament on matters of common interest.”

It is no secret, because, again, it has been published in the print media—I read it—and I am sure it was on the electronic media as well, where collectively, chairmen of committees have raised their concerns about resources, attendance, a number of issues and to date, in true typical Government style, nothing has been done about it.

2.00 p.m.

One may argue that the committees are independent but the funding for them comes from the Government. They may meet with other committees from time to time, share ideas and take evidence. There is very little room for that. These committees need an independent place to meet so that the work can go on for more days and longer periods. They need committed and dedicated staff. Oftentimes we overburden the staff of Parliament to get them to assist us. The question of secretarial assistance must be committed and available at all times. When a member of a committee wishes to obtain any assistance to prepare for a meeting, it takes time to get it simply because the Parliament's staff is overworked. The independence of the committee is very important but it could only be treated with if it gets the resources.

Some matters which came to our attention were raised by the Member for La Brea. One was recruitment across the board. This story has been told in the reports of committees for a number of years and there has been no corrective measure. Committee after committee talks about recruiting, performance evaluation and promotion. The country cannot be faced with this all the time. We submit a report and say the same things over and over. Why are we debating this report? To draw it to the attention of Members, or to make noise here? I am sure that is not the intention. It is to ensure that corrective measures take place.

With regard to school, the question of school management and funding come up time after time. To date, nothing has taken place. A simple thing like the school boards took a long time for some of them to be appointed and to date some of them have not been appointed.

As it relates to recruiting and vacancies in the schools, there are 593 schools with more than 350 or 60 per cent acting appointments, some of which are up to seven and eight years. These matters have been drawn to the relevant authorities including the Ministry of Education. We are told that they are looking into it. It affects the smooth running of the schools. The Ministry of Education will advertise these vacancies in the newspapers and within the school system over and over. On one hand, they advertise for principals and these interviews take place, but you see nothing about it.

When applications were received they were forwarded to the Teaching Service Commission but for some reason they were delayed again. We were told that they were delayed at the level of the ministry, which of course is at government's level. Where candidates are shortlisted suddenly, that is changed. There was an article in the newspaper of a particular person acting as vice principal at the San Fernando Government Secondary school for a number of years. From that same school the head dean was sent to another school as acting vice principal and within six weeks, the person moved from acting vice principal to confirmed vice principal to acting principal to confirmed principal. That is how the PNM operates. That is a total shame. The Government sits there and that is normal. That is how we do it in the PNM and if you do not like it, get out. That is why we are seeing what we are seeing. It translates to the national community in the high rate of murder, crime, teenage pregnancies and drug abuse. The Government must not dismiss this. It is a waste of time. Look at the size of this report! Debate it for what?

Interviews were conducted in 27 key areas which were fixed by the Ministry of Education in relation to the needs of the secondary school system, but not yet treated with. For instance, at the primary schools there have been 7,106 positions of Teacher I. This statistic was supplied to the committee. Up to 2005, 46 vacancies were to be filled. There was a noticeable difference in respect of vacancies in the administrative level as there were 220 vacancies in the 449 available positions of Principal I. There are vacancies for Principal I and the Government delays the appointments. Why is it delayed? The answer is a very short one. The PNM tries to fit persons who are connected to the PNM. In the Canadian or British system it is a straightforward approach. The delays are

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artificial. The Government wants to ensure that people who support the PNM, whether in a party group or village council, get these positions. It has nothing to do with ability or whether somebody has a degree in education, meets the requirements, or in the case of schools boards, even where they recommend the principals. The boards must agree with the appointment of the principal. This Government is on record for having turned down the recommendations of a number of boards as it relates to the positions of principals.

I am very impressed that I recalled that from my head. Now I will confirm it. Page 7 of the report says, for those of you who have the report. Notice that nobody on the Government's side came with the report because they have no interest in this. I am really wasting my time.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Who said so? That is not true.

Mr. C. Sharma: Thank you.

“The process of filling vacancies at the senior administrative levels of principal and vice-principal was one of the major areas of disagreement between the Association of Denominational School Boards and the Teaching Service Commission.”

Why does this exist?

The officials representing the various Boards were unanimous to have the vacancies filled. They meet all the requirements, submit them and no action takes place.

“The Committee noted that the procedures outlined in the Education Act and the Concordat did not provide an adequate mechanism for conflict resolution apart from court litigation...”

The Teaching Service Commission advised the Committee that other than the name of the applicant recommended by the particular Denominational Board, no other information or material was forwarded by the Ministry of Education.”

This is where PNM, Opposition and Independent Members sat. They want to make a little noise no different from the noise outside. It is a concerted effort by the Government to frustrate the process and you want to spend millions of dollars in social welfare programmes.

With regard to a policy for advertising vacancies in primary schools, the committee was informed that this was left to each board. The Presbyterian Board indicated that advertisements for entry level teaching positions were placed in its

newsletters. The representative of the Catholic Board stated that the need for their board to advertise did not arise since every year they were flooded with applications immediately after O and A Levels.

The education and needs of the school children are the responsibility of the Government. The Government does not do them a favour when it treats with it. It is taxpayers' money that does it. Now the Government wants the board to advertise. All that has to be done is that vacancies exist and advertisements are placed by the Government. You see the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources at a cost of \$10,000 to \$12,000 advertising in all the daily newspapers, including the weeklies. The sum of \$321 million is going for PNM propaganda and they cannot spend a few dollars to advertise for teachers to educate our children.

This Government needs to get out of office. It is a total waste of time. Look at the cost to the country! You want the Maha Sabha and Presbyterian boards to place their advertisements. For what? To obtain teachers. To teach whom? The children of our nation. What a sad state our country has reached. I cannot help but see the need for this rally that is going to take place on Sunday. The abuse of Government power. It is very clear that the country needs to rise up and tell the Government that enough is enough. Instead of the Government spending money on advertising the vacancies for teachers and filling the posts of principals, you are seeing, move out the Red House. I have just made the point that we do not have enough space to meet here, but the Prime Minister wants to get the Red House for himself.

Money that should be spent on education is being spent on discriminating against public servants, the classic case of Marlene Coudray, Devant Maharaj and a host of others in every sector of the society. The Government has not built a single school but it is trying to take away the piece of land by the President's house. It is not for a school to educate the children of our nation but for recreation.

In the middle of the night the Government removed the National Entrepreneurship Development Company (NEDCO) from the purview of the Parliament. You want to fund NEDCO but not the school children. Where will the children become educated to borrow the money from NEDCO? They moved it from the freedom of information. We talk about recruiting and that will cover the police service. One must never forget the sworn affidavit of Assistant Police Commissioner, Dennis Graham. That was really a conflict of interest that should never have taken place.

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I want to talk about performance evaluation and promotion as it relates to schools. Officials from the Ministry of Education informed the committee that the ministry was currently in the process of performing a strategic review of the role and function of school supervisors in an attempt to treat with issues. The Ministry of Education has supervisors but they are now reviewing what they do. Every time the schools raise a problem, they say not to worry, the school supervisors are looking at it. They are not treating with the problems.

Today, schools are being closed down because water is not available. Within an hour if there is no water schools can be dismissed. Why must this exist? What prevents a school principal from calling a private contractor to supply water for him or her to run the school? The Government does not support that. They prefer the school to be dismissed; teachers are left with very little to do; the lunches which are delivered for 11.30 a.m. are thrown away and the caterer has to be paid.

“The Committee noted that the staff reporting system in schools had collapsed and this had a deleterious effect on performance and promotion...”

They noted it based on the evidence given by witnesses. The Government was not aware. Having become aware they did not treat with it. Some of the factors that contributed to it are:

- “(i) The unwillingness of principals and school managers to be honest and give a negative assessment of members of staff under their jurisdiction because of a fear of scrutiny by the courts as a result of the judicial review process;”

This is a very interesting point. People fear the PNM Government to the point that they will not perform their duties. This is a very sad state. What does it manifest itself into? It manifests itself into the situation our country finds itself in. Everything around us is collapsing. Crime has taken over. The MORI Report showed that 87 per cent of the population is concerned about crime, the highest ever in any country. In the corruption index we have moved from 39 to 59 under the PNM. Great is the PNM; it shall always prevail. Corruption, murder, rape, you name it.

- “(ii) The undue delay in the implementation of the new Performance Management Appraisal Process (PMAP) System.”

A system has been put but has been delayed by the PNM Government. For what purpose? To treat with their friends. Let us explore some of the new criteria for promotion to the position of principal.

“From the evidence presented to the Committee, it was quite evident that there was some misunderstanding in respect of the effective date of implementation of new criteria for promotion to the position of Principal...”

There is a consideration that principals should have a degree in education. There are persons acting as principals for 7 and 10 years; persons in the system for 30 years and you want them to go to university to obtain a degree in education. It is a good thing. You have to treat with those. Both in the United Kingdom and United States, most of the top universities—one of the largest universities is the University of Phoenix and they have an online programme—will award credits for those persons. For instance, a teacher with 30 years service and is acting principal will need 130 credits to obtain a Bachelor’s Degree and because of the 30 years experience, they will consider the award of half the credits. The ministry has no interest in that. During the meetings some of those things were raised. The important thing to take place is that the best persons are selected, but when their names are forwarded, you see a concerted effort by the Government to delay them. I have identified the reason they are delayed.

“In its consideration of the Report of the Teaching Service Commission for the year 2001, the Committee noted with great concern that only two (2) disciplinary cases had been dealt with by the Commission for that year.”

What does that tell us? Is the Government happy with that? The Government is one of indiscipline. The Government breaks the rules all the time. There is not an area in which the Government does not break the rules. They learnt from the Government.

“This statistic was rather surprising, especially in light of the fact that the system comprised more than fourteen thousand (14,000) teachers and the many complaints that have been brought to the attention of the Committee.”

This must not be seen as an attack on the teachers. Knowing the PNM that is the first thing they would say.

“The Committee also found that the report of the Teaching Service Commission in the area of ‘teacher indiscipline’ was unclear and unhelpful in determining the actual number of transgressions reported and/or finally resolved.”

What is the purpose of the Government? One is to establish policies. They cannot apply simple policies. It is a free for all.

“The Committee is of the view that this matter is critical for effective school management and student learning and therefore recommends that in future reports, the Teaching Service Commission should provide detailed statistics

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that are clear and unambiguous and which would be much more meaningful for the purpose at hand.

From the evidence adduced, the Committee concluded that the mechanisms for disciplining teachers were not functioning as effectively as they should in terms of expediency, documentation, investigation, hearings and determination.”

The Privileges Committee of the Parliament seems to be more effective. We were able to suspend a Member of Parliament for 126 days in a short period of time. The committee concluded that the machinery for disciplining teachers was not functioning. Maybe we should teach them something; 126 days without pay.

“Further, the Committee was advised that there were statutory regulations which mandated investigating officers to report within thirty (30) days.”

This is a very interesting thing. Within the shortest period of time the Privileges Committee was able to report and suspend a Member. The Teaching Service Commission that is responsible for our country—Member for Diego Martin Central this should interest you. A Member from on that side said that the Member for Fyzabad misled this House and moved a motion. Do you see how the PNM operates? When it suits their needs they can apply any law and get away with it. Simple majority. “I eh get pay yet, eh.”

“The Committee learnt that in accordance with the Regulations, several reports were forwarded to the Teaching Service Commission for action. However, there was no time stipulated for action to be taken by the commission.”

This is a concerted effort by the Government to stop the functioning of any system that can add value to this country.

“The Committee also advised that in many cases, teachers remained suspended with full pay or half pay for excessively long periods without having the disciplinary charges against them resolved by the Teaching Service Commission.”

What is clear from this report is that the Government continues to abuse the process. How does it do it? I have identified a number of areas: by not allowing the system to function independently; not funding it and giving it support.

On the question of transfers:

“The Committee, having received correspondence which dealt with ‘transfers’, enquired whether transfers were used as a form of punishment or as a mechanism to discipline teachers.”

Transfers should never be done for this purpose. Today in 2006, this is how the PNM treats with transfers. This is not only in the teaching service but also the police service.

“The officials from the Ministry of Education and the Association of Denominational School Boards both confirmed that transfers were only effected at the request of the officer who is being transferred. However, it was pointed out that the situation at a school had to be intolerable for such a teacher to request a transfer.

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Officials from the Ministry of Education indicated to the Committee that the Ministry recognized the need to build support for the Principals in order to create a peaceful atmosphere to facilitate learning in schools and as a consequence, the Ministry had initiated several strategies, which included:

- i. filling the many vacant positions of Dean to deal with indiscipline;”

That is a very important point. In many of the schools there is a long delay in the appointment of deans. Earlier I raised the employment of school security; this is lacking. In many schools you have seen incidents where persons from the public go to the schools and attack teachers and students. On numerous occasions we on this side have raised the question of security in schools.

Much has been said in the report about absence from the system for different reasons. We have raised the question of substitute teachers. If a teacher has to be away from school due to accident, death in the family or to go away for surgery, there is no system where a replacement can be sent to that school. Form V students might be preparing to write CAPE or CXC; the teacher has to be away and there is no system to send a replacement teacher. The school has to manage with its existing staff.

The Committee was told about the establishment of the post of dean. The Committee discussed the role and effectiveness of deans in reducing student misbehaviour. Officials from the Ministry of Education advised that almost 10 years ago Cabinet was part of a pilot project for the secondary school system to establish 199 positions of dean. To date, those 199 positions have not been filled.

Ten years ago the Cabinet agreed to fill 199 positions of dean. Those were not filled. The Government saw the wisdom in having deans in schools. The committee welcomed the information that within recent times Cabinet created an additional 1,500 positions of dean. Here you had 199; they could not be filled; you created 1,500 positions and, to date, they have not been filled.

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The Government is not showing a desire to treat with the challenges of the system.

“The Committee was advised that one of the main obstacles in making appointments to the position of Dean was that parties involved are yet to agree on whether teachers who are appointed as Deans should have regular teaching schedules or should be used as substitute teachers when the need arises.”

When you thought about establishing the positions of dean, you did not decide what will happen. That still stays and it is not effective because the ministry has not given clear direction whether persons appointed as deans should have regular teaching schedules.

2.30 p.m.

If they are being appointed deans, then they would have to be away from classes on regular occasions and, as a result, there should be teachers to pick up the slack. The representatives of the boards expressed very strong views to the Committee on the role of the Concordat. The committee was informed four years ago that the association conducted a review of same and came up with certain proposals that have not yet been treated with.

“Officials from the Ministry of Education indicated that an in-house Committee was established within the Ministry with a mandate to examine all dimensions of the Concordat and the relationship between the Ministry of and the Denominational School boards”. So that in previous times it worked very well, but of recent times there has been a lot of challenges, and for some reason the Government is delaying in taking the necessary actions.

“During the discussion on the concordat, the question arose as to whether in the opinion of the various Boards the Concordat superseded Education Act or the Teaching Service Regulations. Representatives of the Board agreed that the Concordat was not a statutory document, whilst the Education Act and the Teaching Service Regulations were and could be enforced legally”.

I come to the question of funding. The committee enquired into the method of the disbursement of funds from the Ministry of Education to the boards and the distribution of these funds when received. The committee was informed that as a general rule, applications for funding for school repairs were forwarded through the boards. The funds were received and distributed by the boards. On too many occasions we see where schools have to be closed down because funds did not come on time. And the simple corrective measure to it is simply to understand—and the Government has the know-it-how, it has the engineers, it has the

carpenters and the electricians—to visit the schools on a timely basis to identify what corrective maintenance work needs to take place. There should be no situation where a school, because of electrical problems, has to be closed down. If you examine it on an ongoing basis then that would never arise and it goes for a number of other areas in the school; sometimes a simple thing as installation of water tanks in a school. If that is treated with, then you would be certain that there would always be a supply of water in the schools.

Some of the other issues raised: psychological testing. The committee discussed the question of psychological testing for teachers and was informed that at present no system exists for this. But over the years, in all the teaching service systems that are available now in North America, USA and elsewhere, that is part of the testing that is available, and for years it has been raised by persons in education to become a reality and still the Government is not seeing it fit. Representatives of all the major stakeholders, however, agreed that this was an option worthy of consideration. And for the longest while it has been on the drawing board.

Mr. Speaker, the committee noted the increasing trend of litigation against the service commissions. We are seeing much of this happening of late and rightfully so, because once someone feels that he is not being treated fairly and squarely, then he has a right to go. But the question is oftentimes before it gets there it is drawn to the attention of the authority; in this instance, the Ministry of Education, the Teaching Service Commission, the Police Service Commission and so forth. Too often persons feel that their rights have been interfered with or they are not being promoted for one reason or the other, or they are transferred without consideration, and there should be some system within both the Police Service Commission and the Teaching Service Commission and wherever this applies to treat with those issues so as not to burden the court system. In addition to that, when you do this, you really open a can of worms for more and more of it to happen.

“Over a period of Twenty-five (25) years the Teaching Service Commission has had twelve (12) matters before the courts. Since these judgments may have strong significant repercussions on the administration and functions of the Teaching Service Commission, the Committee is now reviewing these judgments with a view to making appropriate recommendations in a future report.

From the evidence before the Committee, it was clear that there are extremely serious problems facing the education system.”

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Let me repeat that, Mr. Speaker:

“From the evidence before the Committee it was clear that there are extremely serious problems facing the education system, especially in respect of the role and functions of the Teaching Service Commission.”

And this relates to the handling of teachers’ indiscipline, staff vacancies, promotion and school management on the whole as they can no longer be tolerated.

Mr. Speaker, here it is the system is crying out for matters to be treated with, simple matters: the question of staff vacancies, the question of promotions, the question of school management—and the Government has the resources, it has the ability, but for some reason it seems not concerned in the least bit. It is most unfortunate that these matters appear in these reports year after year, report after report.

Mr. Speaker, if it is the aim of the Government to take this country to 2020 Vision, this First Report of this Joint Select Committee must be treated with and the Government must demonstrate that the Report was laid in the Parliament, it was debated and these are some of the actions to be considered. Otherwise, all the persons appearing before these Committees, all the witnesses, all the reports we are compiling, would amount to zero because too often—in fact, when the Member for Tunapuna presented the First Report, one would have noticed there was no debate simply because it has become a habit of the Parliament to lay the report and the Parliament has come to recognize, and persons on the outside have come to recognize, that no follow-up action takes place. But it is our responsibility to draw it to the attention of the House.

Let me treat with some of the recommendations. Having reviewed the evidence, the committee is extremely concerned with the administration of the education system in Trinidad and Tobago. Having reviewed the evidence—the committee are Members of this Parliament and Members from the other place and they are extremely—strong words—concerned with the administration of the education system.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate, as I indicated earlier, the first meeting took place in 2002; the last meeting took place in 2005. Over a three-year period, the committee sat and listened to all the evidence, read all the letters that were sent and received by all the persons who appeared in front of us and concluded that the committee is extremely concerned with the administration of the education system in Trinidad and Tobago.

Therefore, in keeping with the terms of reference and with the general objectives of improving the operations and functions of the Teaching Service Commission, the committee now makes the following recommendations:

- “(i) that a comprehensive analysis of the Education Act be undertaken as a matter of priority, particularly in the areas of student and teacher discipline, staff vacancies and promotion.”

Without the committee making this recommendation the Government should see it as its duty to have started this process. To date, nothing of the sort is taking place.

- “(ii) that promotion should not be determined solely by the interview mechanism, but consideration must be given to the introduction of a supplemental multifaceted points system which will enhance the efficiency, fairness and transparency of the process.”

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

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move, in my capacity as Chief Whip, that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Fyzabad be extended by 30 minutes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it has been moved by the Chief Whip that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Fyzabad be extended by 30 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Sharma: I thank my colleague for moving it in that capacity, and I suggest in the future, in any other capacity, move it for me.

It is nice that we can talk this way, Mr. Speaker. Let me get down to some serious work.

I am suggesting to the Government that the recommendations of this committee are worthy of your most serious considerations and that some implementation should take place.

Mr. Speaker, I was on the question of promotion. Too many teachers, too many acting principals and vice-principals, too many recommendations from the board are saying and have demonstrated very clearly that the process of promotion needs to be revisited to make sure that fairness and transparency obtains and we ask the Government to make sure this takes place.

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“(iii) that the performance appraisal instrument be reviewed so as to improve its clarity and meaningfulness;”

Again, the Government has promised to do this but it has not taken place to this date.

“(iv) that systems be put in place to allow for an increase in efficiency and shortening of the lag-time for the handling of matters by various agencies.”

This is a very important point I raised earlier, that there is no timeframe, and we must—there are teachers suspended for two, three and four years. In fact, there are instances where teachers are so frustrated by the waiting process of their suspension that they went on to study law and other areas which is very good, and they moved on. So that a teacher who is suspended must know the suspension is going to be for a period of 38 days or 45 days by which time corrective measures or the correctness of the situation would be treated with.

“(v) that with immediate effect, time-lines be set for the delivery of certain services by the Ministry of Education, the Teaching Service Commission, and the Denominational School Boards and Schools.”

Mr. Speaker, I want to draw your attention to a few matters:

“After careful consideration of the evidence, the committee found that there were several mitigating factors which prevented the work of the Teaching Service Commission.”

It goes on:

“The Committee further noted that this body was not only constitutionally charged with making appointments to the Teaching Service, but was also responsible for exercising disciplinary control over Teachers. Therefore in an attempt to transform the Teaching Service Commission into a more pro active and service oriented institution with greater emphasis..., the committee recommends:

(i) that the legalistic approach and bureaucratic framework within which the Teaching Service Commission operates be examined with special emphasis on securing greater effectiveness and fairness for teacher discipline, promotion and filling of vacancies.”

Throughout the report you are seeing this occurring again and again. Simply put, the time has come when teachers must know where they stand as it relates to their teaching profession. How are promotions done? How are matters of indiscipline treated with? How are vacancies to be filled? How are transfers to be taken? It

must not happen by accident, it must not happen at the whim and fancies of any government at any given time.

“(ii) that consideration be given to full-time employment of members of the Teaching Service Commission...”

This is a very important consideration. Here are 14,000 teachers and if you are going to have a teaching service commission—I think, the membership is five sitting from time to time, it should really be full-time and it obtains in the United Kingdom and in most of the states in the United States.

“(iii) that the current number of five (5) Commissioners be increased to nine (9).”

I hope the Government takes note of it because the workload increases and the challenges increase. You have 1,000 teachers; the need for management is more and more demanding.

“The persons being appointed to the Commission must possess specific knowledge and/or experience in certain disciplines related to the issues now seriously facing the Education System and the Teaching Service Commission;”

Mr. Speaker, this reminds me of an appointment made at the Central Bank where it was thought that the person appointed was not in keeping with what was required. Again, the point here is “that persons appointed to the Teaching Service Commission must possess specific knowledge and/or experience in certain disciplines related to the issues now seriously facing the Education System and the Teaching Service Commission.” Also, that the persons responsible for looking at disciplinary matters be increased from two to five.

“(v) that the Teaching Service Commission establish an Investigative Unit to investigate allegations of indiscipline, gather evidence and advise the Commission.”

Very important, so that within the Teaching Service Commission they should be given the power, the resources, the support staff to establish an investigative unit to investigate allegations of indiscipline, as I indicated.

“This recommendation is made in light of the heavy administrative and investigating demands being placed on the Teaching Service Commission;”

So we are seeing the workload that has kept increasing for the Teaching Service Commission, but what we are not seeing to match it up is support from the Government.

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“(vi) that the Teaching Service Commission be provided with its own administrative staff, similar to that of other Service Commissions.”

After so many years in Government, the Government should see it fit that the Teaching Service Commission is, perhaps, one of the more important service commissions in the country simply because it deals with the future of this country, it deals with the children in excess of 400,000 who are at our close to 600 schools, and every attempt to demonstrate support must be made available.

Mr. Speaker, a few points I want to raise on the Ministry of Education.

“The Committee recognizes that the Ministry of Education as the central and most important institution responsible for the education system in Trinidad and Tobago, particularly since this is the entity that provides funding.”

The Committee is making the point that most important is the Ministry of Education, and one of the largest roles it performs is providing the funding.

“The Committee likens the role of the Ministry to that of a large conglomerate, with the Minister of Education as its CEO.”

In reviewing the submissions made to it orally and in writing, the Committee found that the Ministry did not function with the transparency control that it should. The Committee found this based on the persons who appeared, based on the numerous letters, based on the evidence provided.

“The Committee also recognized the limitations and sometimes unforeseen circumstances which hinder the progress and realization of the Ministry’s stated objectives. Since the Committee will be meeting with officials from the Ministry of Education, the committee’s recommendations focused mainly on systems, implementation. These now follow:

(i) the Committee strongly recommends that the process of decentralization be accelerated in order to provide supervisors and administrators with the necessary authority to supervise schools under their charge.”

A very simple thing. Let there be centralization so that schools within a particular geographic area can be better treated with its administrative support staff.

“(ii) that principals be given more authority in managing their schools...

In the year 2006, simple little matters have to obtain the permission or the blessings of officials at the Ministry. So here you have a school, a principal, for instance, a senior comprehensive school, the student population is close to 1,000 plus students, the teachers are in excess of 100 teachers and the principal is

limited in discharging his or her duties. Like a CEO, she should have full authority, certainly to consult with, certainly to obtain assistance or advice, but allow the principals to manage their schools.

“(iii) that an immediate survey be conducted to identify the number of vacancies at the School Supervisor level...”

Could you imagine this? The committee has to make this recommendation. The committee has to now do the work of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education must know at all given times where the vacancies are, when somebody will retire. I think in the Teaching Service a supervisor goes home at age 60, so you would have that evidence on a computer—all supervisors in the year 2006, seven would attain the age of 60, if 60 is the retirement age. But the committee, because of all the evidence that came to it, is making the recommendation that an immediate survey be conducted to identify the number of vacancies. This is the year 2006. We want to go to 2020 Vision. And the purpose for it; is in order to determine the effective ratio of school supervisors to the schools in any given electoral district. Simple mathematics! You must know what obtains and if you want, look at what obtains in the United States, look at what obtains in Britain and make a comparison to localize it as the case might be.

“(iv) That additional training of Principals and School Supervisors be undertaken as a matter of priority;”

Why must the committee have to make this recommendation? This must be the work of the Ministry of Education; that training must be an on-going requirement. Here it talks about school principals and supervisors. Very important, that for the recruitment of teachers, there must be background checks.

Every effort should be made to attract more male teachers in the teaching service, both in Trinidad and in Tobago. In fact, what obtains now in the teaching service is that close to 75 per cent of the teachers are female and the fallout from it is that in the schools they are not seeing any role model fathers or male role models. And, many persons have spoken about this so we need to make sure—one of the recommendations made is that there must be a system that obtains up front. For instance, a young man or woman who wants to become a teacher must know what is the system that obtains in Trinidad and Tobago. Presently, there is no system. One either goes to the board to enquire whether he can become a teacher or register with the Ministry. There should be some qualifying requirement so one could know that X number of O’levels is required, some background check and some assessment examination be taken so this person becomes a possible candidate to become a teacher.

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“(vi) that a ‘needs assessment’ be conducted to determine the number of diagnostic and remedial teachers, child psychologists, counsellors and social workers required to effectively address the need of the current school population;”

Mr. Speaker, this has been going on for years and no corrective measures. This is why we are saying, and I am saying that it seems as if the Government does not want the system to function. Further down it says:

“(vii) that a job evaluation exercise be undertaken to determine the terms and conditions of employment which are required to attract and retain senior and experienced administrative and technical officers in the Office of the Minister of Education and the Director of Personnel Administration;”

But the Government should have seen this as a requirement. You need to attract the best minds, you need to attract the best persons, you need to retain them, and as a result you need to engage in a package but not just a package that talks about financial compensation, but one which talks about training, about scholarships, one which talks about possibilities after your contract has ended to make sure you attract and retain the best.

“(viii) given all the implications for promotions, discipline etc, the new performance appraisal system for teachers should be implemented urgently and fully with effect from 2005;”

We are now in 2006 and, to date, nothing has happened as far as I am aware.

“(xi) that a system of performance accountability should be developed for each school with specific emphasis on areas of student academic improvement, discipline and participation in extra-curricular activities. The system must also include accurate records of teachers’ punctuality and attendance;”

The question that begs is: What is the Government doing? The more you listen to this report, the more convincing it is that the Government does not want the system to work. It does not want our children to benefit from the best education system. The Government’s answer to it is: “Provide school lunches”, and that is the end of it. No recreation facilities, no teacher-training, no improvement, no incentives. The Government has no interest. They want to keep people down so that they will fool them down the road with a house somewhere, a CEPEP job, with a URP job and hope that they vote for them. This is how the

Government intends to move this country into 2020. This is the Committee's report. This is not Sharma's report. I am sure the PNM would love to have that.

Mr. Valley: The Privilege Committee should have been more efficient and suspend the report for a longer period.

Mr. C. Sharma: I am sure the PNM would love that. You are there today, but tomorrow you would be elsewhere.

“(x) that there should be continuous performance audits on the work of Deans with a view to reducing delinquency and violence in schools;”

Mr. Speaker, I am sure you are horrified at the number of reports of school violence. You are horrified by the number of teenage pregnancies of school children; you are horrified by the number of accidents within the school system. What is contributing to it? What are some of the measures that could be taken? The largest contributor to it is the Government for its lack of intelligent action, because it is very clear that all of these things are happening under the watch of the Government. So it boils down that the Government is not doing its job.

Mr. Speaker, I want to look a bit at the boards. I would start off by saying the Committee was very impressed with the forthright manner in which the representatives of the boards made their submissions. Of all the boards we met: the Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, the Maha Sabha, the Islamic board and I am sure there are others, they are very committed to the education system. Many of us have benefited from the education board schools. What they lack is the support from the Government because when you look at the schools which are performing in the country, in fact, there was a survey done—I am not sure if it is the Ministry of National Security. The majority of persons in the prisons in Trinidad and Tobago came from schools other than the board schools.

When one looks at the scholarship winners in the country, they come most times from the board schools. It then seems that the board schools are doing a very good job. So all that is required is for the Government to give more support and, perhaps, putting some of the Government schools under the management of the board schools. That might work very well and it might be a win-win situation. You might be able to reduce the violence in schools, you might be able to reduce teenage pregnancy.

How often do you see a 13-, 14- or 15-year-old girl, a daughter to one of us, a sister to one of us, giving birth to a child, and then you see a 19 year-old with three children? Is that what the Government wants to promote? The Committee recommends:

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- i that provision be made to strengthen the consultative role of the Association of Denominational school Boards;
- ii that some system for conflict resolution between the Associations of Denominational School Board, the Ministry of Education and the Teaching Service Commission be put in place and that the system include some form of redress or appeal to the Ministry of Education or to an independent arbitrator, particularly with respect to promotions in Denomination Schools;

The school boards are begging to perform. They are saying let us bring the best minds together and the Committee is recommending it. What is the Government doing about it? This report is for the Government to implement. If it were for the Opposition to implement one would have seen a lot of changes already.

- iii that with regard to the filling of vacancies in denominational schools, primary consideration be given to the recommendation made by the boards in the final choice of candidates;”

A very interesting observation! Why is the committee made up of PNM, UNC, Independent making this recommendation?

- iv that with regard to the filling of vacancies in denominational schools, primary consideration be given to the recommendation made by the board in the final choice of candidates.

So here you have the boards that are required by law to make the recommendations, and the Government is saying, “I am not pleased with your recommendations”. Why is the Government not pleased with the recommendations? Because the Government wants to put its friends and supporters. They do not want to treat—This is a disgrace. In the year 2006, the Government is still trying to man, control and the Government tells them if they do not agree with it, “I will cut your funding”. I will give you no money for new schools. This is a Government! This is not a government for the people of Trinidad and Tobago at all. This Government has no interest in the education of our children and the sooner we get rid of this Government it would be best for this country. This is an abuse of power.

That the boards adopt a less—and here they are talking about how the board should deal with the Ministry of Education and the Teaching Service Commission. Basically, the boards are becoming frustrated. The Government is

doing everything to frustrate them and in that frustration they are unable to deliver as they want to.

I will be failing if I did not take a look at some examination of the teaching service in Tobago. On the other side there are some Members who taught in Tobago, some with very poor records but that is another matter. Mr. Speaker, the committee did visit Tobago.

“At its first meeting in Tobago held on Tuesday, August 10, 2004, the Committee heard numerous complaints and learnt of the severe constraints faced by administrators, teachers and students in Tobago.”

I know oftentimes, the point is made that the Members for Tobago East and West do not represent Tobago in this House. Here it is at the first meeting held in Tobago in August 2004, the committee heard numerous complaints and learnt of severe constraints faced by the administrators, teachers and students in Tobago. This is what the committee heard in Tobago; a committee that is made up of PNM, UNC and Independent, so we did not write this in there.

3.00 p.m.

It was, therefore, particularly reassuring in the circumstances to hear of the vision and plans for the education system in Tobago from the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly, Mr. London. So, you see, what obtains even in Tobago seems to be a little worse.

“The committee is of the view that Tobago is unique because of its separation from Trinidad, which makes it far removed from the institutions of the education system, namely, the Ministry of Education and the Teaching Service Commission. While Act No. 40 of 1996 sets out the framework for the education system in Tobago, the Committee is aware of the fundamental difficulties in the system that exists”.

It is only fair that the committee then make some recommendations:

- “i. That the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) Act No. 40 of 1996 be reviewed with a view to amending same to provide for delegating greater autonomy and authority to the Chief Administrator over appointments in a similar way that the Commissioner of Police has been given such powers by the Police Service Commission.”

This has been on the drawing board for a while. In fact, in the other place, one of the members on this committee has been talking on this for the longest while. That is why I made the point that the Member for Tobago East and the Member

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for Tobago West have never raised this in this House—at least I do not recall it being raised. The Teaching Service Commission would have to implement a system of checks and balance over such delegation. In addition, the THA and the Ministry of Education should develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for administrative framework to oversee the delegation of power.

We went way down. We said that this could be done. These are the checks and balances. Let us get it going. We met with a number of people in Tobago and with the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly and that was their consideration.

“ii That the Division of Education of the THA implements a strategic plan with emphasis on attracting, recruiting and keeping Tobagonians in the Teaching Service Commission.

Very important.

Mrs. Job-Davis: Is anything happening in Fyzabad?

Mr. C. Sharma: Two “roof” blow.

“iii. that the Teaching Service Commission review the employment and reporting practices of the Division of Education in Tobago with a focus on ensuring that the system is open, transparent, fair and effective;”.

Mr. Speaker, are you not disturbed by this observation? The entire country is. What does that say? It says that PNM corruption is across the board—both in Trinidad and in Tobago.

Imagine that in the year 2006, we are being told that there must be focus on ensuring that a system is open, transparent, fair and effective. So, when the Opposition talks about discrimination, abuse of power and lack of transparency, you see where this is coming from. It is across the board. This is a dangerous development.

“iv that representatives of the Denominational School Boards in Tobago receive a list of all applications for teaching positions from the Division of Education....”

Imagine that! There is a shortage of teachers they are trying to recruit and the recommendation is coming out that representatives of the boards in Tobago receive a list of all applications for teaching positions from the Ministry of Education. Why is that list not being given? Well, the short answer to it is that

the PNM Government wants to put whom it wants. They do not care about systems. They do not care about transparency. They do not care about fairness.

Here are the reasons:

- “iv. ...so that their recommendations could be forwarded in a timely manner, thereby improving the levels of transparency in the recruiting process in Tobago;
- “v. that particular consideration be given to the special training needs of Tobago teachers;”

Are you telling me that the committee now has to make this recommendation? This should be an ongoing matter.

- “vii. that at least one member of the Teaching Service Commission be a Tobagonian, residing in Tobago;”

This is Trinidad and Tobago. The PNM is about division. The committee has to make this recommendation? *[Interruption]* I will do it when I come back.

- “viii. that more modern library facilities be strategically installed in Tobago and the existing ones be upgraded on a phased basis.”

Here is a government spending \$34 billion, talking about 2020 vision and our library facilities in Tobago are neither here nor there. What are they doing?

Mr. Speaker, with the limited time available to me and with a report of 770 pages, obtained after meetings from 2002—2005, it is difficult to do justice to it.

In closing, I ask that the Government to give serious consideration to this.

The Minister of Housing (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a few observations on the contents of those on the other side who seek to put the Opposition’s position with respect to the First Report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament appointed to enquire into and report to Parliament on Municipal Corporations and Service Commissions with the exception of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission. I would have ignored the ramblings of the Member for Fyzabad, except that to do so would be to leave the parliamentary record unsatisfied and others coming later would believe that the position taken by the Member for Fyzabad somehow represents some issue of fact in the governance of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me begin by saying that those on the other side, whatever faction they belong to, have a penchant for speaking from both sides of their mouths. When

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they do that, it leaves the listener with the difficulty of trying to figure out what exactly is their position. The same way they cannot decide who is their Whip, their stick, their “dhantal” or whatever it is; who is their leader and their chairman, we cannot determine the position of the Opposition because they do not take any position on principle; they take positions on convenience.

Today, the Government is accused by the Member for Fyzabad of not taking action with respect to certain responsibilities that lie with the Teaching Service Commission. However, if at any other time somebody had raised in this country that the PNM Government had intervened in the business of the Teaching Service Commission, this same Member would have been the first to come in this House and give us a treatise on how the Teaching Service Commission is an independent body that came into being for the specific purpose of preventing the Government from interfering in the management of the teaching service.

So, in one breath, they want to acknowledge the existence of the Teaching Service Commission as an independent body to insulate the management of teaching affairs from the Government, but when there is a shortcoming in there, rather than come out as a Member of Parliament and talk sense—if there is some problem there, we are Members of Parliament we can identify the problem and say it needs to be addressed, but that does not sit with their intellect. The Government has to be blamed. So what should rightly be placed at the doorsteps of the independent Teaching Service Commission, today we hear that the Government should have done this and that, but if the Government had dared, it would have been accused of violating the Constitution because it is overstepping its bounds and interfering in an independent commission.

What are we supposed to do but ignore them while they carry on their internecine warfare? I will tell them a story. The story is told of two snakes that ate each other and left two tails. That will be the UNC. When they try to interfere in the governance of Trinidad and Tobago; whenever they try to speak about the governance of Trinidad and Tobago, they end up speaking foolishness. So the Government did not do what the Teaching Service Commission was supposed to do.

The Member brought the debate so wide. Taking it to his personal troubles, he talked about being suspended for over 100 days. He did not say why. He was suspended by the wider House for lying to a parliamentary committee. That is a fact. It was the House that suspended him; not the PNM. A vote was put to this House and he was suspended. I asked my colleague just now if he knew the meaning of the word “recidivism”.

Mr. Speaker: I think the House suspended him for misleading the Parliament. Perhaps you would want to say that.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat that. The House suspended him for misleading the Parliament. I am saying that he stopped at the point of saying that the House suspended him, giving the impression that some wrongdoing took place.

I was talking about recidivism. One would have thought that after that experience, one would have changed one's attitude. That is the idea behind punishment. There is a whole treatise written on crime and punishment—I am watching him—but he comes here today, takes up the report in front the media and the whole world and says that the Teaching Service Commission is not being able to do these functions because of lack of funding.

I ask my colleagues on the other side to point out to me the page in this document where it is said the Teaching Service Commission fails to function on the issues raised or any issue because of lack of funding from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

That sounds good. It makes news. To the uninitiated, they will say that the problem with the teaching service and teachers—we have many issues—is lack of funding. Nothing is further from the truth. That is not an issue in this report. *[Interruption]* But of course! Say anything because it sounds bad for the Government, because it is to be held responsible and, therefore, as long as you attack the Government, whether true or untrue, it is a useful tool. That is their principle or lack therefore. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, when you hear of a lack of moral and spiritual values, underpinnings of all kinds, you understand why they have these difficulties, because on the simplest matter, a report before the House, they come here and misrepresent about lack of funding for the Teaching Service Commission. Where is that in this report? *[Interruption]* He cannot help it.

Mr. Speaker, he accused the Government of wrongdoing and shortcomings with respect to denominational boards. Where is that? In our country, because of our history, there was a time when the State was not a participant in education and education was run by the denominational boards. Then, at a certain point in our development, the State assumed responsibility for education, but the establishment was the churches and the church and the State came together and established a document called the Concordat, which outlined the role of the State and the role of the churches with respect to education. As far as I am aware, that document is still in existence, even though its existence was disregarded by a UNC government. They behaved as though the Concordat did not exist.

3.15 p.m.

Rather than acknowledge their wildness and their irresponsibility, he comes here today—seeing in the report some of the problems associated with denominational boards and instead of recognizing those problems as problems that come out of the fact that we do have in our education system denominational boards with limited resources, but maximum responsibility—and attacks the Government and says that these shortcomings in the denominational boards are as a result of the Government. Nothing is further from the truth. He goes further and makes the reference that the Government is doing all kinds of things, but not doing certain things in schools.

Recently, you would have heard the reaction of the Servol leaders to the Minister of Education, over a matter with pre-schools. Let the Government go in and try to get involved further with denominational boards, whether it is the Maha Sabha, the Presbyterian, Anglican or Catholic board, and overstep its boundaries in one of those boards and see what the Government would be accused of by the same Member. These boards are integral and are recognized in our education system by the Concordat. The Government goes beyond, contrary to what he had said here this afternoon about the Government's shortcomings in dealing with these boards. The Concordat calls for a certain role for the Government. But because the churches do not have the resources, the Government goes beyond the call of the Concordat and takes up the responsibilities belonging to the boards, so as to ensure that the children in those schools are properly served, but he would not say that. He would come here today and say that the Government is suffering and starving denominational boards, when in fact the problem is that denominational boards are struggling to fund education in the modern economy of Trinidad and Tobago and it is an issue which we have to look at.

His recommendation—I do not know if he is speaking for the party or himself—is to put more state schools under the church boards and you would not get teenage pregnancies. That is the logic of the MP for Fyzabad. Of course, it is a point of view. He has expressed his point of view or their point of view. When he was a minister of government or when they were in government, we did not hear that policy. That has to be policy on the hoof. We did not hear it at all. They had six years to put government schools under church boards. That was not even mentioned, as far as I am aware, but this afternoon to waste and take up Parliament's time he comes with a policy that the thing to do to fix the education system is put state schools under church boards, totally oblivious to the fact that there are series of changes now being made by the State to treat with the State's issues in treating

with the problems in our modern education system. They do not see any of that. They do not hear any of that; it does not serve their purpose. He gets up in the Parliament and misrepresents and accuses the Government of shortcomings in the church school management systems.

“The Government should put out ads for teachers in the Catholic and Presbyterian schools”; where did that come from? Where and when did that come? When the UNC was in government for six years how many ads did they put out for teachers in the Maha Sabha, Catholic or Adventist schools? None! The church boards manage the selection of their teachers. They screen them and go after them. They know who they want. That is the role of the boards: to bring their people to their denomination and to manage their schools and the State acknowledges that by way of the Concordat. A Member of Parliament comes into the Parliament, using a report of the Parliament, to make those misleading and damaging assertions in a society like ours where it can fracture so easily, along the lines of these divisions. He is talking about the State not advertising for teachers and that is what is holding up the process and causing the schools not to have teachers. That is totally misleading. But it is not his fault; it is those who allow him to speak in this Parliament.

In a debate on the first report about service commissions, in a discourse on teachers, he made a comment which I have to address. I do not know what was the relevance of the comment, but the comment symbolizes the Opposition's behaviour. He said that we in this Parliament must take note of the sworn testimony of DCP Dennis Graham. It is not the first time that the Opposition has come into this Parliament to seek to champion some cause of senior police officer, Graham. When they raised it the first time I was concerned, because at the time when, in seeking to bolster their position and arguments over there, the matter was before the court and, in our understanding, the sub judice rule is that no comments should be made which could have the effect of influencing the outcome of a court matter.

While Dennis Graham was putting his testimony in the courthouse, the Opposition Members were in here providing support for him vocally. However, I said nothing then but now that the matter has been dispensed with and this sworn testimony of DCP Graham has failed in the court and he has lost his case in the court we have a Member of Parliament coming here in a debate today and making reference and asking us to take note of the sworn testimony of Dennis Graham, where Dennis Graham went to the court and told the court that his transfer by the

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Commissioner of Police was politically motivated. That failed in the court, but a Member of Parliament comes here today and carrying on that foolishness.

Rather than be concerned with the fact that in a situation in this country, where criminals are running the show, the Commissioner of Police, who is charged with the responsibility of managing the police force, to be able to respond to the criminals, transfers his deputy. Instead of going as the commissioner says, he went to the court with his sworn testimony, according to my friend from Fyzabad, and the sworn testimony had no merit, because he lost the case. Rather than be concerned about that; that the Commissioner of Police cannot transfer his officers and a senior officer, who should be a part of the management of the police service, is going to the court and playing the fool, he comes here and says to us today to take note of Graham's sworn testimony. I say take note of what! Take note of the lack of cohesive management in the police service, where a senior officer, instead of doing his duty, goes to the court and loses his case and incurs cost for the State. What we should be taking note of is the fact that Graham and my friend from Fyzabad make a habit of going to the court with foolish arguments, losing their cases and running up serious costs for the public, because it is the public purse that pays for their folly and nobody recovers those costs.

Today, since he has asked me to take note, I want to ask the Attorney General to take note of the fact that Mr. Graham lost his case in the court and I want to know if costs were attached to that. If they were, I want to know that the Attorney General will collect every cent of it. Whilst at it, every case lost by my friend from Fyzabad, where costs have been awarded, I want him to collect every cent. As a taxpayer, my money is not to pay lawyer to go to court to argue foolishness. My money is to buy medicine for the hospitals and chalk for the schools. Collect the costs! As they go to court with their political arguments, when their politics fail in the courthouse and costs are awarded the Attorney General must collect the costs.

Mr. Speaker, you would shudder to know how many millions of dollars in costs have been incurred by the State to defend spurious and malicious political cases taken to the court in Trinidad and Tobago in recent times. He comes here and says to take note of Graham's sworn testimony; testimony that the court dismissed. But, of course, we have a police service where the commission cannot transfer a constable.

We have a situation here right now, where the Government owns 10 dilapidated houses down in Four Roads, government-owned houses, occupied by junior police officers. The Cabinet takes a decision to condemn those buildings and to replace

them by modern structures to house 80 families. There are 70 families outside there waiting for those houses. Ten police officers in the houses are saying: “We are not moving until the Government pays us.” That is what is going on here today. That could only go on because the Commissioner of Police cannot transfer Officer Graham, because a Member of Parliament will come to the Parliament and ask the Parliament to take note of Graham's failed testimony. Police constables looking on could decide to blackmail the State, make demands on the State and defy the Cabinet and deny people houses, because they are not moving from the condemned Government houses until we pay them substantial sums of money. That is what is going on in this country. If the Member is seriously concerned about doing something for the country and making his appointment useful do not come here and talk about taking note of Graham's testimony, come here and support the Commissioner of Police, who must be given the authority to manage his men. [*Desk thumping*]

I emphasize that as a taxpayer, the Attorney General must collect the costs when costs are awarded to the State where matters are taken, for political purposes in particular. When an officer goes to court and tells the court that he has been transferred because of politics, because he failed to carry out a political directive; he failed to carry out a political directive and the court found no such thing, let him pay the cost. He must pay the cost.

Mr. Speaker, he used the opportunity—

Hon. Member: The Member.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Is it a she? The distinguished Member from Fyzabad used the opportunity to invite us and the rest of the country to a rally on Sunday. I am invited to comment on that. [*Interruption*] I do not have to come because the rally is to discuss a court case. We do not have to go wherever they are meeting. They said that they have no running water and toilets. We do not have to go there for that. What they want us to do to please them, is to agree that Dr. Chandra Naryansingh was not murdered, she committed suicide. Let us finish the story right there. She committed suicide. [*Interruption*] No, the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad is inviting us to a rally, which has been publicized that the main point of the rally is the defence lawyer in a court case is going to talk about abuse of Government power. He, this afternoon, accused the Government of an abuse of power. We do not have to go to the rally. They want us to please them.

Again, I want to point out, Mr. Speaker—I know you are not thin skinned, so I crave your indulgence for a little latitude to be critical of my Chair, not you. While this matter was before the court, I am going on record again, I sat in this

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Parliament and I heard Members of the Opposition attacking the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) without a substantive Motion. The rules of this Parliament specifically says that to make a comment of the nature of which has been made about the DPP, requires a substantive Motion to call into question the conduct of a judge or the Director of Public Prosecutions. No such Motion was made, but on numerous occasions, a large number of Opposition Members, time and time again, came into the Parliament and waylaid the Director of Public Prosecutions and one wonders whether there was method in their madness, whether he was supposed to be frightened of them and, therefore, not act. When the case was dismissed, as he was dismissed under strange circumstances, the defence lawyer advised the DPP not to appeal. The Director of Public Prosecutions has shown that he has the fortitude to hold the office that he holds and he appeals. That means I expect Members of the Opposition to continue attacking him.

My friend from Fyzabad spoke this afternoon about not observing rules. If you are to continue to attack the DPP please bring a substantive Motion to the House and let us all debate it; outside of that, attacking the Director of Public Prosecutions in this House is a violation of the Standing Order. It has happened time and time again in this House.

While the case was being tried, there were Members of Parliament in here making comments which could have the intention of influencing the outcome and that too is out of order. Today, while the matter is on appeal by the State, seeking justice for a doctor who smiled and was murdered in cold blood, Members of Parliament are inviting you to a rally where the defence lawyer will come and tell you what the killer said is a lie. If that is your standard then keep it, but do not invite us to join you in that heinous behaviour.

I went to Bishop's High School in Tobago and I invite all of you on the other side to get a copy of the letterhead and you will notice that it makes reference to moral and spiritual values. We did not make up that. You are inviting me to a rally where a defence lawyer is coming to tell me that one of the most heinous crimes in the country is a political matter, while the appeal is pending at the Privy Council. That is out of order and it must not be encouraged in this country.

We are a decent people and we must show decency. I do not care who supports it. If it is wrong, it is wrong, it is wrong, it is wrong! The Opposition in this country is supporting that foolishness. You have a murder, the police are doing their work, Opposition Members attacking the offices of the State, strange judges doing strange things, appeal for the Privy Council and the Opposition is taking a position and inviting me to join them.

Mr. Speaker: You have made a comment there about strange judges doing strange things. Just as how one is not supposed to attack the Office of the DPP, be very careful that you do not attack judges, except under a substantive Motion.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I have not attacked any judge. I am attacking the dispensing of justice in generalities, and as a Member of this House I preserve that right. I am sent here by the people of Diego Martin West and if I want to speak about the dispensing of justice in this country, I can do so. If I want to attack a particular judge I require a substantive Motion. I have been in this House for 20 years and I know my rights. *[Interruption]* I am saying the dispensing of justice. Understand what I am saying. Mr. Speaker, I am not asking anybody on the other side to agree with me. I am talking to you. They have gone beyond recall.

They are inviting me to a meeting where the lead speaker is before the courthouse, the second speaker is their deputy and is before the International Ethics Committee and the third one is looking for rice that never reached.

Mr. Imbert: There is a next one before the court too.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: The vice-chairman has not brought our rice as yet. As far as they are concerned nothing is wrong with that. That is quite all right. Forgive all of that. Dismiss all of that, because the objective is to move the PNM. Understand that.

Mr. Bereaux: Sleep with the devil.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: You do not have to invite me to your meeting on Sunday because when Ramesh was coming to the PNM I told the PNM, when he come I gone. *[Desk thumping]*

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Chief Whip, I like you.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, you know you cannot take them seriously. In his wanderings, after his 130 days sojourn in the wilderness, he came back here rambling through this report, which I suspect he did not read. If I know him well and I know him very well, he did not read it. He goes to Tobago and starts attacking the Government about underfunding of Tobago. Mr. Speaker, one of the key things that got them where they are over there was the UNC's underfunding of Tobago. You may recall they had two Tobago Senators and when those Senators stood up for moral and spiritual values as for their grandmother's instruction, they were summarily fired. There are firing and dismissals taking place now. They are behaving as though it is news; but it is not news, it is a habit.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: That is their history.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: That is their history and behaviour. They first dismissed the two Tobago Senators, causing a certain amount of friction in their camp. They went further, in an attempt to squeeze Hochoy Charles out of office, they so starved the Assembly for funds that the THA cheques were bouncing in Tobago and, as a result of that, THA and Hochoy Charles could not explain the devil that they were sleeping with and Tobagonians put them out of office. That is their history. Go and ask Hochoy Charles and the Tobagonians and read the newspapers. He comes here today, at a time when Tobago is receiving the largest amount of support it has ever received—[*Desk thumping*]

Tobago has two PNM MPs and 11 Members elected to the THA. He comes here today and says that something is wrong with the PNM's service of Tobago. How can you take them seriously? They say whatever they have to say if they think it is going to score them political points and that is why, if I may quote the Chief Whip—is whip, whimp, “dhantal”, stick or bull pistle, same thing—where you do not have principle and where you subscribe to no value to the point—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Singh: I did not say that.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I am paraphrasing you. I do not have to quote you verbatim. Basically, what he was saying is that one needs to have some kind of principle to operate against, because without principle you are entitled to do anything. You look at the weathervane to see which side the vane is and you turn in that direction; stand for nothing, represent nothing and, therefore, can say anything and, therefore, have no value. I do not want to interfere in their internal affairs.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure you too read the newspapers and you would see what they represent. When you stand in this Parliament to lecture me and attempt to cast aspersions on the PNM, remember that we have our record and so do you, and your record makes a sorry sight. You on the other side cannot even in jest invite us, because we are not of the ilk that you can invite like overtures of something to do. There are those for that; not us. When you come with a report with contents and the contents are contents of fact, Members ought not to come here and seek to represent what is not in the report, so as to give the public the impression that the report contains these nuances which warrant chastisement.

This report represents a coming together of all the difficulties that existed in the Teaching Service Commission and other commissions for years. The way he talked this afternoon, one gets the impression that before the PNM came into office

the difficulties outlined in this report were not there and they only got there after the PNM came into office so, therefore, those who are examining the Teaching Service Commission have found this report and therefore that is an indication of what the Government is not doing. Nothing is further from the truth. There are some inherent difficulties in our system, not the least of which is the functioning of the Teaching Service Commission itself.

The next thing you will hear, Mr. Speaker, if you listen loudly enough, is as they talk frequently about reform of our Constitution, on a day when honesty prevails on their side, they, too, will be saying that with respect to the reform of the Constitution and its provisions, that things like the Teaching Service Commission need to be re-examined. What you have is authority without accountability and that goes back to our independence documents. But today we are having some difficulty living with those situations. Therefore, on this side, he keeps saying that some of these difficulties, not all, because some are management difficulties, incompetence and reporting systems, but at the end of day we do have some structures and strictures which need the attention of the Parliament. If, in fact, they wanted to contribute to the Parliament playing a role, instead of coming here and giving me off-the-cuff comments about putting state schools under church boards to prevent teenage pregnancy, one would seriously present some kind of a position as to how the Parliament should treat with anachronistic institutions in a modern society.

We in this House know that the appointment of a teacher is like pulling teeth, while the vacancies are there. We know that the vacancies are there and in some instances people are waiting to do the work and to be appointed and appointment is a long road like an Olympic march, because all kinds of systems are in place, because there are people who are more concerned about form than substance. We see it all the time; defending the indefensible, because it defends the empire. I do not want to be critical of any individual on the commission, but I would be the first to acknowledge that the commission's role, functioning and efficiency is something that should attract the attention of the Parliament and all Members of the Parliament, because we are not getting the results we are supposed to get; the schools are being affected and they are not producing the kind of citizens that we expect to produce, given what we are putting into our system.

In terms of input to our system in Trinidad and Tobago, we are not lacking; in terms of overall input whether it is human or financial, we are riddled with difficulties all the time and one gets this aggravation, *jhanjhat*, and argument all the time and one gets the impression that something is not right at all times.

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Usually, when one examines it, one finds a system failure. But in our society, we have a punishment for being individualistic; we blame individuals: is Manning, is Rowley, is Sinanan, is Panday, but the system that we operate requires that we all look at it, where our functions call on us to do that and parliamentarians have to take the lead.

We must take the lead in rectifying faulty systems. That is why I am supporting the Commissioner of Police, with respect to managing his men. I have not time for police officers who think that their manager is in the courthouse, no time, because once the management instructions are coming down from the court then there are those in the system that say: "Okay, since the judge is making the ruling let him manage the system." That results in a fall in morale in the entire organization. Once the morale is low, those who want to work will not work, those who did not want to work will cause confusion and at the end of the day, the purpose for which the organization came into being would be defeated. That is why I was so surprised to see a Member of Parliament coming here today, raising a discounted argument and a discounted and discredited testimony of a senior police officer in presenting his case to the Parliament, if only to try to embarrass the Government.

My friend from Fyzabad, you have not embarrassed the Government, you have embarrassed yourself and your party and you provide no support for the police service. You could provide support for misguided officers. God knows we have enough of those and they will get no support from me, regardless of whatever rank they may hold, whether it is deputy commission or constable, because that is part of the problem in the country; people tend to give office precedence over responsibility.

You get into a post and if you ask them at the end of the day what have you done for your day's work they cannot tell you, but they can tell you what office they hold and full of self-importance and get nothing done. The public pays for work to be done and work is not done. At the end of the day, they have X thousand this and X thousand that, paying X millions of that and we are no better off than we were before because we are losing sight of the wood for the trees. That is why my colleagues on the other side ought not to take the position of supporting wrongdoing in this country; whether the wrong doing has to do with murder or delinquent policemen. They ought not to do that, because it serves no useful purpose at the end of the day; none whatsoever.

If they believe that makes them popular, it makes them popular only in the eyes of a few, because the majority expect better from their Members of Parliament. I

expected that after the trials and tribulations of my friend from Fyzabad, when he came back in the Parliament he would be a changed and chastened man, but it appears as though nothing has changed, business as usual. *[Interruption]* I could not have entered the debate and said these things if he had not introduced them. Nothing has changed.

This report is full of all kinds of opinions and findings and it falls to the Parliament to decide how we are going to treat with these things. Some of them are ministerial responsibilities, but there are other aspects of matters which do not fall only to a ministry.

One last thing I want to make mention of is that the Member was very vocal about committees and their attendance. Parliamentary committees are not meant to be inquisitions. I observed some of these committees. Some of the public officials who come before these committees find themselves being humiliated by Members of Parliament and that ought not to be. Parliamentary committees are meant to assist in the governance of the country, not to promote oneself as a Parliamentarian or to humiliate public officers who come before you. As soon as members of the committees understand that, the effectiveness of some of those committees will improve and then they may contribute to the governance of the country.

I have seen members of those committees shouting at public officers, placing questions to them in staccato versions, one after the other, before they could answer and then concluding that: "You are a failure and a waste of time!" People have feelings. If you hurt my feelings in that way, I cannot cooperate with you. I am sure that does not prevail in Parliaments where decency is the yardstick, but in our young Parliament where committees are new to us, it seems as though the showoff gets to the top, makes the evening news, embarrasses the chief executive officer, makes outlandish statements about accountability and gives the impression that money was stolen, when in fact there are simple explanations for these matters. If that is what committee means in this Parliament, it does not contribute to an orderly governance of the country. Why would I want to use the word "orderly" with my friends on the other side?

Mr. Speaker, the committee system can make a contribution to the Parliament, but there is a lot that has to be done in this Parliament, in the country's Parliament, before the committee system can really make any serious contribution. The report is very detailed. I wonder how many Members in this House read the report. What I expect is more of what we got from my friend from Fyzabad, which is get up,

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make statements, throw accusations, cast aspersions and then sit down. What I have said is for the record only. The PNM Government will not sit idly by and allow itself to be targeted and presented as responsible for other people's responsibilities and to accept blame for things that we have not done. Whatever we do as a government we do not expect that every person in the country would agree with everything we do. We will acknowledge dissent, but when we have not done something we will not accept for a Member of Parliament to come to the Parliament and put on *Hansard* that the Government has done so and so, when in fact the Government has not done so. Today, I deny all the allegations about the Government's shortcomings with respect to the denominational boards and the Teaching Service Commission. Those allegations are without merit, without foundation, irresponsible and quite provocative and they come from a Member who is ill-informed and governed by malice.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Dr. Adesh Nanan (*Tabaquite*): Mr. Speaker, I enter the debate which states:

“Be it resolved that the First Report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament appointed to inquire into and report to Parliament on Municipal Corporations and Service Commissions with the exception of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission be adopted.”

We heard from the Member for Diego Martin West today about the situation in Tobago. Before I get there, I want to clear up some misconceptions that he brought into the debate. In his contribution the Member said that the UNC government ignored the Concordat. That is absolutely false. I want to correct, for the record, that as former Minister of Education, a committee was set up to review the Concordat. I see the Member for Diego Martin Central is smiling, because I am sure he is well aware of that.

This report that is before the Parliament this afternoon shows quite clearly that the Minister of Education is a failure. I would go on to show that, because the report speaks of failures in the Ministry of Education. In this report there is a report from the Teaching Service Commission of an application for a teaching position. All the information was sent to the Ministry of Education and all that was sent from the Ministry of Education to the Teaching Service Commission was the name of the applicant. Does that not show poor performance from the Ministry of Education? The Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West gave us a picture that we are here as parliamentarians to scrutinize and advise. The

report shows clearly the Minister of Education's poor performance. In every area in this report I will show the House this afternoon. One wonders why the Member went into education in such detail. I have a feeling that in the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West's sojourn in teaching there were serious allegations of his conduct in Tobago. That is why he has entered this debate.

The Tobago House of Assembly is moving to get rid of the boards in Tobago. They are going into state-run schools and they have closed down several board schools in Tobago. We have not heard any response from the Government with respect to that kind of position. [*Interruption*] I am hearing whispers from the Member for Tobago West. He does not speak in this House about Tobago, only when I raise matters in this House he grumbles. Later this evening I would speak on a motion on crime.

I am glad the Member for Diego Martin West introduced Tobago in the debate. He introduced Tobago in terms of funding for Tobago. I will deal in detail with what is happening in Tobago, funding or not, from the Government. Clearly there is the lack of responsibility on the Government that is causing Tobago to be blacklisted.

The Member spoke about moral and spiritual values and that Senators were fired. This gave the House the impression that it is because of moral and spiritual values. He needs to be correct for the record. It was a situation based on the Tourism Development Bill. There was a position taken by the Government and a position taken by the Senators and that was the direction that was taken. To give this House that kind of suggestion of moral and spiritual values and that the government was doing something underhand, is quite false.

Because of the tourism development thrust and the Tourism Development Bill—I would remind you and I am sure you are well aware—that was the position taken: that the recommendations would come from the THA to Central Government, with respect to the Tourism Development Bill that was going to be passed. The THA did not want that, they wanted control with respect to tourism in Tobago. That is why we had that conflict with respect to the Tobago Senators. It had nothing to do with moral and spiritual values and for the Member to introduce that into the debate is totally unsatisfactory.

The Member continually broke Standing Order 36(7) and the Speaker said nothing about it.

Mr. Speaker: I know you have a serious problem when Members refer to others by "he or she". But also, if you continue raising objections to that, that in

itself is disorderly. I hear you and sometimes it all depends on the context in which a Member is speaking. When you attempt to object to that and raise that particular Standing Order, that itself can be disorderly. Please continue.

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, I have quite a long contribution to make this afternoon because the Member opened the debate extremely wide.

Mr. Hart: Long and boring.

Dr. A. Nanan: It may not be long and boring, Member for Tunapuna. It will deal with specific issues and show the House this afternoon that the Member for Diego Martin West was totally unprepared in this debate. The Member spoke about the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad only reading. The Member never read the document. He came into this House and just replied off-the-cuff. That is the mistake the Member made in the House this afternoon.

This report points to the school management system and school boards. As a former Minister of Education, I was intimately involved in the process. The report speaks about discipline. You will recall how the PNM Government handled the problem of indiscipline at the Arima Senior Comprehensive School, sending jeep loads of armed police to deliver letters to the homes of teachers. You will recall that. The indiscipline problem was recognized. It is not something that happened under the UNC government, it was always there in the system but during the period 1991—1995 the PNM did nothing about that. It is only now we are hearing from the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West about a whole series of events passing through various governments. We took certain steps. Indiscipline and violence were recognized. The government recognized that introducing a school board management system would put more emphasis within the confines of the school environment and bring people from outside to assist the principal.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall when the legislation came before the House, there was not even a chairman appointed to a school board. That had to be amended in the House. That is the kind of high priority area that the PNM Government came forward with. Only when we were going to file an action, the Minister of Education came hurriedly and said: “We have now appointed several school boards.” If you look at the budgetary allocation for the Ministry of Education you would see that there were no allocations for school boards. Only lip service was being paid and the Teaching Service Commission is pointing to that particular situation.

With respect to the deans of management, a whole concept of handling the problem of indiscipline in our schools, was part of the school board management.

Decentralization, putting in the deans of discipline and having the school boards were part of an overall plan. That is nothing new. That is not something that was designed by the UNC government.

Mr. Manning: Where did it come from? Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. Member for Tabaquite for giving way. Am I correct in saying that the UNC attempted to follow the provisions of the strategic document in the education system, strategic plan 1993—2003, and is it not that those concepts came out of that document?

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, I am not here to score political points. When we speak about the education system, we are speaking about thousands of children throughout this country who must have an education system from which they will benefit. When the Prime Minister makes reference to a 1993—2003 plan, whether it is the PNM—[*Interruption*] The Member made reference to me in a term I do not want to refer to.

When I entered the Ministry of Education in that particular office there were several shelves, files and reports on the shelves in dust. I made reference to those and I told the Ministry officials that I do not want any reports that we are doing this term to end up on the shelves. That is why we put them on CD-ROMs and made use of them. All the PNM documents were on the shelves doing nothing. I did not want to bring that up here. I did not want to go so low in this debate but the Member for Diego Martin West went there. It is unfortunate that I have to go there but the country needs to know that plans were put in place, based on the platform that was there, if there was any platform. It was utilized but not by the PNM. I said in this House that is nothing new. We accepted the White Paper.

Mr. Manning: I thank the Member for giving way once again. He is very generous this afternoon. Thank you very much.

Would the hon. Member agree that the 1993—2003 document is a document that was arrived at after a technical team worked for 10 months putting it together and then another 14 months were spent consulting stakeholders all across the country including teachers, students and parents and the Government began to implement that plan in 1994, but we did not last long enough in government to take it as far forward as we would have liked? Would the Member also agree that they took it up, but did so little of it that we found ourselves in 2002 having do the vast majority of the implementation that was associated with that very forward-looking policy position?

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, with that kind of intervention, I would ask you to give me more than 75 minutes. I have to reply to the Prime Minister in great detail. I would have to speak about the World Bank loan, the education sector, the secondary sector and then eventually the tertiary sector. When he speaks of that plan I could give him the details on what has happened. I could speak in great detail about the White Paper, to show the Prime Minister. Probably he was not aware; probably he was sitting in his office having reports coming to him, not reading the reports or his Cabinet notes. The Prime Minister would have seen that the White Paper was there. Yes, there was a platform on the White Paper.

In fact there was a World Bank loan that was negotiated on the White Paper. There was dormancy with respect to the World Bank loan when the UNC government came into office. The loan required that there was supposed to be a project coordinating unit that had to be set up to implement the loan; to have the capacity and part of the conditionality to get the first tranche. Nothing was happening in that Ministry, with due respect. The loan was negotiated. The officials took a lot of time to negotiate a loan. I was part of the negotiating team for the IDB secondary school sector loan. Night after night we had discussions with the officials. I know how difficult it is. There was a lot of work done with respect to the World Bank loan. With respect to the period that the Prime Minister spoke about, there was a great lag and dormancy and nothing was taking place. The loan was there, there was no coordinating unit and the schools were in disrepair.

I do not know if the Prime Minister recalled the state of the education landscape in 1995. When the UNC came in 1995, we had the White Paper but that was only a document. In terms of the infrastructure almost everything was in total chaos.

We were outing bushfires for the first five or six months when we were in office. That is not what is happening today with the PNM government. They had a strong platform to go on. That is why—when we come to the House and we observe and see the Government's performance, which is almost non-performance—the difference is that there was nothing happening in that Ministry, as compared to when we left that Ministry under a kind of duress.

I now go to the education sector in the pre-primary and primary sector. In the pre-primary sector nothing was happening. It is in the *Hansard*. Their government recognized that they could not go to universal tertiary education before they dealt with pre-school and universal pre-school education. They recognized that and still did nothing about it. They have not built a single pre-school in their term of office

since 2002. They are always putting on the record some big obstacle that came about. One of the obstacles, of course, was the low price that the UNC government put forward for a pre-school. They increased it and still they have not built a single pre-school. It is unfortunate that the Prime Minister would want to claim credit for that particular plan that they did not follow.

Again, we are hearing about reports on shelves, but nothing. To answer the Prime Minister on the question of the lag by the UNC government, I want to let the Prime Minister know and I am sure that the *Hansard* will show that in my contribution in this House and that of other Ministers of Education. You would see the kind of performance by the UNC in education. In every single area, you would see that, not only in *Hansard*. With respect to the allocations, you would see the allocations given by the PNM government to education. If you look at the education landscape, you would see the condition of it. It is a definite lag by the PNM Government in every single area.

When I speak about Tobago—I do not know if the Prime Minister is still heading the Tourism Task Force. If he is not, I urge him to go back there, because the situation in Tobago is critical. The Members for Tobago West and East come to this House and say nothing about Tobago. When I speak about Tobago issues they get upset, but somebody has to speak about Tobago because Tobago is collapsing! The natural beauty of Tobago, the flora and fauna of that particular island, has been the attraction for years and they are allowing the entire tourism sector to collapse.

The crime situation is so bad in Tobago that we have been blacklisted internationally. For the Member for Diego Martin West to come to this House and tell the House that we have underfunded the THA—we did not underfund the THA, it is quite the contrary. When that matter raised its head in Tobago with respect to the rape of the British national in Back Bay, Tobago, we took decisive steps. We confronted the matter head-on. We dealt with the issues and put more police there. We put joint army and police patrols and a helicopter patrol. We did what was necessary, because we recognized that the tourism sector is a vital part of the tourism economy for Tobago. Almost 56 per cent of the employment of Tobago is in the tourism sector. Still, they are not dealing with the issue. I want the Minister of National Security, or whoever is going to speak this evening, to let us know what they are doing for Tobago. The Member for Diego Martin West came and attacked us with respect to the Senators and underfunding of Tobago. Not only are the school boards and management dealt with in this particular report, there are other areas that I will go into.

In the secondary education sector, I asked questions in this House, you could check the *Hansard*. I asked about teacher absenteeism and teachers absent from schools. For a whole year students have had no Mathematics classes and they continue to say that they have so many different strategies dealing with every single sector of education. Many documents are sent to my home daily from the Ministry of Education, more and more paper and reports to put on shelves. That is what they are doing. We are seeing nothing, in terms of performance from that Ministry. That Ministry is supposed to be driving the Government. Because of the Ministry of Education's failure, the Government will fail. They cannot get that right and the children and parents of this country will not tolerate that.

Mr. Manning: Why are you so unkind? That is not true.

Dr. A. Nanan: The Ministry of Education—you have to face facts, the polls show it. The polls are reflecting it. It is not a matter of smokes and mirrors; the polls are there; you can see the performance.

We may have the Minister of Education going to a school and smiling and taking off her earrings for a hearing programme. Face facts, we are seeing it in every area of that Ministry. They are failing. The officials' morale is low in that Ministry.

Teaching vacancies: How can there be people progressing? In terms of the tertiary education sector the Government is providing student revolving loans and more loans are coming for students in the tertiary sector but there must be a transition from the secondary to the tertiary sector. If the children are not performing at the secondary schools, how can they advance to the tertiary sector? It is a transition process from the pre-school to the primary school to the secondary school and up to the tertiary sector.

With respect to the boards of management and the denominational boards, the Member for Tobago West said that it is a new policy in the House for the denominational boards to take over government secondary schools. The facts reflect that the better management is in the denominational schools. It was being considered. It is nothing new. It is part of the IDB negotiations. The boards of management were part of the IDB negotiations for the secondary schools loan in the setting up of boards of management and working with MOUs with the denominational boards.

When we deal with the secondary school system in Tobago we would see that the UNC earmarked Mason Hall Government Secondary in its recognizing of part of the loan programme and the lack of secondary school places for children in

Tobago. Mason Hall Government School was one of the schools that were to be constructed. It is unfortunate that although we had the situation where the Tobago House of Assembly and the government could not see eye to eye on certain matters and there was a lag in the construction of the Mason Hall Government Secondary School, it was on the programme. The Government saw that there was a shortage of places for the students in Tobago and that was part of the IDB loan.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, so for the Member for Tobago West to come here this afternoon and say that the UNC government totally ignored Tobago is totally incorrect. Member for Tobago West, I am sorry. I think I have dealt with you enough. I am sorry, but you should be thankful that I put your name in the *Hansard*. [Laughter] The Member for Diego Martin West came to this House and said that we did not do anything for Tobago; we underfunded Tobago; and tried to show that Tobago sent a message and that is why we lost the election. That is another debate that we would go into later in terms of the Elections and Boundaries Commission Report, if we do get there.

I have other issues that I want to deal with like the secondary schools and the vacancies in those schools that are causing children not to behave. The Mathematics failures are very high. English and Mathematics failures are extremely high at the CXC level and that is so because the children are not being taught since the teachers are absent in our schools. There is no rocket science there. So, there are vacancies that exist in our secondary schools and, hopefully, they are going to build some more secondary schools. I do not know because of this particular Government's direction with respect to the tardiness in the construction programme.

I am sure that in August they are going to come with a revised PSIP and say that they are going to move all the moneys from the Ministry of Education and probably give them to the Ministry of Housing, because they cannot do the work and they would build no pre-schools. They would come with a big document to say why they did not build the preschools.

Mr. Speaker, in this particular situation, we have seen the PNM undermining independent institutions. To take it even further, the Tarouba stadium which is the Prime Minister's apple—the \$800 million Tarouba stadium—

Mr. Manning: Pet project.

Dr. A. Nanan:—to be built for tsunami relief. [Laughter] I want to advise the Prime Minister of a situation which developed today in the Philippines where a

mudslide totally destroyed a primary school and there was tremendous loss of lives. So, when I asked a question about the environmental impact study on the Tarouba stadium, it was unfortunate that when the result came back to me there was no environmental impact assessment done before the certificate of environmental clearance was given on October 27, 2005. All the information that was asked for was shape analysis. So, what are they doing?

Mr. Speaker, we are seeing an undermining of the independent institutions. The Prime Minister said that the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) is an independent body, and they do not get involved in any area. We heard the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of that independent institution saying that the Biche High School should be closed down, supporting the stance of the PNM Government. According to the Prime Minister, the EMA is an independent institution.

Mr. Speaker, in the debate, we heard about the abuse of power rally. The Member for Diego Martin West went on to attack the speakers at that particular rally on Sunday. What is the agenda for that abuse of power rally on Sunday? Let me just give you some information. The Member went on to attack all the speakers and introduced it into the debate.

“Refusal to initiate an independent enquiry into planting of deadly cocaine and mortar bombs in water tank at the home of Sen. Sadiq Baksh.”

That is factual. In fact, in my contribution this afternoon I would read a letter into the record.

“Prime Minister Manning called Marabella Police Station to enquire about his driver.”

That is true; that is nothing new.

“Prime Minister Manning selfishly wants Red House for his office and so arrogantly moves to evict Parliament.”

He totally disregarded the House Committee which was set up in this Parliament according to the Standing Orders.

“Ongoing harassment of Opposition Leader Basdeo Panday, including having him internationally embarrassed while formally meeting an official delegation from the Government of India.”

I am sure the Prime Minister would recall that.

Mr. Bereaux: I was there—

Dr. A. Nanan: The Member for Diego Martin West talked about commissions and the role of commissions, but I want to remind this House that the Member for La Brea attacked a CEO for not wearing a tie in one of those meetings. You could stand and say if that is not true.

Mr. Bereaux: I did not attack him; he came undressed. [*Laughter*]

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, there is also the issue of:

“Marlene Coudray, Devant Maharaj and others having to go to court against thus unfair treatment.

Prime Minister wants the President’s ground for his domestic garden and ignores the protest of residents of Cascade, St. Ann’s and Mount Hololo.”

They are long time users of this facility.

“The removal of the Central Bank and NEDCO from under the purview of the Freedom of Information Act.

Assistant Commissioner of Police Dennis Graham transferred after disagreement with San Fernando Mayor Ian Atherly, a close friend of PM Manning.

UNC MPs arrested and harassed in peaceful march.”

I am sure the Prime Minister would recall that.

“More than 9,000 sugar workers summarily sent home and still no suitable alternative plan.”

They took back the land that was designated for the sugar workers.

“Heartlessly and callously smashed squatters’ homes in several parts of the country, including Cashew Gardens, Wallerfield and Union Hall.

Elections and Boundaries Commission harassed in 2002.

Hon. Patrick Manning hands Police Commissioner Everald Snaggs his letter of appointment thus politicizing an independent and vital public office.

The illegal release of two Bajan fishermen.

Striking LNG workers intimidated.

Protesting Point Fortin residents pepper sprayed and tear gassed.

Hubert Alleyne summarily removed as the Chairman of Unit Trust Corporation.

Ongoing failure to implement the Occupational Safety and Health Act even after several innocent workers have died on the job.

Refusal to implement the Equal Opportunity Act of 2002.

Bob Lindquist paid more than \$21 million to investigate the UNC.”

The Prime Minister must stand and say if that is not true.

Mr. Manning: And still counting.

Dr. A. Nanan: There is also the issue of:

“Refusal to open Biche High School.

No legislation brought to manage the Revenue Stabilization Fund.”

These are the issues and not what the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West talked about when he tried to vilify the speakers. That kind of vitriolized attack coming from the Member for Diego Martin West about the speakers would only heighten the tension and more people would come to the rally. So, we thank you for the opportunity and the excitement.

Mr. Valley: Are you going to the rally?

Dr. A. Nanan: Yes, I would be there. Mr. Speaker, the theme of the rally is: “Now is the time to take a stand against rampant abuse of power.”

“Corruption is a way of life under the PNM Government.

Two Government Ministers including party chairman charged with corruption in Dhansook affair.”

That is factual.

“Several Ministers and PNM officials are being investigated by the Integrity Commission.”

Mr. Speaker: I think you have made the point. Please get back to the Motion before us.

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to put that on the record, because the Member for Diego Martin West gave the wrong impression about this particular rally on Sunday.

Getting back to the matter of education and the situation with respect to indiscipline in schools, we are seeing a breakdown of discipline and violence in our schools. The report talks about security guards being placed in schools. Recently, we have seen that the Minister of Education assigned more security guards to a particular school because of a situation. Every time the Minister of Education comes to this House she would read a document about the number of schools that have security. Yes, there is security in schools, but what about the

computerization effort of that ministry. There was a big hue and cry about a wide area network and there is absolute silence about that matter in that particular ministry. Nothing is happening there with respect to computerization!

Mr. Ramsaran: Tell him what a CD rom is.

Dr. A. Nanan: So, it is unfortunate that the Member for Diego Martin West would stand in this debate and try to defend the Ministry of Education. He did not do a very good job. The report talked about the faults of that particular ministry.

In the Prime Minister's short intervention, he talked about the key stakeholders' interest. The Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association (TTUTA) have commented on the various problems in that Ministry. It is not that I am talking without any facts. The PTA, TTUTA, the American Chamber of Commerce and the Tobago Chamber of Commerce continue to talk out about the problems with education under the PNM Government.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to performance evaluation and promotion, that has been a thorn from day one in that particular ministry. In 1995 when the United National Congress (UNC) came into government, there were a lot of actors and actresses in the Ministry of Education. People were acting there for years—principals, vice-principals, deans of discipline—the Prime Minister talked about that plan. The deans of discipline were appointed in a haphazard fashion and there was absolutely no coordination. The report talked about school supervisors and the performance of school supervisors.

The school supervisors in that ministry were placed in a building and every time rain fell they had to run out the building. Imagine that! They had to run out of the building because it was leaking. That is the condition under which the school supervisors were operating. How can they perform at any level when they have to operate under that condition?

In that particular ministry, the files were so old and they were falling apart. There was so much dust and the workers were complaining. They said they could not work under those conditions. It was in a terrible state. That ministry was supposed to be the engine room, driving the country with respect to the education thrust. How could you perform when the conditions were so terrible? So, for the Prime Minister to stand and talk about a plan—and that ministry is in such a terrible state—could you imagine what was happening to personnel who were working there? The morale would be low. How could they relate to the principals and teachers? The entire system was in shambles. That is why under the UNC we

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worked very slowly and steadily and built a platform and we made sure that it was solid. So when the PNM Government got in there, by its underhand means, they had something to work on. They did nothing. They got in there and revised everything that they did not have to revise. They kept revising and revising and coming up with new plans.

Mr. Speaker, you would remember Kenrick Burgess in that ministry. He maligned everybody, from the Minister down. That consultant was paid \$90,000 a month to do nothing. There was a school repair programme and one week after the IDB consultant—they gave him that prestige job in that ministry to do nothing, but to have a school repair programme that came in one week later and thousands of children remained at their homes. My information is that he is still there doing nothing. How could they come here and talk about—that is why the Parliament is here and that report is in front of us today. If they could have stopped that report from being laid today, they would have stopped it. The chairmen of these commissions want their reports to be laid in Parliament and that is why they came here, otherwise they would have blocked them. It shows quite clearly that the Ministry is not performing and every single ministry is going to show that when their reports come to the Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I think it is time to be refreshed for tea. The sitting of the House is suspended and it would be resumed at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Dr. A. Nanan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The contribution of the Member for Diego Martin West this afternoon was unfortunate. As a Member of a joint select committee, it shows quite clearly that the Minister is not au courant with what is happening with these committees. The record would show that as a Member of a joint select committee, the Member has not attended a single meeting of the joint select committee that he is on.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out—I do not want to participate in this debate—that the concept of a Minister being a Member of a joint select committee that is examining government ministries is a contradiction in terms.
[*Desk thumping*]

Dr. A. Nanan: That point is a non point. I am shocked that the Member for Diego Martin Central would stand and defend the Member for Diego Martin West. [*Laughter*] Probably, because of the report that was laid before the House

this afternoon, the Member might start to attend these particular committee meetings, because there is now remuneration being put forward.

Mr. Speaker, I have dealt with the Member for Diego Martin West in terms of his hollow contribution in this House. As I said before, this report shows, quite clearly, that the Minister of Education is a failure.

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

Mr. Hedwige Breaux (*La Brea*): Mr. Speaker, I have listened—I would not say with rapt attention—with horror to some extent to the contributions of the hon. Members for Fyzabad and Tabaquite. Mr. Speaker, there is a statement which says: “It is better to be quiet and thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.” [*Laughter*]

The hon. Member for Tabaquite went on to talk about the failure of the Ministry of Education to have teachers appointed. For the Member’s benefit, I would like to read section 125 of the Constitution which states inter alia:

“Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, power to appoint persons to hold or act in public offices in the Teaching Service established under the Education Act, including power to make appointments on promotion and transfer and to confirm appointments, and to remove and exercise disciplinary control over persons holding or acting in such offices shall vest in the Teaching Service Commission.”

I am glad the Member talked as he did so he knows now. He also knows the source from which the authority of the Teaching Service Commission comes and the party responsible for it.

[*Hon Member on his feet*]

I am not giving way. You spent a long time wasting time. The Member for Tabaquite was so busy trying to place the blame for the failures in the system on the present Government and he forgot that 8.8 of the report says:

“The Teaching Service Commission advised the Committee that other than the name of the applicant recommended by the particular Denominational Board, no other information or material was forwarded by the Ministry of Education.”

That occurred in 2001. So when the Member talked about the failure of the Minister, it is the UNC Minister. It is said that when you point one finger, at least three fingers go back at you but, in this case, all fingers point to the government of which you were a part.

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I noted that both Members spent a lot of time trying to pass out handbills about some rally they would be having in Central. Now, that is a matter for them but since you brought it here it appears as though Members on the other side—whichever faction they belong to—seem to want to get us all involved in what is going on in their particular group or party [*Interruption*] I thought that since you have read out one advertisement, I would do the service and the favour to the country and read the other side from the *Express* newspaper dated Friday, February 17, 2006:

To all UNC Members and supporters: Send Panday a strong message today. Give youths and fresh ideas a chance. For the sake of the youths, for the sake of Trinidad and Tobago, for the sake of the UNC and its members and its supporters, for the sake of unity, Panday must go.

Mr. Speaker, while the hon. Member for Fyzabad was talking, I allowed him to ramble along. I believe that I am entitled to the same privilege, seeing that I would be referring to statements that he would have made. So, please ask him to leave me alone, otherwise I would have to deal directly with him and I would prefer not to do that.

Let me tell them that since they seem to have a little problem with coming together, I want to quote Psalm 133—

Mrs. Job-Davis: All right!

Mr. H. Bereaux: It says:

“Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”

I know that this is not particularly your religious persuasion, but I consider it to be advice to all men and women, universal. I want to tell the hon. Members that we were in a joint select committee and we examined the entire Teaching Service Commission and what may ail it. As the hon. Member for Diego Martin West said, that was there for a long time and we are trying to correct it. We sat on a joint select committee—Members of the Opposition, Members of the Government and Independent Senators to try to deal with that matter. The Member came here today and he does not even know the parts of the Standing Order which referred to what we are doing and how it is being dealt with.

Normally, when this report is done, it would be brought to this House and one would expect that in accordance with Standing Order 79—[*Interruption*]—Mr. Speaker, would you please assist me. I really cannot—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Fyzabad, the hon. Member is asking to make his contribution without interruption.

Mr. H. Breaux: In accordance with Standing Order 79B(13) it says:

“The Minister responsible for the Ministry/body under review shall, not later than ninety days after a report from a Joint Select Committee, relating to the ministry/body, has been laid upon the Table, present a paper to the House responding to any recommendations/comments...”

So, we are expecting that report from the Minister in due course. I am certain that most of the answers that you are calling for would come. I know that you are having some problems, and when you are having these problems you tend to get irrational, but please keep it to yourself and let us deal with the business of the Parliament without your own problems here.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

VALIDATION OF THE FIFTH REPORT OF THE ELECTIONS AND BOUNDARIES COMMISSION (LOCAL GOVERNMENT) BILL

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Rennie Dumas): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to validate the Fifth Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission under the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Act, Chap. 25:50 for the purpose of Local Government Elections, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, the intent of this Bill is to validate the late submission of the Fifth Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission under the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Act, Chap. 25:50 for the purpose of local government elections by deeming the said report to have been submitted to the Minister in accordance with section 4(2)(b) of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Act.

Mr. Speaker, as read, and it is identified in the preamble to the Bill, is the function of the commission—that is the Elections and Boundaries Commission—to define and review the boundaries of the electoral districts into which an electoral area is, or is to be divided and shall submit to the Minister reports thereon.

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The time period set is identified under subsection (2) of the said subsection (4) that reports under subsection (1) shall be submitted by the Commission not less than two nor more than three years from the date of the submission of its last report.

The Fourth Report of the commission was submitted on July 08, 2002 and whereas the Fifth Report of the commission under the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Act, was submitted to the Minister on the 8th day of July 2005, more than three years from the date of submission of the commission's last report, the validation is required.

The Government, having agreed that the submission is out of time, and that the said Fifth Report of the commission should be validated for the purposes of the forthcoming local government election, and considering that it is expedient to do so, we are asking that the House agree that we validate the said report by way of this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon Members, by agreement between the Chief Whip and the Leader of the House, Members can feel free to debate both the Bill and the Motion related thereto.

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (Fyzabad): Mr. Speaker, only one was moved. So I do not know if an agreement was arrived at.

Mr. Speaker: You can debate both. Do you want to move the Motion now?

Sen. Dumas: Yes.

Mr. C. Sharma: Only one was moved.

Mr. Valley: Okay.

The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Rennie Dumas): I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas it is provided by subsection (3) of section 4 of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Act, that as soon as may be after the Elections and Boundaries Commission (hereinafter referred to as "the Commission") has submitted a report under paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section 4 of the said Act, the Minister shall lay before the House of Representatives for its approval the draft of an Order by the

President for giving effect, whether with or without modifications, to the recommendations contained in the report;

And whereas the Commission has submitted a report to the Minister in accordance with the provisions of paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section 4;

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I am advised that the Motion cannot really be moved at this point, and it would be moved after the debate on the Bill.

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (Fyzabad): Mr. Speaker, you see, I would be talking to one which was presented and one which would be presented in the future. I am not sure if that is allowed. You see, I am going to reply to something that did not come to the House.

Mr. Speaker: The Order is before you. What we are doing here is the Bill, and then the Order relating to the Bill. You have the Order before you.

Mr. C. Sharma: I am guided, but I am required to respond to what is presented and not what is intended to be presented.

Hon. Member: Do not respond. [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. The presenter of the Bill, my good friend, the hon. Minister, is a guest in the House and he must be treated with the good intention of this House but, unfortunately, the Minister did not do a very good job at presenting the Bill.

Now, earlier today, in the other debate, we witnessed the abuse of Government's power which was presented to us in reply to the presentations of both the Member for La Brea and the Member for Tunapuna. The Minister accepted, in his presentation, that this report was dangerously late. He identified that it came here in July 2002, and these reports should be getting the attention here every six months. So, the question is: why is the report late? The quantum of time is not important. If it is laid then it is laid for a reason, and that reason is the Government's failure so to do. Why is it late? Did the EBC have a funding problem? Did the EBC have a staffing problem? Was the EBC instructed by the Minister not to do it on time? Those are very important questions.

There is a history of the PNM interfering with the work of the EBC. There is a history of the PNM thieving the election. In the last couple of years we have seen that. On a previous occasion, we have seen where the PNM accused the EBC of all kinds of things. Today, the Minister did not read into the record that he had communicated with the EBC to enquire as to why the report was late. One is not

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allowed to just come here and say that the report is late and that is the end of it. More than that, we are changing boundaries. This is the report that we are dealing with. We are moving from X number to X number plus which is an increase of five districts.

Now, there has been absolutely no consultation with any organization or bodies or the official Opposition of Trinidad and Tobago about this procedure.

The question is why is this so? Was there consultation with the Government? You see, the Minister has an obligation to tell this House how the five additional seats were arrived at. I think one seat is in Siparia. [*Interruption*] When the Minister is presenting the report he has to indicate to this House how this was arrived at. One just cannot come and say: "Listen, we are moving from "X" to "X" plus and I hope you would approve it." It is not done that way at all. For instance, one of the considerations extended is that—

Mr. Valley: You are talking on the wrong report.

Mr. C. Sharma: No, we are talking about the report here where you are increasing the electoral districts by five seats. Minister, are you familiar with this? I am very surprised. Oh my Lord, look where we have reached. [*Laughter*] Well, my friend, five electoral districts means five more seats.

Mr. Valley: No.

Mr. C. Sharma: It does not mean that? "Great is the PNM and it shall prevail." Look where this country has reached. They do not know the difference. Do you all discuss these matters in Cabinet? Do you just come here without any discussions? Under my Chief Whip you cannot do that. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation has moved from 12 seats to 13 seats; Penal/Debe from seven seats to eight seats; Sangre Grande from eight seats to nine seats; Siparia from eight seats to nine seats; and Tunapuna/Piarco from 13 seats to 14 seats. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I intend to be very short.

One of the considerations for arriving at the increased seats was really intended to better serve the community. That is the larger consideration in moving from 126 seats to 131 seats, but they must look at what obtains now. One of the major crises in local government is the lack of funding. This has been raised with the hon. Prime Minister, the Leader of Government Business, the Minister and a host of other Members. What is local government required to do? They have a host of services to render. Presently throughout Trinidad—I suspect this also

obtains in Tobago as well and the Member for Tobago East and West could raise that matter with us—there is a lack of funding. I want to first deal with the lack of funding. I am going to use the Rio Claro/Mayaro Regional Corporation as an example.

On the last occasion, I raised a matter where they are obtaining 67 cents per year per citizen in that area. Could you imagine that in the year 2006? Out of a budget of \$34 billion they are obtaining 67 cents per year per citizen. What are they required to deliver with this 67 cents per year? They are required to deliver truck borne-water; they are required to maintain recreation grounds; they are required to deal with cemeteries and cremation sites; they are required to do local roads and drains; and a host of other things. How can they ever deliver when you are increasing the seats? It does not make sense. That is why I say the Minister has done us an injustice. He should indicate clearly what would be the benefit of this.

Mr. Speaker, firstly, what we want to propose for the Minister's consideration is that local government should be constituted, meaning it should be a creature of the Constitution. Presently, the Minister, with a stroke of a pen, could remove local government from the history of Trinidad and Tobago and this should not be allowed. In addition, local government must have a block vote system. In any electoral district, moneys must be made available according to the needs of that community. Presently, they just look and say: "Okay, last year you got \$10 million so we would increase it by 5 or 6 per cent." That has been going on so for a period of time.

In many of the corporations, based on Act 21 of 1990, they ought to have a Chief Medical Officer and that does not obtain. In many of the corporations, there should be an engineer for the area, a police force and a lot of other things but they were not implemented. So you cannot increase the seats and decrease the services. You are doing the national community an injustice.

Previously, we talked about a task force being appointed. I want to suggest that this task force should come from the three houses—both sides here and from the other place—to make sure that the largest collection of ideas would be considered.

Mr. Speaker: You talked about three Houses, but there are only two Houses.

Mr. C. Sharma: I said from the three sides—upstairs and both sides here—like what obtains in the other committees where you have Opposition Members, Government Members and upstairs. Thank you for listening.

We had suggested a decentralization unit some time ago and it was considered and suddenly it disappeared. Now, local government bodies need to have constitutional guarantees. In that way, you would be certain that the services reach the communities. You see, in Trinidad and Tobago, the first call for service when you step out of your house is from local government. Whether you live in Port of Spain or Fyzabad, garbage has to be picked up; there is need for truck-borne water when there is no water; there are drains to be cleaned and there are other environmental concerns, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, as it obtains now, local government bodies are not clear as to what they must do. In addition, more and more requests are being made of them. For example, with the closure of Caroni (1975) Limited, all the roads, cemeteries and recreation areas that were maintained by Caroni (1975) Limited have now been transferred to local government and there is no financial aid going to them to take care of these facilities.

In addition, the regional corporations are chaired by a chairman and, in other places, by a mayor. In many instances, the chairman and the mayor do not have the powers to go with the office. As a result, they are not allowed to deliver much. You would have seen that during the recent flooding, the local government bodies were powerless. You also found the intervention of the Minister—again, the Rio Claro/Mayaro Regional Corporation is a good example. Let us compare what happened during that flooding. In the Rio Claro/Mayaro Regional Corporation, a PNM member was able to give out 3,000 hampers within a 24-hour period and in the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation, 100 hampers were given out in the first instance. There is really politics in food now. So, you see, in one area one has different powers. We have to make sure that does not continue. What you are going to end up having is no service being available sooner than later.

I made the point earlier that at present local government bodies could be abolished by the Government by simply utilizing its simple majority. The existing local bodies were created by Act 1990 which required a simple majority in Parliament for its passage and, therefore, it could be revoked by a simple majority. This matter has been raised on numerous occasions to simply assist the local government practitioners so that they would know that they have a very important function to do. In fact, this Government and other governments have made the point that local government is critical to our country's development more so where the Government is aiming at Vision 2020.

The Minister must indicate to this House the continued existence of local government bodies and the protection of the State and the Government. Local

government bodies should be given meaningful functions, especially functions which need the input of citizens before decisions are taken. That is very important. Presently, the Minister chooses which project he is going to fund in any part of the country. He could sit in Port of Spain and say: "Okay, I am going to pave this road into Fyzabad or I am going to light up this recreation ground in Toco." And very little consultation takes place.

It is important for local government bodies to have access to adequate funding to carry out their functions. Any regional corporation could make a number of requests for projects, and the Minister determines which one of those projects would obtain funding. Sometimes you would have the more important projects not necessarily getting the Minister's approval. That is why we are suggesting local input at the local level.

The composition of local government bodies must be revised to include a broader representation of the community. By this I mean that all the regional corporations must be extended to allow larger civic participation by members of the community like NGOs, CBOs, church groups, et cetera.

I want to suggest to the hon. Minister that the title of chairmen should be abolished and they should be made mayors, and they would have that degree of authority. They must be on a level playing field since at the end of the day they have to deliver the same service. They are called upon to do the same work as well.

Many issues pertaining to local government should be treated at the local level. Let us take Siparia Regional Corporation or the Point Fortin Borough Corporation as an example. When issues are raised to be dealt with rather than a team coming from Port of Spain to determine whether it is doable or not, let the local government bodies decide those things because they know what is best. They have all the information at their disposal.

Mr. Speaker, what is happening is because of the difference in funding, there is competition between the bodies rather than cooperation. If equipment should be used for the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation in Siparia it should be automatic. There should be that understanding. There is a difficulty now where a PNM controlled corporation is finding it difficult to borrow for a UNC controlled corporation and vice versa.

What is very important is a fair distribution of resources, more so at the ministry's level. There are provisions in the Ministry for the Minister to decide on projects and so forth. The Minister should make sure that it reaches out to

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everybody. Mr. Speaker, through you, Mr. Minister, lately there has been a concern that the local government bodies are strapped for cash and they are unable to deliver. That inability to deliver is contributing to the challenges that we are seeing in the country, for example at the Los Iros beach and Quinam beach, there have been no lifeguards for the longest while. There are only two lifeguards at Vessigny beach. So you need to improve on that. In most of these places there are no facilities for changing your clothing and there is no drinking water. The local government body also has a responsibility to promote and encourage sports and they are strapped for cash. So there is very little delivery of that as well.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of other areas that local government bodies need to get involved in and they need the ministry's involvement. We talked about the requirement for police at that local level and to increase the number of officers there. In many corporations there are only three or four officers without any equipment.

The local government bodies should be aided and assisted in developing the cultural spirit of a particular area. For instance, in the Siparia Regional Corporation, the Butler Movement is a very strong movement; in Point Fortin it is slightly different; and in the Penal/Debe area it would be different. These bodies should be allowed to encourage these things but the support from your ministry is required. Funding for these things is never on time. In fact, requests are made and they are never treated with.

There is also housing at the local government level. There must be some input. All the local government practitioners are visited by persons who have elected them and they would know their needs. There are no facilities now for these corporations to make any recommendation as it relates to housing. If you look at what obtains in the United Kingdom, the local government bodies get the largest support in that area. What we are seeing is that houses are used for the winning of marginal seats. We want local government bodies to have an input in that matter.

The other area I want to touch on slightly is that in recent times, with the numerous flooding we have seen in many parts of the country, oftentimes the local government bodies are powerless to lend any assistance; for example, a simple thing like spraying or the cleaning of cesspits and so forth. These things take a long time and put the health of the community at risk.

In addition, we expect that local government bodies would get involved in the education of HIV/AIDS. This has been raised in the past and there was a promise to look into the matter.

The corporation is also playing a role with respect to the reduction of poverty. There are a number of projects from another ministry and local government has very little input into it. The corporations must be allowed to look at the multicultural nature of the areas they represent and they must be allowed to contribute to it.

Mr. Speaker, the last point I want to raise is that now that they have increased the number of seats in local government, it means to say that persons who would be qualified to vote are already on the voting list, but what is happening is that people are having a difficulty obtaining their identification cards. The law allows persons from the age of 15 to go to the local EBC office and register. In many areas, they are having difficulty. Persons are being told to come back since the identification cards are taking too long to be prepared. The hon. Minister may want to look at that matter and report, not necessarily today, but to give the assurance that these new areas—no one is clear about the numbers. In some electoral districts you would find the number being 6,000 and in another place it is 3,000.

If you look at Arima, the average size of the electorate is 3,000 and if you look at Siparia it is an average of 7,000 persons. So for 7,000 persons you have “X” amount of moneys being provided and for 3,000 persons in a similar district—the same persons contesting the election with the 3,000 persons one being given the same amount of funding. You would want to look at that matter so regardless of where a person lives, the local government bodies could meet that person’s need and there is no difference in funding; there is no difference in the provision of services.

When you look at the increased number of seats, there is need to increase machinery and equipment in the different areas. Many corporations have been telling us that they are unable to get equipment; they cannot get funding and there is also the question of the administrative complex being delayed since they have to go from one agency to another.

Recently, we saw where the Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited was being given the authority to do one of the administrative complexes and nobody knows how these things are going to be done and who is going to manage them. The corporations must have that control. If the Government says that there should be an administrative complex, let them find the persons to build it. When it goes to a third party agency no one knows how it is going to be done or where the funding is going to come from.

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Mr. Speaker, the last point I want to raise has to do with the question of local government becoming an essential part of our everyday life and that they should be funded and treated with.

With these few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Harry Partap (*Nariva*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I crave your indulgence to make a very short intervention in the debate this afternoon. What I find disturbing here in this exercise this afternoon is the ease with which the PNM Government could flout the law and then come to the House and ask for this matter to be validated.

Clearly, this Government is abusing its majority in this House. One would have thought that the Minister would have come here this afternoon and provided some plausible reasons why this report took so long to reach the Table of the House but, I guess, we should not expect courtesies from Members opposite.

The Government continues to treat this Parliament with contempt. They continue to treat the people of this country with contempt. In fact, they sometimes feel that Trinidad and Tobago is a piece of PNM's real estate, but this is not so. This Fifth Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) was submitted to the hon. Minister since July 08, 2005 and it has now reached the Parliament. It has taken the hon. Minister of Local Government seven months to lay this report in the House. My question is: Why has it taken the Minister seven months to bring this report to us here in Parliament? He took seven months to bring the report here and gave us seven days to read, digest and debate the report.

Mr. Speaker, there is an ulterior motive in their incompetence. It reminds me of the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development who held back the Occupational Safety and Health Act for two years, and during that time 24 workers lost their lives. He brought 34 amendments to justify the holding back of the Act for proclamation for two years. What we are seeing here this afternoon is similar. You have held back the report for seven months, so there seems to be a trend in the PNM's incompetence.

Mr. Speaker, I learnt from reports in today's newspaper and yesterday's newspaper that the Occupational Safety and Health Act would be proclaimed today. I want to thank the Government for having the Act proclaimed, because it now forms part of the labour legislation to protect workers and employers of this country.

5.45 p.m.

We on this side are justly proud of our part in forcing the PNM to proclaim the Act and we are happy about that, because you know, it is ten years this year that UNC had been making a determined effort to get OSHA on the law books. Our struggle is to save the lives of workers, we would continue to do that and we would also continue to monitor and ensure that the legislation is put into operation.

I had asked earlier, why did the Government delay laying the fifth report in the Parliament, and to me I think the reason is quite simple. The PNM wanted to leap ahead in preparation for the local government elections. So they felt that if they kept the report to themselves for seven months, they could put things in place before we knew about it, where we could organize our electoral districts.

Mr. Manning: I thank the hon. Member for Nariva for giving way. But have we not been advising the Members of the Opposition and the national community to be on the alert for elections for some time now? Have we not put the PNM on election alert a long time ago in plain view of public scrutiny? How in those circumstances could such an allegation therefore be justifiably laid at our doorstep? How could it be?

Mr. H. Partap: Of course you agree with me that you all had this report before and you all knew what the report talked about. This report talks about five new electoral districts, therefore you had prior knowledge of it, and you could have told your constituents and your people to prepare and organize, because you knew what you had in the report. We did not have that. So it was a kind of an unfair advantage that you had in preparing for elections. But Mr. Speaker, whether they held back the report for seven months or whether they would have it for 12 months, the fact is, they would still get their "licking" in the local government elections, whenever it is called. You are going to get your "licking" as usual. You see why they held back the report and kept it to themselves for seven months, it is so that they could organize the CEPEP, URP and all these things, so that they could influence the elections. But people smarter now.

Mr. Manning: But please, Mr. Speaker, please. Did we not know that the term of office of the local government body is three years? Therefore three years ago, do we not know when the local government election is due? All I am saying is, this is the month of February and the local government elections are due later in the year, and that the report has come to the Parliament in good time to ensure that hon. Members opposite can make adequate preparation on the basis of new

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arrangements. The argument of the hon. Member for Nariva certainly does not follow and it does not hold.

Mr. H. Partap: It simply means, Mr. Speaker, you would have had seven months prior knowledge that we did not have; that is what I am saying. Every time you stand, hon. Prime Minister, you strengthen my case. I would advise you not to stand again.

Mr. Manning: I would take the advice from elsewhere.

Mr. H. Partap: What I am saying is, you had this report for seven months and you have given us some time, yes, but you also had seven months before. The fact is that you are preparing yourself, you know what you are going to do; you know how you want to win this election.

Mr. Manning: You are right on that.

Mr. H. Partap: You know that lightning does not strike the same place twice. You would not have the human resources in a previous time to assist you this time. Be that as it may—

Hon. Member: We have the resources now?

Dr. Moonilal: We would be prepared.

Mr. H. Partap:—we would be prepared.

Dr. Rafeeq: Some of them in jail.

Mr. H. Partap: I am reminded that some of them in jail. We do not want the EBC to be involved in any scheme that would undermine the fairness of this election. Looking at the fifth report, I am detecting some subtle manoeuvres in that report that would suggest that the EBC is positioning itself to frustrate voters in any election that would come; I am seeing it in this report. We on this side really do not trust the EBC, because there are too many commissioners on the EBC that are independent PNM, so we do not trust them. But of course, the UNC leadership would look after that at an appropriate time.

Mr. Speaker, the EBC must provide the mechanism to prevent arbitrary decisions by presiding officers on election day. Too much of that had happened in the past. Presiding officers make arbitrary decisions on the spot and always not in favour of the voters. So we have to be careful about that. I think that the EBC must set out the law as it is in the Constitution in relation to elections, so that all and sundry will know what the laws are.

We are not happy about the conduct of the police at the polling stations on election day. As far as we are concerned and as far as the law allows, the police will be there to maintain law and order. I know in the constituency of Nariva, during the elections prior, the police were actually turning people away from the polling stations. They had a good reason for doing that. The reason was that people came looking for their names in polling stations, because the EBC had split the polling divisions and put them in alphabetical order, and they informed neither the Opposition nor the Member of Parliament for the area; no one. They simply set up arbitrarily, they put A to S will be here and S to Z would be in another area, and no information to people. Now that was a recipe for confusion. There was confusion, and a lot of people could not exercise their franchise, and I am saying the EBC must avoid that, they must not have any split polling divisions.

Mr. Speaker, I think too, that the EBC should have more regional ombudsmen roaming the country so that we could get some official decisions so that people would not lose their right to vote.

One of the things that the EBC must seek to do is to make the polling divisions manageable. I do not think that the EBC is taking into account the process of voting in each polling division, because you vote by polling divisions in a polling station. You have some polling stations with a voters' list of 800, 900, 1,200 people. If you really look at what is happening on election day, only about 20 people can exercise their vote in an hour; sometimes it is fewer than 20 people. I think voting is a 12-hour period, so you might only get about 240 people for the most who can exercise their franchise within that 12-hour period. We are saying that the EBC must not strain the limit. What they have to do is make these polling divisions a little manageable, so that people could exercise their franchise without any problem.

Mr. Imbert: There is more than one polling station.

Mr. H. Partap: You are right; sometimes they split the polling divisions. When they split the polling divisions they do not inform people where their names would be.

Hon. Member: What?

Mr. H. Partap: You do not know that, you should know that. Anyway, I want to finish quickly so you could go to your Carnival fete after Parliament. Mr. Speaker, I am yet to understand the rationale of the EBC in determining the polling divisions. The law provides for specifics in terms of electoral districts; so that is in the law, and the EBC had been following the law. What I cannot understand is

their rationale now for polling divisions in an electoral district. I want to use the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation as my point of reference.

Hon. Member: You have no seats there.

Mr. H. Partap: You would know; you think you could fool people all the days of their lives. I want to use Sangre Grande Regional Corporation to demonstrate what I mean in terms of the distribution of the polling divisions. Before I do so, I do not know if the Minister—I came here a little late—made any corrections to the draft order. On page 1, the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation is really from seven to eight and not from eight to nine; I hope you would make that correction as it is.

Let me just look at Sangre Grande Regional Corporation and let me tell you what happened. In the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation you have eight electoral districts. In Cumuto/Tamana, you have 12 polling divisions and 6,574 voters and the EBC assigned 12 polling divisions for that area. The lowest number of voters in a polling division is 211, and the highest is 996. Nine hundred and ninety six, I feel is still too high. There are too many people in this electoral district; but we have that there.

Then you have the Manzanilla electoral district, you have 5,353 voters and they were allocated 13 polling divisions. Now remember Cumuto/Tamana has 6,574 and they have 12 polling divisions; Manzanilla has 5,353, they have 13 polling divisions. I cannot understand how the EBC did that calculation. In Sangre Grande North East you have 5,874 voters, but you have nine polling divisions. In Manzanilla you have 5,353, but you have 13 polling divisions. I do not know how they did that; I do not know what was the rationale.

In Sangre Grande North West you have 5,630 electors, but you have 12 polling divisions. Remember I told you in North East you have 5,874, voters but you have nine polling divisions. I do not know really how they arrived at it. Over in Sangre Grande South you have 5,765 voters and nine polling divisions. It could not be geography or it could not be the settlements; it is not that at all, because the Sangre Grande area is the same; every polling division is the same. Then you have in Toco/Fishing Pond 5,744 voters, but you have 14 polling divisions. The issue is how did they arrive at distributing the polling divisions.

I would go on again. The electoral district of Valencia has 5,426 voters but you only have four polling divisions, and of the four polling divisions, one has 2,527 voters; that is ridiculous. One in Arima has 3,000 voters. Also, you have in Valencia another polling division with 1,587 voters and another one with 1,239,

but then you have the fourth one with only 73 voters. That is the point I am making, I cannot understand how the EBC arrived at that. The law tells them how to deal with the electoral districts, but they do their own thing in relation to polling divisions. Then the final one, the new one—

Mr. Valley: Please, please. Mr. Speaker, an electoral district is an amalgamation of polling divisions. If you go back years the only thing the EBC may do is to split the polling division. Even when that is done it is called 1281A or 1281B. You do not change the polling division, it is the basic unit. If you want to reconfigure the electoral district there is a different configuration of polling divisions, but the polling divisions do not change. If a polling division has 73 now, I mean unless people die—of course people would die—but it is the same area it is going to cover as five years ago. The polling division is the basic unit, it does not change.

Mr. H. Partap: I am not telling you that you must change the polling division unit, what I am saying is the numbers— How could you justify in how you are interpreting what I am saying? How could you justify one polling division? You have 5,426 voters but you only allocate four polling divisions. Then you have 5,353 voters, but you put 13 polling divisions. That is my argument, perhaps you are not following me; take another look at it again.

In Vega/Oropouche, which is the new electoral district in Sangre Grande, you have nine polling divisions, but you have 5,761 voters. In one polling division there you have 1,316. My point is that when you have these large polling divisions—I am not talking about electoral districts—it becomes very difficult in terms of administration and the political management of these polling divisions on Election Day. [*Interruption*] Do not let me say what I should not say. You do not seem to understand what I am saying.

Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is the EBC has a lot of explaining to do and I feel they should go back again and look at this and see if they can make these polling divisions a little more manageable because it is creating a lot of problems. It may be good for you to adjourn this meeting and send it back to the EBC and let them do it for you.

Mr. Speaker, that is the point I want to raise and thank you so much.

The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Rennie Dumas): Mr. Speaker, having noted the contributions of the Member for Fyzabad and the Member for Nariva on the question of why the report is late, I think we are quite

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clear that in laying this matter out, we made it clear that this is a responsibility of the Elections and Boundaries Commission. The time period in which they should report was given to them also by the same instrument, which is the Act, and of course, the responsibilities of the Commission are laid out in the Constitution.

The conditions that require the validation why we must come here is also identified and honestly, there is nothing for the Government to explain, in that any explanation would be presumptuous, could be construed to be determining the activities of the EBC. I think we prefer not to engage in that, and certainly some of the questions being raised to us are in fact explained in the Report, in that the EBC identifies in paragraph 5 what is the formula that is required to follow under rule four of the schedule for Municipal Corporations.

In terms of determination of things like the polling division numbers, et cetera, they refer to the fact that in taking the formula into account, they further argue that in a division of an electoral district into regional electoral areas, natural boundaries such as major highways, rivers and so on shall be used wherever possible. So the explanation is in the Report. I would not seek to go below the explanations that are explicated in the Report as written by the Commission. I think we prefer to leave that.

The only way I would seek to explain, as to the understanding, is that enumeration districts lead to polling divisions, leading to electoral districts, leading to the determination of what is a local government seat and the same way it is built in other electoral counting or enumeration, and I would leave it at that, Mr. Speaker.

In some of the matters raised, I want to suggest that maybe we have a difference in the culture of the two teams in this Parliament. One is that there is a culture that seems to suggest that there is responsibility here; there is accountability here, and concern for good governance, and I would like to suggest that that is on this side. There is another culture that says find somebody to blame; avoid any responsibility; determine no accountability and suggest that good governance does not exist.

Mr. Sharma: That is a calypso?

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: I would suggest that every Trinidadian and Tobagonian could create a good calypso and sing it too. Mr. Speaker, this argument of lack of funding, I want to suggest that if the arithmetic of the Member from Fyzabad is correct, that the arithmetic is much better now than it was previously. If we are seeing 67 cents per person per year then the reality is

that that is three times what we were seeing on the funding provided for Local Government in previous times, when another group was in that administration.

Then there are a number of issues raised. I know that the caucus of Local Government for the other side was held on Wednesday at 9.00 a.m. What happened was that a litany of areas of dissent was raised, except that they were raised in the context of picking issues that were already discussed in the local government reform initiative of this Government. The Government has in fact determined that there are issues in local government that need address in terms of funding, financing, et cetera, and we have looked at these issues. The decentralization unit that was discussed is, in fact, in place and that unit has presented to the Government and to the country an initial draft Green Paper.

We have gone out to country and there have been at least five national seminars and discussions on local government. The Government has funded a survey by TTCAN independently; has brought in the other people in the NGOs, et cetera, and all these matters now constitute proposals to the country. In that context the issues that were being raised were in fact dealt with.

On issues of flooding, management and authority of the chairman, we have dealt with that matter and it should be for the information of the House. Every month all the chairmen and mayors in local government including those who belong to another party do in fact meet every second Wednesday of the month and discuss the issues facing local government.

I want to suggest that there is a degree of collaboration and cooperation that we have never had before. These mayors and chairmen have in fact—I could tell you that at the last meeting, before Wednesday, I asked the question and I could repeat that anywhere. Do we have funding issues in local government? Do you have trouble for the funding of your corporations?

Hon. Member: Every caucus they said this?

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: Every single mayor, including your mayor for Chaguanas, who is your leader in those discussions, said they do not have trouble and they do not have inequity in accessing funding from the Government. I am suggesting to you—

Mr. Singh: Hon. Minister, are you saying that the Mayor, Suruj Rambachan, said, in response to you, that he has no problem with funding? Because I can tell you that at our caucus he raises the funding issue.

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: Mr. Speaker, given the history of the party on the other side, the vindictiveness and the way in which people are treated when they dissent, I would hesitate to answer the question, lest Mayor Rambachan finds himself the victim of a pogrom.

I want to suggest that the discussions in local government— *[Interruption]* I do not want them to kill him.

Hon. Member: Yes, let them kill him. *[Crosstalk]* *[Laughter]*

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: I do not want them to kill him. Mr. Speaker, we would want that the business of local government continues to be carried out with appropriate collaboration and cooperation.

Mr. Speaker, the question that arises really, is that the EBC has done its duty; the order is in place and has been drafted; the report is before us and I would want to suggest, that given the importance of local government; given the general national consensus that we need change and a new direction for local government and especially, given the fact that we have agreed that the direction of decentralization; the agreement that local Government is a critical change factor in the governance to this country, all Members of this House agree to validate the Report and agree to the promulgation of the order.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

6.15 p.m.

Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Preamble approved.

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

House resumed.

Bill reported, without amendment, read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Ministry in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, February 24, 2006 at 1.30 pm. I wish to inform my colleagues that on that day the Government intends to debate Motion No. 2 on

Adjournment

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today's Supplemental Order Paper, that is, the Report of the Salaries Review Commission. [*Interruption*]

Escalating Food Prices

Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (*Chaguanas*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am really pleased to raise a matter relating to the escalating food prices in this Motion.

Mr. Speaker, rising food prices are creating havoc and dislocating our society. Government has abdicated its responsibilities to the people in several areas of national life. They are not intervening to exercise the necessary controls for the welfare of the people. This country is on auto pilot because the Government does not have a clue on how to intervene; how to govern effectively. They believe in the invisible hand of market forces. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, this Government's record is one of self-serving. They are diverting State funds to promote their selfish, politically partisan agenda; nepotism, cronyism, favouritism, et cetera are the order of the day. Since 2002 the price of food has increased annually, by around 30 per cent. Four years later the price of food may have increased by as much as 150 per cent, in certain instances.

What has this Government done to stem the spiralling cost of living; especially food prices? The basic necessities of food, shelter and clothing are fast becoming beyond the reach of our people. Maybe, PNM would have to commission another expensive MORI poll to tell them that. They do not care for the over 200,000 pensioners who are on fixed incomes and whose pensions have been virtually devalued. On top of the rising food prices and increasing inflation, residential consumers across the board will now have to pay a whopping 45 per cent increase in their electricity bills come March 01, 2006. The 55 per cent increase to be levied on commercial consumers would also be passed on to the householders. This increase is more than six times the rate of inflation; further increases would be added in 2007 to 2010 and while the exchequer is awash with cash, rising food prices keep contributing to the inflation spiral. Electricity increase would also add to the food price spiral.

Mr. Speaker, I am calling on this Government, now, to zero-rate the VAT on electricity bills. If this Government cares about the poor people they should remove the VAT from electricity bills, so that this could affect— [*Interruption*] Electricity bills; that is vatable in case you pay electricity bills.

Hon. Member: Residential?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Residential, of course. Also, to subsidize gas; Trinidad and Tobago boasts of so much natural gas and yet a basic necessity as electricity. I would ask that the gas be subsidized; that it be used by PowerGen, Trinity Power and others; and, of course, Mr. Speaker, I want to advise the Government that what is taking place in this country, this T&TEC rate is ill-advised. When you look at the cost of living in this country, at this time, T&TEC rates increase is ill-timed.

The cardinal role of a responsible and caring Government is to provide not only a reliable supply of wholesome food but to keep food prices within the reach of all citizens, especially our senior citizens. When you look at all developed countries this is the case, and Trinidad and Tobago old aged pensioners—\$1,000 per month, around there—and public assistance recipients, when they have to face the grocery to buy their basic food stuff, it erodes that pension; nothing is left for electricity bills, doctor bills and so on. These people, as far as I am concerned, continue to suffer.

The progressive achievement of food security and the installation of our food supply from the health risk, price and supply vagaries of the international markets are fundamental to our integrity as a nation. We are all aware of the huge import bill, as far as food is concerned—\$2 billion annually is spent on its importation—obscene. We have had a golden opportunity to transform 77,000 acres of prime agricultural lands into productive food supply, but a woeful lack of vision prevented us from doing so.

The award of two-acres of land to former Caroni workers without the requisite supporting infrastructure can only result in achieving uncoordinated subsistence farming. In addition to achieving food security and reasonable food prices, we can be exporting food to the high priced tourist economies of the Caricom markets and even to our communities in North America and other such destinations.

We are lacking enlightened leadership and the ability to apply simple solutions to enhance the realization of our food security. We can produce our food and insulate ourselves from the inflationary prices paid to foreign producers, but this Government is prepared to cut its nose to spite its face because of the spite against Caroni (1975) Limited and other people. Why do we not harness our abundant agricultural resources to feed ourselves at cheaper cost? Politics have taken precedence over sound economic fundamentals.

We may have the best farmers in the Caribbean; we have the largest acreage of prime agricultural lands; our history is known as one of agriculture, but, Mr. Speaker, why must food prices continue to escalate? The agricultural sector has been sidelined and neglected by this Government; access roads have deteriorated; irrigation systems have been neglected and a lack of a system of incentives for fertilizers, seedlings, et cetera has resulted in skyrocketing food prices. There are hazards in agriculture from flooding to a lack of systems of irrigation in the dry season. It would appear that this Government has a psychological block against the development of the agricultural sector because of its fixation in winning votes.

Mr. Speaker, in Trinidad and Tobago we have a glaring contradiction of mushrooming poverty in increasing prosperity. It seems that the agenda of this Government is to keep 40 per cent of our people in persistent and permanent poverty; after they buy food, as I said, little or no money is left for what they could do. What do we see; the Prime Minister and his Cabinet entertain themselves on their ego trips.

Recent fire in Port of Spain; no water in the fire hydrants; [*Interruption*] while the Prime Minister is hell-bent on having his way in building a palace, a rose garden and other such modern luxury; and the rest of the country suffers. This Parliament would be converted into the Prime Minister's office; again pampering himself, and allowing food prices to go unabatedly—up.

When I look at today's report which was laid concerning the Salaries Review Commission, I want to read into the record something I find very interesting and apt to this debate, Chapter 4 page 7:

“Since our last review, Trinidad and Tobago has continued to experience positive economic growth. The data suggest that the ample energy resource and the decisions made several years ago to promote downstream development have given the country a solid and enviable economic base. Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by 7% in 2005 compared with a growth rate of 6.2% in 2004 and we have been advised that in 2006, it is anticipated that real GDP will grow by 10%. The main impetus for the strong GDP growth came from the energy sector which expanded by 10.9% in 2005.”

Mr. Speaker, this trend is expected to continue in the medium term. It goes on to say:

“The Commission notes, however, that inflation picked up sharply in the latter part of 2004, stimulated by a sharp rise in food prices. This trend continued in 2005 and was affected further by increasing fiscal expenditures.”

Mr. Speaker, having read this into the record—and the Salaries Review Commission has realized that; because of the cost of food prices and inflation they have decided to increase the salaries of the people that are covered by this report. But yet the people out there; the people who are working for \$2,000 a month and less; the people who live under the poverty line, must face the same groceries like we do and it is quite unfortunate that this Government only thinks about the rich. If this trend continues, the rich in this country will become richer and the poor will become poorer because of the non-caring attitude of this Government.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Christine Kangaloo): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In dealing with the issue of rising food prices one, of course, has to appreciate the factors that caused the phenomenon in the first place. There has to be an understanding of the disease before there can be a prescription for the cure.

Many of the factors that caused food prices to rise are external to us. Some of the international factors are: the increasing international demand for food, especially, from China; erratic weather conditions adversely affecting food belts around the globe; restrictions in international trades as a result of animal diseases which adversely affects food safety; removal of subsidies in the European Union which impacted customers directly in the form of increases in the price of milk, and increases in oil prices which have led to increases in the cost of production, packaging and transportation.

Because prices have increased globally, local manufacturers also faced increased prices when they buy raw material from international suppliers. Increased production cost of local items result in higher retail prices for consumers. And on the local scene, agricultural prices fluctuate, mainly because of erratic weather pattern.

So, Mr. Speaker, in order to ameliorate the increase in food prices these are the factors that are required to be addressed. Many of these factors are completely outside Government control. Government can no more control the weather than it can the international market for oil; therefore, as the Member ought to know in relation to curbing increases of food prices there is a limited area of permissible Government intervention; and I say permissible, because the old approach of price control is, of course, anathema to modern economies.

Some permissible areas of influence include the development of domestic agriculture to promote self-sufficiency in food production through the development of the country's agricultural infrastructure, and this will result in a removal of dependence on foreign food resources. Another permissible area of influence is the removal or reduction of import duties and a third one is in the area of moral suasion or consumer empowerment. I want to point out that this Government is doing all three.

In respect of food security, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is implementing programmes to increase food production and to make more resources such as seeds, credit and technical support available to farmers and is promoting an accelerated land distribution programme and improved training for farmers. The Ministry is improving the strategic sub-sector initiatives that include revitalization of the cocoa industry; development of the honey industry and strengthening its marketing arm—NAMDEVCO—and is now better prepared to explore and acquire new markets for agricultural commodities.

Mr. Speaker, the recent distribution of the two-acre plots of land to some 7,000 former Caroni workers also serves as part of Government's thrust to increase domestic agricultural production. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources will be working closely with farmers to promote the growth of specially selected crops with an emphasis on those deemed strategically and nutritionally significant to citizens.

In listening to what the Member said about agriculture, I just wanted to point out some statistics which really show the performance of the agricultural sector during the period 1995—2001; where the contribution of agriculture to GDP decreased from 5 per cent to 1.4 per cent. The growth rate in the crop sub-sector decreased from 1.9 per cent to 1.8 per cent. There was a decline in cocoa production; there was a decline in coffee production and there was a decline in citrus production between the years 1995—2001.

I just want to point out that between the years 2001—2004 the agriculture GDP has grown by approximately \$200 million. This is one of the indicators that demonstrate that we are well on our way to self-sufficiency in food production. I also wish to refer to a publication of NAMDEVCO, *Green Vine*, for the month of February where it says that the School Nutrition Programme currently absorbs close to 5 million kilograms of locally produced fresh fruits and vegetables per year. So, all of these are showing that Government is moving in the right direction towards self-sustainment in food production.

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Another issue is the removal and reduction of import duties. The Government had indicated during the presentation of the budget that it would be reducing or removing the import duties on a selected list of food items. Duties on frozen beef, pork and lamb, as well as on goat meat, cod, unsweetened milk and condensed milk were almost immediately reduced. I now wish to announce that Caricom has agreed to the suspension of duties on even more food items and these items include peas, beans, grape juice, dried grapes, frozen mixed vegetables, cooking oil, pig tail, prunes, some infant preparations and raisin bran.

This is a comprehensive list of some 18 items, which really, we could compare in 2001 when the only thing that was done in the budget, at that time, was to remove VAT on salted fish. It is expected that the action taken by the Government in removing and reducing these import duties will go some way in curbing the effects of rising food prices. I wish to point out that information received from the Consumer Affairs Division has shown that there was a 1.5 per cent decrease in the price of condensed milk between December, 2005 and January, 2006. Remember, Mr. Speaker, that the duty on condensed milk was decreased from 25 per cent to 15 per cent.

The third point of moral suasion is that the Government intends to ensure that the consumer is empowered to make the best decision for his budget when purchasing food items. And therefore, the Consumer Affairs Division intends to act as a watchdog for the consumer and will soon be publishing prices on selected food items at groceries and supermarkets throughout Trinidad and Tobago. In so doing, consumers can see for themselves what is being charged for food by competitors in the marketplace and make informed decisions about where and from whom to purchase their foodstuff; by so doing, any unscrupulous business practices and scandalous profiteering at the expense of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will therefore be exposed.

Discussions are currently being held with the Supermarkets Association on this new initiative and it is expected to be launched by the middle of March, 2006. These then are the limited areas in which a Government might permissibly, intervene in attempting to curb rising food prices. This Government has intervened in all of them; because of their limited scope, however, it is to measures aimed at mitigating the impact as opposed to the cause of rising food prices that the majority of a Government's efforts must turn, and in this area the Government is sparing no effort.

I turn, Mr. Speaker, to the issue of the Smart Card which was announced in the budget. [*Interruption*] I am pleased to inform you that with effect from March

31, 2006 a debit card system would become operational. This system would allow its recipients, estimated to be about 16,000 households at the beginning of the launch, in the first instance, to access funds in the amount of \$300 per month for a family of three persons and under; \$400 a month for a family of four to five persons and \$500 per month for a family of six persons or more for the specific purpose of purchasing food items. This debit card system will be replaced by a Smart Card programme which will have a full rollout by December, 2006. Some 60,000 families should benefit from the full rollout of the Smart Card programme and this programme would involve participation in training.

Mr. Speaker, this initiative is a social intervention strategy targeting the more vulnerable sectors of society. And you can see that these persons would, therefore, get a reprieve from rising food prices. I also wish, in talking about mitigating the effects of rising food prices, to remind hon. Members of the reduction of the rate of income tax; the recent reduction to 25 per cent which has, of course, increased the disposable income of our citizens. There are also in place, the social programmes of the Government, which, again, allow the Government to put in place efforts to mitigate the effects of rising food prices. You have all of the social programmes such as old age pension, public assistance which had been increased, and not to forget, the school feeding programme which caters for over 140,000 meals on a daily basis.

Mr. Speaker, this Motion implicitly recognizes that Government's role is to curb and cannot be to prevent, altogether, the rising food prices.

I, therefore, wish to thank the hon. Member for providing this Government with the opportunity to restate, yet again, the multifaceted approach that has been put in place, both to curb rising food prices and to mitigate their effects upon the population.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.39 p.m.