

*Leave of Absence**Tuesday, October 26, 1993***SENATE***Tuesday, October 26, 1993*

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I have granted leave to Sen. Russell Huggins to be absent from today's sitting due to illness.

Sen. Dr. Lenny Saith and Sen. Surendranath Capildeo have both indicated that they would be late for today's sitting.

SESSIONAL SELECT COMMITTEES

Mr. President: The following Sessional Select Committees have been appointed for the current session:

Committee of Privileges

Mr. President (Chairman)

Sen. R. Huggins

Sen. D. Ojah-Maharaj

Sen. S. Capildeo

Sen. Prof. J. Spence

Standing Orders Committee

Sen. A. Mark (Chairman)

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis

Sen. A. Hassim

Sen. W. Mark

Sen. M. Daly

Statutory Instruments Committee

Sen. J. Rahael (Chairman)

Sen. G. Draper

Sen. Pundit R. Gosine

Sen. C. Merritt

Sen. J. Rooks

Sessional Select Committee

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

House Committee

Sen. J. Elder (Chairman)

Sen. B. Kuei Tung

Sen. S. Callender

Sen. S. Baksh

Sen. D. Mahabir-Wyatt

COMPANIES BILL

(Joint Select Committee)

Mr. President: I have received the following communication from the Speaker of the House of Representatives:

"Dear Mr. President,

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE

With reference to your letter dated October 20, 1993, the House of Representatives agreed to the following Resolution at a sitting held on Friday, October 22, 1993:

'Whereas the Senate has agreed that a Committee of both Houses be appointed to consider and report on the Companies Bill, 1993:

Be it Resolved:

That this House appoint and nominate a Select Committee of six (6) Members to join with a Select Committee of equal number appointed and nominated by the Senate to consider and report on the Companies Bill, 1993.'

The Senate accordingly is requested to appoint six (6) Members to join with the following six (6) Members appointed by the House:

Mr. Keith Sobion

Mr. Kenneth Valley

Mr. Andrew Casimire

Mr. Hedwige Bereaux

Mr. Shamshuddin Mohammed

Mr. Subhas Panday.

Yours faithfully,

Speaker,

House of Representatives."

GUARANTEE OF LOANS (UWI) BILL

Bill to enable the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to guarantee loans to the University of the West Indies by any lending agency for use at the campuses of St. Augustine and Mount Hope, brought from the House of Representatives [*The Minister of Public Administration in the Office of the Prime Minister*]; read the first time.

Motion made, That the next stage be taken at the next sitting of the Senate. [*Hon. G. Draper*]

Question put and agreed to.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of the Primary Education Programme—Inter-American Development Bank Loan Contracts 796/SF-TT and 215/1C-TT for the year ended December 31, 1990. [*The Minister of Public Administration in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Gordon Draper)*]
2. Business Expansion and Industrial Restructuring Loan between Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and International Bank for Reconstruction Development and Letter of Sectoral Policy to the World Bank Business Expansion and Industrial Restructuring Loan. (Loan Contract No. 3432-TR). [*Hon. G. Draper*]
3. US \$25 million Fixed Rate Bond, 1996. [*Hon. G. Draper*]
4. Annual Report of the Public Utilities Commission for the year ended December 31, 1992. [*Hon. G. Draper*]
5. Annual Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission for the year 1989. [*Hon. G. Draper*]
6. Inter-American Development Bank—Draft Loan Contract 764/OC-TT—Multi-Sectoral Pre-Investment Programme. [*Hon. G. Draper*]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**IMF Annual Review Report**

2. **Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt** asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Will the 1993 Annual Review Report submitted by the International Monetary Fund under Article 4 of the International Monetary Fund Membership Agreement be laid in Parliament?

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Wendell Mottley): Mr. President, the Annual Review Report submitted by the IMF under Article 4 is a confidential document and it is not the practice by member countries to lay it in their respective parliaments.

The 1993 Review Report is still in the process of being prepared and no decision has been taken by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, to date, in respect of laying this report in this Parliament.

Sen. Daly: Mr. President, could the Minister indicate whether any of the contents of this document could become Government's policy?

Hon. W. Mottley: Mr. President, I have not seen the report and I do not know if the IMF, in all instances, would be going along with Trinidad and Tobago's policy.

Industrial Restructuring Loan

4. Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

(a) Will the Letter of Intent and the contents of the Inter-American Development Bank Agreement covering the Industrial Restructuring Loan be laid in Parliament?

(b) Can the Minister outline the conditionalities attached to this loan?

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Wendell Mottley): Mr. President, there is no loan with the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) for industrial restructuring. There is, however, an Investment Sector Loan (ISL) with the IADB for US \$80 million. The loan agreement for the ISL was signed on August 5, 1993 and was recently laid before Parliament along with the supporting sectoral policy letter.

1.40 p.m.

SELECT COMMITTEE

The Minister of Public Administration in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Gordon Draper): Mr. President, I beg to move the following resolution:

Be it resolved that the Senate appoint and nominate a select committee of the following six Senators to join with a select committee of equal number appointed and nominated by the House of Representatives to consider and report on the Companies Bill 1993:

Sen. Brian Kuei Tung

Sen. Ainsley Mark

Sen. John Rahael

Sen. Michael Mansoor

Sen. Martin Daly

Sen. Wade Mark

Question put and agreed to.

ORDER

(Public Gallery)

Mr. President: I would just like to remind those in charge of order in the public gallery, that in any House in any Parliament of the Commonwealth, when the Presiding Officer is on his feet no one should be moving about, entering or leaving the Chamber. Please try to ensure that those who do not know, comply with that basic rule.

AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

Sen. Prof. John Spence: Mr. President, my strategy this afternoon will be to try to be as brief as I can with the hope that what I say would stimulate wider discussion from other Senators. I, myself, have spoken on the subject of agriculture many times in the Senate and so my views, by now, should be well known. And since I would have a final opportunity at the end of the debate, I hope, to wind up at that stage I may, perhaps, have more to say. That is the way I would like to approach this afternoon's discussion.

The motion, as set out, is really a summary on the position that I hold with respect to this subject. I would now like to read the motion.

Mr. President, I beg to move,

Whereas the major industrial countries support and subsidize agriculture; for example, in 1990 the USA subsidized beef, milk and rice by 31 per cent, 62

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. PROF. SPENCE]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

per cent and 49 per cent respectively; while the EEC supported these three commodities in that same year by 54 per cent, 69 per cent and 60 per cent respectively; and

Whereas agricultural sub-sectors are being threatened by the importation of subsidized products; and

Whereas capital in agriculture is being depleted particularly in sub-sectors of milk, meat and coconut:

Be it Resolved that this Senate urge the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to immediately:

- a. Announce its intention to support the agricultural sector through managing the trade in agricultural products and through subsidies, where necessary, employing funds derived from tariffs on competitive food imports;
- b. Pay subsidies now due to farmers;
- c. Analyze commodities on an individual basis in terms of the social and economic issues which they raise;
- d. Commission studies led by local experts on the effects of conditionalities attached to loans as they affect the agricultural sector;
- e. Develop policies to ensure long-term support for the agricultural sector with reference to food security and national nutritional requirements and the possibilities arising from CARICOM trade;
- f. Develop a role for UWI and ECIAF graduates in farming.

The present situation with agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago, to put it mildly, is such that would not give one very great optimism for the future.

The total contribution of agriculture to GDP in Trinidad and Tobago is now about 2.5 per cent. It is interesting to note that we seem to be concluding from this that this sector should not be given a great deal of prominence in our overall thrust.

I think it is interesting to reflect that in the United States no one can decry the importance of the agricultural sector in that country. The contribution is three per cent in the United States and in France it is four per cent. Yet, in France as we are all aware, the agricultural sector is a very powerful one. Indeed, the possibility that the GATT round of discussions may be delayed, very much hinges on the

activities of the French farmers and the pressure that they are bringing to bear on their governments and, therefore, the position which these governments are taking. I think we are very mistaken if we conclude that because the sector makes a small contribution to GDP, that it should not be given prominence. I hope to indicate why I think, in spite of that, it is not a matter of some importance.

It is interesting to reflect on the situation of agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago over the years. I will use some published data from the Central Statistical Office to try to arrive at figures which would indicate the change that we have had. I have deliberately used the 1962–1987 figures because they were all under the continuous regime of one government, so that we need not blame the last Government if the changes occurred.

In 1962 our agricultural sector contributed 10 per cent to GDP and in 1987 it was 5 per cent. Of course, as I have said it is now 2.5 per cent. But, in addition to that, in 1962, our agricultural exports paid for 64 per cent of our food imports. In 1987 they paid for about 11.1 per cent. Today it is approximately 10 per cent, as well. So that certainly the importance of agriculture has declined quite considerably over that period.

The present situation has seen an accelerating decline in the sector and many of us fear that it is in the process of rapid demise. Some of us believe that that demise is engendered by policies on the macro economic level which the Government is pursuing, particularly with respect to trade liberalization and the removal of subsidies and, also, the lack of adequate protection against subsidized imports of food.

1.50 p.m.

The dairy industry is very much under attack from the importation of heavily subsidized powdered milk. In a sense one cannot blame Nestle, the company that buys our fresh milk because it is under pressure from these imports. It would seem it has decided to limit its buying of fresh milk on the local market at a certain level; in addition to which it has substantially reduced the price of fresh milk paid to the larger farms which on the whole are state farms such as Caroni, Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises and the university. As an aside, this is a great blow to the finances of the university which is under pressure in other ways.

The consequence of this is that dairy farmers are finding it very difficult to meet their commitments—for example, the Agricultural Development Bank—and are actually offering their animals for slaughter for meat, to meet these payments.

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. PROF. SPENCE]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

Now the capacity for any country to produce dairy milk rests on the size of its herds. Any reduction in the size of that herd, means not only a substantial expenditure in capital to replace it or to build it up again, but also, if one remembers the importation of cattle—not only the cost, but the processes that have to be undergone to move cattle from Canada; in many cases we bought cattle wholesale from Canada—in order to replenish the herd, this is likely to take a very long time. If we lose the capital on the animals that we now have, then, replacing them would not be possible in the short term.

While it is true, that currently, we produce only about 10 per cent of our milk requirement, if we lose even that small amount, then as I said, it would be very difficult to replace. On the other hand, if we start from that base and our strategy is to expand, then the position would be somewhat different.

The coconut industry has fallen on even harder times. The importation of subsidized soya beans to be made into oil was the first problem that arose. Of course, if we look at the television news and read the newspapers, we would realize that the coconut farms in Cedros and Icacos are being closed, with the resultant rise in the unemployment level, especially in areas which were depressed, to begin with.

Again, with coconut, if these farms are sold, and farmers who would like to cultivate some other crop come in to the picture, then the likelihood is that they would destroy these coconut trees and take them out in order to cultivate another crop. This is also being done in some instances. For example, I know of one farmer who is cultivating water melons and so has cleared about 60 acres of coconut to that end.

Again, coconut trees take at least 10 years to bear, and so the replacement of mature bearing trees would be a long-term business. It is even worse than that in the case of coconut because coconut trees are subject to a disease in Trinidad and Tobago when they are young, but to which they are resistant when they are mature. This is the red ring disease. This was a problem in 1933, after the hurricane which passed over Cedros and Icacos. The re-establishment of the coconut industry was very difficult because a large number of young trees were susceptible at the same time, and so they were devastated when they were growing. Therefore, this means more cost and a longer time to re-establish the industry if it should close.

In the case of coconuts we may have the situation where a marginal or a slight change in the rate of exchange, say we went from US\$1 to TT\$10 instead of the present US\$1 to TT\$5.7, this could mean that the importation of soya beans would not compete as effectively with the local production of coconuts. We might lose the industry and then find that we pay more for our oil than we are doing now.

There should be thought outside the realms of possibility with respect to what might happen to our rate of exchange. If we think of the present move to enlarge our sphere to be at one with the Latin American countries, with whom we are exchanging trade—I think this is undoubtedly a good move in the right direction—if we are to trade with Venezuela in which the bolivar is US\$1 to 99 bolivars. I wish somebody would explain to me how you would compete in trade when your currency is US\$1 to TT\$5.75 with a country in which the rate of exchange is US\$1 to 99 bolivars.

Recently, I was told by a farmer that he tried to sell some water buffaloes to Venezuela and of course, when the Venezuelan farmer compared the price that he would have to pay here, given the rate of exchange, with the price at which he could buy water buffaloes in Venezuela, he just could not do it, despite the fact that we have a superior herd. Certainly the rate of exchange is important.

In the citrus industry, in the late 60s and early 70s, we exported over a million crates of grapefruit. This was of a very high quality and it carried a good reputation on the world market. Largely, I would say that the demise of that sector was coincidental with the boom in oil prices, because it is a labour intensive industry, and the competition for wage rates, in other sectors, was great, and that sector tended to decline. The same is the case with cocoa.

In the case of meat, again, we produced about 10 per cent of our meat, but this is also under threat with the importation of highly subsidized products. For example, I am told that one can land Irish intervention beef in Trinidad and Tobago at US 75 cents per pound. The Irish Government buys this beef from Irish farmers at \$1.40 per pound, puts it in cold storage, sells it to brokers who also get their commission, then it is landed here at US 75 cents per pound. Clearly, the Irish Government thinks it is worthwhile to support its farmers by subsidizing their products quite heavily.

In the case of pork, I am told that the giving of excessive licences for importation of pork has had a devastating effect on that industry.

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. PROF. SPENCE]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

So far, the poultry industry has been protected, but poultry farmers were extremely nervous because one hears pronouncements periodically with respect to the importation of poultry. In my opinion, these pronouncements tend to be somewhat imprecise. For example, recently, I listened to the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources on the radio referring to poultry and he made the comment that while there may be some poultry imports allowed, these might all be for turkey and so they would not affect the type of chickens that we produce here. If this is so, then that should be clearly stated as Government's policy, irrevocably that that is what it intends to do. Saying that it is a possibility, or something that might be done or might not be done, does not really help with the poultry industry.

Recently, a study was done on the poultry industry by Price Waterhouse, a reputable firm. It is called, *The Report on the Current Status of The Poultry Industry in Trinidad and Tobago*. I think it was done for the Poultry Association. This report indicates that by and large our production of poultry meat is competitive by way of costs with that of the United States. It is not the case that we are inefficient producers. Of course, the problem is that the United States subsidizes its export of poultry, in addition to which it pays a premium price for white meat, and therefore the other parts can be sold at a much lower price; then, the importing country is faced with this competition, if the meat is allowed entry.

The report under comment states that there are about 8,000 jobs dependent on the poultry industry in Trinidad and Tobago and that ADB has about \$54.4 million out on loans to poultry farmers. One can see what would happen if there is any demise or threat to this industry. It is stated here that the United States subsidizes exports of poultry meat to the value of US 24 cents per pound. I ask: Could US farmers compete against such a subsidy, were they allowed to import meat on that basis? Of course, it would not be allowed into the United States because they have their anti-dumping legislation in place.

2.00 p.m.

With respect to vegetables, the problem is mainly flooding in many areas. I believe that we are efficient vegetable producers, but there are some issues that need attention in order for that efficiency to express itself properly.

In addition to that, vegetable farming usually occurs near to capital cities for obvious reasons. It is a perishable crop, and so movement is usually easier close to the city. This happens all over the world. This has the added advantage when one

has a green belt in proximity to the city. If you drive out of Port of Spain, along the Eastern Main Road, there is ribbon development and housing all the way up to Arima. I myself have invited the previous Minister of Housing, and the present one, to drive along the Priority Bus Route to see that the last little area, which at one time was producing vegetables, is now going into housing. However, on the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway, we drive through open spaces because there is the Aranguez area where vegetables are grown. That, too, it is my understanding, is under threat from housing development. I think it would be a tragedy if it goes in that direction. So, with some of our main activities, we do not have a very rosy picture.

There is one bright spot on the horizon and that is in the area of floriculture because there are new investors. It is a heavy capital investment industry and certainly not open to small farmers, unless they have very heavy capital investments and assets to back it up. It is an export industry, so it is earning foreign exchange. Of course, one does not know how long this will continue because already there are rumblings in the United States and there is at least one bill from a senator from Hawaii which has been put up two years running in the United States Parliament, to limit the importation of cut flowers to the existing level.

Anytime one talks with the advisers from the multinational institutions, whether it be the World Bank or the Inter-American Development Bank, their position is that we should import cheap food from developed countries—of course, particularly the United States, and these consultants are often from that country—and we should grow things for export. Then you say to them, "What should we grow for export?" And the only answer I have ever had from one of these gentlemen is, "cut flowers".

Mr. President, if we had 500 acres of cut flowers in Trinidad and Tobago, we would flood whatever markets we now have. Certainly, the likelihood of getting up to 500 acres in the near future is not very great. It would involve an investment of \$200 million or \$300 million. It is about \$.5 million an acre in investment. That is not likely to occur. What then do we do with the other 200,000 acres of arable land in Trinidad and Tobago if the only solution to the agricultural issue is cut flowers?

We are left with the question of what is Government's policy? I suppose there are three ways one can deduce Government's policy. One is pronouncement from Government ministers. The other is such documents as the loan agreement with

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. PROF. SPENCE]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

the Inter-American Development Bank, because some policy issues are stated there. Thirdly, is the recent Green Paper on Agriculture.

I suppose in some ways one should say that the Green Paper should supersede the other avenues for information, that is, the statements by ministers and the loan agreement. It cannot possibly supersede the loan agreement because that is a signed international agreement. The Green Paper is out for discussion and it is interesting to look at some of the comments being made on that Green Paper.

One of its members, Prof. Lawrence Wilson, has said that the paper is imprecise and open to several interpretations. I quote from the *Guardian* newspaper—I regret that I have not got the date—an article by Mr. John Cassie as follows:

"Wilson, commenting on the draft paper yesterday, told the *Guardian* that while the report has great merit, the imprecise language means that one is unable to find a definitive policy framework for agricultural development."

If one of the authors of the paper says that, I think that one can conclude that we are not going to get policy from that source.

Also, writing in the *Express* on July 22, 1993, Mr. Lloyd Best has said, more or less, that the gentlemen who were involved in writing the document had dodged the issues and in fact had not come up with a policy. I suppose in a sense this is not really surprising because a policy has to come from the Government and so technocrats come in after the policy has been written and then they will flesh it out, give the strategies for implementation and the like.

With respect to the document itself, it has about 32 pages of background and this really is a rehash of a number of other documents which have been written. Basically, we have had a spate of these documents. The last Government had a huge document called *National Agricultural Development Plan*. Then the FAO had a report on *Agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago*; then the Inter-American Development Bank had a sector study during the last government, run by an Israeli group, Tihad, and so some of the information that is here is available in fuller form in those other documents. So the first 30 pages give background information.

We have one page, page 32, the policy objectives. I will not read them, but that brings out the policy objectives, not the policy. The next chapter is headed, "Strategies", not policies, and we have to extract from the strategies what the

policies may be. In a sense, this is why Prof. Wilson has made the point that it is very difficult from this document to get hard government policies. I think we have to discard that source as our information on what the Government policy may be. Let us hope that when the White Paper comes out, this document would have been completely rewritten and we will have a clearer statement of the policy. My intervention at this time is because I hope that by discussing it we may have some thoughts with which the Government will interact about what the policy may be.

An interesting aspect of the document, however, is the attachment at the end. After we have gone through the full set of recommendations, there is an attachment which says, "Policy Actions Already Agreed Re. Agricultural Policy". So, we are developing a policy, but some reactions have already been agreed to. At the bottom it says: "Cabinet Minute No. 3287 dated December 30, 1982 modified by ISL". I think that is Inter-sectoral Loan Agreement. So the policy document has already been modified by a Cabinet decision, of which we do not have the details and by the Structural Adjustment Loan, which Letter of Agreement was written in May, according to the documentation we have had recently.

In the light of this difficulty in finding out what Government policy would be, I consulted one of my economist friends and gave him the Structural Adjustment Loan documents to read and asked him to give me a reaction. He had already read the Green Paper.

2.10 p.m

He responded by saying that he had deduced seven myths under which he felt the Government was acting in formulating its policy with respect to the agricultural sector. I am going to read these myths because I think they are quite interesting and throw some light on perhaps, what might be happening with respect to how policies were being formulated.

The first myth that is being suggested that the Government may have is that:

"the international community is moving rapidly to substitute tariffication for other forms of protection in agriculture and manufacturing;"

In fact, Mr. President, what is happening is that the number of non-tariff barriers is increasing, rather than substituting tariffication for other forms of protection in the developed countries, the non-tariff barriers are increasing. So that in 1980, 26.5 per cent of the manufactured goods imported by industrialized

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. PROF. SPENCE]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

countries from developing countries was subject to non-tariff restrictions. In 1990, this percentage had risen to 28 per cent. It is on the increase, and one can refer to the document which gives this sort of data.

The second myth, Mr. President, is that:

"the conclusion of the Uruguay Round will result in a very rapid, if not immediate, dismantling of the system of producer and export subsidies and that competitive forces will appear in international markets for the first time in the history of the universe;"

Of course, Mr. President, we know that that cannot be the case, but in fact, in all the agreements for dismantling, even with the North American Free Trade Area, (NAFTA) long-time scales are given for reducing to that state. The discussion that is going on between France and the United States is not on the removal of subsidies, it is on how low they shall come, and the French is sticking out for a higher level, not to remove it, and the bartering is, to what level they will be reduced. Yet, we seem to be basing our policies on the assumption that these subsidies will be removed. Even if they were removed, what would happen?

A recent Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) publication series has indicated that should all subsidies be removed, the price of food on the world market would rise to a higher level than it now is and the countries that will suffer are the net importers of food like, Trinidad and Tobago. The picture that I see is that we may have reduced our capacity to produce and now we will be faced with higher import bills. If we go the route of the hon. Minister of Trade, Industry and Tourism, in reply to my question about the subsidizing of Irish beef, his reply was "but I require cheap food for the consumers". The consumers would have cheap food for a period of time, two or three years but if his belief that the subsidies are going to be removed, succeeds, the price will go up, by which time we would have reduced our capacity to produce.

The third myth is that:

"agricultural technology is generic, not crop specific, and there is an easy, costless migration of agricultural skills and agricultural infrastructure from one form of agronomy to another, say, from growing tomatoes or rice, to say, cut flowers; that capital needs for the transition are readily supplied and that new forms of agronomy will encounter no tariff or non tariff barriers in international markets in the future;"

The point that I had been making earlier was that, indeed, it could be very costly, either to replace or to shift from one enterprise to another and that the new enterprise may also face barriers in the world market.

The fourth myth is that:

"agricultural subsidies paid to farmers represent a major net transfer of resources from the general community to the farming community;

This is often stated and the economist do all sorts of calculations indicating that we are in fact transferring resources from urban to rural areas. Of course, they do their calculations, not on the real price of growing food in the developed countries, but based on the subsidized price, and they say that is a transfer.

My economist friend has done a very interesting calculation, and I must say that does not normally occur to one, but nevertheless, I think we should give it some thought. What he has suggested is, that because we have zoning laws between urban and rural land, agricultural and non-agricultural land, which you must have, there is no doubt that it is important from an environmental and every point of view—and I will support this and so would he—but the effect of this is to make the value of urban land very much greater than the value of rural land. He considers that if we put a value in the difference between an acre of land in the urban areas and the rural lands in Trinidad and Tobago, it comes out in a differential, in very conservative terms, of some \$40,000. And if we take the total acreage of land in Trinidad and Tobago, this differential value then comes out at \$14 billion. If we take the interest on that, it is about \$1.4 billion per year.

Now we can consider that what we are having here is a transfer of resources from the rural to the urban areas, because the differential in value of land is made by an arbitrary decision that we have made in order to zone. When we are talking about transfer from one area to another, perhaps we should consider some of these other issues with respect to the value of urban and rural areas.

The fifth myth that my friend suggests that we are suffering under, is that:

"food security means the provision of soup kitchens for the poor and the destitute;"

That is not to say that one should not have soup kitchens for the poor and the destitute, but if you read the structural adjustment loan letter, you will see that the impression is given there that food security is not with respect to growing one's food and security in that sense, but security in the sense that everybody being able

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. PROF. SPENCE]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

to have food, whether we import it or whether we buy it. Indeed, if we could import it in a cheaper way so much the better, is the view given.

Mr. President, if we look at that rather narrow view of food security, we may indeed conclude: Why should we have our own food production system; why should we not import it?

The sixth myth is that:

"farm incomes are high, higher than the rest of the community, and that in consequence farmers can afford to bear heavier impositions than those which the manufacturing or tourism sectors are required to bear";

Perhaps we may ask; how can we possibly conclude that this is the view of the Trinidad and Tobago Government? We know that the wages in the rural sector are perhaps one third of the wages in the urban sector.

Mr. President, again, if we read carefully the conditionalities with respect to the loan agreement, we will see that one of the important issues is the restructure of the Agricultural Development Bank and it is suggested there that the bank must now cover all of its costs. If we take the current administrative cost of the bank and factor those into the rate of interest that they would have to charge, the likelihood is, that what will happen in Trinidad and Tobago is what happened in Jamaica, where a similar policy was pursued and by which interest rates rose to some 32 per cent.

Here I have to declare vested interest. I have a loan from the Agricultural Development Bank for my retirement—that is how I hope to keep myself and my wife when I retire. I can say quite categorically, Mr. President, that we would not be able to keep ourselves if the interest rates went to 32 per cent. Let us hope, again, that we can add some assurance that the uncapping of the ceiling of loans which is what is stated in the document to be happening, will not lead to that sort of rise, but the present data indicates that that is what will happen. I invite the Government Ministers to look at an analysis that was done at the ADB some years ago when state enterprises were being looked at to adjudicate on that point.

2.20 p.m.

So the point is, if we are saying that tourism should have sector loans at 13.5 per cent, why do we feel that the agricultural sector, which already has lower incomes, could stand an increase in interest rates, which might be of great magnitude?

Finally, the seventh myth is:

"the mere promise of the Government to pay subsidies is a bankable asset to the clients of the small farmer, regardless of whether that promise is honoured in a reasonable time frame or not."

Of course, this is one of the difficulties from which the farmers have suffered in the past and are still suffering in the present; the subsidies are not, in fact, paid on time. I am told that the last payment for coconut farmers was made in June this year and covered the period up to July, 1992. The milk subsidies, I believe, are about eight months in arrears.

Now, you may say, Mr. President, that the Government is under pressure for finances. The Minister of Finance is here and, of course, we know he is under great pressure. But, I think we have to look at the rural sector in this sort of way—if the Government has to provide a job in the urban sector, whether it be through one of the state enterprises or through the corporations or through URP or what have you, it does not cost less than \$100 a day. Now, in the rural sector the wage would be one-third of that. Indeed, when one is subsidizing a farmer, one is not paying the full wage, one is paying a part of that \$35.00. So it seems to me that for \$20.00 a day one could buy five jobs in the rural sector and only one in the urban sector.

Perhaps we should think about that when we are talking about the welfare of the country as a whole. When we are expending our limited Government resources we need to be very careful in our analysis as to where the money will do the best work, and how we can let this limited money stretch as far as it will go, with respect to the well-being of our country.

To summarize what appears to be the Government's policy, from these various pronouncements and documents. Certainly some of the advisors to the Inter-American Bank and the World Bank urge this position; I may say not necessarily the officials. The problem is that most of these agencies have advisors and they are recruited as consultants mainly from the United States, and largely, it is their views that are being urged on us. The views are that, basically, we should buy cheap food on the world market, where we can get it, the cheaper the better, and that we should export agriculture. As I have said earlier, no one can say to me what commodities we can compete with in that export, except cut flowers.

Before going on to what the alternatives might be, listen to what the President of the Inter-American Bank is reported to have said. This is the same bank

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. PROF. SPENCE]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

whose—I nearly said "petty"—but I must say "junior" officials were urging us this policy. This is quoted from page 3 of an IDB publication, the section is called "Focus". I would just read a part of the article:

"The lowering of trade barriers as part of Latin America's economic reform will make its agricultural producers subject to aggressive foreign competition, in many cases subsidized. As IDB President Enrique Iglesias..."

My former boss at ECLAC, incidentally—

"...has said, the region's farmers are capable of competing with foreign farmers, but not with the treasuries of the developed countries."

So, Iglesias is saying, sure we can compete with the farmers—and this is what the Price Waterhouse study has found in respect of poultry in Trinidad and Tobago—we can compete with the US, but we cannot compete with the treasury which is putting money to the export of their products. The article continues:

"To level the playing field, countries must adopt policies for implementing external tariffs based on subsidies for producers and consumers in their trading partners."

I repeat:

"...external tariffs based on the subsidies for producers and consumers in their trading partners."

On the last occasion that a question was answered on the agricultural sector, the hon. acting Prime Minister made the point that Trinidad and Tobago will not dismantle its protection to its agricultural sector ahead of the dismantling in other countries.

Now, if that is the Government's policy, why in heaven's name does it not say that unequivocally, clearly and in bold letters as headline in tomorrow's newspaper for all to see? Why, at the same time, is the Minister of Trade, Industry and Tourism talking about importation of cheap food, in reply to a question that was asked about doing just that—protecting the country from subsidized imports in the way that Mr. Iglesias is suggesting, by using the anti-dumping legislation? Why has the anti-dumping legislation not been ready before now? All this is happening ahead of the protection that was supposed to have been put in. So, of course, we will close the gate after the horse has escaped.

That really is the issue, Mr. President, and that is why one gets confused about what is Government's policy, because we cannot get clear, unequivocal, unambiguous statements which all Government Ministers will then adhere to. We get this problem of trying to interpret what one is saying, the other is saying, the ambiguities in the Green Paper. Let us be clear, while this document may have been written by a group of twelve persons, once it became a Green Paper it was then adopted as a Government document and the responsibility of those gentlemen ceased, and the Government took on the responsibility. Quite honestly, I wonder if the Members of Cabinet have indeed read this document, because I am certain if they had done so they would not have put it out as a Green Paper.

Mr. President, where should we go from here? What are the alternatives? In my humble opinion, first of all, we need to decide whether we want to have an agriculture sector. That may sound like a very naive and not very sensible question, but the fact is we have to make that decision, and, really, the policies that the Government has been pursuing make one question whether that decision has been made. Or, at least, it does not understand that the policies it is pursuing may result in the country not having an agriculture section. That is the first question.

The second question is, what will this cost, because every country in the world that has maintained an agricultural sector has done so at a cost of Government subsidies and is still doing so. Until the other countries cease doing that, there will be a cost to us. So we have to decide, whether there will be a cost. Then we have to decide if that cost would be better put into maintaining an agriculture sector or into some other sector. I have no quarrel with a logical, sensible, conclusive argument along those lines, but that is not what we are getting.

If, in response to me, the Government Ministers can say: "Look, we have calculated what the cost of subsidies is likely to be, we have decided that if we put that money into investments in the energy sector the likelihood is that we will get such and such return for Trinidad and Tobago, and therefore, in the general analysis this would be good. We can then give the money to the rural areas in some other way in order to maintain the rural area, if that is what we want to do". But what is the consequence of not having an agriculture sector? More movement of people from the rural area into the cities? Is that what we can sustain in Trinidad and Tobago?

On the whole, I do not think it is untrue to say that much of the violent crimes come from the urban areas. On the whole, rural folk are not so cruel—and I think this is true of any country, not just Trinidad and Tobago. But what happens if you put further pressure? What happens in the urban areas in the inner cities in England? It happens when there is greater pressure on the resources in that city, that is, when the young people do not get jobs and the housing is poor. So, one way of diffusing this is to maintain an active and vibrant rural sector and try to reverse that process; move them out. At least maintain the present balance.

2.30 p.m.

What quality of life do we want in Trinidad and Tobago for our children and grandchildren? I suppose it is a question of age, Mr. President. At my age, 64, I think now of my grandchildren. I see past even my children's generation and I really wonder what sort of life they are going to have. I like living in Trinidad because of its mix of rural and urban. I would not like to live in Singapore. They may be very prosperous, but I would not like that sort of life. So we have to decide what sort of life we want here collectively, as a group, as a country, then decide what we need to do in order to get it, or maintain it; and what it is going to cost in order to do this.

It has often been said that we had many subsidies in the past and still our agriculture declines, which is undoubtedly true. No one is saying that subsidies alone will do it. We are saying that if the price of one's competitive products which are being allowed in, is lower than a reasonable cost of production, then one cannot compete. Clearly, one must have an efficient, productive agricultural sector. That is another clear policy that we have to take.

In some sense it is hinted at, again, in one of the documents with respect to the correspondence with the Bank. Because it has been suggested that if there is going to be a loan facility for small farmers under five acres and certain commodities are excluded from that loan system, clearly, what is being said there is that we do not want small farmers to be producing those commodities, and that I entirely agree with.

But why is that not an important policy plan? It is something that I have been saying every time I speak on the agricultural sector. One cannot expect small farmers to produce low-priced commodities and make a decent living; and yet we are encouraging small farmers to produce rice; and we are discouraging large farmers. So what are we doing? I think, myself, that the Nariva Swamp issue should have been handled quite differently.

Obviously, people should not go and squat on lands, whether they be squatting on 10,000 acres or on one acre. It should not be allowed. But, nevertheless, it is a fact of life in Trinidad and Tobago that the only bright spot in agriculture in the last 10 years, apart from vegetable production, has been the increase in rice production—from five million pounds to 45 million. That has taken place because some businessmen have invested very heavily in the agricultural sector in machinery and equipment in the Nariva Swamp.

Now, obviously, they should not have gone into the Bush Bush sanctuary. Obviously, we should have done it differently. There is absolutely no doubt about that. We should have anticipated that possible development. What we should have done was to look at the FAO report which was done in the 50s; the Japanese report which was done in the 60s or 70s; or the Dutch report which was done in the 80s. All dealt with development of the Nariva Swamp and very large acreages were suggested there for development outside of the sanctuary area—some 6,000 hectares, I believe, were down for development. Why was that not done?

Even now, why did we not take the position that, we have one rice mill in Trinidad and Tobago. The only place that the farmers in the Nariva Swamp can sell their rice is to that rice mill. So that, in my opinion, there is no need for legal action and legislation. It is quite simple. Tell them you are not buying their rice; and you will shut them down. What I would say to them is, "Look gentlemen, you have to come in here and discuss this issue. We are going to lease you that land at a rental which is economical. So you are paying for the land, you are not getting it as free capital. We are going to tell you how the drainage system should be done, along the lines of what our experts say, and you have to pay to put it in, in that way." Suppose they all move out now, under the court's action, what will happen to that land? Is it just going to stay like that? Has the Government got the financial resources to put it back the way it was before? I do not think so, because they say they have no money at all. So I think we can deal with that. But if we deal with it the way we are doing, I am afraid that our rice production—mark my words—will go back down from 45 million to five million pounds.

Perhaps, that is what we want, because we just capped the subsidy on rice. What are we saying? That we will allow the 400 acres in the Nariva Swamp which small farmers have to cultivate? But then we are encouraging small farmers to produce a low-priced crop. So where is the policy? It is so confusing. What do we want to do? Small farmers cannot produce low-priced crops and make a decent living. So you put them to produce vegetables, herbs and spices, cut flowers, if

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. PROF. SPENCE]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

you like—high-priced things. Exotic fruits for export and the low priced crops, like potatoes or rice, or whatever it is you can grow here as your starch and protein—your basic foods—have to be produced on a large-scale efficient system; just as poultry, which you need at low cost, has to be produced in an efficient system.

Nobody is saying, have an inefficient agricultural system by way of subsidies. But, of course, we did it wrong in the past when we had the boom years and we were throwing money around, but that is not to blame the agricultural sector as such. That was our policy in those days. We paid subsidies for ploughing land; for putting in water for livestock; for spraying. I remember when I first joined the Ministry of Agriculture, the then Director of Agriculture called me one day and said, "Spence, what is the price of...?" Some insecticide. And discerning immediately what he was trying to do—it was just before a budget debate—I said to him, "You know, Sir, with due respect, that insecticide is not used to control froghoppers anymore, so if you are thinking of giving a subsidy to cane farmers to control froghoppers, there is no use my giving you the price of that insecticide. You want this insecticide, and this is the price." That is the thing. As a senior officer, I could not be trusted to know that they were going to give a subsidy to cane farmers for spraying the froghoppers. But, perhaps, they should not have been doing it in that way. Perhaps they should have been giving them a better price for their cane, or perhaps, it should have been done co-operatively.

In the Windward Islands in the banana industry, the association manages many activities of the industry, for example, the spraying which is done by low volume mist spray. That is done by the co-operatives. So it is not a question of the individual farmer having to be given a subsidy direct in that way. The co-operative does it. And people are so tuned, in that system, to be involved in their spraying that they demand that they should get their spray from the association because they are paying for it. It is not some government over there that is paying for it. They are paying for it; and sure, we should not be giving subsidies, for example, in charging material.

We produce cocoa plants in this country and sell them. It used to be 50 cents to a dollar, I think, and then last Minister in the NAR Government reduced it to 50 cents. I think it has gone back up to a dollar. That cocoa plant costs the Government \$40 to produce. Of course, it is ridiculous to sell it at a dollar! Of course, the cocoa farmers will now be after my head, but it is ridiculous, and that is why the cocoa plants do not get taken care of. That is why we produce millions

of cocoa plants and they never get into mature trees to bear. If you had all the cocoa trees that we have produced in Trinidad and Tobago over the last 10 years and all the citrus trees—the grapefruit trees—Trinidad would be covered in grapefruit and citrus. We subsidize it so heavily, that is a mistake, but that was Government policy, that does not mean that you should not subsidize the cost of the price that you pay for the end product. I think that is the way to give your subsidy. We have learnt that lesson. But that does not mean to say, because we gave subsidies in the past and agriculture did not increase that we should not give subsidies now, to try to counterbalance the effect of cheap imports from subsidized countries. So, clearly, I believe, we need to know what we are doing. But, of course, we are still dealing with this question of subsidies.

When this Government first came into power it suggested a subsidy on the purchase of corn. Mr. President, one could have said in advance that this was going to be a failure. I am still trying to find somebody who advised the Government that this should be done. Of course, nobody has sold corn. Why should you sell dried corn at 50 cents a pound, which would take 50 or so ears, and a longer time in the process, to the National Flour Mills, when you can sell one ear—one cob—in the fresh state, for a dollar a cob, or if you boil or roast it, \$2.00 or \$3.00? No farmer is so stupid. He is not going to do that. So, of course, National Flour Mills has had no purchases of corn, or very negligible.

I certainly agree that we need to know what we are doing when we are giving subsidies. We do not just need to throw them around, but nevertheless, they are essential if we are to have an agricultural sector.

Mr. President, I am going to conclude by reading the issues that I think the Government needs to address unambiguously. These are taken from a document which I wrote as comments to a White Paper to the Ministry of Agriculture. There are 12 points.

First of all, I think we ought to have as a basic policy that we intend to enhance social stability by, at least, maintaining the present urban/rural balance—at least that. I prefer to say that we should increase the rural sector, but let us say at least that. Apparently in 1989 the population in urban areas was 859,000 and the rural areas, 402,000. So it is nearly twice as much in the urban areas, but that is not yet more than twice as much. This is taken from World Bank data. The document is *Poverty and Income Distribution in Latin America—The Story of the 1980s*, Technical Department, Latin America and the Caribbean Region, The

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. PROF. SPENCE]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

World Bank, April 29, 1983. That is the first thing—that we should, at least, maintain the *status quo*.

2.40 p.m.

Secondly, unequivocally and unambiguously, protect the agricultural sector from subsidized imports, at least until GATT succeeds, at which stage if the subsidies are removed worldwide, then we can follow suit. Such protection to take the form of countervailing duties and my suggestion—supported by my colleagues in the paper that we wrote—is that this be by way of duties applied and put into an agricultural producers support fund. So if the Government has no resources to provide these subsidies, then you can do two things at once; you can protect against the subsidized imports and you can put the money into a fund for subsidizing your local commodities. And that helps to balance the price which the consumer would have to pay for food.

Thirdly, I think we should target a greater contribution by the agricultural sector to GDP, at least to get back to where we were. Let us target 10 per cent over the next five years, so we can go back to where we were in 1962. Not to move forward, just to get back to where we were.

Fourthly, target a greater contribution to foreign exchange balance, particularly by producing a greater proportion of food locally, say 50 per cent in the next five to ten years. Let us give a target. We may not achieve it, but that is what we would like to see. We would like to see 50 per cent of our food produced locally in the next ten years; about 10 per cent more.

Fifthly, when next we have a discussion—well, it is floating now so there is no point. I was going to say when next we have a discussion on the rate of exchange we should consider the agricultural sector. So perhaps what I should say is, when the banks are deciding what the rate of exchange should be, they might consider the effect on the agricultural sector, because the Government no longer controls the rate of exchange.

Sixthly, generate employment in the sector by the development of inputs and processing as well as by cultivation of as much land as possible. So the employment should be generated in the agricultural sector, not by having labour intensive systems which would be inefficient, because we have to compete—we are now going into an open market system or that is the eventual aim in 20 or 30 years' time—but by bringing all the land into cultivation and we will get the employment in that way.

The employment in the agricultural sector comes in developed countries, not from so many people being on the land, but from the ancillary services with which the inputs into agriculture are concerned, for example the fertilizer, the machinery, the services, repairing the machinery, on that side. We should see how much more machinery we could manufacture. On the other side, it is the processing. We have a sector in that regard to some extent now but largely it is based on imported inputs.

Seventhly, I think this really is the key to the catalyst we should use, and to some extent the Government has stated this as its policy. I think it is still being seen as a social service. That is, the School Feeding Programme. This should not be a social service, it should be a development tool. It should be a system for catalyzing the country's activities, for economic development but based in the agricultural sector. We need to look at this very carefully and very comprehensively and see how we could use this for development and we should sell this to the World Bank. Perhaps they can apply it in other parts of the world, but we should use the loan that we might have for social purposes as well as to have a developmental thrust. I think this is absolutely critical.

If we extend that to all the schools, primary, secondary, all the government institutions and then let us go beyond that, let us think about the various government departments, like the Central Bank that might have a cafeteria. Why should that not be part of the thrust to develop our agricultural system? Why, as a country, should we not be looking to see how all of these avenues—where we collectively eat, which we do every day, most of us eat out at least once a day—why should these not be collectively linked to our agricultural development thrust? Soon we are, I am told, by listening to the *Breakfast Club*, to have McDonald's outlets in Trinidad and Tobago.

Now are they going to source their food locally or are they going to import it? And will this be another avenue that the Minister of Trade, Industry and Tourism has to look at with his anti-dumping legislation, in the sense that if they cannot import the raw materials because our barriers are up, will they import it in processed form?

Japan faced this. They had prohibited the importation of rice so it was then imported as a packaged frozen meal that included rice and they had to tackle that as well. So let us be clear. If McDonald's can source their food cheaper in the United States, they are not going to want to buy it here unless we have some form of protective barrier.

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. PROF. SPENCE]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

All of these feeding systems can be linked to our agricultural sector. We talk about tourism development. We never talk of it—at least I never hear it spoken of in terms of how it should link to the agricultural sector.

When we are deciding what sort of tourists we want to come to our country, do we sit down and say; now should we encourage the tourist who wants his Texas steak or should we encourage the person who is interested in seeing what a roti tastes like?

Mr. President: You have two minutes to conclude.

Sen. Prof. J. Spence: Thank you.

I will just go to the end, Mr. President, because I think really that the point is being made repeatedly as to what we need to do. I would just like to make two very quick points.

We have said very little about forestry. Now, again, I think it is important when we are thinking of developing our forestry sector, not just to think about teak and pine, but to think about things like mahogany, processing the furniture and exporting the furniture.

I am told that with respect to fisheries an important development would be the establishment of small anchorages on the east coast at Balandra and North Manzanilla. Nowhere have I seen this mentioned in any documentation. I am obliged to Prof. Kenny for making that suggestion. Prof. Wilson has made the point with respect to how we organize our research activities within the Ministry and what is said in the Green Paper. The Green Paper says we must co-ordinate better; we must indeed have the Institute perform better. But what they have not come out and said is that the only way that can happen is if you take it out of the bureaucracy and have it as a separate institute.

Mr. President, I had to give a talk to the Caribbean Academy of Sciences recently on Research and Development as a take-off for economic development. I had to give the stark facts. In Trinidad and Tobago, there is an inverse relationship between the expenditure and research and output in the agricultural sector. The more you spend, the more the agricultural sector goes down. We spend \$40 million a year conservatively only in the bureaucracy, not to take account of CARDI and the University and all of those places.

Again, I will be crucified by my colleagues, but surely Minister Draper, in looking at restructuring, has to face this issue. Can we afford to spend \$40 million

and get no return for it in a sector which is diminishing? Because, let us be clear, if we decide not to have an agricultural sector and we are going to import everything, then clearly we do not need a research division of that sort of expenditure, nor indeed do we need, I regret to say, a ministry. Perhaps we still have a Minister to sit in Cabinet but we do not need all the paraphernalia that goes with it.

So, Mr. President, I really think that we need to address ourselves seriously to what policies we should have and how we should arrange our affairs in this sector.

Thank you, Sir.

Seconded by Sen. Everard Dean.

Question proposed.

2.50 p.m.

Sen. Stanford Callender: Mr. President, as Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, I have the honour and privilege to make a contribution to this very important private Member's motion.

I want to say from the outset that we need to set the record straight for it is being misconceived that this administration has no interest in agriculture. From the beginning, I want to refer to our manifesto and its stated objectives.

Sen. Mark: Words! Words!

Sen. S. Callender: Is the manifesto affecting you as our tie is doing, Sen. Wade Mark?

I quote from page 16 of the manifesto which states:

"The PNM is committed to the development of our agricultural sector as major generator of employment, economic production and foreign exchange, and as a primary instrument in the economic diversification process."

While in Opposition we saw some of the challenges that faced us in the 1990s. So in our manifesto we said that:

"During the decade of the nineties, the issues of agricultural development, food production and food security will become some of the most critical matters with which small developing nations (like Trinidad and Tobago) will have to reckon.

Three developments give rise to this view, viz.

- economic globalisation
- trade liberalisation
- earning of foreign exchange
- unification of Europe due to begin in 1992.

For countries such as Trinidad and Tobago, immediate attention needs to be focused on the consequences of these developments on:

- levels of employment
- traditional export agriculture and the
- food security insofar as foreign exchange will be available to import food."

This has been our position and these are the some of the challenges we saw while in Opposition. I want to also make the point that we see agriculture as a trade, whether we are doing it as a domestic trade, trade within Caricom or trade in the international market. The nature and business of trade is that the rules change from time to time. It has changed in the past and as we debate this Motion the rules are changing and it will continue to change. That is the nature of trade. If we are to survive in the business of trade, in this instance, agriculture, we need to take certain initiatives. I am confident that this administration, under the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, and by, extension, this Government, has taken the initiative to bring some stability and meaning and purpose to the agricultural sector.

I need to remind the Senate that one of the first initiatives of this Government through the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, was the appointment of that tripartite committee to deal with Caroni, because we saw Caroni as playing a pivotal role in the development of agriculture in this country. The objective of that tripartite committee appointed by Cabinet in April 1992 was to develop an agenda for action aimed at putting Caroni (1975) Limited on a viable footing over an agreed time frame. That is being addressed most aggressively.

In the *Medium Term Policy Framework* we also stated the Government's position.

"The Government is committed to the development of the agricultural sector as a major generator of economic production and foreign exchange...

The state accepts responsibility for the creation of an environment that will foster development of a vibrant and competitive agricultural sector."

I can give this Senate the assurance that under this present Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and this administration, we are setting the stage in the Ministry to facilitate improvement in the development of agriculture. *[Interruption]* I can understand the comments by Sen. Wade Mark because he has a destructive mind.

I want to spend a little time in attempting to address some of the concerns raised by Prof. Spence in his Motion. I want to say that I think I am beginning to understand the objective of the Motion after I listened to Prof. Spence. I would have to spend some time with my Minister to have us put in place—and I know that Sen. Draper would have some work—a more effective system of dissemination of information, because this Motion, obviously, is seeking to get information from the Government as to what it has been doing in this sector, and as Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry, it is my duty to attempt to address some of the concerns as raised by Prof. Spence. The Motion says:

"Whereas capital in agriculture is being depleted particularly in sub-sectors of milk, meat and coconuts:"

He wants the Government to:

" a. Announce its intention to support the agricultural sector through managing the trade in agricultural products and through subsidies, where necessary, employing funds derived from tariffs on competitive food imports."

This Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago remains committed to the agricultural sector, particularly those subsectors that deem to be sensitive and vulnerable, for example, sugar, rice, poultry and dairy. The Government is also mindful that for sustainable agricultural development, the sector cannot remain isolated from global market trends, particularly, trade and price reform. Consequently, Government has decided on a general policy to manage the trade in the sector through tariffication. Tariffs would be placed on each commodity at the level that affords similar protection that is now provided by the negative list, taking into consideration the importance to the economy of each commodity, protection levels, employment opportunities, foreign exchange earnings and the

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. CALLENDER]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

level of support given to these commodities by major trading partners in their own countries.

Subsidies are designed to enable farmers to increase their competitiveness. The protection through tariffs, Common External Tariff (CET) and surcharges, is expected to provide that incentive. The role of subsidization to all farmers on the basis of price or production will therefore be diminished. Another form of direct subsidization to target the farmer is now being contemplated. Price support will still apply for some time to the sensitive and vulnerable subsector of rice.

Sen. Prof. Spence wanted the Government to pay subsidies now due to farmers. It is no secret that given the tight financial situation in the economy resulting in the trickling of funds from the Treasury to all sectors, one would recognize that almost every sector sees itself as priority. I am sure if the Minister of National Security were present today he would have wanted to voice his concerns, so would have the Minister of Health. Notwithstanding that, the Government has been able to effect timely subsidy payments to the agricultural sector. Government, nevertheless, remains committed to this sector by making these payments and would do so as soon as these funds are available.

3.00 p.m.

The situation with respect to subsidy payments for major commodities in the subsector programme are as follows: to date for 1993, we have paid \$5.2 million to dairy farmers; \$753,000 to coffee; fuel subsidy rebate, \$92,000; copra \$1.3 million and \$5.375 million paid to cane farmers in support of guaranteed prices for cane.

Before I leave the issue of subsidy I think it is important to indicate to this Senate that over the years, when our economy was on a more sound footing, the Government—this administration and former administrations—demonstrated their commitment to some measure of subsidy. For example, sugar cane, between the years 1978—1992, Government's support in subsidy amounted to \$329.3 million; cocoa and coffee \$119.4 million; milk, \$94.3 million; paddy, from 1986—1992, \$103.1 million; copra, 1977—1992, \$63.3 million. Other inputs of subsidies from 1977—1992, \$90.5 million. We even paid a subsidy in 1986 to sorrel which amounted to \$0.10 million. In 1978, 1982, 1986, 1988 and 1989, we paid a subsidy for oranges, \$1.1 million. In 1981 we paid a subsidy for grapefruit of \$0.50 million. A total of \$801.6 million.

Coupled with food subsidies, from 1977—1988, which amounted to \$1,362.7 million, previous administrations over the years supported subsidized the sector from 1977—1992 to the tune of \$2,164.3 million. We could have done that when the economy could have afforded it; circumstances have changed. *[Interruption]* If I should recall the words of my minister when we met with farmers' organizations in San Fernando a few months ago, "our situation began to change when we lost our colonial market. Before independence we had a sort of free market business with Britain but when we took the bold step as a people to become independent, a forward movement, that left us. *[Interruption]* I am almost certain that after this debate you will have your mind recolonized, so do not worry.

Prof. Spence spent little time talking about our Green Paper on agriculture. I, as a new man on the scene, became very concerned because I was always of the view that the purpose of a Green Paper was to encourage constructive and productive criticisms, recommendations and otherwise, so as to assist us, as a people, in coming up, in the final analysis, with the White Paper. This Green Paper is not cast in stone and that is the reason why it is called a Green Paper.

Prof. Spence also referred to comments made by Prof. Wilson. I do not know if he was referring to Prof. Wilson as a member of the team that prepared this Green Paper, but my information is that he was not. He also made reference to Lloyd Best.

Sen. Prof. Spence: Just for the records, Prof. Wilson was a member of the team.

Sen. S. Callender: Mr. President, yes, he was.

The other point raised by Prof. Spence, in his Motion, is with respect to analyzing commodities on an individual basis in terms of the social land economic use, which there is. As I said earlier, I would have thought that the information was available, because social economic studies were undertaken for each of the following commodities: poultry, particularly broiler chicken meat, rice, beef, veal, ham and mutton, pork, milk, edible oil, sugar, coffee, cocoa, feed grains, livestock feeds, vegetables and fruits. These studies were completed some time in September, 1993. I am sure Prof. Spence would be happy to know that these studies were undertaken by local experts.

Firstly, in the area of meat, beef and pork, the study was done by Lauren Phillip, UW/CARDI; poultry, Edward Evans, CARDI; cocoa, coffee and sugar,

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. CALLENDER]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

Carlyle Farrell; vegetables, Allan Williams of the Association for Caribbean Transformation.

Sen. Mansoor: Mr. President, could the Senator tell the Senate whether these studies are available for public consumption?

Sen. S. Callender: Mr. President, those studies would be available in due course.

These studies provided an evaluation for current agricultural policies and the likely fiscal impact on the Government, producers and consumers, as a result of trade liberalization on agriculture.

Options for agricultural policy reform were also examined. The findings and conclusions of these studies are now being considered by officers of the relevant ministries. The Government will be guided by these findings and the recommendations of these studies, especially the implementation of its trade and pricing policy, would be addressed soon.

3.10 p.m.

Mr. President, the basic agricultural sector studies completed in June, 1992, while undertaken by TAHAL Consulting Firm for the Inter-American Development Bank as a precursor to the agricultural sector loan comprised the following local experts as counterparts: Dr. Ranjit Singh, UWI Farm Management; Dr. R. Braithwaite, UWI Production Systems; Dr. D. Rajkumar Agronomist Cocoa and Coffee; Dr. A. Wood, Livestock and Dr. B. Harrison, sugar-cane. These last two gentlemen are from the Caricom country of Jamaica.

With respect to part (d) of the Motion—"commission studies led by local experts on the effects of the conditionalities attached to loans as they affect the agricultural sector—I wish to inform the Senate that in the *Medium Term Policy Framework* of 1992—1995, the Government is committed to moving the agricultural sector in a certain direction which accords with the general thrust of the conditionalities for the agricultural sector with respect to investments and agricultural sector loans of the Inter-American Development Bank. The impact of these conditionalities in the sector has been fully analyzed and reflected in the findings on each of the commodity studies undertaken by local consultants. It is pointless, therefore, to attempt to re-invent the wheel.

With respect to part (e) of the Motion—"develop policies to ensure long-term support for the agricultural sector with reference to food security and national

nutritional requirements and the possibilities arising from Caricom trade”—the Draft National Policy, recently published as a Green Paper, has attempted to achieve that very goal, including the need to be competitive. The document is now out for public comment and will be considered in the final preparation of the general policies.

Mr. President, at this stage I need to place on record that the team appointed by Cabinet to prepare the draft National Policy for Food and Agriculture consist of what Prof. Spence likes to call, local experts. The members of the committee were: Mr. Ruthven Rudder, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, Chairman; Prof. Lawrence Wilson, Dean, Faculty of Agriculture, University of the West Indies; Mr. Irwin Titus, Deputy Director, Policy, Research and Planning, Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources; Mr. Vishnu Ramlogan, Management Expert; Mr. Neville Cross, representing the Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago; Mr. Jeremy Matouk, Agro-Processing Industrialist; Mr. Mohammed Khan, Agriculturist; Mr. Roopnarine Bissoon, Dairy Agronomist; Mr. Reginald Phillips, representing the Tobago House of Assembly; Mr. Glen Ramjag, representing the National Foodcrop Farmers Association; Mr. Ronald Myal, Secretary, Project Analyst, Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. During their discussions they had the privilege of having Dr. Joan Wallace, the Inter-American Institute for Co-operation on Agriculture (IICA) representative in Trinidad and Tobago who served on the team up to December 14, 1992.

In addition to that, there were a number of non-committee individuals within the agricultural sector who made contributions during the discussion on the Draft National Policy on Food and Agriculture. They were: Mr. Gerry Mac Farlane, Secretary for Agriculture, Tobago House of Assembly; David Knott, Chairman Agricultural Development Bank; Dr. Carlisle Pemberton, Lecturer in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Farm Management, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine; Dr. R.H. Singh, Lecturer in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Farm Management, University of the West Indies; Mr. Terrence O'Neil Lewis, General Manager, Agricultural Development Bank, and Mr. Edward Evans Agricultural Economist, Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI).

Most of these honourable persons I do not know, but given their background and their profession, I take this opportunity to compliment them for their work in providing this country with a Green Paper on agriculture. And unlike Sen. Spence,

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. CALLENDER]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

I cannot be disappointed if Cabinet approved the Green Paper on agriculture. The country was given the opportunity to have a document so they can constructively criticize, analyze and make recommendations, if, as a people, we are to take this sector forward.

Sen. Prof. Spence wants a role developed for the University of the West Indies and the Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry (ECIAF) graduates in farming. Again, one of the first things this administration did under this present Minister was to lay in Parliament a new administration and distribution policy for land, because we are very mindful that the availability of land is a prerequisite to any form of agricultural development. Some of the general policy goals of this new land policy are as follows:

"The New Land Policy aims to maximize the benefits which the community derives from national land resources, while seeking a balance between current gains and sustainable development. This entails the following:

(i) preventing prime agricultural land from being subjected to non-agricultural use by instituting a system of land zoning;"

Sen. Prof. Spence made reference to Aranguez.

"(ii) the provision of adequate security of tenure for tenants of State lands;

(iii) the discouraging of land speculation and the taking of steps to bring idle land into production;

(iv) the promotion of development that is sustainable economically, socially and ecologically".

Our response to the last section of Sen. Prof. Spence's Motion is that in the implementation of the new policy for administration and distribution of land, preference will be given to persons between the ages of 18 and 45 years, University of the West Indies and ECIAF graduates. By their aptitude and training, we are encouraging them to make use of this opportunity to consider agriculture as a career to make a contribution to the sector.

Mr. President, I end by saying that our projection from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, in the short to medium term, is to promote growth by focusing on the following priority areas: providing physical infrastructure, initiating institutional reform, providing marketing information on market facilities and promoting adoption of appropriate technology.

3.20 p.m.

However, while this could make a positive impact on production and productivity, as well as prices, successful implementation would depend on one critical success factor—that is funds.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources stands committed, so is the Government, to moving this sector forward.

Thank you very much.

Sen. Muntaz Hosein: Mr. President, it is good to see the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources with us today. I welcome him to this honourable Senate once more. Today, when he was a bit late, I thought for a moment that he might chicken out and stay away. I thought, perhaps, the farmers' demonstration outside would have inhibited his attendance. It is good to see that he is here. Welcome again.

The Motion before us today, is about Government's reordering of national priorities. It is about Government's rhetoric versus Government's action. The last speaker, Sen. Callender, in his inimitable style, seemed to be choking on his speech a bit. I wondered whether it was because he could not believe himself and that was why the words could not come out clearly.

He indicated that the supply of funds is a problem. Whenever we talk about agriculture, it is always funds being a problem. How do we understand the statement recently made by the Minister of Finance, when he said that we were going to have a surplus in this year's budget. If funds were so much of a problem, how come are we having a surplus? The truth of the matter is that there can be a surplus at anytime if the money is not used. If the money is not paid out, obviously, there would be a surplus. To come and tell us that funds is the problem, we would have to take that with a pinch of salt.

I see the Government is attempting to get to the truth. In his contribution, I see Sen. Callender is telling us loud and clear that the IADB is calling the shots. It has taken about two years to get the Government to accept and to admit that it is not calling the shots anymore. I do not know if in Sen. Callender's innocence he might have let the cat out of the bag. I underline the statement he made that availability of land is a prerequisite for agriculture. He went on to talk about Government's policy and land zoning.

Agriculture is the major source of food, fiber and raw materials essential to human life. These are facts that we cannot overlook. Agricultural labour or work on farms, in many respects, is unique among the major occupations. In no other major industry, does so large a proportion of the work-force consist of self-employed operators, for so small a proportion of wages and salaries. In Trinidad and Tobago, the statistics show that the majority of workers in the agricultural sector earn less than \$800 per month or \$29 per day. Farmers work from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and when the day is longer they go to 6.30 p.m. They work seven days per week.

There is a myth that when people drive through agricultural areas such as Aranguez and Barataria and see large houses, they take that to mean that farming is making a tremendous amount of money. Therefore, that informs the policy of the Government of the day. Nothing could be further from the truth. How could anyone, working for \$29 per day, afford the good things of this life? It is important that the record in Parliament shows the hardship that is undergone by these people who are involved in agriculture.

Sen. Kuei Tung: Mr. President, I wonder if the hon. Senator would indicate how he arrived at the conclusion that the large houses in Aranguez informs the Government on the agricultural policy. I was waiting for him to develop the point, but I missed that. Would he mind explaining that?

Sen. M. Hosein: As we go along, I would come to that. Just a little patience, Mr. Minister.

Senators on the opposite side and the community at large must understand that in the agricultural sector in Trinidad and Tobago, are the thriftiest people you can find. The majority of agriculturists are suffering from bad stomachs, gas and all kinds of diseases that one can think about. The reason for that is that they go with little or nothing in order to save their money to send their children to school to have them educated, so that they would not have to undergo the kind of humiliation that is attached to the farmer.

3.30 p.m.

It is almost impossible for anyone to understand, unless he is involved with these people, the level of thriftiness that takes place; to understand that the family sticks together—husband, wife, children, and, in many instances, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law—work the land, pool their resources and that is how these houses are built. I want to make certain that that myth is discarded once and for all

and that we understand the hardships suffered by the people in agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago.

Let us examine the advice given to us by the former head of the Caribbean Development Bank, speaking on the subject of food security. He had this to say:

"Food security incorporates valid economic arguments about the need to ensure that every household has adequate food of adequate nutritional value available, and the equally valid political notion that no country could be considered truly independent if it must depend on imports for meeting the vast bulk of its food requirements."

I want to repeat that last part, Mr. President:

"... no country could be considered truly independent if it must depend on imports for meeting the vast bulk of its food requirements."

If we understand and accept that William Demas understood what he was talking about, and if we examine our dependency on imported food, we will come to the conclusion that we are far from being independent in Trinidad and Tobago. You see, our dependency on food imports is in the vicinity of \$800 million annually.

Let us look at Government's *Medium Term Policy Framework: From Stabilisation to Growth, 1993-1995*, which my good Friend Sen. Callender alluded to earlier. The Government makes an unequivocal statement of policy:

"The State accepts responsibility for the creation of an environment that will foster development of a vibrant and competitive agricultural sector".

It is the same paragraph, my good Friend, the Senator, quoted. I want us to remember that quotation. We will see later on in my contribution whether the Government is doing what it says it wants to do. I have had a running battle with Senators on the other side for the last two years, and that battle has always been what they say versus what they do. One is rhetoric and the other is inaction.

The agricultural sector has historically enjoyed a prominent place in development theory in Trinidad and Tobago. The need to propel the sector into greater contribution to employment, foreign exchange earning, import substitution and overall development has been recognized in all the development plans devised by the various governments of this country.

I am sure you remember, Mr. President, if my memory serves me correctly, it was 1961 that the late former Prime Minister, Dr. The Right Honourable Eric

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. HOSEIN]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

Williams, came up with the bright idea that he was going to plant thousands of acres of topi bamboo in Tabaquite and put them in tins and the world was going to enjoy topi bamboo from Tabaquite. Not even one root of topi bamboo was planted in Tabaquite, nor was one topi bamboo put into one can and exported to any country in any part of the world. You will remember the famous statement, Mr. President—

Dr. Rowley: I thank the Member for giving way. I want to be clear. I wonder if the Senator is making a case that it is very bad form for prime ministers to take advice from politicians in Tabaquite.

Sen. M. Hosein: Mr. President, that does not even deserve recognition and I will treat it as such. I will choose to answer only those things which ought to be recognized.

Mr. President, I hope you are taking note that my time is being taken up unduly.

Unfortunately, actual emphasis has always been on the industrial sector to the neglect of agriculture, so much so that today this country, which was initially a net exporter of agricultural output, now imports a significant amount of its food requirements from the United States and Europe.

Item 63 of the Green Paper on Agriculture, June 1993, referring to food and nutrition security states:

"While increases in production levels of some commodities are observed, the self-sufficiency ratio is low and the situation is compounded by diminishing self-reliance as foreign exchange earnings from agricultural exports continue to decline. In addition, the ratio of imports to demand requirements is relatively high, even for basic commodities. In 1992, the estimated figures were:

Dairy and Dairy Products	90%
Rice	75%
Beef and Veal	80%
Livestock Feed Ingredients	95%
Edible Oil	75%
Fish and Fish Products	60%"

On an annual basis, Trinidad and Tobago imports over \$800 million worth of food. This excludes imports of fertilizers, agricultural machinery and equipment, which would push this figure even higher. Food exports, though increasing, have been less than half the value of imports with sugar and its by-products accounting for the lion's share of the export earnings from agriculture.

The agricultural sector accounts for 13 per cent of the employed in Trinidad and Tobago. This translates into some 65,000 persons. Compare that to the hydrocarbon sector which employs approximately 15,000 persons or 3.9 per cent.

Although agriculture's contribution to the gross domestic product is small—less than 3 per cent—the sector has been showing relatively consistent, positive annual growth rates, even when other sectors and overall GDP have shown negative rates.

We also have to consider that the contribution of agriculture to GDP should not merely be seen in terms of agricultural output, it must also be seen with the relationship of agriculture to other industries.

3.40 p.m

Mr. President, the agro-processing industry in Trinidad and Tobago depends heavily on agricultural products. Sen. Professor Spence dealt with the service industry in its entirety, so I would not go through that. I am simply saying that when we are dealing with agriculture and its contribution to GDP, we must look up the subsectors and its relationship to the other sectors.

Let us look at problems in the agricultural sectors which affect farmers competitiveness against foreign products. The problems which confront today's farmers are essentially the same that faced farmers a decade ago. They are as follows:

- (1) Inadequate marketing and pricing arrangements.
- (2) Predial larceny.
- (3) Need for improvement of land distribution and land tenure.
- (4) Poorly developed and maintained physical infrastructure particularly with respect to access roads, rural electrification, flood control and irrigation.
- (5) Poor land reserve management, including soil and water conservation.
- (6) Indebtedness of farmers to lending institutions.
- (7) Need for better cultivation practices, general modernization and technological improvements, poor use of fertilizer.

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. HOSEIN]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

- (8) Inadequate facilities for marketing, for example, Princes Town market now closed.
- (9) Late payment of subsidy.
- (10) Diseases and pests and high cost of chemicals to address same.
- (11) Predial larceny between January to August, 1992.

There were 555 reports of predial larceny.

- (12) Competition from heavily subsidized imports.

Let me deal briefly with the question of inadequate marketing and pricing arrangements. I have had occasion in this House about two or three times to raise this issue regarding marketing arrangements and my colleagues did the same in another place and I want to raise it again today.

Mr. President, I invite you to go to the wholesale market in Port of Spain, the market which the farmers have to use. It is a bit early, but if you can do that, Sir, you will see what I am talking about. If you go to that place on a Thursday or Friday at 3.00 o'clock in the morning, you will see farmers lined up all along the highway, double parked on the side of the road. They are harassed by policemen and they have to wait to get into this market which is not opened until 6.00 o'clock in the morning. Some of those people, stay there all night in order to sell their produce. They have a hassle to get into the market and when they do get in, there are no facilities.

They must put their goods on the concrete floor. When it rains they get wet or when the sun is hot they are dried and baked. This is how we treat our farmers in this country. No wonder Sen. Callender had trouble getting the words out, because he really could not believe himself, somebody wrote a little thing for him and he could not believe what he was reading because he knew what he was saying could not be true. As if that is not bad enough, at least three robberies take place at that wholesale market every week.

Mr. President: Senator could you please move on, you are guilty of anticipation. You have a matter on the Motion for the Adjournment today. Another Senator has sought leave to raise a matter on the Motion for the Adjournment at the next sitting which deals with the security arrangements outside the market, exactly what you are speaking about. Having mentioned it, I allowed you to say a little, could you please go back to the Motion before the Senate and leave the Member who filed the matter to deal with it?

Sen. M. Hosein: Mr. President, I am not aware that there is such a Motion filed.

Mr. President: That is why I am telling you.

Sen. M. Hosein: Mr. President, these are some of the conditions under which the farmers of this country have to sell their produce. The pricing arrangement is non-existent. Every budget that has come before this House—and you have been here longer than I have—talks about top priority to agriculture. They have been talking about pricing structure for the longest while; that there will be cold storage facilities and when things are plentiful they will be put in cold storage and therefore a medium price will be maintained. Well, it has been so long, and nothing has happened, they still have the vagaries of glut and scarcity. I would, therefore, advise Sen. Callender to look at these things again, and when he has all the facts, he may choose not to talk at all the next time.

Mr. President, we have to understand that some of us come in the Parliament to make contributions for the betterment of our country, others make complete fools of themselves, and all that they do is sit down and heckle and that is the only purpose for which they are here, so I understand my learned Friend, Sen. Ojah-Maharaj's role very well.

I come now to the question of "need for improvement of land distribution and land tenure". What has happened about the Agricultural Small Holdings Tenure Act? Perhaps, the Minister who might choose to speak today might tell us something about that, because that might be an important pivot in the question of the improvement of land distribution.

What is happening now with land distribution, contrary to what the Senator before me said, is that the arable lands in Trinidad and Tobago are being used for housing. That is what is happening! We have a case in point right now with the Aranguez estate tenants. Those people took a day off from their labour to come down here today to demonstrate and to appeal to the consciences of the Members opposite. They are here in the Senate today gracing us with their presence.

3.50 p.m.

What is happening is that Aranguez Estate Limited, the landowners, have put such a high price on the lands occupied by these farmers with the hope that they will not buy the lands and then they will be able to sell it for housing and make a "killing". That is the problem the farmers are faced with, and the Government of the day sits idly by and does absolutely nothing.

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. HOSEIN]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

Mr. President, we must understand that land is the genesis of all agriculture—if there is no land, there is no agriculture. Therefore, it must be given pride of place in any agricultural development. The farmers who are tenants of the Aranguez Estate—land stretching from Barataria to Aranguez, to Silver Mill, Mt. Lambert and surrounding areas—have been on this land for 75 years. For 75 years they have been tenants on this land, paying their rent. We are dealing here with people who are into legitimate business, who are feeding their families, and the nation, from the land. I am sure hon. Senators have heard that "Aranguez is the food basket of Trinidad and Tobago", albeit, the food basket is getting a little empty at this stage—but those are some of the most arable lands in Trinidad and Tobago.

Aranguez Estate is asking \$40,000 per acre for the lands in Aranguez and \$80,000 an acre for the ones in Barataria. The ones in Barataria come with a little gold edge, so they are twice the price—if you dig deep enough you might get a little gold on the side. But the technique being used by this company, which is in voluntary liquidation, is very clear. During the boom years and before, this company, Aranguez Estate Limited made a killing, they made billions of dollars by liquidating the land and selling it at high prices. I have tried to find some way in which this company has contributed to the Trinidad and Tobago society, but I found very little. It was difficult to find any significant contribution made by this company. All of this money is going out of the country, because the owners do not reside here anymore.

What we are saying, Mr. President, is that the Government should bring pressure to bear on the Aranguez Estate and get them to charge a reasonable fee for those lands. If Aranguez Estate is unwilling to do that then, certainly, the Government must acquire the lands.

I have a document here from the Laventille Regional Corporation:

“FROM: Acting Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Local Government
TO: Chief Executive Officer, San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation
DATED: August 24, 1992
SUBJECT: Acquisition of Land from Aranguez Estate Limited

Cabinet by Minute No. 1815 dated July, 30 1992, has agreed that:

- (a) The undermentioned parcels of land, together comprising approximately 39 acres owned by Aranguez Estate Limited, be acquired by private treaty at a price not exceeding \$1.00 per acre."

The princely sum of \$1.00 per acre:

- “1. Aranguéz Savannah, park, playing-field and playing ground, Aranguéz
 2. Malick Recreation Ground, Malick
 3. Jogie Road Twelfth Street Wiltshire Ground, Jogie Road.
- (b) The acquisition by private treaty of the said parcels of land be negotiated by the Property Management Unit of the Office of the Prime Minister for and on behalf of the Laventille/San Juan Regional Corporation.”

Mr. President, I am very happy that the Government was able to acquire this land, and I am very happy that it was able to do it for the purpose of recreation and sports. But, food in your stomach is the basis for good sporting performance. *[Clapping from public gallery]* If you do not have food in your stomach—

Mr. President: Hon. Senator, I see your supporters are getting carried away. I am very happy to welcome those who are here for the first time, but there are a few basic rules that must be observed. Once you are here, persons in the public gallery must listen to the proceedings in absolute silence. One cannot applaud or do anything that would disturb the proceedings.

Sen. M. Hosein: Mr. President, at the beginning of my contribution you would recall that I said that this debate had to do with national priority, reordering of national priority. I am saying, therefore, that our friends opposite have their priorities all mixed up, that food should be at the top of the priority list, and certainly sport and recreation must be somewhere there, as well, but not sport first and food after. I have difficulty understanding that order of priority.

Farmers in Aranguéz and the surrounding areas do not want the land for free. These are proud, hard-working people, these are not squatters. These are not the people who go and squat on the hills and squat all over the place and give headache to the Government; these are people who work hard for their living and they are willing to pay. What they are saying, however, is that due respect and consideration must be given for the length of time that they have been on the land and have been paying rent, and for the kind of work which they are doing, which is essential to this country. That is all that they are saying.

They are willing to pay \$12,000 per acre, which is more than fair after 75 years. I know my Friend, the Leader of the Opposition on this side would say they

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. HOSEIN]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

should be given the land free, but you see how reasonable these people are? More than reasonable. Therefore, the onus is on the Government, because it has said so in its medium-term plan. The Government has said that it is going to create the environment; it is committed to that. All we are saying is that if the Government is committed to that, then it should live up to its commitment. That is what we are saying here, live up to your commitment.

4.00 p.m.

There are over 350-odd farmers in that area. We are looking at well over 2,000 lives. If they cannot pay for the land and it is sold to somebody else, and houses start going up, what will they do? These people only know how to do agriculture. Are they going to put them on the breadline; or subject them to the indignity of a "10 days"? Is that what they are going to do to these people? Are they going to make them beg for their living or will they now say that since these people have nowhere to plant and no income, that they should go and "lock people's neck" and stick them up and shoot them down? Is that what they are going to say to these people? Is that what they are encouraging in this country, Mr. President? I think not.

I now come to the question of treatment for flood victims. Some time ago, we were saved from a devastating hurricane, but the South of Trinidad and Tobago had so much rain that it was under water for several weeks and one will remember how long it took this Government to respond, and up to today, I have not heard of any concrete plan to compensate those farmers in the South. Only recently we had a little action here in the North. One remembers we had a sitting here in this Parliament on the Tuesday and it even knocked out the system. From the very same day, backhoes and trucks were all over the place. I never knew we had so many backhoes. Before you knew it, people who had their houses on the river, were putting them back again. No problem! They were being given material. I am happy for that. Not for them building their houses on the river, but I am happy that they have got the assistance, Mr. President. That is what a caring Government ought to do.

But why is this Government only caring about one section of the people? Why is it that they have no care at all for the farmers? When the farmer gets flooded out, one hears, point blank, "We have no money for you. We might be able to give you some seeds." "Might", Mr. President. I should not have to speak in this Parliament about discrimination of this nature. We should never discriminate

against our citizens, one against the other, in this day and age, 1993. I shudder to think what my grandson or granddaughter will be saying in this Parliament, if they live that long.

Mr. President, if you ask the people of Aranguez about flooding, it is a way of life for them. They live with it all the time and their compensation takes forever, if they get it at all.

Sen. Capildeo: I see WASA won a case the other day.

Sen. M. Hosein: What are they encouraging? Are they not saying to the farmers, "Look you all better go and squat on the hills. " Is that not what they are saying? Because if the only place they are going to get action from the Government is in the hills and in the North then, perhaps, all the people from the South should stop planting down there and come here and go on the hills and live, because they are going to be better off! That is, perhaps, the message that is going out loud and clear to the people of this country. I am very unhappy about that.

When we look at the question of late subsidies, Mr. President, right away we start talking about the coconut industry. I have a report here from the *Express*, of Thursday October 21, 1993, page 31. It states:

"Good for you, but bad for the farmers."

In part, Mr. President, this is what it says:

"If Government removes the present subsidy on copra production as part of its trade reform policy, the coconut industry would collapse with negative social implications for people living in the Cedros—Icacos and Nariva/Mayaro areas. And the removal of the monopoly position of the National Flour Mills in soya oil production as well as the imposition of a 10 per cent tariff on the beans can result in a drop of 25 per cent in the price to consumers, but a TT \$21.8 million loss to Government in profits by National Flour Mills.

These points were raised in an Agricultural Sub-sector Study (Edible Oils) compiled for the Inter-American Development Bank and the Ministry of Agriculture by Frank D. Merry. The final report on the study dated October 4, 1993, a confidential document, is now in the hands of Government."

Confidential document! Mr. President, perhaps we may be so fortunate that we could share in the confidence of this document. It goes on to state:

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. HOSEIN]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

"The study suggested that prior to any move to discontinue subsidy there should be considerable study of alternative employment options for the people of Cedros—Icacos and Nariva/Mayaro. According to the study, the copra industry employed 3,000 persons in 1987 of which 2,700 are farmers. But, a recent study gave the full-time employment in the copra industry as 1,200 persons with temporary employment reaching 2,700 persons."

It goes on, Mr. President:

"The study said coconut farmers did not benefit directly from the recent devaluations of the TT dollar because their price has been fixed at TT \$1.21 cents a pound."

Mr. President: Senator, your speaking time has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. W. Mark*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. M. Hosein: Mr. President, on the question of subsidies as it relates to the coconut industry, which is on the verge of collapse. The Government will have on their hands another 3,000 persons on the breadline unless something is done rather quickly. Sen. Spence talked about the question of milk. In all of these industries the subsidy is way behind time. The Government is owing for three or four months.

When they owe these people subsidies, it is not like McAl, Neal & Massy, or Republic Bank, because they have a lot of capital. I am only saying this to give you an idea. They are dealing with farmers who are "hand to mouth", owing the ADB money; and when they do not get their subsidies, they are unable to meet their payments. My good Friend, Sen. Ashick Hassim, who is a member of the ADB, will bear me out when I say that, right now, they are selling out farmers' lands—putting them up for sale! So on the one hand the Government owes subsidy, does not pay the farmer, the farmer cannot pay his instalments to the ADB, and his land is up for sale. So you have a "Catch 22" situation. Mr. President, the Government has to be very careful how it treads in fields of this nature. I urge it to regularize this matter very quickly, otherwise there will be serious social implications.

4.10 p.m.

You have competition from heavily subsidized import. There is a threat to the chicken industry and we have our famous threat agent here, the Senator facing me. At one time, he wanted to throw the chicken people out of business. I want to read from the *Trinidad Guardian* of Monday, October 25, 1993. Page 4:

"Chicken imports will hurt economy—report

The Trinidad and Tobago chicken industry saves the country almost US \$30 million yearly and employs some 8,000 persons directly, states a recently concluded Price Waterhouse report on the local business.

The country spends US \$14.32 million annually on the imported requirements of the trade, and this produces the 78 million pounds of chicken consumed by the public. At the same time, the report said if TT were to import the equivalent of consumed meat, the country would pay about US \$44 million.

But with the probable withdrawal of protection from the local industry, the Price Waterhouse executive summary stated: 'There would be no great benefit to the consumer to withdraw protection from the industry and open the market to imported chicken.' Instead, the summary noted: 'the damage to the economy could be quite severe,' including job retrenchment, the loss of National Flour Mills revenue, fallen revenue of indirect related industries, the lack of fresh chicken meat, increased foreign exchange expenditure, and the loss of utilisation of capital stock, such as buildings and equipment."

I would not read the whole report. I just wanted to give you an idea so that you would understand the problems that these industries are facing. I hope that the Government will do nothing to change the equilibrium of this industry and the ones we just discussed.

I want to quote again, Mr. President, but this time the *Central Bank Economic Bulletin*.

"Outstanding commercial bank loans to agriculture have grown steadily to \$334.7 million by June 1993."

So you understand how much money is being owed by farmers to the banks and, therefore, any kind of shaking up is going to cause hardship and problems to the farmers of Trinidad and Tobago.

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. HOSEIN]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

I want to support very strongly the mover of the Motion, Prof. Spence. I want to especially support him when he spoke about the linkage between farming and the School Feeding Programme. For some time now I have been trying to make a case out for that and I am glad to see that he has taken it up. I know Lloyd Best also took up that matter. I think it makes good economic sense. Why it was not done before is amazing to me, but then, again, I should not really be amazed because with that bunch on that side, it always causes amazement.

A friend of mine was telling me the other day that it is very easy—to show you how amazing the people on that side are—for us to solve the drug problem in Trinidad and Tobago. I said, "Well, boy, I am all ears. Tell me how you will do it." He said all you have to do is give it to the PNM, they bound to 'buss' it. They will retrench everybody and 'buss' it so we will be free from drugs. So gentlemen, get into the drug business and 'buss' it for us. *[Interruption]* What is that? They are already in it. Okay. I did not know.

The linkages between agricultural production and the School Feeding Programme make a tremendous amount of economic sense. I urge this Government to heed the advice given earlier on by Prof. Spence and really look at this in its entirety, because in that we can solve several problems. I will not go on longer with that because he has made a very strong point. I just want to support it.

You know, our talkative Sen. Brian Kuei Tung, I do not know what he has got today. I do not know what kind of bird he ate. Did he eat parrot today for lunch? But, however, I am glad to hear him talking a lot and I want to hear from him why it is he has not brought the regulations for the anti-dumping and countervailing duties. I mean, everything is short on that side. You have nothing tall, nothing long; everything is short. You see, by delaying this you leave the agricultural sector and other sectors of this economy naked to the vagaries of dumping from other countries.

Because in any part of the world, you will always find someone who will have an overproduction and surplus of some commodity. There will always be somebody in the world on whom they must dump it. If we do not have anti-dumping legislation in place, what will happen is that they will dump it in our land at such low prices that they are going to devastate that sector of the population.

In this particular case, if that were to happen to tomatoes, all the people who plant tomatoes in Trinidad and Tobago will not know what to do with it, because

you are dealing with a commodity that is perishable. So if you had dumping of that nature coming into Trinidad and Tobago, just to name one, what will happen to us?

Let me quote from one other report this Government has in its possession. It is called the Maxwell Stamp Report. You must be familiar with it. You know what Maxwell Stamp advises this Government? Maxwell Stamp advises this Government that its economic strategy for development should be based on unskilled cheap labour. Government has not told us whether it has accepted the report.

If that is the kind of advice the Government is getting, and seeing what it is doing here in this country, it seems to me that Government has accepted that advice and wants to turn this country into a whole lot of unskilled cheap labour. It wants to make beggars out of all of us. That is what is going to happen here. As it is already, as you are fully aware, even the Mayor of Port of Spain has turned into a beggar. He has gone begging all over the place for all kinds of scrap iron and so forth. What is really happening to us in this country?

In conclusion, I wish to warn this Government—

[Sen. A. Mark stands]

Sen. M. Hosein: Mr. President, is he on a point of order?

Sen. A. Mark: Yes. I am on a point of order. Would the Senator please give the source of that quotation, page, document and so on, so it can be verified?

Sen. M. Hosein: That is not a point of order. Yes, Mr. President. That is information you are seeking.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. President, I wonder—

Mr. President: I have two people on their feet now.

Dr. Rowley: I thank the Senator for giving way. Since I wish to participate in the debate at some stage, for my own clarification, I would like to respond to the Senator. I wonder if he could assist us by directing us to the source of this quotation that he just did on Maxwell Stamp.

Mr. President: Will you adhere to the request by Sen. A. Mark?

Sen. M. Hosein: Mr. President, I said it came from the Maxwell Stamp Report. I said that before I started.

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. HOSEIN]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

In conclusion, Sir, I wish to warn this Government that events which happened in Canada yesterday are a signal for people who make promises and cannot keep them and people who go that route which you all are going—the same route as the Canadian government—I want you to know they were wiped out completely.

Sen. W. Mark: Including the Prime Minister.

Sen. M. Hosein: Including the Prime Minister. It took a Trini to beat the Prime Minister. The same thing will happen to you in 1996 or before.

Thank you.

4.20 p.m.

Sen. Surendranath Capildeo: I note the time, Mr. President. I will be short, sweet, and bitter.

Mr. President, I want to make my position absolutely clear with respect to agriculture. I have gone down the road with agriculture and I have reached the end of the line with agriculture as far as this Government is concerned. I think it is time we stop playing games with agriculture in this country.

It is a fact that the policy of the People's National Movement, since its inception, has been to industrialize Trinidad and Tobago at the expense of agriculture.

It is a fact that the PNM's policy of industrialization outside the energy industries has failed, and now, even the energy industries are in trouble.

It is a fact that the PNM has never had an agricultural policy honest to the needs of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is a fact that the PNM does not have a clue about what to do about agriculture. I say so because of the peculiar demographics of agriculture. They are embarrassed to assist agriculture. It would be interesting to note who are the farmers of this country. I challenge the Ministry and the Government to authorize the statistical department to carry out a survey to determine who are the farmers of this country and to identify, publicize and publish those figures and we will see where the farms are, who the farmers are and why the PNM has killed agriculture in this country. I hope the Minister stays out. He cannot take it. He does not have the "guts".

It is a fact that the PNM's social policy is predicated upon the proposition of a dependency syndrome. Their human policy is predicated upon a proposition of a dependency syndrome, and to make that policy work, you have to kill agriculture, force the people off the lands so they all depend on a "ten-days" hand-out. You make the whole country into a country of vagrants. That is consecutive PNM administration policy from 1956 to date. These are historical facts. In fact, it seems to me that the largest export that we are exporting now is marijuana and cocaine on the *Harold La Borde*. I listened to the hon. Sen. Brian Kuei Tung when he first came in here as a neophyte with all his naivety. He was landed the proposition to sell this idea of liberalization and the freeing up of the economy.

You do not mind if I call you, Brian?

Sen. Kuei Tung: Not at all.

Sen. S. Capildeo: Well, Brian, they are making a sap out of you.

It is the greatest irony of this century; it is the supreme irony, that this Government, in its quest for the liberalization of the economy, in its quest for privatization and the development of private industry, in its quest for the opening up of the economy, will seek to kill the initiative of the farmers. The farmer who is the quintessence of private enterprise is being killed. I cannot understand the dichotomy. The farmer is landowner; he is capitalist; he is self-employed; self-income generating; he is the creator of employment; he feeds himself; he is self-reliant; he feeds the nation; he is the quintessence of what you want to produce in your liberalization effort, and you kill him. It is because your policy is to industrialize at their expense, and it is a policy that is doomed to failure, because if we do not feed ourselves, we shall surely starve.

The fact of the matter is contained in this *Investment Sector Reform Programme—Letter of Sectoral Policy, May 4, 1993*. It is proof; it is in writing:

"Agricultural Trade and Pricing Policy—

Taking into account a product by product review, the Government is embarking upon a programme to improve the incentive regime in agriculture."

Bogus words. In the very next sentence it says:

"In the first phase, the Government will cap the level of support to rice production."

It means, in other words, they will kill rice production.

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. CAPILDEO]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

"Quantitative restrictions on pork products have already been removed and those on pork meats will be replaced by tariffs and surcharges at levels to be determined after a study of the industry. "

The pig industry gone through the window!

"A study of the domestic poultry industry (including efficiency and employment aspects) will be undertaken and appropriate mechanisms and timing for subsequent reforms will be proposed consistent with the objectives of improved efficiency and competitiveness."

We are going to import American chicken. They will kill the poultry industry. It is here. They have set out their programme and their programme is quite clear. It is a very short, simple proposition. They are not interested in agriculture. Every statement made by this administration is in keeping with the policy of the PNM for the last 36 years. It is going to be, "industrialize this country at the expense of agriculture".

It is mind-boggling and incredible to come here, year after year, to read and to hear about access roads for farms; agricultural policies being put into effect. After 36 years we are still talking about access roads to farms? We are still talking about markets for vendors; we are still talking about wholesale markets and retail markets? After 36 years we cannot build a shed? And they want to tell me they have interest in agriculture? But they could put down three buildings in Port of Spain at a cost of over \$1 billion, and you will spend millions to maintain it, when, if you had taken that same \$1 billion and pumped it into agriculture, we would not be in the hell hole the country is in today.

You build your Hall of Justice, your Twin Towers, both "museums of human misery". You are "prettying-up" Port of Spain and the whole place floods. Millions of dollars are going in there and agriculture has gone through.

Mr. President, I challenge this Government to make an honest statement on agriculture for the first time in its existence. I challenge any Member of the PNM to search their consciences and to tell us why, after so many years, nearly 40 years we are in this parlous state in the agricultural industry. Why is it that the peasant farmer of Trinidad and Tobago is being squeezed out of existence? Why?

I do not want to know the economics. I do not want to know the international antecedents. I want to know their policy. Why this policy against that particular community? Why, when they have encouraged every other form of business

activity in this country; why, when they have encouraged LIDP, DEWD, URP; why, when they have encouraged people to export; why, when they have pumped billions into the oil industry; why, when they have spent billions in buildings all over this country do they have this peculiar policy of almost completely destroying the entire agricultural sector of this country? Why?

4.30 p.m.

I would like you all to search your consciences and let me know why, and, I will give you the answer. Demographics; look and see who the farmers are, see where the lands are and maybe you would understand why you are doing it.

There is also another answer, there are no kickbacks. There are no kickbacks for working in the lagoon. There are no kickbacks in planting rice, tomatoes and cabbage. There are no kickbacks in the agricultural sector, you work hard 24 hours a day, seven days a week with no holiday. It is the entire clan that works there, grandmother, grandfather, father, mother, aunt, uncle, children. Why are you destroying them? Why are you creating vagrants out of whole communities?

My Friend, Sen. Hosein, referred to Aranguez. The problem there is so simple that I cannot understand why, after so many years, no minister has the courage to go to Aranguez and tell them come let us sit around a table and build the Aranguez farmer back into supplying the food basket for Port of Spain and the environment. Why are full-page notices placed in the *Trinidad Guardian* that all vendors' sheds along the highway would be broken down? Do you want to destroy those people and send them to steal, rape and kill. They sell agricultural produce. When you "lick" down those vendors' sheds, pursuant to section 48:01—the law is on your side so you can put a bulldozer and break them down.

Do you know who sell in those sheds? Father, mother and children! What do they sell? Agricultural produce. So, you destroy them, you destroy the farmer who sells to them and you unleash onto the country another set of vagrants. Why do you not tackle the problems in the inner cities? Why go on the highways? Why have we not developed a system of lay-bys? You have all travelled. You have travelled well. You travel first class. I travel first class, but I pay for mine. You go abroad, you see lay-bys, you see how they operate. You have all been to California, and to those places in the United States of America, and you have seen how the farmers have their products on the side of the road so one can stop and purchase, and nobody dies in accidents.

Agricultural Sector
[SEN. CAPILDEO]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

Tell me, has any statistical work been done? How many people have died as a result of those vendors on the highway as opposed to how many people have died because there are no police patrolling the place; because traffic lights are not working or because you would not build a simple flyover? Why this hatred for the farmer?

I want to get at the psychology behind the policy of the Government? What does it have against farmers? Is it an historical thing? Why do you not follow the number one capitalist country in the world, the United States of America, which you ape so much? They have the most brilliant farmers in the world. They subsidize their farmers to the nth degree. And, here in the *Letter of Sectoral Policy*, your words are that you will "cap the level of support on rice production". Do you know what this reminds me of? It reminds me of when Dr. Williams died and a minister, was it "Merve the Swerve", said "let us cap the news of his death"?

You are aping America. You are following everything the Americans tell you to do. Why not follow them in agriculture? Why do you not subsidize the farmers like the Americans do? Why does every country in the world subsidize their farmers? Why are you not? You are capping them—a nice word for killing and murdering them. Why? The people want to know where you stand. What are you going to leave for our children? Are we going to drink the oil? Barry tells me "so far it is only air and gas coming out of the wells, no oil". And, all that is going to come out of this side is hot air. Is that not so? That is all we can do.

All we can do in a democratic society is to get up here and talk. But, there will come a time, as has happened before, and it is going to happen again, people will stop talking, and you are pushing ordinary people into that position. The farmer is the most conservative capitalist the world knows. You are trying to create a capitalist society and you are destroying that society. It is beyond me. I cannot understand it. And, I cannot understand, why, over the last 36 to 40 years you have not given the farmer the basic necessities of life. Why? These are questions the people need to have answered. They want to know what their position is so that they will be able to respond, not only with hot air, but with other things too, when the time comes.

So, I call on the hon. Minister, Brian Kuei Tung, because they have saddled him with the responsibility of freeing-up the economy, to free up the farmers. Do not go touring by helicopter and say, "We cannot drop two seeds for you". I mean, you fly around and look down and say "We cannot give them feed, those fellas

cause the thing, you know. They blocked up the drains and the whole place flood". That was naive to the extreme.

If you are really serious about this country and the preservation of democracy and our way of life, preserve that farming community, because it is the backbone of this country. If you destroy them, you destroy whatever little civilization we have here. The army will then have to patrol and the Minister of National Security, Sen. Huggins, will have to bring back that joint army/police patrol.

I see the hon. acting Prime Minister is getting a little excited. Joke and fun aside, if the People's National Movement does not abandon its disgraceful "non-existent" policy on agriculture, and be honest with the people, the People's National Movement will be held responsible for the destruction of this land, because without agriculture, we cannot survive.

Thank you, Mr. President.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Sen. Dr. The Hon. Lenny Saith): Mr. President, I beg to move that the Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday, November 2, 1993 at 1.30 p.m.

May I take this opportunity to advise hon. Senators that before we continue the debate on the Children (Amdt.) Bill, next Tuesday, we would like to deal with the Guarantee of Loans (UWI) Bill 1993.

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, before putting the question for the adjournment, Sen. Hosein has obtained leave to raise a matter on a motion for the adjournment.

Sen. Hosein, you have 15 minutes.

Islamic Dress in School

Sen. Muntaz Hosein: Mr. President, let me welcome the Minister of Education to this hon. Senate. On September 15, 1992, I raised this problem of Islamic dress in this honourable Senate whereby children were being turned away from school because they chose to dress modestly and follow the dictates of their religious beliefs.

On that occasion I pointed out what constitutes Islamic dress. The difference between children going to school in their normal uniform and Islamic dress is simply that the hair, in the case of girls, mainly, is covered; they wear sleeves

Islamic Dress in Schools
[SEN. HOSEIN]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

down to their wrists and they cover their legs down to their ankles. On top of that, the uniform of the school is being worn.

In our nation today, we are seeing a fall in standards. We are seeing women walking about almost naked. If one even goes to the churches, you can see women half naked. Standards have fallen; and one would have thought that anything that would raise the standard of decency in Trinidad and Tobago would be supported by the Minister of Education and by the Government.

4.40 p.m.

Surely, we all want to have a society of which we can be proud, where there will be fewer rapes, where the women-folk will be honoured, respected and loved and we will no longer have people making snide remarks about our women-folk. I believe that Islamic dress wear by those Muslim girls who so desire to follow the injunction of their religion and to follow the commandments of their Lord, and to wear this dress which is a modest dress wear, should be encouraged.

Mr. President, you will remember that I raised this matter on that occasion and I showed a picture which I will show again today, of what it looks like, so that others may see it is even less modest than that worn by nuns. Why then should students be turned away from school?

After I made my contribution in the Senate on December 15, 1992, on September 20, 1992, the Muslim Co-ordinating Council representing Muslims in Trinidad and Tobago, wrote the Minister of Education supporting my stand in Parliament, and advising him of the Islamic injunction of dressing modestly in public. And, for the benefit of all, I quote the relevant passage of the Holy Qur-an so that you will understand the injunction.

Mr. President, this is what God says in the Holy Qur-an:

"26. O ye Children of Adam!
We have bestowed raiment
Upon you to cover
Your shame, as well as
To be an adornment to you,
But the raiment of righteousness,
Such are among the Signs
Of Allah, that they
may receive admonition!

27. O ye Children of Adam!
 Let not Satan seduce you,
 in the same manner as
 He got your parents out
 Of the Garden, stripping them
 Of their raiment, to expose
 Their shame: for he
 And his tribe watch you
 From a position where ye
 Cannot see them: We made
 The Evil Ones friends
 (Only) to those without Faith.
Holy Qur-an Chap. 7:26-27.

I quote this chapter so that the hon. Minister will be aware that a devout Muslim believes that everything in the Holy Qur-an is the exact word of God and, therefore, that is a command of the Lord that women who are Muslims should be dressed in that manner. Although in Trinidad and Tobago all Muslim women do not follow that injunction we should encourage it and that those women who chose to obey the command of the Lord should not find themselves in a position whereby they are not allowed so to do, and to get a good education.

The Minister replied to the Muslim Co-ordinating Council on May 7, 1993. I do not understand why it took so long for the Minister to reply but he is here today and he will probably tell me why. He replied by saying, in essence, that consultation on the subject is in progress. It is more than a year now and I do not understand why consultation is taking so long on a simple matter like this.

I had several follow-up discussions with the Minister on this subject, and the latest information that I got from the Minister is that he was awaiting legal advice from the Attorney General before he makes his decision. It has been a long time and you must understand that the latest information coming to me is that in some schools they are accepting the dress code. I am told that the principal of one of the offending schools, after refusing children, was called in by the Ministry and was told by the Ministry that they ought not to do it, that it is wrong. And the principal of the offending school went back and accepted the children for which I am very pleased. But this is not the answer. Because you have so many other children who would like to dress according to the commandments of their Lord, but because they are afraid of victimization, because they are afraid that they will be turned

Islamic Dress in Schools
[SEN. HOSEIN]

Tuesday, October 26, 1993

away, because they are afraid they may be jeered at and people may look upon them as something else and something different, they do not take that chance to do so.

I am calling on the Minister of Education to make an unequivocal and clear statement that all female Muslims who wish to wear Muslim dress in schools are so allowed and to send a directive to all schools in Trinidad and Tobago to let them know that the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago makes provision for freedom of worship.

Mr. President, if one reads the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago one will see that freedom of religious worship is instituted in our Constitution, and I thank those "fathers" who wrote that Constitution and who thought it fit to put that in. I ask the Minister to put an end to this discriminatory practice in Trinidad and Tobago and put an end to it today. We do not want to hear today that they are still studying the matter. It is a clear-cut issue. There are no ambiguities. The law is clear. The Constitution is clear. The people of Trinidad and Tobago belong to this sacred land and should share the same opportunities for a good education. Do not deny one sector of the community the opportunity to worship their Lord in this manner and also to get a good education.

I thank you, Mr. President.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Augustus Ramrekersingh): Mr. President, I thank the hon. Senator for having raised this issue. The issue, as it was raised with me some time ago, was discussed at length and over a long period of time by officials from the Ministry of Education and officials from the Attorney General's Department, using that term in its widest sense. We were looking, essentially, at the question of constitutional rights of the individual and certain regulations which may be enforced in schools.

4.50 p.m.

The question is far wider than mere Islamic dress because Trinidad and Tobago is a multi-religious society, so that many other religious bodies could find themselves in a similar situation, not necessarily with dress. You may belong to a religious group which does not believe in immunization, and in schools in Trinidad and Tobago, registration is dependent on showing the immunization cards for certain reasons of health. There again, you would have that kind of conflict.

For many months, in looking at the question, I want to admit we were looking at it very legalistically. We have come to the conclusion that the way in which to deal with this problem, as I said—the question of individual rights in certain areas, school rules and regulations—is not in the legalistic way, but to take a more human approach and to seek some form of consensus.

Therefore, I wish to inform the hon. Senator and the Senate that I am proposing—I have already indicated to some persons to this effect—that we would seek a consensual solution. Therefore, I have directed the Director of School Supervision to set up a group with representatives from all the denominational boards, as well as a representative from the Principals' Association, Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association and the Solicitor General's Department in order to discuss the issue and arrive at a consensus, if possible, and to make a recommendation, so that we can avoid all the legalisms and to come up with a solution which will be mutually satisfactory to everyone and which would preserve that balance between individual rights and certain regulations.

I so wish to advise this Senate.

Sen. Hosein: Mr. President, before the Minister takes his seat, I would like to ask when would this happen?

Hon. A. Ramrekersingh: I expect that the group would proceed with its task expeditiously, but as the hon. Senator would realize, consensus, and the kind of consensus I am seeking, will not be obtained in a day. It will take a little longer. I can assure him that I would insist on expeditiousness.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.55 p.m.