

*Leave of Absence*

*Tuesday, July 04, 1995*

**SENATE**

*Tuesday, July 04, 1995*

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. The Hon. Gordon Draper to be absent from sittings of the Senate during the period July 3—8, 1995 as he would be out of the country.

I have also granted leave to Sen. The Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams to be absent from today's sitting of the Senate as she will be out of the country also.

**SENATOR'S APPOINTMENT**

**Mr. President:** Hon. Senators, I have been advised that His Excellency the President has appointed Mrs. Norma Lewis-Phillip to be a temporary Senator with effect from July 1, 1995 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of Sen. Joan Yuille-Williams.

I have also been advised that His Excellency the President has appointed Dr. Eric Baldwin Anderson St. Cyr to be a temporary Senator with effect from July 3, 1995 and continuing, during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of Sen. Carol Mahadeo

His Excellency the President has also appointed Prof. Kenneth Ramchand to be a temporary Senator with effect from July 3, 1995 and continuing, during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of Sen. Prof. John Spence. His Excellency the President has appointed Mr. Sankar Mahabirsingh to be a temporary Senator with effect from July 3, 1995 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of Sen. Gordon Draper.

**OATH OF ALLEGIANCE**

*The following Senators took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law:*

Norma Lewis-Phillip, Sankar Mahabirsingh, Prof. Kenneth Ramchand, Dr. Eric Baldwin and Anderson St. Cyr.

**ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION**

*The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Sen. Everard Dean:*

**Accounts of State Enterprises  
(Examination by PA(E)C)**

- 35.** Would the hon. Minister of Finance state what mechanisms have been made to facilitate the submission to Parliament of the accounts of state enterprises which have been audited by an auditor other than the Auditor General and the examination of those accounts by the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee referred to in the Auditor General's Report (page 67 subsection 10:07) for the year ended December 31, 1993?

**Mr. President:** Hon. Senators, due to the absence of Sen. Dean, who is out of the country, we would have to defer this question to the next sitting of the Senate

*Question deferred.*

**MISCELLANEOUS TAXES (AMDT.) BILL**

*Order for second reading read.*

**The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism (Hon. Wendell Mottley):** Mr. President, I beg to move,

That a Bill to amend the Miscellaneous Taxes Act, be now read a second time.

You may recall, Sir, that when the budget was presented at the end of 1994, it was announced that the negative list for primary agricultural goods was to be replaced by increases in the rates of customs duties and by an import surcharge which would be reduced to zero over a four-year period. In the case of meat, the surcharges are for a three-year period. The intention was to create a more open and less distorted agricultural market by allowing greater market access to the conversion of quantitative restrictions—that is the negative list—to tariff equivalents initially, and by the gradual reduction in these tariffs.

These trade reform measures were part of a package of proposals for revitalizing the agricultural sector with the aim of making it more robust and competitive.

**1.40 p.m.**

Other elements of that agricultural package included legislative and institutional reform, appropriate incentives to foster increased investments in the

sector, as well as a significant amount of infrastructural work, most notably, the agricultural or rural access roads and bridges programme, all part of a comprehensive programme designed towards making the agricultural sector more competitive and modern. However, since these surcharges were imposed in January, 1995 there have been new developments in the international market for meat products which have had the effect of significantly increasing the price of meat to domestic consumers.

Firstly, as a result of shortages of beef in Japan, Saudi Arabia and the former countries of the USSR, significant quantities of beef which were formerly sourced in Ireland are now being exported instead to these countries where there is a shortage. The result has been that Irish beef has gone from surplus to short and prices have moved accordingly.

In addition, as a result of the recently concluded Uruguay Round of multilateral negotiations, restrictions have been placed on the level of domestic and export subsidies on agricultural commodities both for developing countries and for developed countries. As a result of this, with the restriction and the lowering of these subsidies, the price of beef that is available to importing countries such as Trinidad and Tobago has gone up. In the absence of a subsidy from the domestic government in the exporting country the farmer has now had to recoup the full cost of production plus profit from the consumer. The consumer is no longer shielded from those full costs by the subsidy payable in Ireland and these other countries; the consumer must now meet the full price. This has come about, as I said, as a result of the recently concluded multilateral negotiations and GATT.

Mr. President, this Government is acutely aware of the consumers who have been forced to bear the brunt of these increases in their weekly grocery bills; but the interest of consumers has always got to be balanced with the interest of producers. When we put on the tariffication and the surcharge we were aiming to put on a calculated amount of surcharge and tariff with the effect of delivering the same amount of protection as the farmer here formerly enjoyed under negative listing; and then to reduce that gradually as the farmer so organizes his business, through higher productivity in his own operations to deal with increased competition. That was our goal.

Unexpectedly, came the shortages and the removal of the subsidies, which had the effect of driving up the prices. So that since the domestic farmer was pricing his goods; since he is the smaller supplier; the real market leader is the import—

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we import more beef than we produce—therefore the domestic farmer is a price-taker rather than a price-maker. In these circumstances with the import prices going up the farmer merely moves up his price to suit, and therefore he does not need the same amount of tariffication protection as he might otherwise have needed had the imported price continued to be subsidized and the benefit of a surplus of meat products in the world market.

So that the Government saw that it could discharge its obligations to the farmer—and obligations we do have—and it is important that the country understand that—and at the same time discharge the obligation to the consumer by allowing the import surcharges to come down, bearing in mind that as we did so the consumer would benefit either by some lowering of prices or at least prices holding steady, and the farmer would benefit because he had already reaped the benefit of higher than expected prices because of conditions prevailing in the international meat market.

Therefore, after careful consideration of all these issues we concluded that the increases in the price of meat would have the effect of providing a measure of protection equivalent to part of that which the import surcharge was intended to provide. We therefore took the decision to reduce the import surcharge on beef, veal, goat meat, mutton and lamb by 50 per cent, that is from 20 per cent to 10 per cent in 1995 and from 10 per cent to 5 per cent in 1996; it will remain at 5 per cent for 1997. It was also agreed that these deductions should take effect from May 18, 1995. We took administrative measures to ensure that containers that were landed could anticipate the moves that we are now proposing.

Mr. President, the effect of clause 2(b) of the Bill which is before us is, as I have just explained. Also, in the course of the introduction of these measures there was considerable public criticism of the fact that the reduction in the rate of import surcharge required an amendment to the Miscellaneous Taxes Act and a debate through both Houses of Parliament which necessarily delayed implementation. We were strongly criticized and it was felt that there should be more flexibility in these matters since, again, conditions in the international market might change in relatively quick time. Therefore, in an effort to ensure a faster response in time, clause 2(a) of the Bill makes provision for the Minister to amend the Schedules to the Act by order.

Mr. President, the Schedules for the Act now cover import surcharge, alcoholic and other beverage taxes and the financial services tax. This provision would allow for the rates of import surcharge, alcoholic and other beverage taxes

to be amended by the publication of an order in the *Gazette*. In the case of the financial services tax, the rates of tax are not contained in the Schedule. The proposed amendment is intended to allow changes to be made more quickly as changes in the international circumstances occur.

Therefore, Mr. President, I beg to move.

*Question proposed.*

**Sen. Kamla Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. President, it is with a heavy heart that I look at this Bill because in itself the Bill is a welcome one, seeking to reduce the import surcharge on beef, veal, goat meat, mutton and lamb. Regrettably, on this side we look at this Bill as another manifestation of the contempt in which this Government holds the people in this land; it exemplifies what can only be termed arrogance. Indeed, I may go so far as to say it exemplifies the ignorance of some of those on the Government Benches as to what is happening in this country. I say arrogance because it comes in the midst of cries of those in this country who are living under the poverty line—26 per cent of them. What does that mean? We are dealing with a population of about 1.5 million people and when we say 26 per cent it sounds like a small figure, but in fact it represents 390,000 persons in this country living under the poverty line.

**1.50 p.m.**

Mr. President, I say "ignorance" again because they do not seem to be aware of the suffering of those 390,000 persons in this country living under the poverty line. It is ignorance because they are not aware of the number of persons who call the streets their home and who do not know where the next meal is coming from, and even more heart-breaking, the number of persons who do not now where the next meal for their children is coming from. Ignorance, I say again, because the Government is not aware of the number of persons who do not have the luxury of choosing whether to have lamb for dinner today or veal for lunch tomorrow. Their only choice when they are looking for a meal sometimes is whether to line up outside Kentucky Fried Chicken or Pizza Hut to collect leftovers.

What is the answer of this Government to the cries of those people? This Bill is the answer to the weeping and wailing. This is the answer to the suffering of the 390,000 persons. The Government's answer is to reduce the surcharge on meats. Its answer is the liberalization of trade. Its answer is free trade and divestment, high and mighty sounding words, Mr. President, when in fact, they are merely

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prayers that worship the mighty dollar. How it worships mammon, Mr. President, to forget the suffering of those people under the poverty line.

On this side, we feel that the Government fails to heed the voice of the poor that steer us as we traverse up and down this land. We could see that poverty on the streets and in the homes of people. The Government seems not to be aware of that. The Government knows that the voice of the people is the voice of God, and if its members fail to heed that voice, it does so at its own peril. So, the Government comes to this Parliament, with the greatest respect to Members opposite, to frustrate the voice of the people.

It is my respectful view that at times this is merely a parody of democracy. It is a charade when it is that the Government engages in using its majority in this place to frustrate the voice and the will of the people on the outside. That is the extent to which we feel the contempt, callousness and arrogance of this Government. Week after week we have come to this Senate and the Government has found all manner of ways and byways in its attempts to frustrate and silence the voice of the people. I had always thought, and we would have hoped, that it upheld the principle that every creed and race find an equal place in this nation. But, each week it seems they stray farther and farther away from that in its quest for the almighty foreign dollar.

We know that those in and outside this Senate who are truly concerned about the people, who are truly independent, would examine their hearts and consciences and know to do what is right. They would know when the time comes to do what is right and they would stand up and do what is right.

Mr. President, we on this side of the Senate, the Opposition, have made it abundantly clear what our view is on this Bill. We know this Bill would eventually be passed, and we have said that in itself it is welcomed, therefore, we would spend no more time repeating our position on this Bill. We do hope that Members in this Chamber who are truly concerned about democracy and heeding the voice of the people; Members who care about every community in this nation, would give way and allow the debate on public holidays to start and continue. We ask that you let the voices of the Orisha and Baptist communities be heard.

Thank you, Mr. President.

**Sen. Rev. Daniel Teelucksingh:** Mr. President, I too would like to compliment the hon. Minister, and the Government, on this positive response, even in this small way, to what is now a national plea to address the unprecedented rise in food prices.

I have no difficulty in supporting the Miscellaneous Taxes (Amdt.) Bill, 1995, except that I feel that it has not really captured the urgency of the hunger crisis facing the poor, the unemployed and the working classes in our community. This is my problem with the Bill. The Bill seems to be indecisive not geared to dealing with a serious issue. In fact, I think we need a Bill—I hope another one would be coming, and this would be the beginning of a series—to include other food items within the surcharge category.

I do not think I have ever heard, as I hear now, people complain so bitterly about the astronomical and unbelievable rise in the cost of food. This seems to be a food Bill—it is a food Bill. If the salaried class in this country has been complaining so much, I wonder what about the unemployed. Because of their cries, the unemployed and the poor in this land—I believe we are faced with a social crisis which we cannot ignore.

Only last weekend an announcement was made concerning basic foods. One of them was a popular brand of powdered milk which was increased by 17 per cent, but in several instances the cost of grocery items seems to be increasing almost overnight, silently, but with deadly consequences.

A few days ago I looked at some of the commodities, especially those mentioned in the Bill: beef, veal, goat, mutton and lamb. I wonder, notwithstanding the explanation given by the hon. Minister, how are our people going to address prices like these. Beef at \$36.99 per kilogram in one of the popular chains of food stores; T-bone steak, \$73.99, that is for the upper crust in society; but lamb, \$35.06 per kilogram; oxtail, which I think would form part of the basic menu of the poorer people, \$28.64 per kilogram; and goat, \$24.29 per kilogram. I wonder, even with the reduction we are aiming at today, if there will be a significant decrease in the price of these commodities.

I am worried, because if external factors are responsible for such exorbitant prices, then our regime of surcharges and duties would certainly be a very important factor with our consumers in mind and the problem facing us at present.

I ask myself the question though, Trinidad and Tobago is not a sheep-rearing country, so what is the rationale for continuing duties on mutton and lamb? Trinidad and Tobago can supply only 20 per cent of the local demand for beef, so what is the rationale for continued duties on beef and veal?

This is a food-related Bill—and I would add, maybe other commodities that are equally important—I would like to ask the hon. Minister since Trinidad and Tobago does not produce cereals like wheat and oats, then why have import

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surcharges and VAT on breakfast foods? There are some of them in the grocery, \$30 per box.

There is no good reason to maintain tariffs on the items listed in the Bill. They should not only be reduced—I submit that such tariffs should be removed now. We must make every effort to make food available today at cheaper prices and not wait, as envisaged in the Bill, for 1996 or thereafter.

I would also like to add, since this is a food-related Bill, that the Government and all of us, need to consider relief measures for the hungry in this nation. How are we going to feed unemployed people? I am going to zero in on the category of those who are too young to receive a pension. There is another group, not qualified to receive public assistance. I am worried and it is a long time now we have this increasing class of people; young and middle-aged people with no jobs whatsoever, no one to support or provide for them. How are they going to eat?

**2.00 p.m.**

There are thousands of people like this in our country. I want to suggest, and I know the Government must have considered this very seriously—that we look again at providing some kind of temporary relief measure, probably through food stamps. Of course, this must be properly supervised, not meant to encourage laziness in any way, but there are people who are desperately hungry in this country and this Bill means very little or nothing to them—and soup kitchens Sir, are very slow in coming.

In this Miscellaneous Taxes (Amdt.) Bill debate we are reminded that surcharges are designed to protect the local agricultural industry. The hon. Minister made mention of this in his presentation. Today, we are reaping the whirlwind for neglecting the agricultural sector and this has spanned decades. Tariff barriers, surcharges and duties are not enough to protect the local industry. I will repeat this: tariff barriers, surcharges and duties are not enough to protect the local industry. We have had this for the longest while but somehow or the other the industry has not been producing. It seems as though it is dying. I am very happy today that the hon. Minister made mention of at least a few of the supporting systems: access roads, irrigation works, relief for farms that have been destroyed by floods; praedial larceny, and inadequate market facilities.

Mr. President, I will draw your attention to our increasing demand for bananas. I am glad the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is here. We have been dependent so much on other territories up the islands and



because of the recent pest problems, we realize that there is a shortage of bananas. And bananas can be grown in Trinidad and Tobago.

There is need for us to be self-sufficient, at least in food that can be produced in our country. We must put in place incentives, we must do this now. I am glad that the Government has started putting in place incentives for the local farming community to increase its production—at least in partial answer to those external forces which dictate the price of the nation's food.

Mr. President, my closing comment is to reiterate that we are aware of the value of surcharges and duties, either as revenue measures on luxury items, or to protect indigenous industries. Such mechanisms, that is, the surcharges and duties, must be used to our advantage in the quest for fair trade and must never be used as a whip on the backs of our people.

I thank you, Sir.

**Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand:** Mr. President, I have not had the time to prepare a full response to this Bill, but I want to go on record as maintaining an opposition to the philosophy, if such it may be called, that lies behind this Bill and others like it.

I am not a maker of meat, and I am not a taker of meat; what is even more to the point, I am not a buyer and seller of meat. The lowering of the import surcharge applicable to beef, veal, goat meat, mutton and lamb is not likely to lower the cost of living for the 26 per cent of the population referred to by Sen. Persad-Bissessar. It is unlikely to bring profit to local farmers; it is not geared to increase production by local farmers. If anything, it would drive them into further despair. We have to ask rhetorically, for the answer is obvious, who will benefit from the lowering of the tariff and from an increase in the trade in imported meats?

I am not in the profession of numbers and cannot offer economic solutions within paradigms set by those who see the world in economic terms. I know that it is difficult to change eating and drinking habits overnight, but many of us who have listened to the rhetoric of how the economy is about to turn around, how we are now part of a larger world economy and how we must attach ourselves to this great system or drown, know that people who are takers of prices and not makers of prices are at the mercy of those forces that I consider evil forces out there in the world.

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I believe that many of the solutions to our economic problems depend upon a radical alteration of the lifestyle. Alterations such as making sure that we produce something like yam flour to mix with wheat flour so that gradually we would change people's taste for wheat flour so that we can live on the kind of flour we produce for ourselves. We would have also to orient the population away from these imported meats into more vegetables.

I know this may sound silly. It is not silly to me and part of my opposition to this Bill comes from a belief that the Government and many people do not take seriously the need to radically alter the lifestyle in this country, and this is what we have to do if we are ever to become independent.

I thank you.

**The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism (Hon. Wendell Mottley):** Mr. President, the strength of the hon. Senators' criticisms on the other side is that the Bill before us is inadequate in terms of bringing about lower prices. The Government's view is that where there are no Government taxes and charges we do not have the capacity to influence in this particular way. We have introduced, in the surcharges a flexible tool and once it is adopted we will have the flexibility to intervene and hopefully, lower, remove, sometimes increase, if the farmer comes under extreme pressure. It will be a flexible tool available to the Government. The Government is not pretending that this measure is the be-all and end-all of its proposed measures to deal with genuinely difficult circumstances experienced by the population.

**2.10 p.m.**

This measure is not an all-embracing, all-inclusive one. It is but one aspect of our arsenal in dealing with the problem. It is but one aspect of our arsenal in dealing with the problem. The fact is that already, there are no import surcharges on a whole range of items such as macaroni, spaghetti, cornflakes, oats, corned beef, sardine, ketchup, tea, cocoa, mustard, mayonnaise and others. We introduced surcharges in January specifically on a few locally produced items which were removed from the negative list. It is also being argued that it is inadequate and cannot help the large number of poor and unemployed people. The fact is that beef, flour and milk at any price is beyond the reach of people without income. That is a truism. Government has to use other methods to try to assist people who find themselves in those circumstances.

I want to read into the record the fact that we have done so. In this measure the Government is attempting to update the rate of price increases on a number of

items. It has gone beyond that and has tried to redistribute state funds to put money into the hands of the unfortunate who find themselves in a situation where if they have no income, beef at one cent per pound would be beyond their reach. The Government has a number of programmes in place for those people.

| <i>Programme</i>              | <i>\$ Million</i><br>(1992) | <i>\$ Million</i><br>(1995) |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Unemployment Relief Programme | 119                         | 130                         |
| Civilian Conservation Corps   | -                           | 15                          |
| Servol                        | 2.2                         | 2.5                         |
| Old age pension               | 179                         | 228                         |
| Social assistance             | 41                          | 57                          |
| Food subsidy                  | 60                          | 96                          |
| Urgent temporary assistance   | 3                           | 5                           |
| School Feeding Programme      | 23                          | 78.5                        |

The Civilian Conservation Corps is a new programme with which we are trying to reach youngsters who otherwise would be unable to get job experience in the commercial sector. This programme did not exist in 1992. Old age pension is at the other end of the spectrum. The SHARE Programme fed 6,000 families and was not handled directly by the Government. We went out, cleaned it up and dealt with a number of NGOs.

In response to that truism, it does not matter how the Government tries to moderate price increase, it is not going to help those who are in very desperate situations. I clearly point out the fact that the Government recognizes that and has been dealing with persons in those unfortunate circumstances by different methods. As our economy improves, hopefully, more funds will be available to deal with those who fall out from normal economic circumstances.

Therefore, I recommend this Bill to this Senate. I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

*Bill committed to a committee of the whole Senate.*

*Senate in committee.*

*Clauses 1 to 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Question put and agreed to, That the bill be reported to the Senate.*

*Senate resumed.*

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

#### ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

**The Minister of Planning and Development (Sen. Dr. The Hon. Lenny Saith):** Mr. President, I beg to propose that the Senate now consider Item 4 under "Private Business" and to resume debate on the motion dealing with the Joint Select Committee Report (Public Holidays).

*Agreed to.*

**Mr. President:** I just want to remind Members of the Senate that we observe certain conventions in this Parliament which have developed over the years and have become practice. I say so because there are Members on both sides who very often find difficulty in complying with the Standing Order which says that all Senators must maintain silence unless they are addressing the Senate.

The next two Senators whom I am going to call will be making their maiden speeches. It is a convention that parliamentarians ought not to be interrupted during their maiden speeches. I would also like to bring to the attention of those who would be making their maiden speeches that it is the convention as well that they ought not to become controversial.

#### JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT

##### (PUBLIC HOLIDAYS)

##### Adoption

[Second Day]

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [June 13, 1995]:*

*Be it Resolved* that this Senate adopt the Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed by the Senate and the House of Representatives to consider the entire question of Public Holidays and to report by March 31, 1995. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

*Question again proposed.*

**Sen. Rev. Barbara Gray-Burke:** Mr. President, this speech is dedicated to the memory of Archbishop Dr. Elton George Griffith, liberator of the faith

and founder of the National Evangelical Spiritual Baptist Faith Archdiocese Incorporated (Shouter) and all our ancestors whether Shouter or not, who have been engaged in the struggle for religious and cultural freedom, equity and justice.

**2.20 p.m.**

To this late, great man, Archbishop Griffith, this public holiday will be documented, whenever it is given, as an unprecedented historic occasion in the lives of Spiritual Baptists in the nation of Trinidad and Tobago. It will be an occasion when unheralded greatness is publicly acknowledged and honoured on the basic principle that man's work should not be denied or ignored.

To know Archbishop, Dr. Elton George Griffith's capacity and his achievements and to see them cast aside as if they never existed is no easy experience. This is a human tragedy, an act of grave injustice that stands to be corrected. Dr. Elton George Griffith gave us an appreciation of the necessity of honouring our Liberation Day, the day of the repeal of the Shouters Prohibition Ordinance, 1951, and its social significance. This day, March 30, is of great historical, social and religious significance to the Spiritual Baptist, the African community in particular, and the people of this nation in general.

Some people may ask themselves why we, the members of the Spiritual Baptist community, are firm in the stance that we do not want another festival day and that March 30 should be declared a public holiday. There is a reason we do not want another public festival day, Mr. President. How many Senators know that Carnival is a dramatic display of the African cultural genius in protest against a wicked, repressive and immoral colonial society? Carnival, as Senators are aware, is presently held on two days, the Monday and Tuesday immediately preceding the Lenten Season, but in the nineteenth century, up to the 1840s, the celebration was three days long taking in the Sunday as well. It was the so-called behaviour of the former slaves with their canboulay street theatre re-enactment of the burning of the cane which caused the authorities to remove the Sunday from the actual Carnival festival.

It would be instructive to note that canboulay called to mind the suffering that the slaves had to endure as their masters whipped them out of bed and into the fields to put out the cane fires. Canboulay was about religious oppression since the burning of the cane signified that African religious rites were in progress.

While canboulay was about mas, calypso was about songs of protest, battle or defiant confrontation, satire, caricature, admonition, warnings, prophesying, and so forth. See the "Evolution of Calypso" in TATIL's Almanac, 1994. From the

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evidence produced by many modern writers, along with the oral history passed on to this day, Carnival, as occurs in Trinidad, is an Africanized festival.

It is significant that the steelband was developed out of the culture of the discard—that is the discarded oil drums—among poor, black, African people. But even more significant is the psychology which would have inspired its development. Economic deprivation is a powerful argument, and a necessary one at that, but in this instance it is not sufficient. The psychological incentive or motivation for the invention of the steelband was the cultural and religious repression of the Africans in Trinidad.

The East Dry River area where the steelband is said to have been born, was a place littered with Orisha (Shango) Palis and Shouter churches—*A Short History of Calypso* by "Attila The Hun," *The Steelband Movement in Trinidad and Tobago* by Stephen Steumpfle. It is not accidental that the steelband was invented as a percussion instrument to replace the goatskin drum during the Carnival celebration. The Shouters' Prohibition Ordinance, 1917 was in effect during the period of the steelband invention, along with Chap. 25, Ordinance No. 31 of 1921 entitled the Summary Conviction Offences Ordinance.

It is because of the close association between masquerade, calypso and steelband that Dick Aebdigh was inspired to write his book, *Cut N Mixed*. Without steelband and calypso there would be no Carnival.

### **2.30 p.m.**

So the African culture had to hijack a Christian festival in order to find a medium of expression. No government, conscious of our historical antecedents would venture to give a public festival to an African-based religion such as Spiritual Baptists, in the context of our known and well published history.

Ignorance seems to be the reason our request for a public holiday to mark the repeal of the Shouters' Prohibition Ordinance was met with this insult in the form of another public festival. Carnival, calypso and steelband are now officially recognized integral parts of our culture. These cultural forms are already exported to many parts of the West Indies, North America, Britain and have captured the imagination of people the world over.

Even with this fact before us we cannot be overcome by it. A protest culture such as Carnival cannot be expected to yield the necessary type of religious, social, cultural and economic development of our people. That is why a non-protest, recognized and dignified cultural expression is crucial to the African

community. Should it be expected that it needs to move forward, we must embark upon a programme of positive social values in the African community. This is the root of self-esteem, this is a positive concept of self. The key is, of course, a positive identity.

Why a public holiday, Mr. President? There are many reasons why March 30 should be declared a public holiday. The following few points would give an insight.

- (1) March 30, 1951, is the day on which the obnoxious and wicked Shouters' Prohibition Ordinance 1917 was repealed.
- (2) This ordinance represents the first most diabolical attempt by the colonial authority since the abolition of slavery in 1834, to use the legislative process with such potency to make extinct the religion and culture of our people.
- (3) This ordinance did not only attack the public worship of the shouter; the police were given the authority to enter suspected Shouters' homes and to make arrests if any evidence of Shouter worship was found. Children and the aged were often persecuted.
- (4) The persecution caused much physical and psychological hardship to the vast majority of the members of the African community. An example of this is the wife of an old man who was convicted and sentenced to six months imprisonment. The wife pleaded with the magistrate to send her to jail in his place to prevent the punishment from killing him.
- (5) The ordinance had a devastating effect on the religious practices of the Spiritual Baptist Shouter. The religion was driven underground. Many Baptists had to camouflage themselves under the cover of English and Roman Catholic churches to show that they belonged to a legal religious entity, to enter schools, to have access to jobs or simply to be identified as citizens.
- (6) The ordinance of 1917 severely disrupted the re-emergence of the African family life and cultural legacy which were damaged as a result of slavery. This effect is only now being felt in the second and third generations of the African. The evidence in its raw nakedness can be seen in the number of young African men who comprise the inmates of the prison and the mental hospital as well as the vagrant population in this country.

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**2.40 p.m.**

No country, conscious of its history, could allow such an important event and the consequence for its people, to pass in to oblivion. *[Desk Thumping]* For more than 40 years the Spiritual Baptist community has commemorated the repeal of the Shouters Prohibition Ordinance; we cannot allow this most painful event to be lost on our people in the next few decades and our Government should be even more mindful of this. Outside of the emancipation of slaves in 1834 there is no other single event which carries greater significance than this day, March 30, to the African community. That is why the members of the Spiritual Baptist are adamant that we should have our day, March 30, declared a public holiday.

The injustice imposed upon us by the Shouters' Prohibition Ordinance must never be forgotten lest it be repeated. There is a saying that goes: He who forgets the lessons of history is doomed to repeat them. Another saying is: The price of freedom is eternal vigilance. The prominent religions and their adherents in our society take pride in and have admiration for the history which has made them great, their struggles against oppression, their heroes and their deliverance. They have their day not only to celebrate their events and personalities but also to pay tribute and homage to God.

Each individual ought to know what is right and what is wrong; let us be part of this historical process for justice by participating in doing the right thing according to the dictates of our conscience. I come now to the promises made by successive Prime Ministers to the Spiritual Baptist community.

I, Archbishop Barbara Gray-Burke, and the late Archbishop Dr. Elton George Griffith celebrated 25 years of liberation on March 30, 1976. I was a Reverend Mother ordained by the late Archbishop Elton George Griffith at that time. The celebration was held in Woodford Square. The father of the Nation, the late Dr. Eric Williams, Prime Minister, attended and promised a day. We, the Spiritual Baptists were optimistic the year he passed away we had great expectation that it would have been given that time. God knows best! He was demised leaving us to his successors.

Prime Minister, Mr. George Chambers, came on the scene and offered us August 01. The late Archbishop Elton George Griffith refused, because it was not the day of the repeal of the Shouters' Prohibition Ordinance. This day had meant a lot to him.



When Prime Minister A.N.R Robinson attended the Liberation Celebration at the Jean Pierre Complex he said the next year the almanac would carry March 30 as a public holiday. That did not happen. I do not know why!

On April 10, 1988, Mr. Manning visited the National Evangelical Archdiocese; it was to solicit votes for the up-coming election. I recall him saying, "When I am in power my Government will grant a public holiday." It was the night Archbishop Raymond Douglas; Archbishop Gertrude Maundy; Archbishop Monica Rando, and I, Archbishop Barbara Gray-Burke and others, had displayed our dissatisfaction on issues affecting us. He was present; he was accustomed to coming there and was a close associate of the Spiritual Baptist community. Mr. Patrick Manning was the Leader of the Opposition when Archbishop Monica Rando and I went to his office at Chepstow House to invite him to a National Day of Prayer in the month of August, 1989; he did attend. It was held at the Princes Building Grounds. That National Day of Prayer was a vision by her Grace Archbishop Monica Rando.

The next year Archbishop Monica Rando had a vision to call the nation to a National Thanksgiving Service which was to be held at the Jean Pierre Complex; this was to be on August 14, 1990. Archbishop Monica Rando and I went to Mr. Patrick Manning's office and asked him to grace us with his presence. In our discussion, he then declared "I would be the next Prime Minister." We were thrilled, because he had confidence in himself, and Baptist people are positive people. I recall it as if it happened yesterday. We began saying to him that our Father of the Nation demised, Mr. Chambers and also Mr Robinson did not give it. His words were, "When I become Prime Minister the first thing I would do is give the Spiritual Baptist community the public holiday. I know of their struggle." These were the gentleman's words. The coup had just happened before the thanksgiving service. Mr. Patrick Manning did not attend the service at the Jean Pierre Complex, but Mr. Lincoln Myers and Mr. Clive Pantin did attend. That year an article was carried by the *Bomb*, 'Weekly prayers under guns.'

The PNM won the election; Archbishop Monica Rando and I, Archbishop Gray-Burke, were always waiting and listening to hear the day announced.

### **2.50 p.m.**

Sometimes I would say, "Let us go to him!" and Her Grace would say, "Wait". Sometimes I would say, "Look, I have the urge," but we would agree to give him time. But, the greatest shock of my life was when he announced other public

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holidays and not ours. I felt betrayed by such treatment by my party, a government I fought for through blood and sand. I am speaking with grief. We put them there and cannot receive anything at all from them, as our Government.

In the name of God, and in pursuance of the ideals enshrined in our Constitution and our National Anthem, I, Archbishop Gray-Burke, on behalf of the Spiritual Baptist community call upon the nation; the religious community, including the Muslims, Hindus and the Orisha congregations; the social and community organizations as well as right-thinking individuals in this society to stand in solidarity with your spiritual brothers and sisters in our just request to have our day.

I call upon the nation to reflect upon the words of the National Anthem, where it states that "every creed and race finds and equal place, and may God bless our nation". The National Anthem states clearly that God would bless our nation only when every creed and race finds and equal place.

Our nation needs all the blessing it can get. This nation's leaders must stop alienating important groups in this society. The Spiritual Baptist community has begged and has had too many broken promises. We would not be humiliated forever. We demand our recognition; we want a day.

I call upon each and every Senator to use his or her initiative by putting aside partisan interests; look upon the plight of the Spiritual Baptist community and support the granting of a public holiday on March 30 as Liberation Day for us.

Last, but not least, let me satisfy the curiosity of those who would be sincere in their inquiring about my appointment as a Senator. Recently, I wrote a letter of gratitude to Mr. Basdeo Panday on behalf of the Spiritual Baptist community, thanking him for his support to have March 30 declared a public holiday. The letter also asked Mr. Basdeo Panday to continue the struggle on behalf of the alienated, and unjustly treated in our society.

Recently, I had the privilege to meet the hon. Gentleman and discussed a number of issues affecting this nation. When I mentioned that there is not a single Baptist voice in Parliament, although, we the members of the Spiritual Baptist have openly supported a particular political party for the past 39 years, Mr. Basdeo Panday asked me whether I would be prepared to have a voice heard in the Parliament on the issue of the public holidays. I did not hesitate.

I accepted this offer since it gave me, and by extension, the Spiritual Baptist community, the only available avenue to have the Parliament come face to face with broken promises—which have been the history of the relationship between

past governments, the present Government and the Spiritual Baptist community! Here I am!

Mr. President, I make no apology for being appointed an Opposition Senator. I know, as a matter of fact, it is a blessing that I am here. For years we have openly proclaimed the PNM, but recent events have left me feeling as if the entire Spiritual Baptist community was betrayed. I make no statement here to appease or disillusion anyone in this context.

Let me say once, more that I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition. We know how to show gratitude and are overwhelmed by his demonstration of keeping the vigil for those who have been alienated and humiliated for so long.

Jeremiah 37 states:

"19 Where are now your prophets which prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land?

20 Therefore hear now, I pray thee, O my lord the king: let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee; that thou cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there."

May God bless you all abundantly and cause you to accomplish all your worthy goals.

Thank you, Mr. President.

**Sen. O-ga Edmund Mejias:** Mr. President, in the name of the Oludumare, I give thanks to our ancestors. I give thanks to the Orishas. I give thanks to Yalorisa Mother Melvina Rodney, the spiritual head of the Orisha Congregation of Trinidad and Tobago; Chairperson of the National Council of Orisha Elders in Trinidad and Tobago.

I give thanks to the hon. Mr. Basdeo Panday, Leader of the Opposition, for this recognition and facility on behalf of the Orisha community to have their views heard in this Parliament.

I further give thanks to those hon. Senators on these Opposition Benches in this Senate who have demonstrated magnanimity in making my presence here possible and very comfortable.

Mr. President, I believe it to be very important at this time for me to state my bona fides as a representative of the Orisha community in Trinidad and Tobago in this debate. For this purpose I would read from the highlights of the meeting of

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the Holy Father, His Royal Highness, the Ooni of Ife with the Mambags, heads of Shrines, as they are called in Trinidad, at Maraval on August 6, 1988 and properly recorded.

**3.00 p.m.**

By virtue of an appointment made by Dr. Illuemi, secretary and High Priest to the Ooni, I was summoned to his presence at 10.00 a.m. on August 6, at his residence at Maraval. Having kept this appointment I was invited to be present at 3.00 p.m. that same day when the Ooni officially met with the members and senior adherents to the Orisha traditions.

On arriving at that meeting I met Iya Melvina Rodney seated along with the Ooni and the High Priest. I was invited in and spoken to. Instructions were given by the Ooni to the Iya and me to select 10 persons to form a Council of Elders in Trinidad and Tobago.

I selected one Olori Jeffrey Beddeau, and Babalawo Forde, and delegated them to select eight other persons to form a council of 12 and to report to the Ooni. Twelve persons were selected and brought before the spiritual head and the spiritual head selected Mother Melvina Rodney as the chief Priestess and Yalorisa of Trinidad and Tobago, a representative and spiritual Mother of the Orisha children in Trinidad and Tobago.

Molly Ahee, now Iya of Opa Orisa was selected to be the secretary to the spiritual Mother and Olori Jeffrey Beddeau was selected to be the deputy secretary. The other members were: Okalego Olafami, treasurer; Emanuel Pierre, public relations; Oludare Massatungi Babalawo, trustee; Archbishop Edmund Mejias of the Shouters Faith Minister to the Ooni, Bishop Eudora Thomas of the Spiritual Baptist, trustee; Randolph Eastman, member; Clarence Forde, now spiritual head of Opa Orisa Babalawo; and Michael Maloney, member. This is the official Orisha Council, lawfully appointed and installed by the spiritual head of the Orishas in the world, His Royal Highness the Ooni of Ife on August 6, 1988 at 5.30 p.m. at Maraval.

Sometime in 1994 I was summoned to a meeting with Olori Jeffrey Beddeau to meet the Apena of Ife at his home at Matura. I met with the High Priest who set a date at the shrine of Iya Melvina Rodney at Marabella for a meeting to rejuvenate this council which did not work as appointed by the Ooni. I attended that meeting and seven persons, including myself took the oath of office, which is the emule as head of shrines, to the satisfaction of the High Priest for his report to the Ooni on his return. It was at this meeting that Olori Jeffrey Beddeau also took

the official emule and was appointed subsequent to his appointment. After that, Olori Jeffrey Beddeau nominated Archbishop Mejias now O-ga Mejias for the office of vice-president and the Archbishop was duly elected.

I am now standing as Vice-President of the National Council of Orisha Elders in Trinidad and Tobago. Subsequently, the Iya appointed me to represent the Elders Council at the level of this Parliament by giving her recommendations directly to the hon. Basdeo Panday, Leader of the Opposition, who in turn informed me of this appointment.

Mr. President, the purpose of my presence in this Senate today, is to put before you a claim for a national public holiday to honour the Orisha deity, Lord Shango, in the diaspora of Trinidad and Tobago. This petition or request for a national holiday to honour Lord Shango is not in any way to seek recompense for the request made by any group. Lord Shango, over the centuries, has earned the honour and worship of all men and women in all religions in the world. Shango has claimed for itself the festivals, so rightly said by Sen. Barbara Gray-Burke, for the children of the Orishas in Trinidad and Tobago in the canboulay, in the Africanized Carnival, the steelband movement, in the calypso and most of the cultures that we enjoy in Trinidad and Tobago, Shango has already claimed that for himself. It would be impossible for any human, to say to him or to us that they can give Orisha people a festival in Trinidad and Tobago when Shango has claimed that festival beforehand.

Mr. President, the National Council of Elders declares that a fixed date for this holiday, which we are quite sure will be granted, would not be appropriate to the Orisha community for Lord Shango Day, because in keeping with the Yoruba tradition and the ancient traditions of the Orishas, the elders would have to carefully observe the national and natural cycles of the universe from an esoteric and spiritual point of view before announcing to the national community an appropriate date to honour the deity, Lord Shango.

Let me turn to a quick overview of the religion of the Yorubas referred to as Shango worship in Trinidad and Tobago. Bearing in mind that the worship of the Orishas is commonly called Shango in English but the Yoruba term is Sango, was brought to Trinidad and the New World in stages, it was brought by slaves, indentures and immigrants. Only the Orishas knew why our religion travelled in the triplicate principle. It was inevitable that the interpretation of the religion would be varied. It would vary a great deal by that experience, an experience which resulted in a slightly altered version of the worship handed down to this

day. At the first world-wide conference of Orishas, Orisha worship in the Caribbean, in the diaspora and in the world held, at Ile Ife in Nigeria, hosting over 1,000 attendees with contingents from the United States of America, Trinidad and Tobago, Brazil, Venezuela, Cuba and Puerto Rico, it was recognized that Lord Shango is worshipped in Trinidad and Tobago and the religion was practised in Trinidad and Tobago second to none in the world and that Lord Shango is the patron deity of Trinidad and Tobago. The traditional and ancestral religion of the Orishas is the religion of many of the indigenous African men and women. Although there may appear to the untrained and uninitiated eyes to be many differences of concepts, beliefs and practices among these worshippers, they manifest an underlying theological unity which reflects the unity of African culture from an Afrocentric thought.

### **3.10 p.m.**

The Oludumare is the chief of the exalted one in the Yoruba panchion to whom one must go or return after his journey on the earth. No deity in any Orisha panchion is more honoured in our worship among the 401 Orishas than Lord Shango. This God or deity is associated with thunder and lightning. The prominence of this Lord Shango is due to the political underpinnings that the kings of Oyo specifically worshipped in that deity. The Priests of Shango were always sent or acted as emissaries and representatives of their kings in every part of the Yoruba empire.

In the Western diaspora Shango is worshipped by the worshippers in Trinidad and Tobago, by the Maccumbas in Brazil, the Santerias in Cuba and Venezuela, the Winties in Guyana, Orisha Shango in Jamaica and incorporates the Congo elements, and many other religions that have evolved from the religion practised by the various ethnic groups in Central and West Africa. In each diaspora Shango is accepted by all worshippers and there is no sacred day dedicated to this deity, Lord Shango.

It appears that the manner in which we speak as Africans may be responsible for the type of prejudice that has developed against us; that has caused our voices not to be heard even though it was spoken from our shrines, on the side of the streets, and in any place where it is spoken. Our voices seem never to be heard with the same credibility or authority as the voices of others. Therefore, permit me to allow others who have spoken before, and for whom you have developed respect, have honoured in your universities for speaking on our behalf in a manner that the African man could not speak for himself. Someone always has to speak

for him, whether his work was correct or incorrect, biased or unbiased, damaging in the context to the African man or neutral in the dissemination of information by men who pose themselves as repositories of the knowledge of our faith.

In order for us to be comfortable with the type of information from those who spoke before us, I wish to refer to excerpts from *The Book of Trinidad*. The subject there is Shango in Trinidad by an honourable and respected author Miss Naomi Laird. Pages 368—370 state:

"The Yoruba religious cult Shango, is one of the African cultural institutions which survived the Middle Passage to Trinidad. According to William Bascom,...In addition to this some of the Yoruba came to Trinidad as immigrants as well...

The reason the cult lost some of its ritual in the Middle Passage was due to the misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the cult's mythology. The elaborate mythology which underlines and explains the religious worship of the Yoruba was not allowed to be maintained by the slave population. Therefore, only the few priests who knew the myth, and who survived the Middle Passage possessed this knowledge. Further, on arrival in the new world, the myth was adapted to the slavery conditions under which the worshippers found themselves. With the migration of the Yoruba later in the century however, a great many came to Trinidad to establish themselves in a new land. This arrival injected new life into the fast fading cult and contributed greatly to the fact that Shango worship has persisted till today. The religion however has maintained a strong community of worshippers throughout its evolution in Trinidad. Furthermore, not only did Shango experience changes in structure due to internal elements, but external pressures from the middle-class laws also tested the strength of the Shango unity as well...

The necessity of Shango as a religion for either the slave or the immigrant in the new world was important as it offered a form of identification and security from a cultural as well as a religious perspective...

This identity and security was found in the commonality of the worship. Since Shango in Africa originally provided reassurance about life after death, certain illnesses, major crisis and certain mystic experiences, the worshipper in the new world strove to maintain similar circumstances to which he or she was accustomed back home, in order to cope with the new lifestyle. For the believers in Shango who were deprived either politically or economically, the

practice of the religion substituted for the denial of their accustomed way of life.

Shango Worshippers shared a common need for the ritual and therefore maintained an identity which became the means of perpetuating the group. Having begun in Trinidad a small group who were originally from Africa, Shango worship passed down to other generations. With the passage of time, some rituals were maintained, and some forgotten. Through an intermarriage of nations, and the eventual modification of the structure, a form of religious syncretization came about."

The designation of the name Negro enabled the colonist slave masters to divide, separate and rule the African man as he was separated from his religion, concept of law, politics, economy, morality, science, ancestral values and cultures. To make the black African man a Negro, that is to say a man that is totally opposite to an African, and then adopt him as a Son of God through European Christian doctrines and beliefs, commonly called Scripture, so that he could have salvation through a European Government, is an insult.

This condition of any human being in any society can only be determined as a disease, a state of total amnesia. To refuse the indigenous religion of the Yorubas, the Orisha worshippers, a national public holiday to honour the deity Lord Shango that is the strength of the black African people, a deity recognized as national head of the Orisha panchion in Trinidad and Tobago, is regarded as an act of racism, and religious bigotry, directed against the indigenous descendants of African people in this diaspora.

We might agree that only people who continue to be in amnesia can forget. We were forced to be baptized and confirmed into the religion of the Western European christianity. We were forced to merge the essential elements of our religion, concept and our spirituality into Roman Catholicism, English Catholicism, and other Christian Protestant religions when we were renamed, re-identified and declared by law and letters of government to government to be Christians by successful conversion. I do not see how human beings can be converted. I think you can convert cars and furniture. How can you convert human minds? That the African identity and personality were alienated is no secret; and then speaking our language above all other things was a crime.

### **3.20 p.m.**

We were forced through these processes to give birth to the phenomenon known today proudly as synchronized religion. When we speak about it, people



say, "No problem!" We were forced to give birth to that. We were forced to clothe the Orishas in their ideas and the concept of Eurocentric thought, philosophy and religion and then we were forced to hand that down to the children of the Orishas. In the attempt to transfer the responsibility for those heinous crimes against the indigenous African man, hypocritically one might just ask why. The answer to that question is still evident in the law books today, and up to this day no attempt has been made to either revise or remove them, of which I shall speak later.

The encounter between African religions and European christianity, colonialization and colonialist slavery is the historical persecuted state of the Orisha religion in the Caribbean—Trinidad and Tobago and other lands. This has forced the worshippers to concentrate their religions and practices into ceremonies resembling African religions. We have been confined to night practices as in slavery. As a matter of fact, it is probably only on pilgrimages and on special occasions that the rituals of the Orishas are done in the day time. The reason for this is that since Emancipation, African religions, or any indigenous religious act of the African people, had and still have no sanction to exist. Religious activity therefore had to be done under the cover of darkness, forcing all the rights, rituals and ceremonies into non-working hours in the same manner as the slaves did it. Our worship, rituals and ceremonies still have to be confined to our homes, our garden plots, our backyards and under our houses. To this day, no public space was ever allotted for the religious use of any African traditional and ancestral worshippers.

Our traditional religion is inherited. That is, persons born into an ethnic group or a cultural group are also born into the religion of the Shouters or the Orishas. The religion is therefore an integral part of the social fabric of the community so that there is no need for the mechanism of outreach programmes—no preaching. In the traditional society everyone belongs to the same culture, but in the Orisha religion membership in the religion is automatic. Our priests and priestesses are passed along family lines similar to the Aaronite priesthood, commonly referred to in the Scriptures as the Sons of Aaron, devoted to a particular deity.

Had it not been for a criminal and immoral piece of legislation, known as the Shouters Prohibition Ordinance, 1917, Shango would have been the dominant religion in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. For the descendants of African people, it was that religious genocide against the African black traditional and ancestral religions that is responsible for the dispersal of the children of the Orishas into the European major state religions and other branches of religions

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denominations identified as the Christian community which is, in reality, the slave masters' concept of religion as history so clearly recorded. Roman and English Catholicism, including Protestants, whose religious authority superseded the Africans, assisted in the destruction of African religions in the diaspora by the application of degrading designations to every African belief, ritual and philosophy.

Mr. President, the African Orisha priests and priestesses were identified and still are identified in the law books of this country as obeah men and women, witch doctors and charlatans, and any practice of Orisha worship seen anywhere was frowned upon and is evidenced by Acts of Parliament that outlawed our religion, our instruments, articles, symbols and hieroglyphics; and any articles used in our worship were known as articles used in the practice of obeah. I shall refer to this again.

Trinidad and Tobago has a long history of deprivation and injustice especially in respect of African descent and origin associated with African indigenous religions. It is not only a history of African slavery and a shameful period of chattel slavery and the grievous wrongs, pains and sufferings as well as the triumphs of the human spirit, but a deliberate and conscious act of discrimination against the black African man and his descendants. The psychological tendency of the white European and American slave traders and slave masters continues to exist in this country and people still pretend that it did not really happen. For different reasons they continue to preserve this illness and to manure this disease that slavery had produced. We must therefore believe that they want us to forget that it ever happened to us and it is expected that we must now come out and build this nation under a veil of hypocrisy, hiding important truths about ourselves, our families, religion and culture, putting our culture in the pan, in the steel band, putting it on the street at Carnival, hiding the Orishas in the mas, but when we worship we are obeah men and women.

In their hiding these truths, we are expected to make no attempt at all to purge the society of the legacy of those actions in their colonial past. We must accept this fate; we must continue to live under these conditions that have been handed to us through the white European traditions and have them control our lives in matters relating to economy and education. While we agree that a considerable amount of work was done by worthy men and women in the field of the economy and labour to free this nation from its colonial past, with a measure of success, it is now time that we must turn our minds to deal honestly with the religious and

psychological influences in an honest and conscious way, if the African man is to develop his true self and, of course, his racial identity.

It is our belief that the granting of a national holiday in the honour of Lord Shango will be a positive step in that direction, to assist in the liberation of the African's damaged psyche in matters of faith and spirituality; a fortitude that made his existence possible during the period of slavery, horror, pain and suffering; an opportunity for other groups in the society to develop a better understanding of the African man and his religion; a basis for racial harmony in our nation.

No one can tell us what the Orisha religion is. They have to ask us. We have to show and tell them. There is no coming at nights into our palis; no coming around us in times of need to have us make invocation to the Orishas for assistance and see it work. What is Shango except this red carpet that we now walk on? What is Shango except the honourable situation that makes our national flag?

### **3.30 p.m.**

Maybe it is by chance that our National Flag puts us in subjection to humility and respect because we bow to it in the name of Shango. The racial harmony cannot be achieved unless we are given an opportunity to develop a mutual respect and understanding, first for myself as an African man. As I have always respected others so that they, too, can look at me and respect me.

Mr. President, I now refer to Dr. Maureen Warner-Lewis a lecturer at the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, Researcher in African religions. In a lecture at conference in Trinidad, Dr. Warner-Lewis said, of traditional African religions, Orisha can be seen in all things. We have the voodoo of Haiti and vudunu of Trinidad; we have the santeria or lucumi in Cuba; the Orisha in Trinidad and Tobago and in Grenada; kele in St. Lucia; palo monte in Cuba; kumina and koromanti in Cuba and in Jamaica; winti in Surinam; kumfa in Guyana.

All these religions evolved out of the religious practices of the ethnic groups in West and Central Africa. Each religion by its different name, in different places recognizes and worships Shango as a major deity. Vudunu and voodoo derive largely from the Fon and Folus, people of the former kingdom of Dahomey and incorporate the entire Congo elements. Orisha, lucumi and kele have crystallized out of the state religion of the Yoruba Empire, the state religion, and in this

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country we have to beg for a national holiday. I repeat, a state religion of an empire.

The worship of Orisha consists in prayers, it consists in invocations. One thing that is important is the principal feature of our worship; that is our prayers and our invocations are mainly sung rather than spoken. No preaching is involved in our temples and our shrines, because dance is our major expression of the will and the soul of all the worship. The musical accompaniment is not incidental; it is not taken as pleasure. It is integral to the act of worship because the worship of the Orishas largely depends on drums. Do you know drums are outlawed?

These indigenous religious rites of the Orishas were considered to be heathenish, devilish, and probably worst of all, it was non-Christian. What does one expect? The fact is that most Europeans believed then, and still believe now, that Africans do not have a religion. Even today, we still behave that way. Such historical injustice cannot be allowed to continue unanswered in this Republic.

In Act No. 20 of 1941, the religion of the Orishas was pushed into the night. They were given a few hours of the night by licence, and were intimidated; they were in fear whenever they worshipped. We have silently and in humility borne this open show of racism and hostility by others, to recognize the need of a people seeking to establish their racial identity. If a man does not know who he was, he cannot know who he is. If he does not know who he is now, he does not know where he is going and what he will be.

Racial identity allows the man to see himself, but not in the clothing, food or in the habits of others. This was first done by European colonizers; it was done by American and European slave masters; by priests and scholars of the 16th century, who claimed the African by ridicule and contempt. This was not coincidence as many would have us believe; and some strongly believe that it should still be so. Mr. President, we recognized that was a plan and it is evident that the plan is still intended to continue as they still continue to call the African man a Negro. The word Negro had no historical significance at all until African slavery by European and American slavers during the 16th century.

Now, while the refusal of the national public holiday to the honour of Lord Shango to the Orisha community in Trinidad and Tobago may be to the satisfaction of the supporters of racial and religious bigotry, this cultural and religious genocide against the indigenous black African people's culture, religion and ancestral heritage, must never be permitted to continue unchecked and

unchallenged in this our beloved country and nation—the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. President, on the day when I met His Royal Highness the Ooni of Ife for the first time, I was of the concept that there were so many differences and divisions among us in our religion. What surprised me at that meeting was that the wisdom of His Royal Highness selected a Spiritual Baptist Bishop, Bishop Eudora Thomas to be placed on the National Council of Orishas. He also selected an archbishop of the Shouter faith and placed them on that national council. I wondered why. Not until I had further knowledge of the Yoruba religion, even though a senior minister of religion and to understand the survival of the Orisha people that existed before the foundation of the Nile Valley civilization, travelling down from the Egyptian source straight into West Africa as the words Ele, Ife seem to identify when properly interpreted.

I do not wish to burden this Senate with the historical context but I would like at this moment—I Archbishop Edmund Mejias—O-ga means the same thing as archbishop, a senior elder of the Orisha of Pantian head and we, the national council of Orisha Elders representing the Orisha community in Trinidad and Tobago, in recognition of the damaging effect of the Summary Offences Act No. 31 of 1921, Chap 11:02, sections 42, 44 and 63. I will read section 43—Superstitious Devices. It says:

"43(1) Any person who, by the practice of obeah or by any occult means or by any assumption of supernatural power or knowledge, intimidates or attempts to intimidate any person, obtains or endeavours to obtain any chattel, money or valuable security from any other person, or pretends to discover any treasure or any lost or stolen goods, or the person who stole the same, or to inflict any disease, loss, damage or personal injury to or upon any other person, or to restore any other person to health, and any person who procures, counsels, induces, or persuades or endeavours to persuade any other person to commit any such offence, is liable to imprisonment for six months, and, subject to the Corporal Punishment Acts, may be sentenced to undergo corporal punishment; and, if a female, may, during such imprisonment, be kept in solitary confinement not exceeding three days at any one time and not exceeding one month in the whole, as such Magistrate shall direct."

### **3.40 p.m.**

Mr. President, when my grandmother used to take me as a child to the Catholic Church at Mount St. Benedict and would buy a scapular to put around

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my neck, and tabeche to put around my hand, that was not obeah. But when a person goes into a Baptist Church and takes a bath and they put a banner on him and some beads around his neck, that is the practice of obeah. If one should take the yardstick by which things are being measured one would clearly see the discrimination in the law against our people. Section 44 says:

"Where it is shown, upon the oath of a credible witness that there is a reasonable cause to suspect that any person is in possession of any article or thing used by him in the practice of obeah or witchcraft, any Justice may, by warrant under his hand, cause any place whatsoever belonging to or under the control of such person to be searched, either in the day or in the night, and, if any such article is found in any place so searched, cause it to be seized and brought before him or some other Justice, who shall cause it to be secured for the purpose of being produced in evidence in any case in which it may be required."

Even as I stand here speaking, the police can go to Point Fortin at my shrine, break open my home and take the shepherd rods, the symbols, the silvers and all the different things; when I go home I could meet them waiting to say, "You are arrested for having implements and articles used in obeah" because they suspect. Mr. President, I am here; sometimes I wonder if we are there. Mr. President, are we there? I am here. I will now turn to section 63 which says:

"Any owner or occupier of a house, building, yard, or other place who—

- (a) without licence under the hand of the First Division police officer, permits any persons to assemble and play or dance therein to any drum, gong, tambour, bangee, chac chac, or other similar instrument of music, at any time between the hour of ten o'clock in the evening of one day, and the hour of six o'clock in the morning of the next day; or
- (b) permits any person to assemble and dance therein the dance known as 'bungo' or any similar dance, is liable to a fine of four hundred dollars; and any constable may, with such assistants as he may take to his aid, enter any house, building, yard, or place where any persons may be so assembled, and stop such dance or seize and carry away all such drums, gongs, tambours, bangees, chac-chacs, or other instruments of music, and forfeit them."

Mr. President, I am wondering when the Prime Minister sent out a large document to all our people in their villages and they were all gathered together and got up on stage to shake chac-chacs and beat drums in the Prime Minister's Best Village Trophy Competition, if there was a permit. For us to do it in our church there must be a permit. We have to do it with a permit, but other people can go and do this, and they will receive a silver trophy for doing it without a permit. Mr. President, in this country we need to take a very good look at the yardsticks by which things are measured against our people. We ask that these sections of the Summary Offences Act, Chap. 11.02, sections 42, 44 and 63 be immediately removed from the law, not amended.

**Mr. President:** I do not want to interrupt, but you are one minute over your regular limit.

**Sen. O-ga E. Mejias:** Thank you, Mr. President; I am closing.

**Sen. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. President, I would like to ask for an extension of time for the Senator.

**Mr. President:** It is all right, I just want to let him know that he has finished his first 45 minutes a minute ago. He can continue with the extra 15 minutes.

**Sen. O-ga E. Mejias:** Mr. President, if ever it was possible to remove these laws with retroactive effect, it should apply from the time of Independence, and all those who have suffered under those sections during the period 1962 to 1995 should be compensated.

Mr. President, let us all be mindful that this society owes us for two major violations—slavery, for which we have not yet received reparation; and post slavery laws such as the Shouters' Prohibition Ordinance and the Summary Offences Act, which I have just quoted. They constituted an unmitigated psychological, religious and cultural hostility against the black African people, and we have not yet been compensated.

Looking at these grounds we ask this illustrious Senate to meditate carefully on the condition of men and women in this country, in all corners of Trinidad and Tobago, who are Orisha worshippers; consider their position; and for the benefit of the wider diaspora of African people give our people a public national holiday to honour the deity Lord Shango.

I thank you, Mr. President.

**Sen. Hydar Ali:** Mr. President, I would like to congratulate the two previous speakers, Sen. Archbishop Burke and Sen. Archbishop Mejias on their maiden contributions and for the forceful manner in which they presented their cases. I do look forward to hearing from them again.

I think the task of the joint select committee was very difficult so I was not surprised that there was a minority report. When I first made these notes I compared the role of the joint select committee with that of the role of the West Indies selectors, where in both cases they were unable to please everyone. The criticisms in picking a team have been insular but here I think they have been more parochial. Mr. President, I was a bit sympathetic then with the selectors but recent events have shown that I should not be so sympathetic towards them, but that is another issue.

I think the task of the committee was made more difficult by not setting some specific guidelines. I know it had to consider all aspects of public holidays, but it should have produced certain guidelines which would have reduced expectations of various segments of the society. For example, I would have thought the committee would have made some comment on the review of religious holidays; given some further guidelines as to whether they were going to increase the number of religious holidays; whether it was looking at some sort of evenness with respect to the division of holidays among the various religions and points like those. I also thought that the committee should have made some statement about holidays of religious significance. More importantly, I think there should have been some signal—something firmer than that—as to whether the number of holidays was going to increase or decrease. There was really a free-for-all, everyone was recommending that his group be given a holiday and things like that and that led to certain expectations, hence the disappointments that ensued.

I was wondering, when I read the report of the committee, why the committee ventured in the area of recommending certain days as public festivals. I would like to quote from the report on page 8, section 16.3, it says:

"Your Committee therefore, does not recommend public holidays to mark any other events. However, in recognition of the multi-ethnic, multi-religious nature of the Trinidad and Tobago society, the committee proposes that consideration be given to the observance of some of these days as public festivals."

Why should the committee make recommendations for days to be considered as public festivals? That was not the mandate given to the committee. The



committee was not asked to review the Public Holidays and Public Festivals Act, Chap. 19:03. That was not under review. Why should it have done that? So, one could understand the reaction of one of the previous speakers who was aghast at the fact that a certain day which was recommended by his group for a public holiday was relegated to a public festival.

**3.50 p.m.**

If the committee wanted to consider days for public festivals, it should have asked people to make certain recommendations and then, perhaps, there might have been at least two categories; one category for public holidays and one for public festivals. What has happened now is that people who have taken the time and trouble to make recommendations for public holidays, have seen the committee relegate those days to public festivals.

The various groups and individuals would have done a far better job had they known that the committee was going to make recommendations for public festivals. Perhaps, there ought to be another committee to either do a comprehensive review of the Public Holidays and Public Festivals Act, Chap. 19:03, or another committee to discuss public festivals.

I was also intrigued by some of the comments made about how some of these holidays are spent. I feel almost guilty that I am not spending the holidays the way the report suggested these holidays are being spent. In particular, on page 6, section 12.1—

"Boxing Day:

Your committee noted that notwithstanding the original rationale for Boxing Day, it has now become to a large extent a day when family members, especially the extended families, visit each other. In this context, therefore, your committee recommends the retention of Boxing Day as a public holiday to be observed as a family day devoted to the uplift of family life and the strengthening of family ties."

I never realized that was what Boxing Day was about. I know it included that or a small fraction of that. If one looks at the newspapers, Boxing Day is a big racing day and so is New Year's Day. I wonder if the real reason is for the uplift of family life and strengthening of family ties, or is it a concession to the strong and powerful racing lobby. I would not mind if the real reasons were given here, but as I said I do feel a bit guilty.

Another strange feature of the report is that it has taken some well-known dates that are clearly associated with certain events and groups; dates that are well-known and are celebrated in a certain manner, and germane to a particular group, and has tried to put them into a more general context. This is what I cannot understand.

I would give one example that has caused much controversy in Trinidad and Tobago. That is, the recommendation that May 30 be declared "Arrival Day." It is clear, and is known to everyone, that May 30 is associated with the arrival of Indians in this country. I cannot see, from a logistic point of view, how that can now become an "Arrival Day."

One has to make up one's mind whether it is going to be "Indian Arrival Day" or just an "Arrival Day". If one looked at the celebrations that took place this year, for example, and saw what has taken place, one would find it very hard to contemplate any other kind of celebrations. It may happen. One may find it very hard to contemplate any kind of arrival celebrations taking place on that day, other than Indian arrival.

I am not here making a case that it should be called Indian Arrival Day; what I cannot really understand is why choose that day which is associated with the arrival of Indians here and call it by a non-descriptive term, "Arrival Day". That is what I cannot understand. To me it is a bit illogical.

To make one final point in that area, one can see, for example, that when one celebrates these holidays one invites dignitaries, head of state and so forth, and one wonders how they can be shared among the various people who would want to take advantage of this day and celebrate Arrival Day.

Another point I would like to make concerns the position of Eid-ul-Adha. If one looks at page 6 one would see that there are several days which were recommended by various organizations to be considered as public holidays. The seventh one under section 13.1, is Eid-ul-Adha. I have spoken on this issue already, before the committee was set up, and I am not going to repeat those points again, but just for completeness and for information, there are two festivals in Islam; one is Eid-ul-Fitr which takes place after Ramadan, the month of fasting; and the second is Eid-ul-Adha which is the one mentioned here, and which is the bigger of the two Eids.

This is a festival for which the activities take all day to perform. It is not just a matter of going to the mosque for an hour or so. It involves sacrifice, distribution

of meat and so forth. This takes all day, so it is more conducive if one has the public holiday on that day, not just to celebrate it, but to actually go through the rituals associated with that day.

I had made another point when I first spoke on this issue—not on the motion—that it is easier to determine this day in advance. One can determine the date of Eid-ul-Adha about nine days in advance.

I am not privy to what the recommendations were. In all fairness, I would assume that there was not a strong recommendation. If the recommendation was strong I would have thought that there would be some comment on it, but there was absolutely no comment. There are comments on Whit Monday and other days, but there is no comment on Eid-ul-Adha at all. It seems to have been absolutely ignored, except for having been listed in the Majority Report.

Mr. President, I cannot understand the argument in an article entitled "Oh My Papa" in the *Daily Express* of Wednesday, May 10, 1995, in which Eid-ul-Adha which is associated with one of the pillars of Islam, which is the pilgrimage to Mecca. The author says:

"The importance in political terms of the Hong Kong trip resembles that of a Muslim's hajj to Mecca. Since his return, 'options' have come tumbling out of the Prime Ministerial mouth, in the manner of divine revelations by a prophet anointed."

Mr. President, what is the relevance of that statement? What is the connection with this trip to Hong Kong which cost \$2 million and this organized trip which satisfies a pillar of the religion? There was nothing about not finding anybody. You go to and make the circumambulation around the Ka'ba and there is no problem in finding that. It is easy to find. There is no problem with transport. What is the analogy? I cannot see the analogy. The only common term is the word "trip"; a trip to Hong Kong and a trip to Mecca. I really cannot understand that.

I would not comment on the other point which says:

"Since his return, 'options' have come tumbling out of the Prime Ministerial mouth, in the manner of divine revelations by a prophet anointed."

Mr. President, I cannot see how something coming out of the Prime Minister's mouth could be equated with what comes out of the mouth of a prophet. I really do not understand that. I think it was in very poor taste, unless I have completely missed the analogy.

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Mr. President, I just wondered why on page 3 of the Minority Report under the section dealing with consideration of other public holidays and public festivals, the Eid-ul-Adha day was not mentioned. I do not know whether it was an omission, but everything is similar to the one in the Majority Report except the omission of Eid-ul-Adha. It was probably a mistake.

**4.00 p.m.**

My final comment concerns the reaction of the society to the report of the joint select committee. If one listened to the radio at that time one would have heard the divisions in the society, the hate in the society. There are two arguments. One is saying if you satisfy each group you are going to cause division. I cannot understand that. If one shows respect for each group one would have a more cohesive society. What is homogeneity? Is homogeneity having the same religion, race and so forth? It does not go like that at all. Even today when the heat of it is gone—there is an article that appeared in yesterday's *Daily Express* July 3, 1995—"Public holidays: A new approach written by Frank Rampersad where he says:

"Harsh as it may appear, the reality is that religion has been a divisive factor in the world in the past. As the hijab dispute demonstrated, we in Trinidad and Tobago, living in a multi-religious, multi-ethnic society, have an obligation to build our defences against the emergence of sectional differences within the society."

What is wrong with having sections? What is offensive about the word section? What is wrong with recognizing that there can be different sections of the society? I do not see why he has made this point, on the one hand recognizing that we are multi-religious and multi-ethnic, and then saying we have an obligation to build our defences against the emergence of sectional differences. That is inherent in the society. I really cannot argue that. The only thing I can see there, is a certain prejudice against religion. If it is a religious difference and that is a problem, then any other criteria can be used to divide the society, not only divide in opposing terms, divisions that make up the whole. When religion is used as a component that makes up the society it seems that is wrong. I do not understand that. I honestly feel that more emphasis should have been placed on the religious holidays. Among all the controversy that has emerged—apart from the one relating to Indian Arrival, the Arrival Day holiday—the one that has caused the most heated discussion and argument is the one relating to the religious holidays, number of religious holidays, the inequity in the holidays, and so forth.

Mr. President, I thought that the committee, perhaps, could have produced a better report. As I said at the beginning, sufficient guidelines were not given and more specific guidelines were not given to elicit the kind of information that would have produced the report I am thinking about.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

**Sen. Martin Daly:** Mr. President, it is difficult to find a polite word to describe the complete absence from this report of any thought about what is Trinidad and Tobago, who we are and what is this society. The most striking thing about this report is that it gives no consideration to what is the purpose of the public holidays that we have, what should be the purpose of public holidays generally, and what is the relationship of those questions to the type of society we have. With our existing public holidays there is inconsistency. With the proposal for other public holidays and the treatment of those proposals, there are major inconsistencies.

Without regard for any group or any demand, the first thing they should have examined was: How did we arrive at the public holidays we have now? Are they still an appropriate dispensation to Trinidad and Tobago, either since independence, since we became a Republic or now? How did we arrive at the holidays we have now, and are they still the holidays that are appropriate for a society that has undergone fundamental, political and social change? That question simply has not been asked by the framers of this report. Instead, they put themselves in a bind immediately by considering that entrenchment is a good reason for not disturbing a holiday. If entrenchment is a good reason for not disturbing something in this society, Frank Worrell or Clive Lloyd would never have become captains of the West Indies cricket teams.

Entrenchment is an absolutely bogus reason for examining a topic like this that affects the society as a whole; and that is the first place they went wrong. One of the problems about this issue is the fact that we are now stuck with whatever it is—13—so we cannot move forward; we cannot consider any more holidays because it is going to mean additional holidays. I totally reject that. I should have thought, as I have said, that the first thing to do was to examine those holidays to see how they were arrived at. If you do that it becomes very clear that there is a Christian bias in these holidays.

I do not have the learning to examine why that is so. I do not have the political experience as to why that is so, but we can take it that because we were ruled by Christians, albeit we were diverse, one would expect to find that bias. To me it is

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a simple, logical kind of equation and, therefore, one has to examine whether all the Christian holidays are justified. That is a matter that we have to discuss with the Christians. We cannot do anything arbitrarily.

A bit of the foolishness we have done is to take away Whit Monday—on some basis which I do not understand which, if it has any significance at all, is purely religious, in order to accommodate another holiday that has significance that is multifaceted—religious, political, ethnic and cultural. Even that is an act of inconsistency. In taking away Whit Monday the committee has apparently offended another group in the society, namely the Pentecostals. That is because we have not conducted any of the examinations which I have suggested.

In my view we have to ask: Do we have political holidays and should we have political holidays? Do we have religious holidays and should we have religious holidays? Do we have holidays that reflect the fact that we are of a diverse ethnic background and do we have holidays that reflect the fact that we are of a diverse cultural background? The holidays have to be examined and measured against those yardsticks. One cannot take away a religious holiday to accommodate a political holiday and take away a political holiday to accommodate a fete. One cannot do those things because these are very, very sensitive matters.

Mr. President, those are some of the things that we have to examine. Certainly—and I am going to do my best not to offend anyone—even before we examine whether there is a Christian bias in the holidays—and I emphasize, whether by negotiations, a group may appear to have more holidays or to have a bias in its favour as to holidays. Even before we seek to negotiate with that group and say at this stage of our history we can perhaps agree to give up a day that one regards, one has to be the sole judge of that. We cannot judge that for anyone else. We cannot judge whether Whit Monday is more or less significant than Corpus Christi. Is there some day that he will judge to be more significant in your discretion, given your knowledge of his religion, which he is prepared to give up in order to accommodate the aspirations of some other group in the society whose aspirations may not have been met that historical or political reasons, like the types that have been described by the two persons who spoke today?

**4.10 p.m.**

It is not a question of an arbitrary act. One of the particulars of my criticism is that nowhere here do I see the question of negotiation and resolution of these problems, being recommended. It is almost as though one is given a block of stone or wood to carve in a certain way, and chips will fly or the marble may get cracked in the process of carving. I do not accept that.

More importantly, even before we begin to suggest to any group that numerically may have more holidays than any other group, what is the purpose of Boxing Day and New Year's Day other than being entrenched? They are not political holidays, ethnic or cultural holidays, unless New Year's Day is regarded as a hangover and betting on a racehorse on Boxing Day as some kind of cultural act. We may not have to negotiate with the group that has the most holidays in order to offend the ceiling on the number of holidays.

I think it is generally accepted that we do have a problem with the number of holidays. I sin like everyone else. For one moment, I do not accept that holidays do not affect my productivity. If there is a holiday on Thursday, I know perfectly well God willing what I will do with the Friday. I would not go to work if I can possibly help it and arrange my business. If I do I can tell you that my phone will ring approximately 10 per cent of the time that it would normally ring on a Friday. What will I be doing there? People will not look for me.

I do not accept this business about productivity. I think that we have absolutely reached the limit as far as the number of public holidays is concerned and I would not like to see the number of public holidays increased. We do have a problem with the aspirations of various groups in the society, and unless we approach it in a mature, negotiating framework, and ask some of these deeper questions, we would not get anywhere. For narrow political purposes we will try to satisfy the aspirations of various people in the group and really give them a holiday, not because we have thought out that they deserve it, but because they are voters. I think it is an insult to meet those aspirations of the people on the basis that we will satisfy them purely in the interest of democracy or because they are voters.

Without offending anyone, I think that other than the horse-racer or the drinker, New Year's Day and Boxing Day should have been the first to be looked at. We must ask what is their significance now. Maybe they had significance at sometime. I am not aware of it, but what is their significance now? It may be that the non-religious or the less sensitive among us would resent having a day that represents a good time being taken away, and it will annoy another group of voters. This is an issue where a committee like this and the Government have to provide leadership. They cannot simply attempt to arrive at compromises that may or may not be satisfactory at any given time to their political skill.

I associate myself with the remarks made by my colleague Sen. Hydar Ali. How can you insult anyone's intelligence, whether they belong to the relevant group or not, by placing a holiday on a day of which everyone knows the

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significance, and then try to call it something else? That is another inconsistency. This is because no one wants to approach it in a deep or non-superficial manner. I think we have a serious problem. I think this is a tremendous opportunity to re-examine the fabric of this society and decide what is appropriate for us now.

I was very pleased to hear Sen. Mejias say this, and it supports my own point of view, that what he is seeking is not because someone else got something. As I understand his case he is seeking it—whether it is a good case or not—because he thinks that the reasons he is putting forward are compelling ones. It is very refreshing to hear that, so we are getting away from this narrow interest of politics. Quite frankly, I think if we were to examine the public holidays issue, in this light, we would get into far less difficulty and would be able to arrive at a wiser and saner solution to this whole issue.

I am going to take the risk in due course of summarizing what my preferences will be, but I am trying to approach it in a way to raise policy questions which I do not see have been raised in this report. As I have indicated, if those policy questions were agitated here, they certainly do not appear in this report. Whether we like it or not, the fact is that whether it was right or wrong, concessions were made at different times to specific groups who sought holidays for their sections, as my colleague has described it.

If that is the recent history particularly since Independence, there would be a policy problem to tell other sections that a concession cannot be made, either because there are too many holidays or we are stuck historically with certain holidays. I think certain hard facts have to be faced. I think numbers are very important when you are dealing with policy. It cannot be that every ethnic group, sub-ethnic group, religion or sub-religion can get a holiday. Numbers become important as to whether or not the group as a whole is numerically significant, not because it represents votes, but because by being numerically significant in the practice of its religion or culture, it makes a significant contribution to the society.

I do not have the answers to these questions. The committee heard witnesses and I dare say there were people whom they could have commissioned or studies which could have been read to find out these things. It cannot be that numbers alone are significant, although I regard that as important. The contributions made today were very enlightening and they reminded us very clearly that a religious group in a society that might have been numerically strong was prevented from being so by political pressure and a difference in outlook. Therefore, we might



have to examine the claim that was made by the Senators today against the background.

People are saying that everybody wants a holiday. It may be that you will have to examine the case on the basis that this group, whose claims are being advocated today, were unnecessarily disadvantaged by political pressure by a completely differently organized society at the time. That question has to be examined very carefully. Certainly, I tread very warily because I am not an anthropologist or a sociologist. I think I have basic common sense and I think I am a well integrated individual.

As far as I am concerned, there are two more very important features about the case which were advocated today. In those features, not only was there political pressure, but also the fact that the laws were actually written against simple things. I am glad that Sen. Mejias raised the point. Laws were actually written against simple things like dance.

#### **4.20 p.m.**

That dance could be regarded as threatening tells us something about the outlook of the times. Therefore we have to re-examine that outlook and ask ourselves whether at a point in history where dance was regarded as threatening, if we settle these holidays with that outlook—clearly they need to be re-examined with the new outlook where we no longer regard dance as threatening, but as was pointed out, we actually promote it as part of our culture. We cannot have a show under four hours for a visiting dignitary because there are so many different dances that we have to show, including the ones that were once outlawed. It is completely inconsistent.

I will repeat that the opportunity to re-examine the society and to exalt those who have made a contribution in the society has been lost. I think it is because this matter was approached in a very narrow political framework. What we get away with politically! I think these are some of the things that we have to look at. I think that this report—I do not know anything about the procedure—should be sent back to the committee, either with new terms of reference or to dig more deeply into these important questions which I think should properly form the terms of reference.

To summarize my feelings about this report and the whole public holidays issue, I have other things to say. I think that they are approaching it in a narrow, political way for political advantage. This is not the committee, but everyone who has to deal with this. It is overwhelmed by the political advantages to be gained or

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the political losses that could emerge from the situation. I think that is wrong, but it is a problem with our society generally. We cannot do anything about crime because we cannot get together about it. We cannot do anything about drug abuse; we cannot do anything about unemployment; we cannot do anything about high offices in the land because nobody can get together to agree on what are the policies and principles that guide us in dealing with these fundamental problems.

I criticize this report because I think it is contaminated by narrow political considerations. I criticize this report because it has not made any effort to analyze the reason we have holidays—religious, political, ethnic, cultural and so forth. And in case anyone thinks that there is anything wrong with an ethnic holiday, I would invite him anytime he tunes in to his cable television, to look at what happens in New York on St. Patrick's Day. I do not think it does anybody any harm. It does not make the Polish feel inferior because the Irish have a strong turnout on Fifth Avenue. What is wrong with that! I suppose they destroy the parks, but the United States is not destroyed because everyone comes out on St. Patrick's Day. They celebrate their heritage and the land of their birth and they go back to being Americans, to working for America and doing all these other things for America, and bury their differences. There is much to be said for what my colleague Sen. Hydar Ali said about not being over-sensitive about sections. It is all a question of how you manage it and of how you bring the various groups together and if necessary have them negotiated. It is all about redesigning our outlook on these important matters.

I think this report is deficient because it does not sufficiently put forward negotiations among the various groups as a means of settling the problem. I think the report is deficient because it has not paid any proper historical attention to how we arrive at some of these holidays and I certainly think that they put a millstone around their neck when they treat "entrenched" as a reason for retaining a public holiday. These are not constitutional rights which are entrenched. These are things which grew up when the society was in a certain form. They reflect the dynamism of a society when it is developing, changing and nurturing itself. These are not rights that one has to have in perpetuity, and I agree with my colleague Sen. Hydar Ali.

I go further. I am never sure what one is supposed to do with Boxing Day except change the location—the same people going to a different location, and maybe adding or subtracting a few. What do we do on Boxing Day? Nothing really different from Christmas Day, except, I suppose, we do not get two sets of presents. I am always attentive because we have to face reality. Change the brand!

That is what Boxing Day is about, as far as I know it. Maybe other Senators will enlighten me about why we celebrate Boxing Day at this stage of the game. I know it will be very difficult for me to go to work on New Year's Day, but if I had no choice, I would. That is not a good reason for having a holiday.

Next, Mr. President, because we have not examined this matter carefully, does Carnival remain in limbo? We have not dealt with it. The whole country shuts down for Carnival. One cannot go to a bank. If Carnival has any justification for shutting down the country other than tradition, it must be because it is important culturally. If it is not that, then people must go back to work because there cannot really be any justification for shutting down the country. We have a great time but there is no justification for shutting down the country unless in our bumbling way—some of us bumble more than others for different reasons we are helping in some way to promote the culture of Trinidad and Tobago. Some of us do not realize, I suppose, that that is what we are doing. We cannot just leave it there—two days when the whole country shuts down—and there is no official status.

I think it is very easy to give it status. It is culturally important, at least that is what we tell the whole world and certainly it appears to be a festival which is becoming more universal in its appeal in terms of urban, rural and people of all different backgrounds. It is either that or we must redesign it in some way that we only need one day to shut down the country. But all of these things have to be gone into.

Certainly to take away a religious holiday to accommodate a religious demand and a holiday which has other significance, to my mind does not make any sense. What really cuts me is that we talk in this country very easily about struggle for independence, struggle for this, that and the other. We might have had a struggle for Independence, but we did not have to fight a war to get it. One theory is that by the time we were demanding it, the people whose power it was to give it, were glad to see the back of us. So we talk glibly about struggle for this and that—struggle to make runs—but here we have a struggle where people were arrested and prosecuted, that is to say, it was not an armchair struggle, a philosophical struggle or a struggle that was successful because people made speeches alone. We had a struggle to get a particular Act of Parliament repealed, and the struggle was successful.

I would have thought that on those grounds also there would have been much to be said for the case that was advocated today. It is one of the few struggles we have had in the way I define struggle—that is, catch something, not sit in an

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armchair and complain or make some speeches or turn over a few buses and riot. I am talking about a struggle that went on for years and years by a group of dedicated people who wanted to do something and, in the face of all the resistance shown them, succeeded eventually, albeit in smaller numbers, in achieving their objective, after they got 'bootoo' lock up, had their property destroyed, and everything else.

That does not seem to have been considered here. It has nothing to do with the group or the fact that they are religious or derive from another continent. On political grounds one can justify the struggle against the Shouters' Prohibition Ordinance. It is easily justified on political grounds because it represented a struggle by indigenous people against a foreign ruler.

**4.30 p.m.**

I am raising these things, Mr. President, not for people to say—and it will be said—that one panders to this group or the other I am raising matters of principle and I find it very hard—off the top of my head—to think of another struggle that has all the ingredients of the struggle which I am describing; and on political grounds it could be justified.

Mr. President, I try as far as possible to say what I am thinking. Do you know why I can speak about this political struggle so clearly—I am not expecting everybody to agree with me—I am staying off the religious issue; I am staying off the question of how and where the religion was derived. I once went to the Little Carib Theatre, and there in a small auditorium I saw a show called the *Wine of Astonishment* by Earl Lovelace and it had a profound effect on me. It brought real to me things that I did not know, and of course, it was particularly real because the theatre is small, the place was hot and as the people got into the work, one could smell them, and could see and feel their sweat, and one could hear the thump. Then there was the wonderful scene where the people were brought before the magistrate. When I saw that it reminded me of the scene in *Gandhi* when he went before the magistrate in a political struggle on a different continent for an entirely different reason.

Have we thought out any of these things? That is why I say, with the greatest respect to the committee, I do not think we have gone into this issue deeply enough. I do not think that we have considered that if we do not approach this in a much wider perspective we are not taking any proper stock of Trinidad and Tobago and what we think of ourselves. And really, Mr. President, if the man from Mars dropped in and listened to us squabbling about who should have a

holiday and when, it would suggest that we were not a very mature society and that we were not very mature thinkers.

The problem is—and I am conscious of time—that even when one listened to the contribution of my friend Sen. Hydar Ali and one reads what is in the report, even within the holidays that have been granted, there is need for re-examination. So it is completely inconsistent to say, 'Well Group X, you have a holiday, hush your mouth,' when group X may be saying, either as a result of research or re-consideration, 'we want a different holiday; we are prepared to give up this one and give us a different one. So it is a very sensitive matter. Perhaps, Mr. President, it is because I do not belong very strongly to any particular group in this society that I speak like this.

The whole question has to be properly examined from a sociological, anthropological, historical and political point of view; it is not simply about taking a block of wood and recarving it. Therefore, I sincerely hope—I do not know how it is to be achieved procedurally—that this is not the last examination of this issue and that we are not just going to end up with this new carve-up of the holidays.

I think it is also important to examine the positive. I have examined some of the negatives by what I regard as the failure of the committee to take certain things into account. When we did have—and it is really farcical that it was called that—Arrival Day—I learned as much; I saw it as clearly, it was different. It was about a different group, and different struggles and different lifestyles, but I learnt as much and felt as enriched as much as when I saw the *Wine of Astonishment*—the various celebrations that emerged when we finally had a celebration for Arrival Day.

These are enriching things to the society, they are not things to be afraid of. When one does give way to the legitimate aspirations of people, look at what falls forth, including the dance referred to by Sen. Mejias—dance is a thing that was legislated against—look at what falls forth. So why are we so afraid? Let us examine the aspirations of various groups in the society—all of them—and see whether those aspirations are legitimate today, are backed by numbers, by significant contributions to the society, by historical disadvantages and so on. To my mind those are the kinds of things we should see about and not just whether we should please this group or that group in the society.

I sincerely hope that this whole issue is going to be re-examined in a much more sensitive way with these various outlooks.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

*JSC Report (Public Holidays)*  
[SEN. DALY]

*Tuesday, July 04, 1995*

**4.36 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5.05 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Sen. Rev. Daniel Teelucksingh:** Mr. President, first of all I would like to congratulate Sen. Burke on a very eloquent presentation, historically informative, pleasantly enlightening and persuasive with spiritual conviction of an Archbishop's faith.

I also want to congratulate Sen. Mejias of the Orisha on his presentation—very rich, historical, doctrinal and with legislative information. In making this comment I feel I share the sentiment of all Senators. Today we are extremely grateful for the contributions of both these Senators who certainly have enriched the debate. They have emphasized among other things, the unmistakable, inseparable unity of culture and religion. I deeply respect the plea they have made to our society to appreciate indigenous religious forms.

I wish to compliment the joint select committee on the work it has done because, although I would agree with Sen. Daly and Sen. Hydar Ali that there is possibly the need for further work on this very sensitive and important matter of public holidays, I still realize that the committee had to deal with very sensitive issues and it must have required a great deal of sacrifice to hold its 15 meetings within a short space of time. Notwithstanding the common argument that public holidays are counter-productive to economic development, I certainly would compliment our parliamentary committee for its insistence on the need for our citizens—and I quote from the report:

"to pause and reflect, celebrate, or recreate themselves;"

Hence the wisdom in retaining most of the public holidays. I believe that public holidays certainly contribute to the healing and the renewal of both the individual and the community, and their retention is good. These are cherished opportunities, for I believe all of us would like holidays, whether the nation is at play or the nation is at prayer.

I am going to take a particular slant. I am not surprised, according to the report, that of the 21 organizations and individuals interviewed by our parliamentary committee, 13 of them had religious interests. Any attempt to avoid religious holidays is a mistake we are making in this kind of debate which I know, will continue. In our country with so much religious diversity it must have been a very difficult task, and will always be, to do justice to all these applicants. This

committee would have had a difficult time and likewise the next committee, or if the same committee should continue.

I wish to comment briefly on the value of religious holidays; this is my emphasis in the short presentation, since they feature so prominently among the public holidays in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. President, in a society like ours, with its pronounced religious pluralism, understanding and appreciation of our neighbour's spirituality is crucial to harmony and peaceful co-existence. The existing religious holidays have contributed to that awareness, and such understanding and respect may be an antidote for suspicion and rivalry. Some of our religious holidays and religious festival days have been very effective in making us conscious of the diversity of God's revelation, a consciousness which we hope will teach us here in Trinidad and Tobago of the fallacy of spiritual superiority, and also a consciousness which may even be a deterrent to anyone who will promote forms of religious domination.

Furthermore, certain religious holidays have contributed to community bonding, for example, Christmas, Eid-ul-Fitr or Divali. The positive impact on community life is apparent in the co-operation, neighbourliness and the friendship so characteristic of these observances. These religious holidays have added to the social life of Trinidad and Tobago, and added to the spiritual maturity of our people.

Another desirable aspect of these religious holidays and festivals has been the focus on family ties. Particularly, as in our country today, we are rediscovering the significance and the importance of the family as our foremost social institution; although within the past we have witnessed among us new forms of religious expression—this seems to be a daily feature of prayer life in Trinidad and Tobago—and they all seem to clamour for recognition.

The case of the Spiritual Baptist and the Orisha for a public holiday, I submit, merits close attention. I do not believe it is necessary and I will not support any argument or move to increase the number of public holidays. As Sen. Daly and the others have said, I too, believe that we need to look again at days like Easter Monday, Boxing Day and New Year's Day which could well give way to religious holidays as they requested: Liberation Day of the Spiritual Baptist, and similarly the Orisha ought to be favourably considered.

Let me close by saying both these religious organizations occupy, as you have heard earlier in these two unique and special presentations, a historically

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significant place among the pioneers of our present social order and we cannot go wrong if they are given that unique recognition that the national holiday provides. I thank you.

**5.15 p.m.**

**Sen. Dr. Eric St. Cyr:** Mr. President, let me begin by congratulating Sen. Rev. Gray-Burke and Sen. Mejias on their maiden speeches. They were very informative and very well argued.

I believe that in this nation—on this matter which is not ostentatiously a bread-and-butter matter which we tend to emphasize so often—we need to bring tremendous wisdom to bear on what we do and how we do it. We want to be sure that nothing we say or do shows any disrespect for any group within our nation, whether that group is identified racially, culturally or on the basis of religion. We want to be absolutely sure that we show the utmost respect to everyone. In that respect, I rather like our National Anthem, "Here every creed and race find an equal place," and we must live up to that.

I agree with Sen. Daly that the report might have outlined some principles, grappled with those principles and attempted to apply them in the situation, but this is a very complex issue. We are in the middle of this issue. If we were to go back to the period of independence and review the holidays there, we would see that all the holidays then, with the exception of one day, I think we called it Discovery Day, were Christian-centered holidays and we could explain that.

In the course of the next 25 years, we were in the nationalist phase, as a nation, and the holidays introduced there were pretty nearly political—Independence Day, Republic Day and so forth. I think they used to tell us about the spirit of banding, men from all races banding together to go forward and the coming of Eid, Divali and the change of Discovery Day to Emancipation Day, recognizing the African population and their aspirations.

I think we are now about to rationalize this whole issue. I believe that while recognizing the complexity of the society, ethnically, racially, religiously, and culturally, we should bring to this problem some principles such as: How many public holidays might we have? Should it be 14, 40 or probably eight? And, what should be the nature of those holidays?

I would be inclined to think that we may consider the end-of-the-year cycle so that for what we call Christmas, which in my view is not really a religious holiday but the commercial high-point of the nation's life, we could usefully have two



days there; bringing the year's work to an end. Similarly, ushering in the new year might also call for one or two days. If we got four days there, then we might think of the big national days; Independence would certainly stand out and Republic Day would also stand out.

I believe that as an immigrant community, we have all arrived from somewhere or the other, and though we may identify a particular day, just as we were all emancipated, whether from slavery or indentureship, we could celebrate that on August 1. Just so, we may recognize the arrival of various tribes and ethnic groups on a particular day. That would give us eight holidays and, perhaps, that is as many as a nation we should enshrine.

The rest I would think we should probably deal with as is done in the United States of America. I remember going there to teach some years ago and on Good Friday I quietly stayed at home; but when I saw all my students going to their classes I had to hurry, get dressed and go do my work. The day was recognized as a religious day, but it was not a public holiday; those who had to perform religious rites, did it and made the necessary arrangements, but the life of the nation, officially, was not brought to a halt in order to do this.

The sum total of what I am saying is that I have heard the suggestion that we should probably ask the committee to look again at what it has done. I may have been attracted to that solution, except that what I see in the committee's report is a valiant attempt to go in a direction which I broadly subscribe to, knowing that it is not where we are ending up when we sort out all the national issues. So, I would not be inclined to send the report back; I would be inclined to say, "Let us accept this report, recognizing that we are going in a certain direction, while we grapple with the principles that would inform the ultimate course we take. Let us continue."

My basic point is that as of today, I would support accepting the Majority Report as being as far as we could get today.

Mr. President, with those remarks, I would like to say that in whatever we do, recognizing the nature of our nation, we should try not to institutionalize divisions on one or another which, in the long term—50 or 100 years to come—would prove more difficult to undo.

With those remarks, Mr. President, I thank you.

**Sen. Junior Barrack:** Mr. President, I have been very much enthralled by the profound eloquence of our two new Senators on this side, Sen. Barbara Gray-

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Burke and Sen. Edmund Mejias, and for the wealth of information they have brought to us debating this issue here today.

I was also gratified by the contribution of Sen. Daly, for once. I was particularly moved by him. I want to say that he made a particular statement and, as a former member of that committee along with Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt, I would like to draw his attention to the points Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt made during her brief but profound contribution. She said:

"Somewhere between the 14th and 15th meetings—I was not at the 15th meeting—the positions of various strong advocates of certain positions had, over the weekend, changed, and I was totally confused as to why this had happened."

She went on to say:

"I just did not understand what had gone on, and as a result I did not sign the report."

Mr. President, the fact is—and without going into the workings of the committee—that this report by the Government does not reflect—

**Hon. Senators:** By the Government?

**Sen. J. Barrack:**—by the committee—the majority of which were Government Members—does not reflect the honest deliberations over the weeks, during which we had toiled and worked out positions of that particular committee.

**5.25 p. m.**

That is important so that people like Sen. Martin Daly could understand why this report is the way it is. I, myself, have been agonizing because of what was taking place at various times and I made it clear at certain points.

I became very impressed by Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt as a member of that particular committee and during a committee meeting one day, I said to her, "We the members of this committee are primarily the descendents of slaves and indentures and, therefore, we should be mindful of our historical antecedents." There was another statement which I made at that particular committee. It was very traumatic for me to go through that committee because I was looking at what was taking place at various points.

The other statement I thought I should mention was in response to a certain statement made by someone on the committee. It was: History will not record

Sen. Junior Barrack and the UNC making that mistake. I never thought that we would have had two members of the religious groups who were asking for public holidays to be in the Parliament with us today. It was a most traumatic experience for me. I agonized for days, sometimes I could not sleep because I knew the implications of what was taking place. I found that we had a golden opportunity to revisit our past and to correct errors that were made, and injustices that were done and to level the playing field. I do not care if the Spiritual Baptists become Catholics tomorrow. That is not my problem and if the Orisha community is converted by sheer whim, or what have you, to Roman Catholicism or any other way of life for that matter. What I do care about is that we do not disadvantage groups in the society so that we can pick them off as though they are plums. This is what I was very much concerned about.

One of the things that struck me on entering that committee was the fact that many of the groups in the society which I thought should have been part of that debate, submitting memoranda, were not initially invited. I consider that to have been a grave omission in respect of our predecessors and on entering the committee I made reference to that immediately. It is as a result of those references that the Emancipation Support Committee, COATT, and the Orisha community were invited to deliberate on that historical event.

I received a letter recently from Opa Orisha, one of the significant groups in the society in the Orisha community. What was disheartening about everything is the fact that there are people who know that that group exists. It should have been their responsibility—despite the fact that it was also my responsibility as a member of the committee—but their responsibility, because when the matter of protocol comes up they send invitations to these groups to be part of these ceremonies. For us to have a group like the Opa Orisha left out completely from making a contribution on the question of public holidays especially because of the importance of it, shows how little we regarded the various groups in the society, particularly when they are of African descent.

Mr. President, these matters are very important because as I go on I am going to show—

**Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt:** Mr. President, I wonder if I could just ask Sen. Barrack to clarify something. I just understood him to say that the Orisha group was not invited to speak. My memory is that they did come and speak before the committee.

**Sen. J. Barrack:** I spoke about the Orisha Council of Elders being invited and they came before us, but the Opa Orisha wrote a letter recently and I was saying on the basis of that, that particular group should also have been invited so that the committee could have heard their views.

I know that certain people, based on the communications they have through a particular ministry headed by the Prime Minister, know this group. I believe without fear or favour they should have been invited to make a contribution there.

Mr. President, I would like now to show the importance the committee placed on the grant of public holidays.

**Sen. A. Mark:** Mr. President, before Sen. Barrack proceeds, I just want to clear up something. Looking at the individuals and organizations interviewed, there was the National Council of Orisha Elders in Trinidad and Tobago; is he saying that there is another Orisha group that should also have been invited? I want to get it clear.

**Sen. J. Barrack:** I said that twice, Mr. President. I said it first and then Sen. Dianna Mahabir-Wyatt asked the question, and I said it again, and I have now to say it a third time, but I do not mind; I will facilitate those who were not listening.

**Sen. Daly:** Oh dear! That is not the way to carry on in the Senate

**5.35 p.m.**

**Sen. J. Barrack:** Mr. President, paragraph 8.4 of the report states:

"Your committee was also of the view that public holidays could assist the society by affording citizens opportunities to pause and reflect, celebrate or recreate themselves."

"They are also opportunities to recognize and celebrate the diversity of the Trinidad and Tobago society, while at the same time, promoting unity in diversity."

After making such a profound statement we hear nothing of this being the case with public festival days. Public holidays do that, not public festival days. Two significant groups in our society that have been historically sabotaged in their religious practices are given public festival days.

What happens with the need to call citizens to reflect and celebrate, that public holidays afford our people? What happens to the opportunity to recognize and

celebrate the diversity of the Trinidad and Tobago society? It is not the public festival day that is going to do it. It is the public holiday. That is what the report says. Is it not meet that the Orisha community and the Spiritual Baptist community can cause this nation to pause and reflect on its circumstances, historical and otherwise, and celebrate as well? Is it not also important for them to have this opportunity?

For this reason we must take another look at the entire decision which had been taken and we should come to face the facts of our decision as the Government has made them out to be. Based on my knowledge of what has happened, I believe that the Government could have found a day to give to these two groups. I will not go into details because I will follow the guidelines that Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt had set down earlier, as a former member of the committee. I know that the Government could have found days to accommodate the two groups if so desired. I also know that had we gone on with our normal course of deliberation and those had ended up in our report, we would have had a different report before us dealing with different days. I would not go into that matter any further.

When we are dealing with disadvantaged groups in the society we must take into consideration the social and economic effects of their disadvantaged situation. Sen. Rev. Gray-Burke made reference to the effects of the Shouters' Prohibition Ordinance and the third and fourth generation Africans as reflected in the population of our prisons, the vagrant population and the inmates of the St. Ann's Hospital. It is also important for me to make mention of the effects of that disadvantage and the way in which it is perpetrated and perpetuated in the society, and how even the children of the disadvantaged groups are ashamed to identify with the roots from which they came.

When a child from an Orisha family passes Common Entrance and is admitted to one of the prestige schools—I will not call names, probably the one Sen. Ainsley Mark attended—he immediately becomes ashamed of his roots because of the status of his religion. The point was made by Sen. Mejias that the laws of Trinidad and Tobago are against these religions and they are still outlawed today. When these children enter these schools they are ashamed to say that they are Orisha because that is supposed to be obeah people. They are distanced from the path from which they came because of the new culture to which they have to acclimatize in order to achieve something in the society.

When these youths grow up they find it difficult to identify themselves with their roots. The Orisha community and the Spiritual Baptist community become poorer. They produce individuals who after transcending the limits of intellectual and academic attainment which was set before them in previous years, then find themselves unable to maintain their status in society whilst still identifying with the religion. These are very important facts which cannot be denied and must be stated. These have severe implications for the development of the African community because the children are taught to be ashamed of their heritage.

For this reason it is difficult for the elite in a Government of African descent to agree with the Spiritual Baptist and the Orisha. They are still ashamed. They are still psychologically imprisoned. They have not yet transcended the hurdles to make them men and women who are proud of their culture. This has serious implications for the identity of our people. You cannot expect people who are ashamed of their ancestry and culture to have a positive self-image. That is developing a type of schizophrenia which you do not want me to speak about.

Until the African man in this country is able to look at himself in a mirror—when I say himself, I also mean all that he equals to; where he came from; what is his culture and who he is. When he could look at his hair and not wish that it was long and straight; when he could look at his colour and not wish that it was white, not until then, that so-called self-esteem that the Government boasts about and which Mrs. Manning had spoken about would come around. That self-esteem that they are looking for in the African youth will be always elusive. Continuously, the African community is in turmoil.

**5.45 p.m.**

It has never rested from the canboulay riots, as was mentioned earlier, right through to the day of the steelband riots. Do not forget 1970! Remember it very carefully because it is said that those who forget the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them. Remember the year 1990—the African youth had not yet rested. He was still in search. Do you know how the Muslimeen came about? Do you know why there are Muslimeen youths in this country? It is the identity problem. It has not yet been resolved and until it is resolved, we can have unrest after unrest in this country and the Government will still be asking for symposiums on the so-called anatomy of hate and all kinds of ridiculousness and not deal with the problem. It is an identity problem and it will not go away.

They cannot deny the Orisha and Spiritual Baptist community a public holiday. They cannot continue to push them under the rocks and believe that

nothing will happen. They will emerge in very strange ways because we see it happening. It is a continuous rebellion against society that is taking place over a period. It will not go away and the Government would be making a fundamental mistake to believe that it can continue its practice of alienation and discrimination and believe that it is building a society that is whole, just, lasting and peaceful. It is fooling itself.

I listen to them. I know what I am talking about. I lived in CarOoni East for seven years; I know what happens there. I have been among the people, a virtual sociological laboratory, where we see the makings of what we have churning up in our society. Members opposite turn a blind eye. It gives a man approximately US \$100,000 to find out what is going on. They give another one a few million dollars to find out what is going on, wasting taxpayers' money when they can easily deal with the matter on the basis of integration—unity in diversity as they so elegantly put it. Be yourself! Know yourself!

I want to tell you, Mr. President, that we are on the brink of another unrest in this country, whether we like it or not, because the society is not settled. Some people do not like me to say it, but that is their business. I know what is taking place.

When we look at our youths, we will find in what they do a certain level of rebellion against society. It is society they are hitting at, you know. They are saying: "You do not want me here. I am not a part of you. I can have no respect for you. How can you want me to be a part of this if this is not a part of me? What are you doing to me?"

**Sen. Daly:** Mr. President, I thank the Senator for giving way. Just so that I can follow his argument, is he suggesting that the grant of two public holidays will quell this rebellion of which he speaks?

**Sen. J. Barrack:** That is a fundamentally good question. The erasure of alienation within our society cannot take place in one day. It is a process of perfecting our society. It must start at one point, but it must start at a point where people feel a part of a whole, and every other institution within our society must work towards the perfecting of our society. I would say it is a very good place to start.

It is a place to start because for the first time we would be saying that we recognize something which is inherently African by putting it on the national stage. It may not mean a change in the physical lifestyle of individuals in the sense that they might not change from one religious perspective to another, but

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the fact will be that they are recognized and we have removed the identity problem. That is why I said that I am not here to determine which religious belief people follow and which they do not. That is not my contention here. It is about time that the institutions in the society recognized that presence.

Ralph Ellison spoke about it and in his book *The Invisible Man*; he describes what invisibility is. A person is there and no one sees him. He is there, he is making a contribution and no one recognizes him. All he does is to exist, but no one really acknowledges his presence. That is why I must agree with Sen. Barbara Gray-Burke that to give a public festival day to her religion is an insult. I will tell you something. I left it up to the PNM. I said that once successive Prime Ministers had promised it, it must be given and I left it there. I never argued beyond that for one reason. The purpose of the public holidays committee was not about that. It was not about dealing with the African and wider community and settling problems within that. It was primarily political, to deal with the issue of granting Indian Arrival Day.

**5.55 p.m.**

You will see, Mr. President, that as soon as Indian Arrival Day was granted for the 150th anniversary this year, the debate on public holidays was relegated to a football being kicked around; it had no significance in this Parliament at all, because it was never about addressing the fundamental problems that we have in this country from a historical perspective.

Therefore, all the wonderful meetings that we had, all the commitment and dedication boiled down to one thing, when they could not get it by fair and ordinary debate, eventually it was railroaded in a particular direction and was dealt with in a particular way. I consider that to be utterly disgusting. I would not have minded if it came from some other person, or some other group of men and women, but not, Mr. President, from a group of men and women who said, "These people under my charge are the ones whom I love and they have supported me all these years"; who, in its midst boasts about a renowned scholar, the Father of the nation, a historian.

When I heard in this Parliament today that on our books there are still obeah laws—I will tell you what obeah means, Mr. President. Obeah comes from obi; the obi seed is used by the Orisha in their oracles. They throw the seed and it says to them what way they should go. It is a fundamental part of the Orisha religion. To outlaw obeah, to stigmatize the religion, to call it devilish and to have that law on our books after 25 years of Dr. Eric Williams, the historian and another



period amounting to 39 years of a black man ruling this country, talking about blackness—watch Indians—and all kinds of stupidity; preaching racism to our people all the time and they practice the most blatant discrimination and alienation against our people. The most blatant insult is that we have that on the law books. That a PNM Government has that on the law books!

Chapter 11:02 has been amended many times. Two years before Dr. Eric Williams died he amended many sections of this law. It is a disgrace to our nation that that law is still on our law books. I support Sen. Archbishop Mejjias in his call to have it removed as early as possible, and as he said, even with retroactive effect, so that history can be corrected. So that the PNM would not be blamed for having that on the law books for all these years. It is a kind of way in which they can absolve themselves from unnecessary condemnation.

Mr. President, they have put horses before religion, another one of those statements I so vividly remember. One Member of this Parliament recently said that Boxing Day is primarily a racing holiday. Horses before religion you know. Better than Orisha. So that the rich and powerful in the society can be sipping champagne in the racing gallery while the Orisha and the Spiritual Baptist languish for recognition. Is that what we are saying in this country?

I will now turn to one of the more absurd aspects. I say absurd because it is laughable—in a way we can make fun of it but this is very serious; it deals with Indian Arrival Day. Not one African group in the society, neither from the Spiritual Baptists nor the Orishan or any other group that I have interacted with at various levels has asked for an arrival day. It is amazing that the Government is more interested in giving Africans an arrival day than a liberation day. The African community in general, if I may remind my colleagues on the other side, are not particularly happy with the way in which they were brought to Trinidad and Tobago. The legacy of slavery is not one which they would like to celebrate. They do not want to celebrate their arrival on a slave plantation where they were sold like chattel and kept in a particular way; beaten and stripped of their culture. They are not concerned about that arrival. What they are concerned about is their emancipation. They have not asked for an arrival day but they would amass themselves to protect Emancipation Day. What insult are you perpetuating by offering Africans an arrival day? *[Interruption]* Well, you said it is for everybody. You said so. *[Interruption]*

**6.05 p.m.**

I also want to say this, Mr. President. Discovery Day was on August 1, and it represents the arrival of the Europeans to Trinidad and Tobago. That is European Arrival Day. All Dr. Eric Williams did was call it Emancipation Day, but it is still Discovery Day because it is still August 01 and all Europeans who wish to continue the celebration of their arrival here have Discovery Day. I think we should have educated them on that matter. It has not moved and it is still a holiday.

**Mr. President:** Sen. Barrack, Discovery Day was celebrated on the first Monday in August.

**Sen. J. Barrack:** But it is celebrated on the first Monday in August.

Mr. President, one of the other areas of this matter that I want to deal with—*[Interruption]* There are points that must be made whether you like it or not. I know your sensibilities would be aroused because of your attitude but I am not here to appease you; you will have the naked truth whether you like it or not.

We have a significant "dougla" population in this country, and they can identify with both their East Indian and African roots and, therefore, can enjoy both Emancipation Day and now Indian Arrival Day. I am told that the dougla population in Trinidad and Tobago is in excess of 10 per cent. When we combine the fact that approximately 40 per cent of the population is African and approximately 40 per cent of the population is East Indian, and the African community is not calling for an arrival day one would see that over 80 per cent of the population is not against an Arrival Day for Indians. Also, when we add the 10 per cent of the dougla population, there is 90 per cent of the people of Trinidad and Tobago who would not be in direct opposition to an Indian Arrival Day.

**Mr. President:** The speaking time of the hon. Senator 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. J. Barrack:** Thank you, Mr. President. I know that deep in their hearts they would not like me to continue, but this is what we are here for: we are supposed to pull the wool from over their eyes. It is a little painful but that is not my problem, I will continue to do the job which is placed upon me.

I am of the opinion that May 30 should have been called Indian Arrival Day. I consider it to be a type of hypocrisy to give it any other name, and that should be corrected as a matter of urgency.

I want us in this Parliament to take particular notice of the requests that have been made by two of our Senators and that we give those requests very deep consideration when the time comes for us to decide upon this particular motion. We must remember that as a Parliament and a people we have a responsibility to make this nation a place in which all, or at least the vast majority, must feel welcome and at home. I have no doubt that if this happens Trinidad and Tobago would be transformed into one of the most productive societies in the world. We have the intellectual genius to make our society great; we have the natural resources to make our country great, what we need are people who can understand the factors which are interfering with our development and remove those factors so that we can move forward as a nation.

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, July 11, 1995 at 1.30 p.m.

Sir, I want to advise that the Government would wish to deal with item 2, a Bill to Repeal the Sugar Industry Control Board; item 6, a Bill to amend the Petroleum Act under Bills Second Reading; and on completion of these matters we will continue the debate on the motion to adopt the report of the joint select committee on public holidays.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Senate adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 6.15 p.m.*