

*Leave of Absence**Tuesday, October 08, 1996***SENATE***Tuesday, October 08, 1996*

The Senate met at 1.32 p.m.

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

**Mr. President:** Hon. Senators, I have granted leave to Sen. Brig. The Hon. Joseph Theodore, Sen. Deborah Moore-Miggins and Sen. Selwyn John to be absent from today's sitting.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEES**

**Mr. President:** Hon. Senators, I have received the following communication from Hon. Hector McClean, Speaker of the House of Representatives:

“October 07, 1996

Hon. Ganace Ramdial  
 President of the Senate  
 Parliament  
 Red House  
 Port of Spain

Dear Mr. President,

I refer to your letter of October 02, 1996 and inform you that at a sitting held on Friday October 04, 1996, the House of Representatives agreed to the following resolutions which were moved by the hon. Attorney General and Leader of the House:

Resolved that the following Members of this House be appointed to serve with an equal number from the Senate on the Joint Select Committee to consider and report on the Working Paper on Equal Opportunity Legislation.

Mr. T. Sudama  
 Mr. J. Humphrey  
 Dr. F. Khan  
 Mr. C. Sharma  
 Mr. R. Boynes  
 Mr. J. Narine.

*Joint Select Committees*  
[MR. PRESIDENT]

*Tuesday, October 08, 1996*

Resolved that the following Members of this House be appointed to serve with an equal number from the Senate on the Joint Select Committee to consider and report on the report of the Cabinet appointed Committee on the Constitutional and Legislative arrangements for Tobago.

Mr. A.N.R. Robinson

Mr. R. L. Maharaj

Miss P. Nicholson

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar

Mr. P. Manning

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis

Yours sincerely

Hector McClean, MP

Speaker

House of Representatives”

#### SENATORS' APPOINTMENT

**Mr. President:** I have been advised that His Excellency the President has appointed Mr. Roodal Moonilal a temporary Senator with effect from today's date and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of Sen. Brig. The Hon. Joseph Theodore.

I have also been advised that His Excellency the President has appointed Mr. Carlton Callender a temporary Senator with effect from today's date and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of Sen. Deborah Moore-Miggins.

I have been further advised that His Excellency the President has appointed Mr. Vincent Cabrera a temporary Senator with effect from today's date and continuing during the absence from the Senate of Sen. Selwyn John due to illness.

#### OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

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

Roodal Moonilal, Carlton Callender, Vincent Cabrera.

**1.40 p.m.**

**PAPERS LAID**

**The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark):** Mr. President, I have the honour to lay a number of papers on the table of this honourable Senate. I also advise the Senate that I would like to defer the laying of Paper No. 1, which is the Immigration (Amdt.) Regulations, 1996, until the next sitting of the Senate pending conclusion of deliberations by the Statutory Instruments Committee.

2. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the National Settlements Programme - Loan Contract 584/OC-TT between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Inter American Development Bank for the year ended December 31, 1995. (*Hon. W. Mark*)
3. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Carnival Development Committee for the year ended December 31, 1985. (*Hon. W. Mark*)
4. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Carnival Development Committee for the year ended December 31, 1986. (*Hon. W. Mark*)
5. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the National Carnival Commission for the year ended December 31, 1987. (*Hon. W. Mark*)
6. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the National Carnival Commission for the year ended December 31, 1988. (*Hon. W. Mark*)
7. Annual Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Management Development Centre for the year 1992 (*Hon. W. Mark*).
8. Annual Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Management Development Centre for the year 1993. (*Hon. W. Mark*).
9. Report on the Determination and Measurement of Poverty in Trinidad and Tobago. (*Hon. W. Mark*).
10. Annual audited accounts of the Trinidad Nitrogen Company Limited (TRINGEN) for the year ended December 31, 1995. (*Hon. W. Mark*).

**Mr. President:** Hon. Members, I wish to put a Motion that the item under Paper No. 1, the Immigration (Amdt.) Regulations, 1996 be deferred to another sitting of the Senate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE****(Special Report Tobago)  
Presentation**

**Sen. Prof. John Spence:** Mr. President, I would like to present a report of the Cabinet-appointed Select Committee to review the constitutional arrangements for Tobago.

**ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION**

*The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Sen. Martin Daly:*

**Loan Conditionalities  
(Legislation)**

**11. Sen. Martin Daly** asked the Minister of Public Administration and Information:

- (a) Would the hon. Minister please inform the Senate whether the passage of any pieces of legislation placed on the Order Paper of the Senate in the months of June and July, 1996 were conditionalities of any loans entered into by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago?
- (b) If the answer is in the affirmative, could the Minister please state:
  - (i) which pieces of legislation were conditionalities?
  - (ii) to which loans did the pieces of legislation relate?

**The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark):** Mr. President, I have asked Sen. Daly to accommodate a further deferral of this matter until the next sitting of the Senate.

*Question, by leave, deferred.*

**MARRIAGE (AMDT.) BILL  
House Amendment**

**The Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar):** Mr. President, I beg to move, the following Motion standing in my name:

*Be It Resolved* that the House of Representatives amendments to the Marriage (Amdt.) Bill be now considered.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 3*

*House amendment read as follows:*

- A. In subclause (4)—
- (i) Delete the word "such" appearing in paragraph (b) in line three;
  - (ii) Delete the comma appearing after the word "required" and replace with a full stop; and
  - (iii) Delete the words "and there shall be annexed to such affidavit or statutory declaration a letter from a lawyer or a notary public stating that there is no impediment of consanguinity or affinity or other lawful hindrance to such marriage";
- B. Renumber subclauses (5) to (9) as subclauses (6) to (10) respectively;
- C. Insert a new subclause (5) as follows:
- "(5) The Minister may, by Order prescribe such documents that shall be submitted in support of an affidavit or statutory declaration made by each of the parties appearing before the Registrar of Marriages or District Registrar."

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. President, the proposed amendments to the Marriage (Amdt.) Bill 1996, if Members would recall, when we had debated the Bill, we had proposed certain amendments which are the subject of clause 3. We had attempted to tidy that clause up by the new subclause (5) and this is really the substance of the amendment and would make for a wider range of documents to be annexed to an affidavit or statutory declaration rather than the ones that we had itemized when we had originally done this Bill in the Senate.

Mr. President, I beg to move that the Senate doth agree with the House in the said amendment.

*Question proposed.*

**Sen. Martin Daly:** Mr. President, I would like to commend this amendment to my colleagues and I take this opportunity to make a few points in connection with this amendment.

It appears that we are going to have a more orderly conduct of the business of the Senate since those febrile days when we debated this amendment, but I am

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bound to make the point because the Independent Senators have been attacked on account of their concern about the haste of legislation.

**1.50 p.m.**

Mr. President, two to two and a half months have gone by since we debated the Marriage (Amdt.) Bill). It raises the question of why it was done in a hurry in the first place and more importantly, it shows that over that period of time we were able to arrive at a better piece of legislation; and very importantly, when we first started to debate the Marriage (Amdt.) Bill, we did not have placed before us, as was subsequently done by the Minister of Legal Affairs, the provisions relating to the other countries which it was said that we were following.

The end result is that this amendment demonstrates to me, quite conclusively—and I hope I can persuade my colleagues of it—the importance of debating a bill with all of the material before us, particularly the comparable material, when we say it is comparable to legislation in other countries. It also shows the importance of due deliberation. No one wants to move at snail's pace, but it also shows the importance of due deliberation.

Mr. President, I make these points not to re-open old wounds, but for those who are reckless enough to attack, on a personal basis, the Independent Senators when they raise these concerns. It is important that we point this out. My commendation of the amendment is unqualified; it is a better piece of work because we have done it properly.

Another point that I think is important to make, Mr. President—because the work we do in the Parliament is sometimes so far removed from reality—I think there is another piece of commendation that is due to the Government. I do not subscribe to the view that collective Cabinet responsibility means that we cannot pick out those ministers who are foolish and those who are productive. I am sorry the Minister of Finance is not here because one point that was made repeatedly during this debate was: How could you be attracting any new type of business to Tobago in the absence of any reliable means of getting there from metropolitan countries and, in particular, from the United States of America? I would like to congratulate the Government for the fact that during the intervening period, through the efforts of the Minister of Finance, it has been reported that he has been able to get American Airlines, using American Eagle, to have flights into Tobago

on a daily basis, I understand, through Puerto Rico. I think that is a considerable achievement.

I make the point, again, Mr. President, against the background of those who recklessly attack persons who try constructively to criticize legislation. When some of us speak about the importance of governing the country, as opposed to having press conferences, getting American Airlines to come into Tobago is an example of governing the country, and governing it well! That is why I rise to make the point, Mr. President. This Bill now has some meaning because there is some means of transport for the people who might take advantage of this amendment, which we are passing, to get into Tobago and I would like to commend the Government for its efforts.

Mr. President, there is a third point I would like to make, and unfortunately there is a lot of irony in it. I think it is very important that the Minister of Finance continue to be very aggressive about air transport in and out of the twin-island state. Those of us who have had the privilege of being attacked by two different administrations, regrettably, now have the dubious privilege of reminding everyone that all the Senators on these Benches who were in the previous Parliament complained bitterly about the divestment of BWIA and how it was done. The whole country now knows, for a fact—it is no longer conjecture—that it was a tremendous fiasco, and it was not done in the interest of the public of Trinidad and Tobago.

I would like the Minister, in precisely the same way that he has aggressively pursued getting new airlines or new flights into Tobago through American Airlines, to pursue aggressively the BWIA fiasco, and do whatever is necessary to return that airline to some semblance of control by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, or its representatives; and to consign to the dustbin all those who remain in the corridors of BWIA who were connected with that deal. I think it is very important that the Minister be complimented and be encouraged to continue aggressively to deal with the airline situation that relates to Tobago, otherwise measures like this, Mr. President, will not make a great deal of sense.

I must say it is very ironic—and I keep repeating I am not a morality player—that we are passing a Bill to encourage persons to come and marry in Tobago, at the same time when we are keeping Virgin Atlantic out of Tobago. I think it is extremely ironic. I think there really would be a tremendous synergy in encouraging people to marry in Tobago and to get there by means of the Virgin

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Atlantic airline. *[Interruption]* So it just shows how strange politics is. Politics is very strange.

I think it is very important, and I mention Virgin Atlantic, Mr. President, because it is not the first airline that BWIA has sought to chase out of this country. I know for a fact that when another very big international airline under the previous administration was attempting to strike a deal with British Airways, every effort was made either not to give that airline the correct information, or to give them no information at all. It appears that precisely the same thing is now happening with Virgin Atlantic and, therefore, the prospects of getting Virgin Atlantic in to assist BWIA and in the use of measures like this, apparently, is in jeopardy.

Mr. President, it is very relevant because without proper airline service coming in to these islands, we will not be able to exploit the market for which this amendment is intended. But you see, Mr. President, it is hardly surprising that those who have had their noses stuck in the BWIA “feeding trough” for so many years, and who get rebated travel and do all kinds of things with the airlines—bump your son and daughter at Christmas time who have been booked since February, in order to accommodate their “tantie nenen chile”. All those people who have their noses in the feeding trough of BWIA have an interest in keeping BWIA inefficient and lame, in order that they continue to feed in that trough.

So I want to compliment the Government for this measure. I want to compliment the Government for getting American Airlines into Tobago. I want to urge the Government, by any means possible, to regain some semblance of BWIA and if the management will not give possible prospective international partners correct information, find some way of getting them to do it. I think it is very important, Mr. President, and it is for those reasons that I rise to speak in favour of an amendment which is, obviously, such a good amendment. I urge the Government to continue very aggressively to try and secure, as it has been doing, our international airline’s, interests. I think it is very important, otherwise we may not be able to take advantage of measures like this.

Thank you, Mr. President.

**The Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar):** Mr. President, through you, I thank the hon. Senator for his kind words and his encouragement with respect to the amendments made to the Marriage (Amdt.) Bill. I know that he would not mind if I were to remind him, as far as my memory



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serves me, when we debated this Bill I do not recall any great haste in that debate. In fact, we were all very surprised that this debate took so many days, when it was a matter of making an amendment to change from seven to three days. With the greatest of respect to the honourable Senator, I do not recall that this Bill was pushed through post-haste in the Senate. Maybe there were others, but I do not recall this particular Bill being pushed through. We spent many days and hours debating this Marriage (Amdt.) Bill. Mr. President, I thank you very much, and I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

#### ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

**The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark):** Mr. President, I seek leave to deal with Private Business. We had given a commitment that whenever we have the legislative time, we would pursue Private Business. I now seek leave to deal with Motion No. 4 first, and later to resume Motion No. 1.

**Mr. President:** Hon. Senators, at this stage of the proceedings it is suggested that we move on to Private Business and that Motion No. 4 be dealt with at this stage.

*Agreed to.*

**2.00 p.m.**

#### JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE

**(Special Report/Tobago)**

#### **Adoption**

**Sen. Prof. John Spence:** Mr. President, I beg to move that this Senate adopt a Special Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Constitutional and Legislative Arrangements for Tobago.

The report basically asks for an extension of time. As you know, the time-frame was very short to complete the deliberations. We met this morning and agreed that we should request this extension of time from the Senate.

*Seconded by Sen. N. Moore.*

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Report adopted.*

**SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS**

[SECOND DAY]

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate* [October 1, 1996]:

*Whereas* the cost of school textbooks has been rising rapidly for various reasons; and

*Whereas* the necessity to meet the cost of these books has been affecting the ability of families to meet the cost of other necessities like food, clothes, and medical care; and

*Whereas* the then Government appointed a committee to investigate and report on the accessibility and availability of school textbooks, and the Report of that committee was laid in both Houses of Parliament in October 1992:

*Be it resolved* that this House urge Government to implement some or all of the recommendations of the said committee, and to take immediate steps to deal with the increasing cost of school textbooks and the hardships arising from such increases. [*Sen. Rev. D. Teelucksingh*]

**Mr. President:** When we last adjourned, the Motion was moved and seconded.

*Question proposed.*

**Sen. Elizabeth Mannette:** Mr. President, I am pleased to lend my support to this Motion proposed by Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand. I hope to make a few comments to highlight some of the committee's recommendations as well as to underscore some of Prof. Ramchand's concerns. I think it is important to inform the Senate and the national community of the efforts of the previous administration to deal with the implementation of some of the aspects of this report because the report was laid in October 1992. A reasonable question could be—what was done to implement some of the suggestions in this report and what can be done further by this Government?

In 1991, the committee was established because the then government was very concerned about the rising cost of textbooks and the effect it was having on parents and families. It is no surprise that these problems continue. In fact, one can hardly walk some of the streets of Port of Spain and other areas during the vacation period as often they are impassable as parents and students seek to peddle their second-hand books to raise funds to purchase the required books for the new

term. The committee made certain recommendations with respect to making school books more available. One set of recommendations centres around increasing the use of second-hand books, because it is no secret and it is a bit obvious that the cost of a second-hand book should be less than the cost of a new book. One way in which the committee recommended that the Government encourage such a trade in second-hand books was to standardize the textbooks for certain subjects.

The committee, on page 6 of its report, defines "standardization" and I think that the committee's definition of standardization should be the one that is used by the Government. I have seen reports in newspapers referring to standardization as something else, but what the committee meant was that all schools should use the same books in certain subject areas. This will certainly increase the opportunity for resale of books both within schools—even within the country—and among siblings and friends.

The committee also made a point which amazed me—and I hope that the Minister is taking a good note of this point—that Forms 1 and 2 in a certain school should be encouraged to use the same books for the same subjects. I find it quite surprising that even within a school there could be one teacher teaching English in Form 1A using a textbook different from another English teacher in Form 1B, for example. I certainly think that the Minister should immediately ensure that there is some sort of organization and good management within the schools.

Another recommendation that I support from the committee's report is that of the establishment of a minimum time for each edition. This recommendation is summarized on page 2 of the report. I would like to point out that in April 1992, prior to the committee's report, under the PNM administration, the Minister of Education sent circulars to schools stating that no textbooks were to be changed under five years for primary schools and for Forms 1—3, except on the approval of the Minister, and, in addition, except for English Literature, not more than one textbook was to be assigned. The immediate result of this circular, of course, was to facilitate the resale of books and also to shorten the book lists. The committee then issued its report in October, subsequent to the then Minister's circular and recommended a three-year minimum time period.

I am pleased to note that the current Minister of Education is continuing this policy that was started in 1992. It was reported in the daily newspapers of May 13, 1996 that the Minister had advised principals to continue to use in the 1996/1997 school year, those books that were used for the period 1995/1996.

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Unfortunately, one principal of a high school told me that the Minister's instructions arrived too late because schools usually supply bookstores with their book lists in March to ensure that the book stores have the stock available by July and August. The Minister's instructions arrived at schools in June.

Interestingly, the newspaper report of Thursday, May 30, 1996—and I am referring to the *Newsday* specifically—mentioned that the Minister of Education was establishing a standing committee to review books currently in use and even those proposed.

### **2.10 p.m.**

Subsequently, I read in the *Sunday Guardian* of October 6, 1996, that this committee had its first meeting on October 2, some five months after its appointment was announced in May. One can only hope that the Minister acts with a bit more speed with respect to other aspects of his ministry.

It is also important for the Government to play some part in increasing the acceptability of second-hand books. I was alarmed to read an advertisement in a newspaper during the recent vacation period, warning parents about using second-hand books. This advertisement stated that the use of second-hand books would result in students failing examinations because of missing pages or students' notes in the margins, underlining or highlighting, all of which tend to make some parts of the books illegible.

I think that the Minister of Education and certainly the Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister of Consumer Affairs should seek to stop this type of misrepresentation. I noted that the advertisement did not continue for many days, but I was sufficiently alarmed to mention it to a colleague and I dare say there may be some parents and students who were affected by this type of misrepresentation.

In addition, to increase the acceptability of second-hand books, the Minister and the Ministry of Education should encourage those PTA school-initiated programmes, which seek to facilitate sales within schools at the end of the school year.

The committee also made recommendations with respect to the affordability of new books. Sen. Prof. Ramchand referred in detail to one main recommendation of the committee which is the establishment of a bulk purchasing agency. This is discussed in the committee's report on page 20. A bulk purchasing agency, as Sen. Prof. Ramchand mentioned, would be able to purchase all or certainly most of the

textbooks required for use in our schools and benefits from this bulk purchase would accrue to students because the price would most likely be less and there would be an elimination of the costs associated with the middleman.

I would like to inform the Senate that the PNM administration, upon receiving this report in 1992, considered this proposal seriously, but there was some concern about establishing an additional state enterprise. In fact, the then Minister of Education sought to encourage credit unions to do the bulk importing and so accomplish the same purpose, but apparently this was not successful. In 1993, the Ministry of Education, under the then Minister, decided to purchase certain books, and as Sen. Prof. Ramchand outlined, the ministry spent over \$7 million in bulk purchasing of primary school books, dictionaries, atlases, English and Mathematics textbooks, as well as 500 science kits. The books were the property of the schools and the schools were free to rent certain texts to students at a nominal cost or to give the dictionaries and the atlases to students free of charge.

Again, in 1995, a sum of \$7.4 million was spent on secondary school books, purchased primarily for the junior secondary school students and those at senior comprehensive and composite schools. More than 20,000—30,000 English, Mathematics and science books, dictionaries, atlases, as well as 1,000 Geography textbooks for O'level students were purchased in a special effort to increase the number of students taking those subjects for the examinations.

So there was some effort made to experiment with the bulk purchasing agency. Indeed, some of the local booksellers were agents for the publishers and thus became involved in this experiment. The anticipated problem with the bulk purchasing agency, of course, is the opposition from the booksellers, who would stand to lose a substantial market. Sen. Prof. Ramchand did not spare much in his characterization of the booksellers. I would like to suggest that in implementing this bulk purchasing agency some effort be made to encourage or motivate booksellers to expand their books to appeal to those beyond the captive student market into the wider adult population. In many countries where the government provides books to the students, there is still a very vibrant retail book industry. So that should be no excuse or no argument against setting up such an agency.

Again, due to the resistance to setting up a separate state agency the previous experiment was done in-house at the Ministry of Education, and it seemed to work quite well and required no hiring of additional staff. This is something that the Minister of Education, perhaps, can report to us about—his perspective on that.

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But it is important that we realize that even if the bulk purchasing agency or division seeks to purchase most of the books, it is inevitable that there would still be some books that students would wish to purchase on their own; these might be supplemental texts. For those books, I think the Ministry of Education should seek to monitor the prices to ensure that bookstores do not extort an unreasonable amount from students and parents.

In September 1995, the Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister of Consumer Affairs introduced the exercise of price inspectors who visited bookstores during the busy season to monitor prices, and perhaps the Minister can tell us whether or not this practice was continued this year. I can relate the experience of one history teacher who told me that she assigned a history text that cost her \$19.95 when she purchased it a number of years ago and continued to assign that text to her students until the cost rose to \$50.00 and \$60.00. She stopped assigning it at that point but then she had to return to it because it was the most satisfactory one on the market. To her dismay, the cost of the text is now \$98.00 and she is still teaching from the one that cost her \$19.95. So there was no great change in the book, yet the price escalated. So something should be done to monitor the prices of the new books that are not purchased by the Government.

In addition to increasing the availability of second-hand books and the affordability of new books, some measure should be put in place to ensure that students who are unable to afford textbooks can be supplied with such books. I want to point out that there are many needy students, even in so-called prestige schools, who need assistance in purchasing books and other materials. In 1992, to help such students a short-term measure was instituted by the then Minister of Education, in that they gave a one-time book grant to over 50,000 students. The total amount came to over \$6 million. This was prior to the committee's report, but it was still an effort to deal with the problem of the rising cost of textbooks and to help those who really were in need.

I am aware that negotiations for the Fourth World Bank Education Loan were completed in October, 1995 under the previous administration and a substantial part of that loan made available was for supplying textbooks to students in all subjects as well as for supplying books for libraries in primary schools. It would be interesting if the Minister could update us as to the obtaining of those funds

subsequent to those negotiations and whether or not this programme has, in fact, been put into place.

I would also like to suggest that the Ministry of Education seek to encourage school-organized book drives, community-organized book drives and the sponsorship by certain companies for certain books and libraries for students, because it certainly would be a worthy goal if the entire national community could become involved in increasing the availability and affordability of textbooks to our students. This will have a long-term beneficial effect on the national community.

Sen. Prof. Ramchand mentioned at the last sitting that the world is changing rapidly. This is something that I was also concerned about upon reading the report. He mentioned the development of CD-ROM technology, on-line library resources, the internet, and the like. The world is quickly changing and while I agree with Sen. Prof. Ramchand's point that there would still be a need for textbooks and concrete learning and instructional materials, I would like to add that it is important that the students who graduate from our secondary and primary schools are equipped to face the 21st Century. The advances in communication and information technology are taking place so rapidly, that unless developing countries such as ours have some organized, deliberate national plan on education policy, then it is possible that the divide between the haves and the have-nots of the world could become even greater, to the detriment of our citizens.

### **2.20 p.m.**

In fact, a recent article in a weekly newspaper of Tuesday October 1, 1996 stated that in England certain schools are introducing laptop computers to replace copybooks. It is certainly feasible or possible, that very soon many schools will not be using textbooks as a form of teaching. Computers, CD-ROMs and diskettes may soon replace textbooks and workbooks, I would say, possibly, within the next five years. Certainly, we cannot seek to immediately catch up to that point, but it would be interesting to know what the Ministry is doing to ensure that our students receive the technological and communications skills to make them competitive in the 21st Century. I would like to know what is the Government's policy in keeping students up to date, especially in the primary and secondary schools.

I have tried to find some statement on the policy and I was unable to do so. The Minister had suggested a number of ideas but nothing really dealing with the Ministry's thrust in terms of information technology and the updating of our

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schools. I hope that any such policy goes beyond merely placing a computer in a classroom or networking the ministry's office, because those are management issues. They are very good but they do not really help the student in developing the skills that are necessary in the 21st Century.

Are any sorts of partnerships being formed between schools and businesses? Is the ministry spearheading any effort to ensure that the skills that will be needed for workers in the 21st Century are actually being developed among our students of today? Is there any sort of strategy for developing an understanding, and a familiarity with technology? These issues are all important because it would be unfortunate if we implement the recommendations of the committee to make textbooks more affordable and yet, when we look around the developed countries are no longer using textbooks and our students are now at a significant disadvantage.

Mr. President, with those few comments, I would like to say that we support the committee's recommendations and urge the speedy implementation of those measures that were not yet implemented by the previous administration.

Thank you.

**Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt:** Mr. President, I very strongly support this Motion. It is long overdue. The fact that we have had such a gap between the 1992 report and today, when nothing has been done about it, cries for somebody to have moved this Motion—and I am very pleased that Sen. Prof. Ramchand did so. I support this Motion for a number of reasons, one of them being, of course, that most of the schoolbooks that are being used are published abroad. If we lower the cost of schoolbooks we could save considerable foreign exchange. As we all know, the cost of buying foreign dollars is going up daily, if not hourly, and the cost of schoolbooks causes an enormous amount of heartbreak and sacrifice among families in Trinidad and Tobago.

I am particularly concerned about a point which the hon. Senator made on literacy a while ago. Literacy rates in Trinidad and Tobago, as we know, are going down steadily; they are going down from what was a very commendable 90 per cent at one time—maybe about 15 years ago—when we could have probably boasted about being the most literate people in the entire West Indies. We are closer to something like 75 per cent presently which is shocking because we are not getting more literate. At a time when we need people to take us into the 21st



Century, we need people of greater literacy and greater education. The cost of schoolbooks is so high that many poor parents cannot afford to buy them and, therefore, they do not. So their children go through the entire school life without being able to read. They are automatically promoted until they reach 11-plus when they still cannot read. This is something which is extremely damaging to our future as a nation.

The network of women's Non-Governmental Organizations has spent some time studying the situation with schoolbooks for obvious reasons. Obviously, women and children are deeply concerned over the cost of schoolbooks and the sacrifice it means to families. The network has also set up a book exchange to assist families in exchanging books to make the cost of schooling easier. In the course of a study on schoolbooks, the network has found some very interesting information indeed; and some of it is somewhat distasteful, even bordering on the unethical, but facts have to be faced.

The current situation as regards schoolbooks operates on two bases, one is an actual basis, and the other is a periodical basis. The actual basis is extremely wasteful. The books which are produced—like in the story that the hon. Senator just gave us of the 1995 book which ended up being \$99.00, while the same book cost \$12.00 when he bought it has happened because the same book again and again is mainly ordered in new editions. When the network examined the new editions, they found that in many cases the only thing that changes from one edition to the next, apart from the price which is always greater, is the cover. Inside the edition is exactly the same but the publishers charge more for each issue and at the same time the foreign exchange rate is increasing so that we all have to pay more for anything that we buy from abroad.

In other instances, the pictures in the books were changed from one edition to another and that was the only change. In other words, they were rearranged, which apparently justified the issuance of a new edition. In other instances still, one would find a general chapter added to the book which justified the issuing of a new edition. There are interesting issues which contribute to this which I will come to. I am not going to fall into the intellectually fashionable trap of putting all of the blame on those men and women who make their living by selling books and often provide jobs and incomes for other people. I think this is too facile and I would not get into that trap.

Mind you, the booksellers are not alone in this, and I am quite aware of the fact that booksellers do take advantage of a situation which was created not by

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themselves, but apparently—from information that I have been getting—by a combination of bureaucratic procedures which exist in the Ministries of Education and Consumer Affairs. That is worth taking note of.

I hope that the Minister will be able to enlighten us on some of these systems and whether he has been able to deal with them in his short period in office. I suppose, since booksellers have not taken up a vow of poverty, as far as I know, it is not unexpected that they would take advantage of a situation like this. What worries me is that there are so many families in Trinidad and Tobago who are suffering as a result. I know that the cost of books is controlled to a certain extent and I understand that is one of the issues which the network looked into.

There is an add-on method which apparently operates. In other words, booksellers are allowed to add a cost of arrival to the price on their receipt of books. It is a mark-up of 15 per cent which means that that is an approved profit which they are allowed to make, which is very interesting at a time when lending rates are between 17—20 per cent. I do not know if they have to live on that, how they are expected to do it.

**2.30 p.m.**

However, relatively speaking, there are few booksellers in Trinidad and Tobago who import books. It was not too difficult for the network to get hard information about what happens when the booksellers import books. This information can be verified if the Minister wishes to do so, through the Customs Department because they have all the invoices and information on this.

In addition to taking away from the price which booksellers have to pay for books, there are agents' discounts and the situation to which the hon. Senator referred a few minutes ago, where bulk purchase is done through local agents. There is a volume discount as well, which agents get when they import books. In some instances these discounts come to more than 50 per cent of the actual cost of the book, and in other instances a clear 50 per cent before the bookseller adds on the 15 per cent. In other words, the 15 per cent is somewhat deceptive. I have no objection to this, because I do not know how people can borrow money at 20 or 22 per cent; pay it back with a 15 per cent profit margin and still pay wages. I point this out because at one time a 20 per cent mark-up was allowed. I think under the NAR government this was changed to 15 per cent when mothers approached the government and begged for a little ease.

Maybe it is government bureaucracy; it is just the way procedures have been set up. From what I gather, the price control mechanism means that someone in

the Ministry of Consumer Affairs draws up a list of those books which are to come under this particular provision and it is revised from time to time. I know in 1988, it had not been revised since 1970. I presume the Minister can give us some reassurance that it is now revised on a more regular basis. I gather that principals draw up a book list which is theoretically sent to the Ministry of Education, which then draws up this list or refers information from it to the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, then it is left to someone there to draw up the final list.

From the information I have, at one point a few years ago, there were 2,000 texts in 22 different subjects. To me that is "over the top". The information which has come to me by the network also indicates that very often the principals do not bother to send a list. Some of them do. I make the point that I am not trying to be judgmental about anyone. I know there are many school principals in this country who are deeply committed and concerned about education, and try to ensure that their students are kept up to date with the sort of information which they need in order to live in this century, far more the one that is coming upon us so quickly. In a number of instances the principals do not bother to revise the lists and send them to the ministry so it can check which ones are relevant and then send them on to the Ministry of Consumer Affairs. I hope that the Minister of Education will enlighten us on this procedure and how it is working at the present time.

In a number of schools it seems as though the principals are a law unto themselves and they do not bother to send their lists to the ministry. They submit them to the booksellers and parents *via* the teachers and this is where we get the different editions, and that ridiculous situation where a teacher in Form 1A assigns different books from a teacher in Form 1B, and as a result students cannot pass on the books to their brothers and sisters.

One of the things the network uncovered was a rather curious colonial situation which exists. Mr. President, you would recall from your history lessons during school days that one of the things which characterized the evils of the colonial system was that raw materials were produced in the colony and sent to the mother country to be manufactured, then sent back to the colony so that the natives could consume them at a considerably higher price. The jobs stayed in the mother country instead of in the colony. Apparently, it has been noted that quite a number of schoolbooks which are used in the country are written by school supervisors. These books are published abroad by foreign publishers and printed abroad by foreign printers, and then sent back to Trinidad for local students to consume. This sounds like a curiously repetitive system. The network has

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commented wryly that the supervisors who write these books supervise teachers and principals who, therefore, may be put under some pressure to recommend that these books go on the book list.

When we discussed this whole question of schoolbooks in this honourable Chamber, I think in 1992, I suggested then and I would suggest again that we consider setting up a university press. UWI always says it is short of funds. In other countries throughout the world university presses have been the publishers and printers of schoolbooks as well as other books. It seems to me that we could keep the foreign exchange in the country. We can give jobs to people in printing and publishing if we could set up a university press. This could also be a source of funds for student scholarships, to help with some of the problems which we are facing with literacy in the country.

Let us face it, schoolbooks are essential. I have no objection to school supervisors making some extra money by receiving royalties on schoolbooks which they sell. Their salaries are low enough as it is. I am sure it is a welcomed extra source of income. Foreign publishers do pay royalties. They do not try to avoid it. It seems to me that we should help ourselves more by producing books in the country that are written by people in the country and perhaps we could also start producing books for other Caricom countries.

In 1993, a study was done by Caricom about this whole question of books in Caricom countries. I was very interested to hear Sen. Mannette's comments about buying. I hope the Minister can give us some information. She did not tell us what happened. She said that bulk buying took place in two subsequent years in primary and then in comprehensive schools with English, Maths and Science books. What happened to the books? Are they still around? In Barbados, apparently, all schoolbooks are supplied by the state, distributed to the schools and rented. One of the safeguards is that any student who destroys a book has to pay for it.

**2.40 p.m.**

Until they have paid the cost of the books that they have lost or destroyed, they will not get their exam results at the end of the year, and apparently it works. It does not seem to me to be a very complicated system and if there is one thing which is important in this country, as far as I am concerned, it is the education of children. That so many children are not learning to read because their parents literally cannot afford to buy them books, is to me a scandal.

I am extremely interested in the proposition of getting funds—I do not care from where; from here or abroad—to buy library books. I think that it is an excellent idea to raise funds in communities for library books for primary schools. I think that our booksellers can be a good source of those books. There are many warehouses full of books abroad, which people are not interested in buying and which are going for next to nothing. That kind of bulk buying to supply libraries, primary and secondary schools would not cost us more than a few dollars a book instead of \$15 or \$17 a book. I know it takes some administration, but that surely cannot be beyond the organizational skills of people in this country. That is one thing which I would very much like to see operating.

While I support the question of Government's policy in relation to computer literacy, I am likewise very worried about the low extent of computer literacy in our schools, where our students have to compete with people who have been playing with computers since kindergarten with literally one on each desk. People who have grown up thinking "computers" think differently from persons who have grown up thinking "reading and writing". Their thought patterns are different and the way they operate is different. If our future generations of Trinidadians and Tobagonians are to compete and negotiate on an international level with people whose ways of thinking are substantially different, it will put us at a disadvantage.

Sen. Prof. Spence has just pointed out to me that there is a university press. I renew my plea that the university press be given the contract to print and publish all schoolbooks in Trinidad and Tobago so that we can keep that aspect of education in the country and save on the foreign exchange.

Thank you, Mr. President.

**Sen. Carol Cuffy-Dowlat:** Mr. President, let me first of all say that debate on this type of matter has been long overdue and I must take this opportunity to congratulate Sen. Prof. Ramchand for having brought it before this Senate.

For far too long and from time to time, various educational committees and relevant personnel from the Ministry of Education have tried to implement some measure of standardization of textbooks, but their attempts have not been successful. What is happening now is that the Government is embarking on a procedure to formalize the standardization of textbooks. It would seem that at last some compulsion of and prescriptions would have to take precedence over persuasion and indiscretion. In this regard, I would like to congratulate the Minister of Education for his initiatives in this respect.

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Mr. President, there are some pertinent observations that must be made as the Government inaugurates this new proposal. Standardization of textbooks for schools must never be confused with absolute uniformity in teaching and pedagogical constraints. It does not mean that all schools in the country would be using the same texts for a particular subject area and at all levels. What in fact would happen is that textbook menus for a particular area would include about three or four textbooks from which principals and teachers would chose freely. In addition, my consultation with experts on education has convinced me—and I can personally attest to the fact having had a very short sojourn in that profession—that no teacher worth her salt would ever teach a class of children out of one textbook. A good teacher has so mastered the curricula context that she would have drawn on her own experience and knowledge in the subject area as well as from a variety of textbooks in teaching her class. In fact, teaching that is heavily dependent on any one textbook is really an over-dependency on programmed learning which many students can handle on their own with minimum instructional support.

Mr. President, I can assure Senators that we can get rid once and for all of the alleged constraints and instructional restrictions which the standardization of textbooks supposedly may inflict on the teaching profession. I can assure you that there will be no constraints on the teaching profession. In fact, teachers and principals would continue to receive respect as professionals since they would now have choice within reason. What we would expect is that the setting up of up to five textbooks in various subject areas for a period of perhaps five years would be done after careful study and elimination by a panel of curricula experts within the given subject area.

On such a panel for selection we would expect not only to have curriculum supervisors on the subject areas, but the highly experienced teaching practitioners from our schools who have demonstrated by way of reputation considerable success in the art and practice of teaching in the curriculum area and who would also make a major contribution to the prescribed list. This, Mr. President, is another guarantee that the standardization of textbooks would use and promote professionalism of teachers rather than be negative or inhibitive.

Mr. President, in the existing procedure by which there would be some responsible supervision of the prescribed textbooks for schools and the inadvisable and individualistic if not eccentric proliferation of texts, the existing procedures are in fact more honoured in the breach than in the practice. In fact, the Textbook

Committee of the Ministry of Education had not met for about two years previous to this. A new committee has been appointed under this administration and again we must congratulate the Minister of Education for having taken this initiative.

It is startling, Mr. President, that about 40 per cent of the textbooks used in primary schools today have not been assessed by any appropriate textbook committee. It seems that legislation may become necessary as a guarantee on behalf of the citizens of this country so that the matter of the standardization of textbooks will be taken seriously. This will also ensure that the management of the prescription or setting of textbooks will be regularized and made accountable and efficient.

There are also other pressing reasons why we should further standardize textbooks in our schools. If we standardize, which in fact means reducing to about three or four in a given order, we can bulk purchase books from publishers and producers ensuring that books will be made available at a much cheaper cost to our parents. Also, the individual schools themselves would become the agencies where second-hand books can be sold at half price to incoming and relevant students.

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

This measure would encourage our students to care their textbooks. And indirectly, the habit of handling carefully, books and objects which they use is a desirable and attitudinal objective of the hidden curriculum. Mr. President, if we ask our children to learn to treat things carefully, and to treat with tender care things that we treasure, we may, in fact, be addressing the domestic violence situation that we have today. I think if we start with textbooks, maybe in truth and in fact, the entire nation would benefit.

Further, books can be recycled all the time after initial, large and expensive purchases have been made. At least 60—70 per cent of the books required by students will be made available through the second-hand schoolbook trade. This can also be done through the bookstores. Competition would, of course, be the variability of prices and this can be a positive thing. We may, in fact, become more conscious of where and when we purchase. Therefore, as consumers, we would also become aware of what is happening in our environment, and the suppliers would soon get the message that if their prices are not affordable or competitive they would find that there is no one standing outside their shops.

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Additionally, Mr. President, we are in an era of educational theory and professionalism where there must never be dependency on textbooks only by teachers and students. We all know, and teachers will attest to this, that no one textbook is voluminous enough to play an exclusive role in any curriculum area. The support libraries attached to schools should, and must be utilized. At present many of those libraries in schools have been underutilized. Students must be made to pursue educational material in given areas on their own. We must encourage our students to use the libraries. A lot of information and instructional material such as audio tapes, video cassettes, book periodicals, journals, magazines and newspapers are available. In fact, Mr. President, supplementary material can be produced by teachers at minimal cost. This is a matter which I think departmental heads and members of the teaching profession can examine.

When we consider the facilities available at the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre, we know that the centre can take the lead in the provision and dissemination of teaching and learning material for teachers and it is specially intended to be compensatory to textbooks in use. Therefore, teachers would be able to supplement the work at schools by making use of the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre to assist in the promotion of the education of their students.

Mr. President, I am certain that I have made every attempt, and that I would have alleviated the fears that my colleagues had, that could have arisen out of the standardization of textbooks. In the widest interest of all the children of this nation, I feel strongly that this measure would bring relief to thousands of our citizens all over this country. However, there are a couple of factors that should also receive priority simultaneously with the introduction of the standardization of textbooks.

Booksellers are having a field-day by persuading schools to introduce all kinds of new textbooks which have never been examined for suitability and efficiency and textbooks committees in the subject area would have to deal with this expeditiously. There must be ongoing review of texts since textbooks need not be changed every five years. New revised editions should also compete with newly produced textbooks. As most of my colleagues here would agree, at times, there are very few changes to the original text in the revised editions,. Again, teachers



can play a major role in ensuring that changes are brought to the attention of their charges. They would have to rise to higher standards of expertise and professionalism themselves. I assure you, Mr. President, that the beneficiaries of this would be the citizens of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you.

**Sen. Dr. Eastlyn Mc Kenzie:** Mr. President, I would like to make some comments based on the recommendations of the committee. Before I do that, however, let me congratulate Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand for bringing this Motion to the Senate.

I will go through some of the points raised in the report and briefly comment on them from my experience and thinking. The report speaks of reducing the dependency on textbooks and recommending that teachers produce their own material for classroom use. Mr. President, this has been going on for years.

I remember as a young teacher, from 1960 to 1970 according to the interest of the children—especially the children in the post-primary classes where they were showing, not so much an academic inclination, but moreso sport and so forth—all their Mathematics, their English, and their Geography, as we called it in those days, were from material composed by the teachers. Therefore, this is something that has been going on. What I think has to happen is that our curriculum experts in the Ministry of Education would have to recognize the teachers who have that talent and inclination and to encourage it, whether asking them to submit the types of material they have been producing or to recognize and appreciate the efforts that they have been making.

I know of books of mathematics on cricket, averages taught on cricket, geography taught on cricket. Where the cricket side came from; who is the Prime Minister of the country who landed at that airport; what is the name of the airport; what food would one get if one landed there. Mr. President, they would know if cricket was played in Barbados they would get flying fish and so forth. All this was done and the children loved it.

I look at the bulk purchasing and we have to be very cognizant of the fact that the organization of something like that would be very costly, time-consuming and would use much expertise. If we are not very careful the candle could cost more than the funeral. Let us ensure, Sir, that when we are making up the processes to bring the bulk purchasing into being that we have it in such a way that we do not

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lose in the end; that we do not gain five cents and spend ten cents. We have to be very careful.

I looked again at the book loans to students and I was very pleased when Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt spoke about what happens in Barbados. I know that there have been book loans to children, especially in the secondary schools—in fact, I only know of it in the secondary schools—and it is always troublesome to get back the books from the fifth-formers. As you know, Mr. President, during the month of examinations these children would take time to study at home and would probably just turn up for their subjects. By that time, however, one cannot take away the books from the child on the last day of the official school term. The child goes home, studies and he comes and writes his exams but he leaves the books at home. Are we going to do as Barbados does and withhold the slip when the results come out? We have to put mechanisms in place if we are going to institute this type of thing.

I look again at the second-hand book sales. Mr. President, this is a thriving enterprise that is going on. It may not be as organized, as some people believe, in bookstores. I do know, however, that in bookstores in Tobago there are second-hand book sales. I know that some parent teachers' associations have them in the secondary schools. I know that some of the sixth-formers organize this within their debating clubs in their schools.

**3.00 p.m.**

I know that in the villages, neighbours exchange books with other neighbours; there are hand downs from the bigger ones to the smaller ones, to cousins, to relatives. So it is thriving; it is going on very, very much. What I would advise against is where the people who sell second-hand books in very good condition are given next to nothing for them, as Prof. Ramchand said, and I think this is what we have to be alert about.

Mr. President, I may be odd, but somehow I support, to a certain extent, different books for different classes. I have had the experience in the primary school in which I taught, where the principal of one of the secondary schools came to my primary school to borrow readers because the crop of students he got for one of his first forms from the Common Entrance Examinations, a whole class could not read the text that was prescribed. He had to come to borrow some of the primary school readers to actually teach these children to read. So the levels were so different that it called for a different text. Sometimes we have to be careful that we do not make our rules so strict that we cannot go outside of what is prescribed to facilitate the children.

The use of books for three years and five years I have heard—yes and no; sometimes it stifles the initiative and the creativity of the very authors whom we are trying to encourage. Because if we are going to say that we cannot change a book in three to five years—as I have heard some principals say, “a new book comes that is so good I believe that the style, content and everything will fit my students better than the one I have been using for the past two years”—you are telling me that I am stifled by that or, I am scared or afraid. I think we have to look at some sort of leniency towards that. I am not saying that it should be abused, but where a good case could be put by a principal or a staff; it should be looked at.

Mr. President, much has been said with respect to the textbook committee; the publishing of book prices, the removal of the duty on paper for books and so forth. With respect to book loans to students, I have spoken on that. I want to speak now about the school libraries. I think that more use could be made of school libraries by the children. I know that the Ministry of Education, over the years, and for that matter within the last two years, has done much to provide primary schools with books for the libraries. They have actually given them the bookshelves and books have been supplied continuously to the schools and there was upgrading of these libraries. A very good point made in the report was the inter-library loan.

Also, I think we should look at the types of books being sent to the different districts. For example, I think a different type of book should be sent to Charlotteville than what you would send to another area. Probably books about fishing, farming, mending nets and so forth, would interest those children, because it is so familiar. It does not mean that it is confined to that.

I like the idea of the pull-out in the newspapers. Schools could actually compile material and children could subscribe probably \$1.50 and use these pull-outs from the newspapers to compile and make their own books.

Again, I want to look at the sort of recommendations made in the committee for the needs that each school should have, such as a digital duplicating machine, photocopier, word processing facility, overhead projector, slide projector, and so forth.

The secondary schools in Tobago, I know, probably with the exception of one private secondary school, would have a duplicating machine—and they would consider that very obsolete—a photocopier—90 per cent of the times not working—overhead projector—I am not sure, and so forth. I think two primary

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schools would have a photocopier and these were gifts from past students or people from the public sector. So in our primary schools we have none of these; in the secondary schools you probably have one or two of these.

What I think is more pressing is that the division of education should be given a stock of some of these things that they could put at the disposal of schools or loan to schools. In the division of education where I worked we had a duplicating machine that worked 10 per cent of the time; we had a photocopier that broke down 90 per cent of the time; we have an overhead projector and I do not think I ever saw a slide projector. I know we have one at the youth camp.

What I am suggesting is that the Ministry should equip the division of education, in the interim, until we can satisfy the requirements, with some of these facilities that they could make them, or the service, available to our primary and secondary schools. Sen. London, as the principal of Signal Hill Senior Comprehensive School, when his photocopier broke down his teachers would come with their paper to me and ask if the division of education could assist. Sometimes we cannot; I will go to YTEPP to seek their assistance and they may say, "bring your paper and we will run it off for you". Why should we have one that if it breaks down we do not have the facility of another? I think we should have about four because if you have only one the strain on that one causes it to break down.

So I am suggesting that the Ministry of Education or the division of education, should be supplied with some of this type of equipment, or whatever, that if they cannot supply the machinery itself to the schools, they could at least give the service to the schools. Again, I say that much of what has been recommended has been happening already. I know the bulk purchasing has started. I know our primary schools have dictionaries and what have you.

Finally, I would say that alongside what the Government will do, must come an education of parents and so forth; an education to make them realize how important education is; an education to make them realize how important and costly books are; an education to make them realize that they have to set their priorities right in terms of what they supply their children with. Because we would not think it wise that a child could be given a \$500.00 pair of sneakers and he does not have his reader. He does not have his reader but he has a watch; he does not have an exercise book or a library book but he has a walkman. So, you see, alongside what we are doing, must be an education to our parents; an involvement of our PTAS; an involvement of TTUTA and everyone in this business of educating

our children and making our books available and affordable and taking priority over the trivial things that parents accede to the likes and the wants of their children and what we leave undone.

**3.10 p.m.**

I welcome this Motion, Mr. President, and I am not going to deal with the booksellers and their rights because they are in business and are there to make a profit. If TTUTA thought the business was so lucrative, they also could get into the book business. I am not here to query the business people and their business, but I am saying that we who are trying to give a service to those who cannot afford it and to make it available, we also have to safeguard our stake in the business and to ensure that our priorities and values are right. There must be respect for property and respect for books. There are cleaners who, when they have finished their chores at the end of the day, find stacks of books under desks and on the floor. We have to ensure that when we try to meet people half the way, that they are also helping themselves.

Again, congratulations to Sen. Prof. Ramchand on bringing this Motion and thank you, Mr. President.

**Sen. Rev. Daniel Teelucksingh:** Mr. President, I wish to compliment and support Sen. Prof. Ramchand on bringing before this Senate a Motion which focuses on a very serious problem which negatively affects several families across this nation. The matter of the rising cost of schoolbooks constitutes a social burden which previous governments have not treated with the seriousness and urgency that the population demanded of them. We all identify with Sen. Prof. Ramchand's insistence, that the present Government should act upon the recommendations of the 1992 School Textbooks Committee. I do not believe he is saying that it is the best report on the subject, for we have had many reports. He is putting forward this as one of the most recent and very important reports which can be a guide for the present Government and all of us to do something positively.

Mr. President, we are very pleased that there are indications already that the hon. Minister of Education is responding to the need for decisive and determined action. I hope that the new Cabinet-appointed committee of which we have been hearing and reading about the standardization and selection of school textbooks will not merely prepare a 1996 report as a UNC/NAR report or to rival or replace a PNM 1992 report. We have had enough of that. Sen. Prof. Ramchand echoes in his

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Motion the pleading of the poorer people of Trinidad and Tobago, that group comprising about 36 per cent of our population.

We have to make a confession. Most of us in this honourable Chamber, the wealthier citizens, and some of us might be close to that group, or those of us of upper middle class may complain a little about the cost of schoolbooks, but in truth and in fact, it is a Motion for the poor. We make much fuss, but we can afford books. We have bought books for our children without much fuss, and we never notice there is a problem, because we were able to dump those books at the end of one school year or just give them away for next to nothing in a garage sale. That is common. Any time there is a garage sale for schoolbooks, they are called by rich, well-to-do people. This Motion is not for them.

What have we done to the poor students of this country, who, for the past 20 years had to face the exorbitant cost of schoolbooks which may partly be responsible for the illiteracy of many of these young persons? Schoolbooks were never in their bag so they found something else to put there.

Previous governments and their Ministry of Education sat back as though helpless and allowed the cost of textbooks and the unregulated proliferation of these books on any one subject to escalate beyond the reach of the poor. Where was, and where is the authority to regulate the cost and the use of textbooks? I shall quote two comments by the press. A report on October 6, 1996 from the *Trinidad Guardian* states:

“...it was up to the Education Ministry to set standards for pricing and quality of textbooks...”

That is their perception. We have been getting at them for the exorbitant prices and all the other things about their trade. Now they are saying it was up to the Ministry of Education, not the importers, nor the distributors, but the Ministry of Education, to set standards for pricing and the quality of textbooks. There is another one reported in the press today. A spokesperson for the booksellers is saying the same thing, that the Ministry of Education should step in. In fact, I am saying now that they should have stepped in 20 years ago, and the booksellers know that. This is not a revelation today, because they, as well as parents and legislators know that. You know that too, Mr. President.

The article went on to state that there are three things the Ministry should address:

- “(i) better co-ordination with schools in a timely manner about what textbooks they need, when, and in what quantities;
- (ii) that they promote the thrust of local publishing; and
- (iii) perhaps they could streamline the process that the textbook committee uses to approve books.”

I believe they are correct. This is my thesis today. I am not going to look at the booksellers, I am looking at the Government and the Ministry of Education who have been the policy-makers over the years. I am not going to blame the people who have been doing their trade.

I just want to point out something about the Common Entrance examinations which I believe all the legislators know, and I am using this as one area of the education scenario in Trinidad and Tobago where there is a glaring exploitation of both the rich and the poor. For years in this country since the Common Entrance examination was introduced, the students and their parents have suffered tremendously due to a well-orchestrated and a well-entrenched textbook racket which is no secret. The only persons who seem never to know about this racket were the governments of yesteryear and I hope that the Government of today would be able to see this.

This matter is well documented. Almost everyone in this country knows that on the day of the examination when the common entrance papers were supposed to be returned to the Ministry of Education, people would get photographs of them because their friends were invigilators. These common entrance papers were compiled and modified by certain persons and instead of using the same figures for a mathematical problem, they just change the figures and names and print them for \$10.00, maybe, at local printeries and sell them for \$40.00. This racket has been going on for the longest while. Do you know what is the excuse? They are workbooks. They are workbooks, but in truth and in fact they are sold and used as textbooks.

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

Mr. President, do you know that the same kind of racket extends to the secondary schools, today, as I speak? Anyone can write a textbook, and somebody would say that is a good idea. There is no standard text. At one time for the preparation of the Common Entrance examination, one could have found 15 different workbooks for Social Studies written by 15 different common entrance teachers. One wondered where they got all that information; and those books were

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compulsory in their school, their friends' schools and in their nennens' school. That is the kind of racket that our government sat down and allowed over the years; that is the kind of racket that I would challenge the present Government to investigate immediately, and put a stop to it.

I am pleased that Sen. Dowlat spoke about the textbook committee, because there are persons in the Ministry of Education who make me feel guilty since Sen. Ramchand spoke; they say 'You fellows in the Senate do not know what you are talking about'. I am very glad she intervened because I have always been reminded that the Ministry has a textbook committee. I am also glad she reminded us that the textbook committee has not met for the last two years. No wonder everybody had a field day.

Do you know where the real problem is? My contention is that the real problem may not be with the importers and distributors; the real problem can be found within the halls of the Ministry of Education and the educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago. That is where the clean-up must begin. It is very important. That is where it must begin. Not in the bookstores, and not with those fellows who sell used books outside the stores, and not with the printers in England. Not at all. The clean-up must start within the Ministry of Education!

It is most interesting that the last report of the Auditor General, earlier this year, listed a certain number of thefts. That report was laid in this honourable House and I must look at it again, but I am absolutely certain. It tells me something. Heading the list of different ministries and other places where there are thefts that he could point out, the Ministry of Education was No. 1! Look at that again.

**Sen. Daly:** Educated thieves.

**Sen. Rev. D. Teelucksingh:** Yes. Look at that again. Talk about racket! Racket involving school principals, teachers, supervisors—officials of the Ministry. You talk about book vultures? Book vultures have had a field-day over the years, and the people who suffered the most have been the poor. The eyes of the poor have been plucked out by the book vultures who have enjoyed themselves and have had a field day; while the Ministry of Education, the whole department and the Government itself have sat by and allowed this matter to go unchecked. This is why I support this Motion. I see the report not as being a PNM report, and the new committee as a UNC/NAR committee, but as a search by all of us—a community that has suffered so much; a community that has been begging, crying and calling



on the Government, on the Executive, to do something on our behalf, because they have the money and the power to do it. The ball is in the hon. Minister's court, and we hope and pray that this Motion will be an incentive for his Government to do something on behalf of the tens of thousands who have suffered, and the many who are still suffering.

I thank you, Mr. President.

**Sen. Martin Daly:** Mr. President, like all those before me, I would like to congratulate Sen. Ramchand for moving this Motion. It is always pleasing when we can try to deal with something in the Parliament which is really relevant to the lives of ordinary people; and the schoolbook issue is certainly a real live and painful issue for many people in this country.

Mr. President, I would associate myself with those who spoke today, and agree that the problem of schoolbook prices is not going to be solved simply by an attack on booksellers. In my very practical way, it seems to me that the booksellers are responding to the market that has been created by the curriculum committees and the teachers and all those responsible for which textbooks are used. So that if they respond to that in a certain way, and we suffer as a result, then we must find a way of dealing with the market they have created.

I note that it is regarded as a major achievement that the textbook committee has been reactivated and one worthy of congratulation that we are moving to standardize textbooks. But I wonder if that is really all that is required. Likewise, Mr. President, I will not have to spend time talking about the sneakers, the walkman and the watches, because very happily, my colleague of unusually robust common-sense, Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie, has done so. I had scribbled a note here to talk more about parents spending less upon sneakers and more upon books, but that is not necessary because Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie, and David Rudder before her, dealt with the *Nike* psychology.

But it always comes back to my favourite theme, you know, Mr. President, on the question of priorities and common objectives, and what help we are giving parents to understand the importance of these books for which they have to pay so much money. But I will not dilate on that, today, Mr. President, because I really rise in relation to this Motion, first of all to support it, and secondly, to say a few words about an amendment which I have proposed and which, I believe, has been circulated.

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I may say, Mr. President, that we must all learn by experience; and I have taken the trouble to consult with the mover and the seconder of the original Motion before circulating this amendment, so hopefully, that will make things move a little more smoothly, and require less interpretation of the Standing Orders.

Now, Mr. President, I know very little about education, except that I had, what I consider, a good one. I was fortunate enough to have a good one. What I know, Mr. President, is that whatever we were being taught in school and whatever desire one had to read was readily facilitated by going to a library. I do not know that such a thing is so easily possible anymore. Of course, I am not talking about the hole in the ground on St. Vincent Street, I am talking about the libraries that existed when I was a child growing up. I have to keep reminding the Senators that as a child growing up in Newtown, the libraries were available. Trinidad was safe enough that you could walk to the Central Library, which was in the basement of Whitehall, or you could walk to the Public Library which was where it is now, without fear of molestation, or harm; without fear of being kidnapped for a 'snuff' movie, and so forth. So you see what a different place it has become! I suppose that somebody, speaking about this Motion, will talk about the importance of libraries and where they fit in as a means of providing books for students, whether they are books actually on the curriculum, or books which will support what they are learning in schools.

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

I am now quite confused about the fate of libraries because we are hearing so many conflicting things. All I can say, is as a little boy growing up in Newtown, we used to walk to the Central Library right there in the basement of Whitehall. Actually, it is strange; there was no burglar proofing in the library and if the book was overdue, the library would send out a note through the post, if someone did not have a telephone, saying that it was overdue and that he would be fined for bringing back the overdue book and it would make him feel quite embarrassed. These things are all relevant to the state of our society, because we talk all this lofty business about world class, where we are going, and financial centre, and all these little nuts and bolts have been lost. So, there was no burglar proofing in the library and if one was sent a note through the mail saying that a book was overdue, the mail came to the house, or the light pole, or the post office, as the case may be.

I am now on my third attempt to get something that was posted to me by an airline and I cannot get it yet, and I know why. When it reaches the post office, it looks as though it is valuable and it is taken. I know that is the reason. So we are

right back to common objectives and how the society is organised. We cannot get away from these things when we talk about any of these motions.

However, Mr. President, let me come to the amendment which I am proposing. I do not think it is Sen. Ramchand's intention—in fact, he has made it very plain that he sees the need to reassess schoolbooks in the context of computerization, disks, CD-ROM and so forth. Sen. Mannette dealt with that today as well. That is what stimulated me to take an interest in this Motion and to move the amendment which I am proposing, because there is something a little static about this Motion and some of the discussion we are having on it because the Motion in print kind of assumed—Sen. Ramchand has made it clear he does not make that kind of assumption—that textbooks will be with us for another century and I am not at all sure about that.

There are many others in this Chamber who understand the implications of computerization and modern technological links better than I do, but I want to give a simple example about the price of books which is part of the reason for my raising this amendment, so we can discuss what impact electronic means of learning will not only have on the price of schoolbooks, but how we plan to teach people in the future. Because I think the price of schoolbooks, common sense tells me, must be related to what we teach, how we teach it and why we are teaching it.

I do not know whether many of these textbooks should not only be replaced by electronic means of learning, but I would like to know whether we are not going to discuss the very static situation that we have in education where we are still basically insisting that a good, old, grammar school education is the right education for our people and whether it is the right education for us at this stage in the century. I would have thought all those things would impact on schoolbooks. We might be wasting a great deal of money in making people buy books to teach them certain grammar school subjects, when they should be provided with other tools that are not books, tools of a trade, which I believe can be learnt in conjunction with a grammar school education. I do not understand.

We have a lot of talk about segregation now. I do not understand why we segregate people in schools, that one either goes to a grammar school, some of which are called 'prestige schools', so I suppose the 'prestige school' is like "The Base" and the grammar school is like the "Parrot". I do not know. It is a whole segregated thing and if one is not going to grammar school, one is sent to John D. There is this whole segregation and I want to challenge all of those assumptions in the context of the price of schoolbooks, because I am certain that millions of

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dollars are being spent by parents to buy books for children who have been forced into a grammar school education who, if they are doing grammar school subjects at all, should be doing that in conjunction with some kind of useful trade, bearing in mind that when one comes out with four or five CXC passes, one cannot get a job. I want to challenge all of those assumptions because I feel huge sums of money are being wasted on schoolbooks because we have not considered what we are teaching, how we are teaching it and why we are teaching it. I would like to raise those issues for debate.

Now, in relation to the price of books, I just share with those of my colleagues who are not in my profession what impact modern technology has had on the price of books. I give a simple example. Lawyers spend huge sums of money on books which are very expensive and we have all the same problems. They come from abroad; they are subject to the fluctuation of foreign exchange; we have to have them; the editions change constantly although there are some that have gone into loose-leaf.

Ironically, and I am sure that Sen. Ramchand particularly would be interested in knowing this, the law reports which are called the *West Indian Law Reports* are the most expensive of all, because they are printed abroad and we are told that the market is so small that those reports have to be very high priced. Therefore, I have to go to *Butterworths*, whose accounting system I never understood except I know I overpay them on a regular basis. In fact, I must consult with Sen. Hamel-Smith to find out how he escapes the tentacles of *Butterworths*. Perhaps he has a system. I go to *Butterworths* and pay twice as much for a volume of the *West Indian Law Reports* as I have to pay for the *All England Law Reports*. So you see, Sen. Ramchand, the problem which you have described is not confined to schoolbooks alone.

But there is one set of law reports which we ought to have in our libraries. I will just give a simple example. It is called the *All England Law Reports* and currently comprises 175 volumes. They produce four volumes per year and each volume, Mr. President, as you might know, costs £85. Multiplied by 10, that is \$850 of our money. We have to buy four \$850 books for that set. I mean there are many others. Four \$850 per volume books per year to keep one's set up to date. Now, interestingly, some years ago—I think it was about two years ago—we got some promotional material which said that all 175 volumes—and remember, Mr. President, it keeps growing by four volumes a year—were now available on a disk for £1,600. Quite apart from the fact that the disk is the cost of 20 books in

relation to a library of 175 volumes that grows by four every year, quite apart from the obviously favourable price of the disk in relation to continuing to buy the hard copy at the prices which I have suggested, of course it means one saves on storage and consequently in the ideal world, one's office would get smaller because one would not have to store all these books and have all the book shelves. And, of course, if as I do, someone leaves Port of Spain on a weekend, he could put the disk in his pocket—actually he could put it in his bathing suit pocket—when he heads for the coast as I do at the weekend, and he has the 175 volumes of the *All England Law Reports* with him.

It seems to me that if that is the position with regard to law reports, presumably similar things may be happening in relation to what are called school textbooks and even if they are not, when I listen to the experts like Sen. Dr. McKenzie contribute to this debate, and we understand that our teachers are frequently producing their own material and so forth, it seems to me that the electronic means of learning opens up whole new possibilities in relation to the cost of textbooks. In any event, I cannot believe that we are simply going to, as a political issue, reduce the cost of schoolbooks and pay no attention to the fact that our children, if they have to compete with any part of the world, however small, have to know how to learn and to communicate by electronic means and, therefore, we should not be talking about textbooks completely in isolation.

The amendment which I am proposing, Mr. President—I believe it has been circulated but I will read it very quickly—is to add at the very end of the Motion, not only to ask the Government to take steps to reduce the increases in schoolbooks, but I am proposing:—

Add at the end of the resolution, after the words "such increases", the following:—

"and to include in those steps the reduction of the use of schoolbooks by the introduction of electronic means of learning as an equally important means of learning at the appropriate level in the education system".

Because I think it is very important that we make this link to electronic means of learning in relation to the debate on the price of schoolbooks.

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

I think it is also very important to draw the Government out on its policy. What is the Government's policy with regard to the stimulation and the hastening

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of electronic means of learning in our schools? I keep saying it is in relation to what we teach, how we teach it and why we teach it. I think it is very important and this amendment is designed not only to support Sen. Prof. Ramchand's excellent Motion, not only to encapsulate much of what has been said in the debate about electronic means of learning, but to find out from the Government what is its policy with regard to this. I entirely agree with Sen. Rev. Teelucksingh; it is not just a question of which government brings down the price of schoolbooks and that would be a consideration.

So are we going to make this choice on the basis of just bringing down the price of schoolbooks? We will just be "brambling" people by telling them we made schoolbooks cheaper. What we are not telling many parents who do not fully understand, particularly among the poor, are the implications of electronic means of learning. We will just be "brambling" them by bringing down the price of schoolbooks and not pushing the barriers further and carrying our education system where it is supposed to be, that is to say, to cater substantially for electronic means of learning.

I propose in this brief contribution really to summarize now what I am saying. I entirely agree with the sentiments of the Motion and that the price of schoolbooks is unacceptable and out of the reach of many ordinary persons in this society, and some measure must be thought out to make these books more affordable to those who have to go through the education system and cannot afford the price of books. But I do insist that the price of schoolbooks is not related simply to the economics of book publishing and book buying. At the risk of repetition, the amount of money that parents have to spend on schoolbooks is related to what we teach, how we teach it and why we teach it. I am equally strong on all of those things.

I am against segregation which I believe exists in the education system, that you either go to a grammar school or a trade school and we streamline and segregate people in that way. As I said on a previous occasion, this is never going to change as long as the 11-plus examination remains the test of a child's capability and determines a child's future for the rest of its life and, I regret to say, in many cases determines the social status of the parent of the successful child.

I complained that every Minister of Culture comes and says, "steelband, the most important invention in the 21st Century", then we pick up one of the newspapers every weekend and we see where there is a pan factory in Ohio, a professor of steelband in China, none of which we have, incidentally. Now in

precisely the same way, every Minister of Education comes and tells us that he is getting rid of the 11-plus examination. The last Minister who told us that is now out of politics. Maybe, Mr. Minister, it is a very dangerous thing to say that you are getting rid of the 11-plus examination, because the last Minister who told us that is out of politics, and indeed, is under suspicion of "leak" and "must declare himself by 4.00 o'clock", and so forth. So you see what a terrible thing this Common Entrance Examination is? It affects the careers of parents as well as children and it affects the careers of Ministers. So be very careful, Mr. Minister, what you say about the 11-plus examination. I know you have to talk about it, but perhaps you could take a more wary approach.

Indeed I saw another Minister of Education who spoke about the 11-plus examination talking on the television this morning about party constitutions. What this 11-plus examination does to people is a terrible thing, you know. Apparently he had written a report and he could not get it read for 10 years. So do be careful what you say about the 11-plus examination. It really is a problem.

We must not discuss school textbooks purely in the context of the reduction of prices. In my respectful view, we have got to raise these broader issues in order to deal with this problem properly. I would ask in due course for my amendment to be supported and if I can raise a seconder.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

*Secinded by Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt.*

*Question, on amendment, proposed.*

**Mr. President:** Senators who wish to speak may speak on the amendment as well as on the original Motion. That is for Senators who have not as yet spoken; Senators who have already spoken may only speak on the amendment.

**The Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs (Sen. Dr. The Hon. Daphne Phillips):** Mr. President, I rise to speak on the original Motion. I would like to congratulate Sen. Prof. Ramchand on bringing this Motion to the Senate which I support.

I would like to link the responsibility of the Government for ensuring adequacy of textbooks in terms of cost and availability—which I agree is the responsibility of a government—to other factors in the classroom which influence learning. I am talking, particularly, about social, cultural and interpersonal factors which contribute to learning which we must also take into account in the whole area of

learning in the classroom. The care and guidance of the children is also the responsibility of a government. That responsibility has been entrusted largely to teachers. So teachers in the school system really have a very sacred responsibility for caring and guiding the children. We know, as well, that the learning process, which is taking place in the classroom, is facilitated by the social climate of the classroom and the interpersonal relationships between the children and the teachers.

Teaching, as we know, has always been a noble profession, a very sacred profession. The lives of children are entrusted to the teachers. We heard from Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie how in her experience, in addition to having or not having books, the teachers went out of their normal expectations, perhaps, and did much in the classroom to encourage learning. Whether there were books or not, that was not sufficient; the teachers had to create ways of encouraging learning and doing things for enhancing learning in the classroom.

So the role of the teacher in the classroom is a very noble and responsible one and it should be well guarded. The responsibility of teachers should be understood by teachers. I would dare say that any abdication of that responsibility would be indeed a serious issue.

### **3.50 p.m.**

We know as well, that parents, particularly among the poor, sacrifice a lot in getting their children to school. The uniform, the books, all of these are a great sacrifice for children, as Sen. Prof. Ramchand showed; it sometimes means that they have to go without food, clothing and so forth. What goes on in the classroom is extremely important and, therefore, should be facilitated by an adequate supply of textbooks, although textbooks alone do not guarantee learning.

It was our first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Eric Williams who said that the future of the nation is in the schoolbags. Today, if we look at what is in the schoolbags of several children, we find that there are no books or few books, guns, knives or drugs. In too many of these schoolbags we find these things.

I am saying that the role of the teacher is even more important in today's environment and under the social conditions which exist around us. The future of the nation must also be linked to the degree of responsibility of the teachers in carrying out their role in caring and guiding children in this country toward



success. The future of the nation, therefore, is entrusted to the teachers and the teachers guide the lives of our children.

Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt mentioned the fall in the literacy rate and, indeed, if we look at academic successes in Trinidad and Tobago, we see a very sad picture. A report in the *Trinidad Guardian* of today's date showed that 63 per cent of students failed the CXC examinations. In my own research, I found that in one year, of approximately 30,000 children who sat the CXC examinations, just above 50 per cent passed no subject at all at their first try. I repeat, just about 50 per cent did not pass even one subject. For those children who went through the junior secondary school system—and in the year I am talking about, approximately 10,000 such students sat the CXC examinations—only 30 students got a full pass at the CXC examinations. A full pass meaning five subjects at the first try. That means that in all the classrooms in Trinidad and Tobago, if we say a classroom averages 30 students, only one classroom was successful by our current measures of success; that is passing five subjects.

Parents are spending their money; the last figure I believe the Government spent was \$1.1 billion on education each year and only 30 children out of 10,000 who went through the junior secondary school system were successful. That is less than one per cent for students who spent three years in the junior secondary system and two years at the senior comprehensive level. So there is a high degree of failure however we measure it. Of course, there are high pass rates at some select schools but at the junior secondary level there is a high degree of failure. Is it because these children did not have the adequate books? Perhaps, that is part of the reason, but it is certainly more than that. The responsibility which teachers have for encouraging success must also be looked at. This is a very important responsibility.

Government's attempt at standardizing the school textbooks to make them more available to parents and to students is the Government's role and this Government is doing whatever is necessary. But this role must be enhanced by the relations that go on in the classroom.

Mr. President, the social climate of the classroom contributes to these relations. What I mean by this is that when students are encouraged, when they can model their behaviour after their teachers, this enhances learning. This is important for self-esteem and for self-assurance.

One of the ways in which this type of interaction and this type of encouragement is created, is through extra-curricular activities. These enhance

social integration; a sense of belonging is encouraged and enhanced through cultural and sporting activities in the school, not only through academic activities themselves. These activities enhance learning and performance because children feel a sense of belonging, they feel a sense of participation. When they can identify with a school, a teacher or a unit, they feel better about themselves and so they perform.

Recently my Ministry assisted two schools in sending their children abroad to play the pan. The schools were the Arima Senior Comprehensive who went to Keywest, Florida and Success Stars Pan Sounds from Laventille who went to Scotland. When these children returned their experiences were so magnanimous. They returned feeling enthused. They went with teachers who had been teaching them their academic subjects but who were also involving them in all the extra activities that were necessary to put together a pan orchestra that would allow them to go abroad—and they were actually applauded by the whole world. The teachers reported that these students' academic performance did improve. They felt good about themselves. The experiences could in no way be costed in terms of the money with which we assisted them in travelling.

Equally, children who were involved in the school netball, football, plays and so forth—we can remember our days being in plays and feeling so good about ourselves. So that these activities must also be taken into account in enhancing learning and providing success. We have found that children who seem to be academically weak improve when they feel a part of, and are involved culturally and socially within the schools. The dedication of the teachers in the school and the fact that the school performs as a team, is essentially important to the well-being of the student.

#### **4.00 p.m.**

If we are providing education we have to look at the whole package, part of which includes a very important component which is the dedication of the teacher. This is more important in the social environment in our country. I note that in recent times extra curricular activities have been curtailed in most schools. We know about the school football activities being curtailed and the school drama festival in which my Ministry is also involved. These build stamina; encourage integration, healthy competition and enhance academic and learning performance. If we are to get our money's worth out of education—which by the way takes one of the largest slices of the budget—then we cannot only look at the cost of books although that is very important. We have to look at the social climate of the

classroom and the psychological well-being of our children because these contribute to success.

While Government is responsible for ensuring adequacy and availability of schoolbooks and perhaps other materials at reasonable prices for our children and particularly the poor children—the Government is attending to this—teachers must also be responsible because they are the persons to whom education, the future of the children and the nation are entrusted. They have a very significant role in contributing, dedicating and understanding their responsibility, and in doing so for the benefit of the children.

This role should not be abandoned or abdicated especially in the context, as I said before, of today's circumstances. Government has a role which this Government intends to ensure that it plays. This is the most that we can do in terms of providing textbooks at reasonable costs. The other part of that role is with the teachers who must, for the benefit of the country, ensure that they carry out their roles.

**Sen. Orville London:** Mr. President, let me first say that I support the Motion moved by Sen. Prof. Ramchand and Sen. Daly's amendment. I think it is necessary for me to make a brief intervention to comment on the trend of this particular debate. I preface my contribution by indicating that we who are involved in politics must recognize that as far as the country is concerned, they recognize that teachers and administrators care about children, and in most cases they care about the children and the parents more than the politicians. If we start off with that kind of premise, I think one of the things we should try not to do, is to be too rigid when we dictate to teachers and administrators exactly how they should conduct their business in the schools of the country.

We have heard a lot of talk about textbooks and their costs. I agree that sometimes the cost impacts negatively on the performance of students in schools. One has to be certain that when one restricts the way in which principals and teachers are asked to deal with this issue, that one does nothing which would affect the ability of those institutions to deliver the curriculum in an effective manner. If there is a *carte blanche* order that textbooks should not be changed within five years... Let me state that I compliment Sen. Ramchand's committee for the very innovative way in which it hopes to deal with this problem about the editing of textbooks. I have no problem with that.

I repeat Sen. Mc Kenzie's concern that sometimes there are genuine situations where there is no choice than to request that a book be changed. I am suggesting that we must recognize that teachers and principals for the most part are just as concerned about the kind of pressures placed on parents and students where textbooks are concerned. I make it very clear that as somebody involved in the education system for an extended period of time, I suggest that less than 5 per cent of the students in the schools that I have taught were unable to acquire textbooks. Students and parents have very innovative ways of acquiring textbooks. In many cases that is not a major issue.

As we talk about textbooks, I want us to recognize that sometimes we go down a very dangerous road when we allow ourselves to be caught up in a situation and deal with this specific problem; pat ourselves on the backs because we have seemingly dealt with this specific problem, but because we have taken a piecemeal approach to the situation, we end up not dealing with the real problem. This is why I feel that considering that the Minister of Education is with us and he has managed to be minister for almost one year without making any comprehensive statement on education, that maybe we should take the opportunity to arrange the Motion in such a way that would provide him with the opportunity to tell us the Government's policy on education in the country.

Before the Government came into power, I think most teachers, parents and students throughout the country were beginning to feel a little energized and enthused because of this White Paper by the national task force on education. This sent a signal that a comprehensive document was prepared after months of consultation that attempted to deal with all the problems which had faced educators and the education system over the years, and to come up with something with which all the players were comfortable. What I find extremely disturbing is that every now and again one hears an announcement about something being taken out of this task force report, but no effort is made to see how it is linked with other things in the report. This textbook situation is one which I accept is important to educational development in the country. It is only a little part of the problem. If we spend a lot of time focusing on that little part of the problem we might end up losing the big picture. That is why I concur with much of what was said by Sen. Dr. Phillips about the need to look at this not only from the narrow perspective of the cost of textbooks. I want all of us to recognize that one of the issues which this report focussed on was the role of the teacher. Sen. Dr. Phillips did focus on the role of the teacher.

**4.10 p.m.**

I just want to quote from page 12 of that report:

“The education system depends on the commitment and performance, the quality of its personnel, for the full realisation of its goals and objectives.”

In Sen. Dr. Phillips’ statement she did indicate that the role of the teacher is extremely important—that it is critical. I am also suggesting, Mr. President, that what is equally critical is the role of the Government in ensuring that the teachers of the country have the kind of relationship with the Government so that they remain committed. I know that the majority of teachers are committed. One of the things that I am hoping that the Minister of Education will be able to tell us is what his Government is doing in these difficult times to send a signal to teachers that they are willing to do what is necessary to ensure that they remain committed.

One of the reasons I was sometimes disturbed at the way the debate was going was the talk about CXC failures—63 per cent failed—but one of the things with which this report dealt was whether in effect the 63 per cent failure of the CXC was an indication of the failure of the children or the system. Why should CXC be the criteria for assessing all the students in junior secondary and senior comprehensive schools? Why should our curriculum be geared in such a way that it leads one to this final evaluation that is relevant to the young people in our country? All of this is in the report.

We should not attempt to reinvent the wheel. We should not attempt even to deal with part of the wheel. If the education system is to be spun around, we must deal with the whole wheel and I am suggesting that the school textbook system is just one spoke. That is why I have proposed an amendment to the Motion which I would like to read:

- (1) Delete the word “and” in paragraph 4, line 3 and replace with a comma
- (2) Delete the full stop after the word “increases” in line 4 and add the words “any other measures which would impact positively on the education system in Trinidad and Tobago.”

I have discussed this amendment with Sen. Prof. Ramchand and he has indicated that he has no serious objection. The reason I thought this amendment critical was because after one year the country and the Senate deserve a comprehensive statement from the Minister about what his Government intends to do, particularly with this document, the National Task Force Report on Education,

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a document which recent events have demonstrated that the present Government is prepared to disregard; a document which seems only to be used when it suits the—

**Sen. Mark:** Let me just correct my hon. Friend. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago adopted the White Paper as policy in February, 1996, so we have not disregarded the document. It is now policy.

**Sen. O. London:** Mr. President, I am even more confused. If this is the policy of the Government, recent events indicate that the Government is not following its own policy.

**Sen. Mark:** It was recently adopted.

**Sen. O. London:** I repeat: Recent events indicate [*Interruption*] Mr. President, may I continue?

**Mr. President:** Will you please allow the Senator to continue?

**Sen. O. London:** I repeat again: Recent events indicate that the present Government is going against its stated policy. I am suggesting that when the Minister is responding he demonstrate to us, using the White Paper, what Sen. Mark has said. I promise him and you, Mr. President, that when he makes the statement, I will ask the appropriate question because I do not think I want to get involved in those details at this time.

The Motion on textbooks caused the whole country to sit up and take a second look at a particular problem which had been with us for a long time and which seemed to become less and less important. I suggest that if the Motion on textbooks could have allowed the whole country to become involved in the debate, a report from the Minister would not only cause the country and all the players to be involved in the discussion on textbooks, but in a wider and more relevant discussion on the education system. That had happened before this present Government came into office. I am suggesting that we have an excellent opportunity at this time to revive that discussion and to revitalize teachers and parents of this country who over the past months, have been totally demoralized.

Mr. President and Senators, we should not let pass this excellent opportunity to ventilate so many critical issues concerning education. I therefore would like to request a seconder to my amendment and hope sincerely that when the Minister of Education is replying he does not confine his response only to textbooks, but to education.

*Seconded by Sen. Nafeesa Mohammed.*

*Question, on amendment, proposed.*

**Mr. President:** Senators who have previously spoken may speak on the amendment and Senators who have not yet spoken may speak on both amendments and the original Motion.

**Sen. Vimala Tota-Maharaj:** Mr. President, education is a subject about which I get very passionate. One response to Sen. London is that teachers did not become demoralized only a few months ago, we became demoralized over 20 years ago. I have been a teacher by profession for over 22 years and whenever a “vaps” hit the other Government, we had to succumb to that “vaps” and be totally frustrated and confused. Being an educator by profession and a parent for life, I was pleased to see this Motion filed by Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand. This Government is cognizant of the fact that textbooks are essential for effective and systematic teaching. Textbooks are guides, not only for teachers, but for parents and students.

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

This Government is also aware that the cost of textbooks has risen exorbitantly over the past few years. I am one of those parents who become anxious at the conclusion of every academic year because I know that not just one of my children but all four of them will be coming home with a weighty booklist. My poor husband and I sit there and say, “Oh, what are we going to do now? We have four weighty booklists, what are we going to do?” Mr. President, together with thousands of parents who receive meagre allowances—yes, I do receive a meagre allowance—we are relieved to know that finally, under the astute guidance of our Minister of Education, checks and balances would be put in place.

Mr. President, you would not believe that this year I had a child going into high school and I spent over \$2,000 just to prepare this child for that school. I was happy when my second son was able to get into an A’level class in Sixth Form but when I took the booklist to the bookstores and the cost of the books hit \$3,000, I held my head and said, “God, help me”. What about those parents who have one income and are barely able to put together money to buy a meal for their children and by the grace of God, through hard work and studying, their children are able to make it to Sixth Form? What happens to these children?

I know, because of the work being done at the Ministry of Education, that when the Minister took up office, he had to dust off the 1992 report by the committee—I hope he did not get an asthma attack by shaking off all that dust—

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and he has revised, and is ensuring that something is finally going to be done. I, along with thousands of other parents, know that our children have a chance of getting an education and they cannot say, “because you are a poor man your child cannot be educated like the rich man’s child.” [*Desk thumping*]

Many fingers are pointed at the publishers and many claim that the system is geared towards supporting a certain group of people. However, Mr. President, I spoke to a printer/publisher recently, and he explained to me that due to the changes that were taking place in Europe, the price of newsprint jumped from US \$450 per metric tonne to US \$1,000 per metric tonne in a matter of a few months. And what has happened recently is that there is a steady decline taking place. The price of newsprint is now US \$750 per metric tonne. So prices are going down. I am not defending any publisher or printer. These are facts and figures that I got from persons in this area.

Mr. President, coming from a primary school as vice-principal—not presently attached to a school, for the records sake—I have been aware for a number of years that a report called “Rationalization of Primary School Textbooks” was sent out. I have one in my hand which went out early in 1995. I would like to highlight certain areas of this report sent out by the Ministry of Education with respect to certain specifications which I know, and many people in the teaching fraternity know, were abused. I quote:

“Principals are required to prescribe only ONE textbook for each subject area.”

Mr. President, do you know my child who was in Standard V last year had something like five common entrance textbooks written by so-called specialists? I continue to quote:

“Great care must be taken in prescribing New Editions of books. The Ministry is alarmed at the number of books appearing as new editions, but with little or no significant change in their content.”

Mr. President, last year I had the good fortune, or should I say the “misfortune”, to have a daughter in Form IV and a son in Form V. It so happened that they were doing the same subjects. They had to get the same books. I was happy. I was elated. One book for two children, that is great! But then I saw on the booklist a little monster written in brackets on my daughter’s Form IV booklist; “Revised edition”. Therefore, the young man in Form V had to buy the ordinary book and my daughter, in Form V, had to buy the revised edition. So I, as a parent, had to put out an extra \$125.00. Mr. President, these people are



exploiting parents. Parents want to educate their children and we have to put a stop to what is taking place and our Minister is ensuring this.

There is also another area I would like to read, and I know, for a fact, because I have several booklists—which I did not bring today, because I did not want to identify schools and bookstores—where this is one of the conditions. I quote:

“On no account should principals indicate on their booklists, the bookstores where books may be purchased.”

I wonder how many schools really read these rules and stick to these regulations. I discussed this with the Minister last week and he is looking into it. I told him that I have queries and concerns: Why it is that in mathematics there is something like seven possible selections that one can choose from? If one has a lower margin, perhaps, three books to choose from, for example, Standard II classes using the same books across the country, the Ministry would be able to monitor the progress or lack of progress in a school, would be able to send the necessary facilitators and supervisors to find out what is going wrong in that school. There is this issue with a poor child in a poor area and a rich child in a rich area, that does not count there. This is the school. As the Minister said just now, teachers play a very important part and I know members of the teaching fraternity, my colleagues, bend backwards. They make day out of night. They go all over the country researching material to ensure that their children learn and that they get the necessary equipment to move ahead. So, Mr. President, this exploitation has to stop and I know the Minister is going to address this need.

However, we must tread cautiously and not enclose our children in an intellectual straitjacket by restricting the number of textbooks to be used in schools. Mr. President, my children thrive on books. I buy a lot of books. Books used to be a part of my monthly budget—not anymore. I can no longer budget for books because of the exorbitant cost. However, we have to find ways to widen a child’s horizon and vision and this is where the public library comes into play.

#### **4.30 p.m.**

The public libraries are not only government libraries. My children and I are members of an NGO library. I do not know how many people know about the NGO libraries, such as the Kiwanis and other organizations, where people donate books and people like us can access and borrow books for a minimal fee. So there are libraries in existence such as that. There are many library facilities right across the country of which our children can make use.

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Mr. President, my main concern here is not a selfish one. I am a parent and I know what it is like sometimes to have difficulty in finding books for my children. I have been searching all over Trinidad for a certain book for my son for the past four weeks and to date I have not been able to get it, and I know when it finally comes to Trinidad I am going to pay an extra \$200.00 more for it. I could barely afford it. What happens to the other parent who cannot afford it?

My main concern is for those parents who want to educate their children; want to send their children to further their education but they are being exploited. Booksellers and even some members of the teaching fraternity are capitalizing on parents. Our parents need to take stock; our parents need to say, "hey, this is enough," and our teachers in our schools who are frustrated—I was frustrated in a school and I knew what it was like when I said, "do not worry to buy that textbook, I would photocopy parts of it for you, and we will work with that." I used to get myself into trouble. I was a rebel at that time, but I was not going to put parents into expense.

I appeal here for the parents who want further education for their children. I know the Minister is going to do something here for us and whatever the committee is doing will not be covered in dust. Mr. President, I thank you.

*Motion made and question proposed, That the Senate do now adjourn to Monday, October 14, 1996 at 1.30 p.m. [Hon. W. Mark]*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Senate adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 4.33 p.m.*