

Motor Vehicles (Amdt.) Bill

Tuesday, October 22, 1996

SENATE

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The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

MOTOR VEHICLES (THIRD-PARTY RISKS) (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend the Motor Vehicles Insurance (Third-Party Risks) Act, brought from the House of Representatives [*The Minister of Public Administration and Information*]; read the first time.

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

Question put and agreed to.

ARBITRATION (FOREIGN ARBITRAL AWARDS) BILL

Bill to give effect in Trinidad and Tobago to the New York Convention on the recognition and enforcement of foreign arbitral awards, brought from the House of Representatives [*The Minister of Public Administration and Information*]; read the first time.

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

Question put and agreed to.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Institute of Marine Affairs for the year ended December 31, 1995. [*The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. W. Mark)*]
2. Trinidad and Tobago Industrial Policy (1996—2000). (*Hon. W. Mark*)
3. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Global Pre-Investment Programme - 550/OC-TT for the year ended December 31, 1995. (*Hon. W. Mark*)

4. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Southern Roads Development Project for the year ended December 31, 1995. (*Hon. W. Mark*)
5. Annual Report of the National Insurance Board (July 1995—June 1996). (*Hon. W. Mark*)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Expenditure Incurred

(La Brea Industrial Project)

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Sen. Rev. Daniel Teelucksingh:

12. Sen. Rev. Daniel Teelucksingh asked the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

- (a) Would the hon. Minister please inform the Senate of the expenditure incurred in site preparation for the aborted industrial estate project at Brighton, La Brea?
- (b) Is the Minister satisfied that such expenditure is justified *vis-a-vis* the work done on that project?
- (c) What plans are there, if any, for that site where such expenditure was incurred?

The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark) Mr. President, we would like to seek your leave and the leave of the honourable Senate to have this question deferred for another day.

Question, by leave, deferred.

Common Entrance Examination, 1996

(Irregularities)

13. Sen. Rev. Daniel Teelucksingh asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Would the hon. Minister please inform the Senate of:

- (i) the exact nature of any irregularities/injustices/fraud pertaining to any aspect of the Common Entrance Examination, 1996?
- (ii) measures to be adopted so as to ensure that such irregularities/injustices/fraud are not repeated in 1997 and thereafter?

The Minister of Education (Dr. The Hon. Adesh Nanan): Mr. President, the Ministry of Education wishes to advise that the fraud squad is currently investigating allegations of irregularities and fraud in the 1996 Common Entrance Examination. It is, therefore, not possible to disclose the nature of the allegations at this time. However, the Ministry will reveal the results of the investigations when they are completed.

After consideration and analysis of the report of the fraud squad, appropriate measures, if required, will be put in place to avoid a recurrence of any identified “irregularities/injustices/fraud”.

The Common Entrance Examination does not operate with a pass/fail marking system. Since its inception the Common Entrance Examination is a test used to determine whether and/or where students will be placed in Form 1 at secondary schools. Placing of students is done in the number of places available and in order of merit. There is also some degree of zoning at the junior secondary school level. This Government has recognized that the system is not a perfect one and a committee has been appointed to review placement and transfer under the Common Entrance Examination system. The committee is to report in early December 1996.

Based on the response at (i), part (ii) of the question does not arise. However, for the information of hon. Senators, 21,093 students of the 29,273 students who sat the 1996 Common Entrance Examinations were placed at secondary schools. Eight thousand, one hundred and eighty of these students were not placed at secondary schools, 1,378 of whom are eligible to write the examination a second time. Of the remaining unplaced students, some are assigned to post-primary centres. Other options are being explored to provide for the training and continuing education of unplaced students, for example, lowering the age of entry into programmes like the Youth Training and Unemployment Partnership Programme.

For 1997, consideration is being given to proposals for purchasing 60 first form places in each of the following private secondary schools: Bates High School, Sangre Grande; Southern Academy, San Fernando and Pentecostal Education Complex, Tobago, if it is completed on time. In 1998 the expected completion of construction of the Mason Hall and Cunupia Secondary Schools will result in an increase of 160 first form places in each of the two schools.

1.40 p.m.

The Ministry of Education has been holding discussions with the denominational boards on the possibility of their constructing additional secondary schools. Some boards have indicated interest in the proposal and this is being pursued.

Thank you.

Sen. Prof. Ramchand: I wonder if the Minister can tell us of the 21,000 students placed in secondary schools, how many were placed in junior secondary schools.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Mr. President, I would treat that question as a new one. When it is filed accordingly I would prepare a response.

PORT OF SPAIN GENERAL HOSPITAL

(Alleged Deaths)

The Minister of Health (Dr. The Hon. Hamza Rafeeq): Mr. President, in September 1996 there were allegations that six persons died as a result of the work-to-rule action by the junior doctors at the Port of Spain General Hospital. The allegations were allegedly made by a person who refused to disclose his identity and he also failed and/or refused to identify or to give any particulars as to the identity of the six patients whom he alleged died.

The matter attracted the public's attention through the media and I gave an undertaking to Parliament that an investigation into the matter would be conducted. It became necessary, therefore, to inquire into all the deaths which occurred at the Port of Spain General Hospital during the period August 28, 1996 to September 30, 1996. The investigation revealed that there were 151 deaths at the Port of Spain General Hospital during that period. This figure revealed no increase in the monthly death rate at the Port of Spain General Hospital or over the same period last year.

The investigation involved, among other things, reviewing the ward notes for the 133 patients who died on the wards and the casualty notes for the 18 patients who died in casualty. I am sure you will appreciate that a detailed examination into the 151 deaths would take a longer period of time. The investigation so far has not been conclusive. Further investigation into each case is continuing and I have accordingly appointed an independent committee comprising Dr. Rasheed Adam, President of the Trinidad and Tobago Medical Association; Mrs. Valerie Rawlins,

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Manager of Quality Assurance at the Ministry of Health; Dr. Albert Persad, Medical Chief of Staff at the Caura Hospital and an officer from the Attorney General's department to conduct further in-depth investigation into the circumstances surrounding the deaths of these patients.

Newspaper reports alleged that recently the late Mr. Glen David died of a severe asthmatic attack because he was denied admission to the Port of Spain General Hospital which was then the subject of work-to-rule action by the junior doctors. In making a report on these matters, the hon. Members of this House and the members of the public will recognize that medical records of individuals are privileged documents and the contents are protected against disclosure by law of confidence and privacy.

Preliminary investigation into this report reveals during the week prior to his death that Mr. David was attended to on three occasions at the Port of Spain General Hospital. On the morning of October 10, 1996 around 2.45 a.m. he visited the Community Hospital at Cocorite where he commenced receiving emergency treatment. Our information is that between 3.00 a.m.—4.00 a.m. the Port of Spain General Hospital was contacted and it was reported by someone who allegedly answered the phone that the intensive care unit was closed as no junior doctor was available.

Contact was made with the Eric Williams Sciences Complex and it was agreed that the patient was to be accepted there for treatment. Mr. David allegedly had a cardiac arrest and after failure of resuscitative measures, died at 4.35 a.m. at the Community Hospital. The junior doctors at the Port of Spain General Hospital have been on a work to rule. As a result the intensive care unit which requires specially trained persons to work was not functioning at full capacity. However, during this period arrangements were made for emergencies to be dealt with at a makeshift intensive care unit in the recovery room of the operating theatre. A senior doctor was on call to service this unit and on the night in question he was available to attend to any emergency.

It is my understanding that where a hospital requires assistance from another hospital in the management of any critical patients that arrangements are normally made between the medical practitioners in both hospitals. The investigation did not identify the individual at the Port of Spain General Hospital who received the call. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is need for more effective communication between the hospitals. The Medical Chief of Staff at Port of Spain General

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Hospital gives the assurance that a senior doctor had been available for the intensive care unit duties on that morning.

Again, I take this opportunity to express our sympathies to the family and relatives of the late Mr. Glen David. In order to ensure that proper information is available to the public at all times on the services available at the public hospitals, I have requested the regional health authorities to put proper communication systems in place.

Thank you.

SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS
[THIRD DAY]

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

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. Prof. K. Ramchand*]

Question again proposed.

Mr. President: Senators who have not spoken as yet may speak on this original Motion. Remember that there are two proposed amendments. Senators who have not spoken before may speak on the original plus the two proposed amendments.

Members who have spoken on the original and Sen. Daly's proposed amendments may speak again, but only on Sen. London's proposed amendments.

Of course, if you have spoken on both you would not be permitted to speak again.

Sen. Penelope Beckles: Mr. President, I rise to make a few comments on the Motion before this honourable Senate. In so doing, I probably would refer, with your leave, to two articles which I read, one last Sunday and one today, which I think highlight the importance of the society dealing with this issue of the cost of schoolbooks, and the related effects it has been having on families in Trinidad and Tobago.

At page 4 of today's *Independent* newspaper, in an article entitled, "With a little help from Mom", reference is made to a Common Entrance student, age 12. What is touching about this article is that his mother is a single parent. He passed

for Presentation College, San Fernando, and her comment when she was being interviewed was that the cost of the books alone would leave her stranded. The article goes on to talk about the difficulty that she experienced as a single mother in being able to give her son, Trevor Daly, all he needed to be successful at his Common Entrance Examination. Her major concern now that he had entered secondary school was whether or not she would be able to purchase the books for his entire school career. Trevor Daly came first in Trinidad and Tobago in the Common Entrance Examination.

I read it today when I thought of making my contribution to this debate and compared that story with one of another person, Heidi Achong, and I am referring to the *Guardian* dated October 13, 1996. In this article, Heidi stated that she actually started working from age 12. She said that during her school years she did stocktaking, balancing books, modelling and whatever jobs she needed to do to make ends meet. Her father died when she was very young. Her mother had three children, two sisters and herself, who also worked for the majority of their school years to purchase their books.

Heidi said, specifically,

“I paid for my school books, my clothes and extra lessons.”

So it meant, Mr. President, that from age 12—21, she worked during the entire period of her vacation, Easter and August, when most of us would have had the benefit of either travelling or doing other things, to purchase her books for the start of school come September.

The interesting thing in these stories that I have related is the fact that in both cases there were single mothers whose major concern was the whole issue of books. Now in Heidi’s case she was able successfully to complete her secondary school. As a matter of fact she has been able to gain a scholarship to attend the University of the West Indies to pursue a course in Business Administration.

Some of us may say that working from age 12—21 to be able to purchase one’s school books is not the type of thing one wants to encourage, but the moral of the story really is that her mother just did not have the money to purchase the books and she was able to do it to the extent that she did it every single year. In a sense it does encourage a certain amount of discipline and productivity which very often we do not have in our society in terms of some of our young people.

Then I looked at another article in today’s *Newsday*—“Seven Youths in court charged with making guns”. Those seven persons, Mr. President, were between

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the ages of 13 and 16. Debating here as we are the cost of school books affecting the ability of families to meet the cost of necessities like food, clothes and medical care, we have some of our young people actually being involved in making guns, and we wonder.

Mr. President, the whole issue then is that education is something that we have to deal with from a very holistic point of view. There are so many other factors which relate to this Motion. The issue, for example, of poverty. Very recent studies indicate that almost 30 per cent of the members of our society are living below the poverty line. I saw another article which said 21 per cent and another which said 36 per cent, but whether it is 21, 36, in between, more or less, the point we must bear in mind is that poverty affects the whole issue of parents being able to purchase books.

We read every day, particularly over the last two weeks, of the situation as it relates to our economy and the dollar which is sliding, notwithstanding that some people say that it is stable, what happens to the cost of school-books which so very often are imported? We therefore go back to the point of some of my other colleagues who mentioned encouraging the production of our school-books locally. Some are already done locally, but we still go back to having to import paper, ink and so many of the other things necessary to produce these books. We have to bear in mind that all those things are extremely relevant.

About three years ago, Mr. President, a study was done on the factor of poverty and absenteeism in schools. That study was done by the Ministry of Education in conjunction with some schools in southern Trinidad. What was found was that in several of the schools there are many students who actually do not attend school because they have nothing to eat. Their parents cannot prepare breakfast and lunch and, therefore, the issue of school-books does not even arise because some of them do not have the money to buy even the basic necessities which some of us take for granted.

Mr. President, in Barbados, for example, they have developed a system of rental of school-books. The Ministry of Education actually purchases school-books in bulk which subsequently are sent to all the relevant schools and a system has been drawn up where those books are rented to parents at a very minimal cost. I know that this system was considered by the former administration. Actually, a contract had already been drafted.

2.00 p.m.

Some of the teachers and principals had a difficulty in terms of how that system would actually be monitored. However, I feel that when we consider where we are today, in terms of the economy and the number of persons that are extremely poor and not in a position to purchase books, and we recognize that education is absolutely critical and necessary, I think that we really have to consider whether or not this method may not be one of the ways through which we would be able to successfully deal with the concerns as raised by Sen. Prof. Ramchand. Not only that, Mr. President, I think that the whole issue of standardization of textbooks can also be factored into the way in which we monitor this whole system.

I certainly know, in my time and, I am sure that of a number of my colleagues', that books were able to be passed down from three or four brothers and sisters. Unfortunately, we have no such system today. As a matter of fact, sometimes for the academic year in which a child is going to school, one might find that the books change. I feel that when we are addressing this issue we need to bear in mind that all these factors are extremely relevant to the whole issue of cost and the other related factors of food, clothes and medical attention.

I do not feel that we would be comfortable if we were able to address this issue of cost of the school-books and not recognize that some of the children may not be able to attend school. Mr. President, when we look at this whole issue of transportation, whilst some of us, in years gone by, have had no difficulty with actually walking to school, some people do not even have enough to eat to strengthen and nourish their children to even do that. Whilst some may say that we could restrict ourselves to the issue of the books, as I said, there are many other related factors if we really want this Motion to materialize and to bear fruit in terms of the children of our society. Whilst the committee may not be looking at all those issues, I am sure that what they can do is to send this report, ultimately, to the other ministries which would also be affected, to ensure that the education system, and by extension, the education of all our children, will actually materialize in a manner in which we would all feel proud.

Mr. President, I support this Motion. I do hope that if and when this entire debate is concluded that we would eventually agree that this is a situation almost like the vagrancy situation, that is one of crisis proportions. When we think of the crime rate, Mr. President, many of us do not recognize that there is a relationship between the fact that so many of our young people are either not bothering to

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benefit from education or do not have the opportunity to be educated, but there is a relationship between that and the rising crime rate in our country.

I believe if we accept all these factors we would recognize that this is an extremely serious Motion, it is one that is crying out for us to make a serious determination on it. I do support it and I hope that we would really recognize the extent of the seriousness of it.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Andrew Gabriel: Mr. President, I would like to make a brief intervention here but first, I would like to support, broadly, Sen. Prof. Ramchand's Motion. This matter of school textbooks has been literally a problem and a nightmare for far too long. We have heard Sen. Vimala Tota-Maharaj's emotional walk-through and testimony of the tribulations of what it took to buy a book in this country. It is obvious that the previous regime had not cared enough to address this problem in any substantial manner. However, we on this side have already started to do that after only months in office.

The hon. Minister of Education gave a directive to all schools that the booklists that had already been issued by the schools were to be used for the following year with no change, thus making it impossible for the barrage of "New Editions" and new textbooks to find their way onto these lists.

Sen. London: Mr. President, I was just enquiring whether the hon. Senator did not remember your admonition about reading.

Mr. President: The reading of debates can be done subject to the approval of the Chair. If the Chair does not object then there is tacit approval.

Sen. A. Gabriel: I repeat, Mr. President, thus making it impossible for the barrage of "New Editions" and new textbooks to find their way onto these lists. That was the problem that rendered the sale of second-hand books almost impossible for the majority of parents. At least, under this administration the book-buying parents now have an option between a new book and a now cheaper second-hand book.

We, on this side, understand the extreme urgency of this problem as does Sen. Prof. Ramchand. The Motion mentioned a report that was laid in both Houses of Parliament in 1992 which outlined recommendations of a committee. I may add, Mr. President, that it was only until this side assumed office that any of the recommendations were ever implemented. It is my understanding that almost all of

the recommendations have been adopted by the ministry and I know that the hon. Minister would elaborate more on this item.

I would like to now turn my attention to Sen. Daly's amendment because I feel it is extremely relevant to the debate. I recently purchased a 24-volume encyclopaedia on a CD-ROM which has video clips, some of which are the greatest speeches in history. Mr. President, these are some of the miracles available on this medium. With the networking of computers that is available today, I believe that schools, in the years to come, could be significantly impacted by this medium of information transfer. We, therefore, support Sen. Daly's amendment fully.

With respect to Sen. London's amendment however, we feel that it is indeed broad. We want the hon. Senator to define what his specific intention was when he put this amendment forward. We feel we would need a bit more information before we could make a decision on his amendment. Mr. President, at this point I am prepared to give way to the hon. Senator for some clarification.

2.10 p.m

Hon. Member: Repeat it, repeat it.

Sen. A. Gabriel: We feel that the amendment is a bit broad, and we would need some clarification as to the intention of this matter.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Prof. John Spence: Mr. President, previous speakers have referred to the problem of poverty and I think we need to put the context of our present discussion into that area. We had the benefit of a recent publication tabled by the Minister of Social Development in which there is indication that under present circumstances, 36 per cent of the population is below the poverty line. It is mainly for this reason that I would like to add whatever support I can give to Sen. Prof. Ramchand's Motion.

He has indicated a number of ways in which the problems with respect to the high cost of school-books may be addressed, but when one puts it into the context of the present situation with respect to poverty in Trinidad and Tobago, one does not only see the urgency. I have come to the conclusion that we must not just try to reduce the cost of school-books, but we must remove the cost of school-books from the parent in Trinidad and Tobago because if we do not do so, a reduction in the cost will not really address that 36 per cent of the population. It may help the persons who are not wealthy but are middle-income, it will not help the poor.

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During the course of this period when we were debating this Motion, I did a little survey by telephone of some of the embassies in Port of Spain with respect to how school-book costs are treated in other countries and I have determined that in the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States of America, parts of France, and parts of Germany, school-books are provided at the schools, parents do not have to provide school-books for the children. Indeed, my son teaches at a comprehensive school in the United Kingdom and I telephoned him and his comment was that any government that tries to institute cost of school-books to parents in Britain will certainly lose the elections. Now, if there is any government in Trinidad and Tobago that removes the cost of school-books from children, it is certain to win the next election.*[Laughter]* Perhaps there is a good political reason, apart from the humanitarian one why we should move in this direction.

One frequently used way for individuals coming out of poverty is by education, so anything we do to assist with that process of education is something that helps to alleviate individuals from poverty. Of course, that does not address the whole issue of poverty, and clearly we have to address that in a number of other ways, some of which we will be discussing in the budget debate and in various other fora this week. I must say that the presence of this document has been extremely important because already we have seen that not only has it alerted Government Ministers, but also the journalists, and the news media. There has been a great deal of discussion and I am sure it has served to focus attention on this problem to a much greater degree than if we did not have a document of this sort.

It is for this reason I, in supporting Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt's motion, urged—and she was very willing to accept, and did accept the idea—that we should have a household survey conducted every three years. For those who may have missed the adjunct to that bill, it is now law in Trinidad and Tobago that the Government of this country shall conduct a household survey every three years. So one trusts that the Minister of Finance will assist the Government by providing the financial resources for this household survey.

With respect to school books, I am in entire agreement with the measures suggested by Sen. Prof. Ramchand for reducing the cost, because whether those costs are to be met by the parents or by the state it is important that they be not excessive. I have tried not to make any suggestions in this Senate which involve expenditure without saying how I would raise the money for that expenditure. Whenever I discuss the annual budget, and suggest measures which will include expenditure, I try to suggest how I, if I were Minister of Finance, would have addressed the budget in order to provide financial resources for that measure.

In the case of school-books, if we take the school population of maybe 300,000 children—Sen. Prof. Ramchand gave the figure of the cost of school-books at an average of about \$1,000 per year, that would work out to be about \$300 million. Let us say that one could reduce the cost of textbooks by the various devices which he suggested and we are able to cut the cost per child per annum to half of that, we are looking at \$150 million. Let us assume that the measures are put in place so we are not changing our school-books every one or two years which is currently the case. Again, I consulted with my son whose information is that in the United Kingdom, the textbooks are estimated to last for about five years. If we take the \$150 million and divide it over a five-year period, assuming that there are no loss of textbooks along the way, that is about \$30 million a year.

If we are faced with the question in addressing our annual budget—which we will be doing very shortly and which the Ministry of Finance is doing now—and we are saying that by an expenditure of \$30 million a year we can alleviate this severe problem from parents which may, in fact, be affecting the well-being of families in other ways, because in order to assist their children out of this poverty cycle, they are sacrificing homes, repairs to the house, clothing and food and that money is going into the textbooks because in certain families there will be a tremendous drive to try to assist their children to get out of the cycle of poverty in which they have found themselves. If we ask the question, should \$30 million be spent in this way? I have no doubt what the answer should be, but let us say that the Minister of Finance finds himself so tight with resources that he cannot move the expenditure of \$30 million from any other Head, then I would say that what he has to do is to increase the level of taxation. I am absolutely against this philosophy which has been demonstrated to be invalid time and time again, that if the rate of marginal tax is reduced there will be more savings and therefore, more investments.

2.20 p.m.

I am quite prepared to bring the data from various countries to indicate that there is no relationship between reduction in the rate of corporate tax and increased savings. That just is not the case, and if the Minister of Finance is able to produce data to demonstrate that it is indeed so, I would be extremely grateful to him, because the data which I have been able to assemble does not indicate that that is the case. But more than that, what is happening now—and I will speak about this, and bring it back to the issue of the cost of school-books because they are both directly related—is that the economists tell us that we have excess liquidity in the system.

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In my opinion that liquidity is leading to excessive expenditure on consumer items and therefore is, in part, contributing to the problem that we now have with the change in the exchange rate and therefore will affect the cost of school-books. Even if it is just 2 per cent, one can be sure that when that is translated into sales in the shops it will be 10 per cent. So what I am saying is that not only would there be extra money which the Minister of Finance is able to acquire by his increasing the rate of tax or not reducing it—if he intends to reduce it again in this coming budget—but it would help him with his liquidity problem. The hon. Minister of Finance pointed out to us, very correctly I believe, in the last few days, that just providing that extra financial resource would not, in fact, lead to investment in this country.

He has pointed to the problem we have with foreign investment which, he has told us, may frequently exacerbate the foreign exchange problem by the investor, quite correctly, wanting to take out not only part of his invested capital but his profits, as well. Clearly, we need to address, not only liquidity in the way of increasing interest rates, which makes the investment less likely, or increasing the reserves in the Central Bank, which means that the banks are likely to increase their charges, again putting the issue of the poorer folk into focus, but we would also be helping poor people who need to have their school-books at no cost. So I have absolutely no doubt that the positive moves that we should, must and can take over the next few weeks, because we would be presenting the new budget, are to remove the cost of textbooks from parents in Trinidad and Tobago by providing them in the schools.

Now there are two mechanisms that can be used to provide textbooks in schools. I was told by someone in the US Embassy that in the affluent parts of the United States, school-books are given to the children and they may take them home. In the poorer parts of the country, however, because the school board cannot provide the resources to deal with the loss of school-books, they are retained within the school. They use them during the school hours.

In the United Kingdom it is also the case that school-books are not taken home: they are used in the schools. This means that teachers now have to show somewhat more imagination than, perhaps, they do when they rely solely upon textbooks. They can give homework to the students in creative ways which would add to their learning but which does not entirely rely upon textbooks.

In that regard I also support Sen. Daly's Motion for the later supply, in schools, of electronic equipment. As the Senate will remember I have—on at least

three occasions—called attention to the fact that Barbados has now gone into a heavy campaign in their educational policy statement of computerizing the schools, so I have no problem with that either.

I have no problem with Sen. London's amendment because, in a sense, what I am suggesting, perhaps, is not specifically stated in Sen. Ramchand's Motion, although he does suggest other measures to be put in place to deal with the hardships arising from the cost of school-books. Mr. President, I would urge the Government to seriously consider in the next budget, at least, moving towards that position, perhaps, starting with the primary schools.

Another aspect of school-books provided by parents and carried back and forth to school is the physical damage that we are doing to our primary school children by having them move these heavy bags of books back and forth from home every day. I wish the Minister of Health was still here, because I certainly think that it needs to be investigated. I drop my grandchildren to and from school on occasions, and the first thing I do is lift these heavy bags away from them, because I feel that being of small physical frame, like myself, they may be damaged. This is happening all up and down the country. One sees these little kids walking for miles. The kids I am talking about only have to walk to the car, but kids are walking for two or three miles with these heavy school-bags. Why are the teachers insisting that their programmes be so arranged that kids have to walk with a number of books each day? Can they not, at least, arrange their timetable so that the children do not have to carry so many books each day back and forth from home to school? Let us provide the books at the schools; let us start, at least, with the primary schools if we cannot do it all at once.

I have no doubt that a loan from the multinational lending agencies of TT\$150 million which, after all is about US\$13 million, could be made available from the ADB just upon the request of the Minister of Finance. But, surely, we could provide this capital ourselves. If we cannot do it all at once, as I say, let us start with the primary schools in the coming budget, and then let us allocate so much each year, if we have to provide it ourselves, so that, in the course of two or three years, we can provide school-books for all the children who need them in this country.

Now, it is often stated that when one provides something for all the kids, the ones who can afford it also benefit. When it is 36 per cent of the population it seems to me that one has no argument anyhow, even if there are some at the top percentage, which is very small these days, who also benefit. But if one has a

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system of progressive taxation, people are paying for it anyhow because they are at the upper scale of the taxation bracket and that is the advantage of a progressive scale of taxation. Instead of which, of course, we have a policy statement on industrial policy which aims to have 20 per cent corporation tax by the year 2000. For whose benefit, and for what benefits to the economy? I trust that at some stage we would have a presentation by the Minister of Industry and Commerce on that industrial policy statement. Perhaps the hon. Minister can then explain to us the benefits of reducing the 20 per cent by the year 2000, because I, myself, am not convinced that that is the way to go.

Thank you, Mr. President. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Prof. Julian Kenny: Mr. President, first of all, I welcome the Motion from Professor Ramchand on the subject if only because, as allowed in the debates here, it raises many related issues. Frankly, I do not think the subject of the cost of textbooks is as important as the education system and where we are headed. One of the things that struck me as being rather odd in this report is the proposal for bulk buying.

Now historically in Trinidad, this has never worked. We bulk-buy drugs and then dump them down in Chaguaramas and they are fired. The Minister of Health is no longer here, but periodically we have episodes like dengue; we had yellow fever, and one of the things used to control mosquitoes is a substance called abate. It comes in two forms. One which can be put into watertanks, and one which is used to control mosquitoes in waterways. The last yellow fever outbreak in Trinidad when there was an emergency, we had to do something. It was found that there was no abate suitable for use in domestic watertanks because of the bulk-purchasing. They had just bulk-purchased, simply, abate for treating waterways. So I am not entirely convinced that the bulk-buying of anything, especially if it is through a Government agency, will ever work. If one were to adopt this argument of bulk-purchasing of books, logically one should bulk-purchase school-clothing, food, cars, and everything we use in society. Quite frankly, I do not think there is much in this approach.

One of the things that struck me also in the debate was a comment coming from Sen. Teelucksingh, who is no longer with us here this afternoon, about suggested corruption in the Ministry. I think the word is being used fairly loosely. Now I have had a fair experience of being in a position where I have to determine what book is used at university level; and my wife, who was Principal of the

University School for many, many years, now retired, has filled me in on the other end of things.

2.30 p.m.

There are certain things that are very, very strange about the way in which the texts are listed. Now, the Minister of Education is looking across at me and he used a textbook in physiology which I actually used as an undergraduate. You remember, Prosser and Brown. It is still in use today. It is possible that if one is going to have an educational system that one can, in fact, limit the number of textbooks. I see no reason why something which has worked for a generation may not continue to work for another generation.

The corruption which Sen. Teelucksingh referred to, again just rather loosely—the real core issue here is: How do textbooks get on to the lists? And herein lies one of the major problems. One school will make up its list. Somebody at the Ministry of Education will write a textbook for common entrance or something, get a few of his or her friends and it will get on to the list for that particular school. I find this very, very strange, where almost all of the education in this country is supported by the taxpayers, that there can be such a casual way of selection of textbooks. I find it also very, very strange when one gets into the secondary schools where they are working to prescribed syllabuses, that schools working towards the CXC and the A'levels, the Cambridge syllabuses, in the end, that one school will be using one textbook here and another school will be using another text there. It seems to me very, very strange that there is not a greater degree of standardization and a greater degree of limitation of what is actually prescribed.

For many years we used in the university a system where we had categories of textbooks. We would have a textbook which is essential reading and when I was there, there was only one essential textbook. Then there would be highly recommended, the sort of textbook where one would go to the library to refer to, and then there would be the others which were just of passing interest. I would suggest that perhaps it is not only a question of looking at the cost, it is looking at the whole subject of standardization of textbooks and limiting the number of textbooks which the students have to use.

Now, I would like to leave the subject of the Motion and look particularly at one of the points which Sen. Prof. Spence is making and also Sen. Daly's amendment. At the University School, of course people paid fees, but all the books were provided. But my wife tells me that the University School is now changing

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back to making the parents pay for the books because the books are allowed to go home and the children tear out things. The life of the textbook is only a couple of years, so they are moving in that direction, that is, away from providing textbooks, to having the parents pay to provide the textbook. But I think there is a way around this. One way would be, as Sen. Spence suggested, to make sure that the books are used in school and this would require, of course, proper library facilities in the schools and so forth. But this is something that would emerge out of any review of how one standardizes textbooks and so forth.

Finally, Mr. President, I would like to turn to Sen. Daly's amendment and to the comments from Sen. Gabriel on the other side. Some children in this country will not be able to recognize a computer if they saw one. They will look at it as some sort of a television. Yet, there are others in the society who will sit down in front of an IBM Aptiva with 16 megabytes of ROM, 2 gigabytes of hard disk space, with multimedia looking at video clips and so forth. There are actually children like this and there are, in fact, even schools like this in this country, primary schools, and again Sen. Prof. Spence was referring to it. In a primary school, there would be children who have access to a computer.

Both my grandsons have access to computers at the primary school they attend and when they go home, they can sit there and whip through their 2 gigabytes and stuff, all their CD-ROMs and so forth. It is a learning process, but so many children in this country would not recognize what a computer is. Hence, I think we ought to pay special attention to what Sen. Daly has suggested and what Sen. Gabriel was talking about, and we have to try to add this on to what Sen. Prof. Spence was saying, that is, we should provide the books, but at the same time, we should provide in every school in this country, at least the nucleus of a computer laboratory, where all the children will have access to it. It is not all that fierce a proposition.

In fact, I keep remembering, if people will allow me to, that one citizen of this country—I think he was a citizen of this country—was paid \$2 million in consultancy fees to set up a piece of bureaucracy. One can buy a Pentium 166 megahertz with 2 gigabytes for about \$12,000. Divide the \$2 million and one can, in fact, put more than one of those machines in every school in this country.

I think that we really ought to be thinking, not just simply in terms of the textbooks and trying to find means of saving a few dollars, but we ought to be thinking instead of modern information technology which is not just simply bankers

whipping money around the world, but information technology starts right down in the primary school.

I support the Motion that the Government should be taking steps, but I would suggest that attention be given to Sen. Daly's proposal that we ought to be looking at the electronic media as well.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. President, this question of school books certainly is one that must touch every parent in Trinidad and Tobago. As I sat here listening in particular to the contribution made by my good Friend, Sen. Beckles, I could not help but believe that maybe she just landed here in Trinidad and Tobago without understanding or appreciating the fact that we have just come into office and that there was another administration in office at the time. One could not help but get the feeling that the country suddenly started on November 6, 1995 and prior to that, we had no history whatsoever and there was no accountability by the previous administration, given the kind of facts that she brought out today.

I happen to know the young lady that Sen. Beckles referred to very well. It happened that she was a friend of my young daughter and they went to school together so I am quite familiar with the circumstances under which she was raised. But those circumstances are not new. They did not just happen in the last few years because she had that particular experience. There are many of us who have had similar experiences. I know for a fact that I grew up with very little parental guidance and yet I was one of those who was fortunate enough to have won a Common Exhibition and got the princely sum of \$24.00 to buy books. I am sure that Sen. Daly remembers that, when a government exhibitor was given \$24.00 to buy books.

So that whereas this Motion talks about the rising cost of school-books, it so happens that in those days, even then, school-books were very expensive because school-books were then imported from overseas. We learnt everything. I remember things like Alcock's Grammar. I do not know if anybody nowadays knows what Alcock's Grammar looks like. We did not know about local school-books then and the fact that the cost of school-books is rising now—I agree entirely with Sen. Prof. Kenny—has nothing to do with the actual cost of the books, because I suspect that in relative terms, given the purchasing power of money today and then, school-books are no more expensive today than then.

What has happened and has changed substantially is the fact that in the last few years previous administrations allowed the system to be manipulated in such a way that the books being used in one year, a comma or full stop was added, there were a few more punctuation marks and suddenly we had a new edition and the old edition was no longer available to our people. So that parents are being put under tremendous pressures to buy new editions because the book stores are no longer willing to carry the old editions to which there are very minor changes.

2.40 p.m.

That is where the cost of school-books are going. I remember in my days, at least 70 to 75 per cent of the books were usable by the next class of school children who were coming behind me. I remember in St. Mary's College, we used to organize a particular Saturday when everyone came and brought their old books. We were encouraged to keep our books in good condition so that we could sell them. We sold them to the next class that was coming in and we bought from the class going out. We had no difficulty. It was in that manner that we were able to meet the cost of school books, rising or not, from a \$24.00 book grant that was given to one who won an exhibition.

Unless we make the effort to change what has been done in the last few years which has caused the system to go off, we will have a situation where people would be complaining day after day about the cost of school-books.

I do not agree with Prof. Spence that if we give free books we would win another election. I do believe that if we give free books, free food, free medical care, free everything, we probably would win another election. Even that, I doubt, because one does not win an election on the basis of giving free base. That has been tried; we have gone down that road and it has not worked for us. What we need to do is to instil in people a certain amount of pride and dignity, and that has not come about in the last few years, because we were busy fighting each other with respect to who is to blame for the increasing cost of this and the increasing cost of that.

I see where a new vision will come upon us whereby people are beginning to feel that they are empowered—and let me explain where I am coming from. It really does not make sense, for argument sake, in a general sense, removing VAT from school-books. Yes, one gets a certain measure of relief because everyone feels that his kids no longer have to pay VAT on school-books. But that helps the rich, the not-so-rich, the middle class and the poor; that does not really reach the

people whom you would want to help, because then you use limited resources to try to assist so many people and it becomes dissipated; it is not appreciated.

I am aware—and I am sorry to go a little bit off on a tangent—of the situation with bus passes. Bus passes are given to kids and I have seen teachers with rolls and rolls of bus passes because the kids do not want them. But we pay for them and they become a waste. There are school buses that go empty because the kids are not interested in them, because they fall, in certain cases, on kids who are not interested. They either have a bicycle or they come to school with a friend, an aunt or a parent. It is the same with things like removing VAT from school books. The more VAT is removed from things, it is the more, firstly, problems are created with the VAT administration, and secondly, it is not targeted to reach the people who are most in need.

So that in terms of school-books and VAT, it is not so much the fact that one subsidizes school-books—and believe you me, the word, subsidy, to my mind, is archaic—it is not so much that one tries to get the cost of school-books down, it is the fact that one rationalizes the whole system. I think our whole educational system has to be revamped. I am anxiously looking forward to the words that the Minister of Education is going to say because I know he is concerned about where that system is going. It is no sense making sure that there are school books in junior secondary schools where the kids who are being turned out are no better off than when they went in. Then any amount of cheap books or free books is not going to help them. What we need is a system of education that will allow the kids to make a meaningful contribution to society. That is where our problems lie. Many of our kids are leaving school unable to read and write. That is my worry, not so much the cost of school-books, although that is part and parcel of the problem. What has to be done is for the whole educational system to have a better system of accountability.

I am aware that there are principals and teachers who really do not feel that they have any need to set standards for themselves so that from year to year they see a better result coming out of their school. They go through the motions; they go into school—and I am not knocking necessarily the teachers; I am knocking the system. Until we put a system of accountability in place, no free books, no VAT off books, is going to help us. What has to be done is a complete change in our attitude.

Sen. Prof. Spence: Mr. President, I wonder if the hon. Minister would comment on the fact that he is suggesting that the philosophy which I know is in

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many developed countries, that if one gives freeness it will have an adverse effect on the population, that these free school-books, as he referred to them, are given in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and so forth. Would he care to comment on that?

Hon. B. Kuei Tung: Mr. President, I was really trying to create for ourselves a standard to which we should ascribe. I am merely saying that at this point in our history, given what has happened, the whole breakdown in our educational system, given the fact that we are now attempting to revamp and to re-engineer the whole system, it is awkward for me to consider this talk about free books, because free books, in my view, are not going to be the solution to the whole problem. Not that I am advocating that free books is not a worthwhile thing, I am merely saying that in terms of an election, certainly a government cannot just consider that because it gives free books it is going to end up being re-elected.

I have gone further to say it is not just free books.

Sen. Prof. Spence: That was an aside comment. Do not take that as the thrust of your argument.

Hon. B. Kuei Tung: No, I am merely making a case that we need to look at the whole system. I also made the case by saying that as Minister of Finance I have had great difficulty in finding a way to focus on assisting those who are most in need, and that when one throws it too far and wide, one ends up taking limited resources and dissipating it so far and wide that it either falls on people who really do not need that kind of help or who may even spurn that kind of help, and those who need the most help only get a small amount of the resources that are available.

So instead of saving \$30 million on VAT because there is no VAT on school books, it is better to take the \$30 million and do precisely what the Senator is saying; find out who needs those books and then give them free books. But to give everybody across the country, from Goodwood Park all the way down to Laventille, VAT off on books, is really spreading our limited resources too far and wide. *[Interruption]*

We are moving towards a situation where we would hope to lower taxes and therefore progressive taxation is really not the way to go. I am looking forward to the day when in terms of tax, it is so simplified that everyone knows precisely what he has to do. I really would welcome the day when there are no reliefs, no allowances, no credits and that the system is simple. In that way, one does not have to take money from one group to make sure everybody else gets some

benefit, because the bag of goodies would be scattered far and wide and hopefully somewhere along the line, the poor that was targeted gets some benefit. So that, in essence, the drift of my argument is, we should target the disadvantaged and try to find ways and means of reaching them.

Finally, while we talk a lot about school-books, where are we really going?. Prof. Spence talked about the weight of the school-books and Prof. Kenny talked about information technology. I think the time is not too far when the size of a school bag is going to be so small because each book is going to be on a small disk and therefore one could have 30 textbooks and they would not weigh more than half a pound. That is where we are going.

What is worrying to me is whilst we are here talking about school-books and the cost of school-books, we are losing ground as far as technology is concerned, with the rest of the world. Our people need to be sure that they are prepared for the information age when we swing into the new century. Until we are satisfied that Trinidad and Tobago is prepared and ready for it, we are really wasting time in these hallowed halls talking about the cost of school-books and the rising cost, when in essence, we should be preparing our kids for what is going on in the rest of the world.

2.50 p.m.

If we do not we are doing them a great injustice—and I am not just talking about the middle class and the rich kids. Unfortunately, when we talk about kids who sit in front of these computers we are talking about people who are very select and the bulk of our human resources, which is going to be necessary in the new century, is being left behind. That is my fear. My kid knows about computers, but my kid happens to be one of those select few. What about the rest of the kids? What are we doing about it? What are we doing for them?

That is why I am quite happy to say that we on this side will support Sen. Daly's comments about the electronics. The electronic age is no longer something that we do not know about. It is upon us and we are ignoring it. We are totally ignoring it. We are not doing enough to make sure that our kids are exposed to electronic forms of learning and until we do that we are allowing them to be left behind.

Mr. President, in looking at Sen. London's comments, unfortunately, I was not too sure of what precisely he was proposing in his amendment and I have not heard any particular support coming from the rest of his colleagues on it. I am

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wondering whether he is just going to allow it to fall by the wayside. His proposed amendment appeared to be rather vague and nebulous as I am not sure of what he meant by adding the words "any other measures which would impact positively on the education system in Trinidad and Tobago" and whether he had specific measures in mind or just meant for it to be left in general terms like that.

Certainly Sen. Daly's amendment, which we support, spoke specifically about the introduction of electronic means of learning which, as I said, has to be supported in this day and age because we have to move and be prepared for the age of technology and information. As I said, we found great difficulty in understanding and appreciating Sen. London's amendment. If we did maybe we would have been able to lend more support to it, but just to say global things like "any other measures which would impact positively on the education system" really does not add anything much to the resolution. Unfortunately, as we were not satisfied about that we found it difficult to support.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The Minister of Education (Dr. The Hon. Adesh Nanan): Mr. President, I join in congratulating Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand for having brought this Motion before this Senate and for his lucid presentation of it. I also thank those Senators who contributed to the ensuing debate on the Motion for their valuable insights, ideas and suggestions.

What is ironical, Mr. President, is that while I sat here in the Senate this afternoon, in the Public Gallery was a group of students of an 11-plus age group, for whom we are planning. Textbooks, the cost of textbooks as well as the electronic means of learning, are applicable to those students.

The Motion, with its two amendments, call upon Government, as a matter of urgency, to take immediate steps to deal with the increasing cost of school textbooks and the hardships arising from such increases by implementation—and that is the key word, "implementation". The previous administration had plans on the drawing board. All just plans. This Government of national unity will succeed because all ministries, not only the Ministry of Education, are networking together for implementation this year and next year. I want to send home that point in terms of implementation.

I would now go on to some or all of the recommendations of the 1992 Cabinet-appointed committee on "making school-books affordable and available" of which Sen. Prof. Ramchand was the Chairman. I feel sorry for the hon. Senator

and I am really sympathetic to his cause. He was the chairman of that committee in 1992 and it is now 1996. If one looks at the system between 1992 and 1996 in terms of the booklists that children are given in our schools, one would see frequent changes. So, this Motion that he has brought before the honourable Senate would not only give the Senator, but the national community, a chance to vent freedom, in terms of how the rising cost of textbooks would affect them with respect to controls by this Government. I would try to elucidate that fact in terms of reducing the cost of textbooks.

I have listened to the contributions of all hon. Senators and I have made some notes as to what parallels can be drawn and what trend is actually running through the debate as to how Senators actually feel. I am of the view that Senators here feel this is a pressing issue and have the cost of textbooks to the school children at heart.

In terms of the summaries I have made during the debate, these include the high cost of textbooks; establishing and expanding schools and other libraries; and the problems of revised editions where changes from the previous editions are insignificant. We have heard about bulk book purchases as a means of driving down the cost of books. We have also heard about the promoting and organizing of the second-hand book trade in terms of location in schools and making it more affordable.

The standardization of books, which the hon. Senator spoke about, would allow them to be used over a three-to five-year period and so permit greater use of the same books by siblings, as well as make the second-hand book trade viable.

I would speak on the second-hand book trade for a moment because the hon. Sen. Dr. Phillips spoke about the relationship in the classroom and the holistic situation of education as it affects the children. When we speak about the second-hand book trade—and Sen. Cuffy-Dowlal spoke about the attitude of caring if we encourage and foster this second-hand book trade—we would need a whole change in attitude in terms of how the children care for books. That is important.

We have heard of encouraging and establishing a local and Caribbean publishing and printing industry which would not only save foreign exchange but also reduce the price of textbooks. Several Senators spoke of exploitation and the wide disparity of prices for the same book titles and the Government's measures to control profit mark-ups, and there was mention of the monitoring of book prices.

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Mr. President, Sen. Daly spoke about the greater use to be made of educational technology, in particular, computers in our schools, the benefits of CD-ROMs, accessing internet not only as a means of reducing our dependence on the textbook but also to prepare our students for the 21st Century. In fact, one of the amendments has to do with the introduction of electronic means of learning.

As I speak of the 21st Century, yesterday I had the opportunity to launch a language arts workshop at the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre in Couva. At that particular workshop I mentioned that over the years we have seen a number of workshops conducted and there is a mulberry bush phenomenon or syndrome where there is no follow-up to these workshops and people who have contributed their time and effort become frustrated.

3.00 p.m.

Yesterday, I told them I would rename it “Workshop with a difference” encouraging teacher-made-instruction material and providing schools with the facilities so to do. Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie spoke of photocopying machines and how use can be made of them by putting more than one in an educational division as a means of reducing the need for textbooks. We have heard about the greater involvement of the community and other interest groups. These include: the business community, trade unions, co-operatives, and the parent-teacher associations, to name a few. Apart from making books more available and affordable by involvement in the bulk book purchasing, the second-hand book trade and even the establishing of expanding libraries, the introduction of a book rental loan scheme in schools, there are other important factors such as the role of parents and teachers in providing student learning, student achievement and performance. Motivating students to learn is another important factor.

In terms of the role of parents, Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie spoke about the change in attitude in terms of the importance of books compared to other items such as sneakers.

I am certain that my response not only speaks to the Motion before this Senate, but will also speak to these recurring themes, as I have outlined.

My presentation will treat mainly with the substantial Motion but it will also make reflection on the amendments and contributions of hon. Senators. Firstly, I shall outline what this Government has done with regard to the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report of the committee that was appointed in 1992, and I quote: “to review the current situation with respect to the supply

and price of school-books and to make recommendations for reducing the financial burden that parents face in obtaining textbooks for their children at primary and secondary schools.” Of particular relevance here, is that it should make recommendations for making textbooks more affordable and accessible or available.

Mr. President, under the heading; “Measures to render books more affordable,” the committee made six recommendations. The first was the establishment of a book bulk-purchasing agency. My Government is seriously considering their recommendations but it is conscious of the complexities and ramifications involved in setting up such a facility. In fact, Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie has urged caution. We intend to be cautious.

There is no doubt that bulk-purchasing will result in lower prices of books. The Ministry of Education, as we have heard, has been engaged in bulk-purchasing through sellers and publishers. As I am on that note, I would like to make reference to a comment made by Sen. Mannette concerning the purchasing of textbooks.

Sen. Mannette spoke at length about measures taken by the former regime to address the problem. Members were reminded of a sum of \$7.4 million spent on books. I take this opportunity to inform the hon. Senator that orders were already placed and books delivered when this Minister took up office. We were saddled with this \$7.4 million bill and were forced to pay whether we liked it or not. The Senator also made reference to a circular concerning the restriction of books that the past regime had introduced. As I have said before, books have been changing frequently. Obviously, the circular referred to by Sen. Mannette, was not adhered to—there must have been loopholes.

As an interim measure an amnesty was granted by the Minister of Education whereby books used last year would be identical for this year. These books are subject to review and no guarantees are given for next year’s book list. A monitoring system is in place whereby school supervisors and curriculum facilitators do frequent spot checks. I would also like to inform hon. Senators how we have been able to foster that second-hand book trade.

Spinning off from this amnesty that was given for last year’s books to be used this year, it has encouraged the second-hand book trade. It is going to introduce the attitude of care that I spoke of earlier in terms of keeping the books in good condition so that they can be passed on to others. To foster that second-hand book

trade we have gone even further. Together with the Ministry of Consumer Affairs and the National Parent-Teacher Association, discussions are under way with a view to developing a system of trading in second-hand books within the nation's schools.

A circular memorandum stated, and I quote: "the National Parent-Teacher Association has indicated its willingness to assume administrative responsibility." The circular memorandum describes in some detail how the project would be implemented at two levels; the micro or unit school level and the macro or school region level.

Principals were informed that in view of the limited time available to implement this project prior to the end of the 1995/1996 school year, they were urged to give the utmost priority to this exercise.

As several Senators, including Sen. Prof. Ramchand have pointed out, schools and parent-teacher associations have been organizing second-hand book sales for some time. However, as their circular memorandum attests, my Ministry, in conjunction with the Ministry of Consumer Affairs and the National Parent-Teacher Association, is formally putting in place a system of trading in second-hand books located in schools thus eliminating the middle men. The third recommendation and I quote: "the fixing of a minimum period about three years for the use of a book as a textbook to allow books to be reused." Mr. President, I fully support this recommendation.

It is now common knowledge that Cabinet has appointed a new textbook committee for the period 1996—1998. Reference was made with respect to the "sleeping" textbook committee in this honourable Senate. The name of the committee has been changed and it is now called the Standing Committee for the Standardization and Selection of Textbooks.

All books to be prescribed for schools must obtain the prior approval of this committee. The committee has begun its work and will concentrate on textbooks for use in primary schools. It is expected that it will have completed its evaluation and selection of books in time for such books to be prescribed for the 1997/1998 academic year.

As I said before, a decision has been taken that books will remain unchanged for a minimum of three years. A new set of guidelines will then be issued to schools with respect to the prescribing of primary school-books. After this initial

exercise, the committee will turn its attention to books prescribed at the secondary school level.

With reference to the six recommendations, I will quote from the report: "Publication in Daily Newspapers before July/August each year with a scheduled list of prices for books as determined by the current 15 per cent plus formula". This recommendation has been implemented for some time.

3.10 p.m.

I would turn to the allegation of CXC insider trading in the contribution of Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand. I have received communication from CXC on this allegation of insider trading and I shall issue a statement on this allegation.

Reference was made to price inspectors. For the months of July and August a survey was conducted throughout Trinidad and Tobago by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs. The findings were that the 15 per cent mark-up was being observed. However, several books on the shelves were not on the revised list. This is in reference to the query made concerning whether or not the price inspectors are going around to the bookstores.

I now turn to the recommendations which are being implemented. Recommendations consist of a three part recommendation and an immediate halt to financial grants for book purchasing. No longer are students given financial grants to purchase books. The second part which calls for a system of loans for one year has not been implemented. The third part which calls for books to be delivered to the schools through the proposed bulk-purchasing agency has also not been implemented, and I gave reasons.

Recommendation (c) called for the upgrading of school and class libraries in all schools to serve as the hub of learning activities. I shall return to this question in the second part of my contribution.

With regard to recommendation (d) concerning the distribution of common entrance test booklets to all schools thereby reducing the need to purchase numerous test booklets in preparation for the examination, common entrance test booklets are now distributed freely to schools immediately following the end of this examination each year.

With respect to the Ramchand committee's request made under the heading "Measures to Reduce the Dependence Upon Textbooks and to Facilitate Teachers

in the Production of More Appropriate Teaching Material", I shall inform this august House in due course of the steps which we have taken to implement them.

I turn to the second and final part of my response. It deals with the actions which are planned. What the Ministry of Education and this Government of national unity would do before implementing those recommendations not yet implemented and establishing a bulk book purchasing agency is to revisit and carefully consider the implications/ramifications before making a decision on this proposal. As we heard from my colleague, Sen. Prof. Kenny when he reminded me of my days in physiology, he spoke about caution when the topic of the book purchasing agency was brought up. We are approaching that with caution.

The removal of duties on the import of paper for printing highly recommended texts is also being actively considered.

With respect to recommendation (e) that is the establishment of a text book development committee to liaise with the Book Review Committee which is now known as 'the Standing Committee for the standardization and selection of textbooks', this would be seriously considered. However, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Consumer Affairs have agreed to discuss a further proposal made at one of their meetings, that is the setting up of a national textbook development council. The idea which has not been fully thought through involves the establishment of a national council for textbook development. This would comprise representatives of the printing and publishing industries, booksellers, representatives of the Ministry of Education and the ministry of Consumer Affairs and would guide, promote and assist in the development of a local textbook publishing industry. Such a council would require local technical assistance and possibly from abroad.

There are more concrete plans afoot concerning the development of a local publishing industry. With special reference to the publishing of local textbooks, publishing, as the Senator reminded us, is distinct from printing. There is a local printing industry. There is no local or indigenous publishing capability.

I take this opportunity to remind Senators, and as stated by hon. Sen. Mark, that this government of national unity adopted the White Paper as its policy on education. One of the activities to be undertaken next year would be the financing of feasibility studies for the local development of written didactic materials. The suggestions made by hon. Senators during the debate concerning the developing of a local publishing and printing capability would be actively pursued.

Under the heading 'Measures to Make Books More Available', next year school libraries would be complemented with appropriate in-classroom reading materials, especially from Caribbean authors. All primary schools would be provided with standards 1 to 3 reading materials because reading problems are identified between standards 1 to 3 especially at educationally-at-risk schools. When I speak of educationally-at-risk schools, I make reference to schools where more than 60 per cent of the students in standard 5 do not make the minimum desirable marks in the Common Entrance Examination. Educationally-at-risk schools would receive additional reading materials for infant years 1 and 2 and standards 4 and 5. In addition, library facilities, reading materials and furniture in new reconstructed primary schools would be introduced.

I must emphasize that the ministry recognises the pivotal role which libraries play in the education of our children and would integrate library, information skills programme into its curricula. In this regard the Schools Broadcasting Unit of the ministry and the School Libraries Division recently prepared a distance teaching package and launched a programme to help students acquire library skills. I was fortunate to be at that launch. I have set up an implementation committee for distance education. How can we introduce distance education into the primary and secondary school curricula? The vision is there.

3.20 p.m.

We are all working towards a national literacy programme for January 1997 because we have heard in this debate about the concern for illiteracy. Mr. President, I would like to say candidly that in an aging population there can be no realistic eradication of illiteracy. We have to address our literacy programmes to the younger generation—the ones who will be moving forward; the leaders of the future, so the National Literacy Programme to be started in January 1997 will target this group.

Getting back to the scenario at the Learning Resource Centre, when the programme was launched to actually hold the audio cassettes and the material which goes along with the cassette, it made one feel a sense of achievement. I must compliment all the staff who were involved in that particular project for their initiative in producing the Library Information Skills Distance Education Package.

Mr. President, the Ministry, conscious of the importance and benefits to be derived from electronic means of learning, which Sen. Martin Daly spoke at length

about, plans to establish a computer network among the nation's schools which will link them not only with one another, but with international centres of learning. Just this morning I had a visit from the British Ambassador and he mentioned that computers will be introduced shortly into the Embassy where students can go in and through the Internet access information from universities in the United Kingdom.

We are thinking of introducing technology into the primary schools. When we look at education we look at it from a para-remedial point of view. We are looking at strengthening the base. We are looking, next year, at the pre-school and primary school specifically in terms of strengthening the base of pre-schools and enhancing the primary school curriculum and infrastructure.

When we speak of telecommunications and the Internet, one wonders how far away these things are from the children of this country. We have heard Senators' comments about children who are fortunate to have computers and be able to move ahead in terms of technology and the education system. We can also look ahead and recognize that teaching in various parts of the world will vary from this particular country's in terms of the advancement in technology. There will be a whole new concept where students will be trained on computers. The actual direction of the curriculum will be different from ours. We recognize that and we are introducing computers into the primary schools initially. We are also calling for private sector involvement to get more impetus into the system in terms of more than one computer for a primary school.

The hon. Sen. Mannette spoke about management issues. In the Ministry of Education, putting computers in the schools is a management issue. It is a start and this Government will be the launching pad for technology.

Sen. Prof. Spence: The situation in Barbados, which does not have an oil revenue, is that the plan for the next five years is to have one computer to each 10 children in primary school and one computer to each four children in secondary school.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: I thank the hon. Senator for that contribution, Mr. President. We are familiar with that scenario in Barbados.

In terms of our economy, we are giving the students in primary schools at least an experience of computers. We are also using our Joint Education Centres because in this system, after the Common Entrance Examination, many students cannot find places in secondary schools. From the response I gave to the question

raised by Sen. Rev. Teelucksingh, in terms of reducing the age for the YTEP Programme, this is all in relation to getting more students into a school experience. Our adult education programme has a minimum age group for entry. We are seeking to introduce more students at an earlier age so that they can get a school experience as an interim measure. We are seeking to improve the education system so that more children can have that school experience necessary. It may not be ideal, but it is a start.

As I said before, we are in an age where there is a tidal wave sweeping the education system, and one of our hon. Senators stated what happened in 1991 to today under the previous regime. We have heard talk about education reform. We have heard discussions about curriculum and technical/vocational aspects. Senators are asking questions concerning technology. What policy does the Government have for technical vocational education? What is its policy on education?

Mr. President, I spoke about the adoption of the White Paper as the policy. I urge all Senators to get familiar with the White Paper. As I addressed the National Advisory Committee on Education, I spoke about the White Paper being the mold, and it is up to us to implement plans to put things into that mold. The shape will be the White Paper, the policy document. If Senators read through that White Paper, they will see many recommendations being made in terms of technical/vocational education.

I would like to enlighten Senators in terms of the technical/vocational aspect of the education system. One of the areas we are addressing in terms of the technical/vocational system and even at the CXC level is the failure rate, that 60 per cent of students who have not had a full certificate at the CXC examination. We are introducing a new system of assessment so that students who go through the system would have some record and probably with a proper marketing technique this system can be used by the private sector as a track record of a particular student, rather than just a pass and fail on his CXC certificate.

In terms of curriculum, we are strengthening it not only in the primary school but in the secondary school. We are looking at technical/vocational education because we have heard how this Government of national unity is placing emphasis on training. We have had much result from the training that has been introduced in this past year.

On the technical/vocational aspect, there is a view, and we are thinking strongly in terms of giving more academic experience to the students. We are

thinking in terms of giving the students a five-year academic background and then streamlining them into a technical/vocational area, so they would be moving out after this experience into “A” levels and probably other areas of academia.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. President, that is the vision as we look at the education system. Let me get back to the Motion, in terms of this Government’s plans for the recommendations on other aspects.

I would also like to make a comment in terms of the training of teachers. That training would be carried out on a routine basis. There would be the development of school libraries, the equipping of schools with printing and photocopying facilities to the point where teachers can produce their own material for their classrooms. Mr. President, as I am on the issue of teachers, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the vast majority of our distinguished teachers. *[Desk thumping]* I heard a comment from the hon. Senator, but I would not deal with it at the present time. *[Interruption]*

I repeat, I would like to pay tribute to the vast majority of our distinguished teachers for the contributions which they have been making over the years, in many cases, under adverse physical conditions. Mr. President, I stress, adverse physical conditions because I would like hon. Senators to be informed that this year we have repaired 111 primary and secondary schools during the School Repair Programme for 1996. *[Desk thumping]* *[Interruption]* I am hearing asides, Mr. President. Plans, plans, that is all, Mr. President! But implementation is this Government.

In fact, many of our teachers have over-extended themselves by producing large numbers of textbooks which are being used in our schools today. These teachers have uplifted the quality that used to be in our primary and secondary schools and since the material they produce is more relevant, we will encourage them to continue to develop material for our schools.

Each school would be responsible for selecting its own instructional materials. These teaching tools will support the delivery of traditional subjects, for example, maths, science, language arts/reading and social studies and will help strengthen the curriculum delivery in the aesthetic subjects; music, art and craft, as well as, physical education.

Mr. President, as I speak of physical education I would like to inform all hon. Senators that the Minister of Education does not work in isolation. We are

networking with all ministries; the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of National Security in this holistic effort to bring relief to the children of this country. When we plan the education system, we do not do so in isolation, we take into consideration all peripherals.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs has said that we are going to improve our relationship with Venezuela in terms of using our ports—the Venezuelans will be coming to a port in San Fernando, the plans are on the way, Mr. President—therefore, we are going to introduce the teaching of Spanish as a pilot project in a selective number of primary schools.

Mr. President, I now turn to reducing the dependence on textbooks. This would include the provision of equipment to assist teachers to prepare their own instructional material and to manage their classrooms. What we would have, in fact, are teacher-resource rooms with a computer and photocopying equipment. As I speak of photocopying equipment, I must digress at this point to remind hon. Senators of the decentralization of the Ministry of Education in terms of giving more autonomy to the educational divisions. An average amount of money would be allocated to furnish and equip schools for the purpose I mentioned before.

Another very important aspect, training, will be provided via workshops for teachers with the intention of training them in designs, development and use of instructional material. Mr. President, you may remember that I mentioned workshops with a difference, not workshops that remain on shelves where people become frustrated as with the previous regime.

I now turn my attention to the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre. At this particular part of my presentation I am bubbling with enthusiasm. *[Laughter]* Mr. President, the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre, as we speak, is being looked at for the impetus of the audio visual aspect to enhance the educational system. I will clarify. There would be development of instructional material at this particular learning centre. Almost 75—80 per cent of the video equipment that is required is in place. As we speak, staff are already being interviewed in terms of the positions available at that particular centre.

When I speak of audio video I see my hon. colleague, Sen. Mark—

Mr. President: The hon. Member's speaking time has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Mr. President, during Sen. Prof. Ramchand's presentation, he expanded on the role that the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre at Couva could play in reducing the dependence on textbooks. He shared his vision of the RCLRC, as we call that particular centre, with its state-of-the-art printing and video production facilities, its digital audio recording facilities—that is why I looked at my colleague, Sen. Mark, when I spoke about the capabilities of that particular centre. Its library facilities which have been dormant over the past four to five years will be beefed up. In fact, that particular centre will become the hub as the school libraries link with the main library in the Learning Resource Centre. Learning resource material will be provided for teachers wishing to obtain teaching material. It will be like a clearing house, Mr. President. There will be reference books for teachers, while serving as a distribution and delivery centre for library books to schools across the nation. There would also be access to the internet.

3.40 p.m

As I have said before, and I do not want to pre-empt any possibilities that may exist, but we are having active discussions in terms of getting our schools linked, not only to schools in Trinidad and Tobago but also with external partners.

Mr. President, the printing capacity of the Learning Resource Centre needs to be studied carefully and we are going to undertake a feasibility study which will look at the particular centre and its equipment, such as the printing press, to see how viable it is to introduce this type of printing to get rid of the tyranny of the textbooks. The centre will serve for curriculum development and there will also be an in-service and pre-service on-the-job teacher training; a central library meeting the professional and teaching needs of our teachers and serving as a distribution centre for books and other instructional material both print and non-print that are produced at the centre; and a material production centre producing instructional material print and non-print for distribution to our nation's schools.

On page 80 of the *National Task Force for Education*, that is the education policy paper, it states:

“The RCLRC media unit plans and programme must form part of the larger national book and materials development plan.”

Senators may recall Sen. Prof. Ramchand's suggestion of establishing a Textbook Development Committee, how it might operate and the role of the RCLRC in producing textbooks within the scenario.

Mr. President, if we look regionally at the Common Entrance Examination, and there can be some commonality with the Common Entrance of various territories, there could be the possibility of a vibrant industry in terms of local printing and publishing and I am having active discussions in terms of trying to convince the Education Ministers of the Caribbean to look at this to see how we can develop the industry for printing and publishing. Only this morning I had with me the Indian High Commissioner who came to visit and we discussed the cost of textbooks, he mentioned that printing is very expensive and as an interim measure, the Government could look to India to print because of the reduced cost. I give that as food for thought to hon. Senators.

The White Paper also says that textbooks must be based on a comprehensive book sector study, and following this, a material policy would be stated. It should not be done haphazardly or *ad hoc*.

I now turn to some remarks on the contributions made by some hon. Senators. First, I will like to congratulate Sen. Tota-Maharaj for her contribution and the actual presentation in terms of sympathy. We all felt touched when we heard her lucid presentation of what she actually faces as a parent. We have heard of the plight of the school children, of single mothers, poverty, nutrition and other important areas during this debate.

I would like to turn to Sen. Beckles' contribution about school transportation which is another burning issue. On assuming office, there was a system where the Ministry of Education used the Public Transport Service Corporation to carry out the transportation arrangements. For this year there have been numerous requests from genuinely needy areas and we are in the process of reorganizing and restructuring the whole school transportation system to meet the requirements of needy children in this country. So I sympathize with her in terms of the situation of the school children presently, but these matters will be addressed shortly.

Mr. President, we also heard about physical damage and the number of books that school children must carry in their bags, and about timetable arrangements that must be suitable to reduce the books the children carry, "the hunchback of notre dame phenomenon". One may see by the standardization and selection of textbooks, the committee has reduced the number of books on the list.

Sen. Prof. Spence's contribution to provide books at the school will be looked at, and that will also alleviate the problem of children having to take so many books to school.

School Textbooks
[DR. THE HON. A. NANAN]

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Mr. President, I now turn to Sen. Daly's contribution because I think that it gives us the feeling of moving forward with the age of technology. I do not know how many Senators recall, but we have moved from the written file system into the computer stage. We have progressed from that age to this age but we have missed the microdot aspect of information. Many universities in the United States of America have the information transcribed on little dots, but our entire Government system has missed that particular aspect of the microdot phenomenon of information and we are going straight into that age of computer technology. That is one area to look at. It is all well and good to say that we want technology into the education system but as it is introduced, the literacy level must rise if we are going to get the benefit of computer technology.

3.50 p.m.

Mr. President, time does not permit me to outline these measures in terms of education policy, but the Ministry is in the process of implementing, on its own, certain recommendations made in the White Paper, and I want to give some insight into these. There will be upgrading in the quality of in-service training for early childhood care and education, and an increase in the number of trained early childhood educators. There will be expansion of the number of early childhood centres, particularly, in poor communities. Improving and reviewing of the early childhood curriculum.

There will be an upgrade of the physical environment for teaching and learning, which involves building of new schools and the rebuilding of old ones. This will aim at reducing serious overcrowding and lack of student spaces. The provision of textbooks and instruction material at primary schools, upgrading the quality of teaching by curriculum strengthening and improving classroom instruction; a teacher-training component, focusing on numeracy, literacy and the aesthetic subjects, such as art and craft, music, and physical education, Ministry of Education reform and restructuring with the emphasis on decentralization. This would also include technical training to improve central and regional planning, management and teamwork skills.

There is also a sub-component dealing with testing and assessment. I am certain that these measures will impact positively on the education system. Moreover, my Ministry is in the process of preparing a seven-year education plan which will take account of the White Paper, now Government's policy, the *Medium-Term Policy Framework* and this Government's national development objectives, at the appropriate time.

Therefore, Mr. President, I shall be only too glad to deliver to the hon. Sen. London a comprehensive statement on this Government's education policy in the future. For the moment, I would refer him to the White Paper where there is a comprehensive statement on existing Government education policy.

In closing, I wish to remind hon. Senators, Mr. President, of the admonitions of Sen. Dr. Phillips, Sen. London, and Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie, among others, that there is much more to education than the provision of textbooks and instruction material. It is a total package. It is an enterprise which requires the contribution and involvement of everyone. Education is everyone's business. I invite hon. Senators to be a vital and vibrant part of this educational enterprise.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand: Mr. President, you would recall that I was just getting into my stride when you intimated that we had moved into 'injury time'. I intend to summarize the immediate economic points of the first part of my statement at a later stage in this winding up. But I want to offer the second part of my presentation, since I did not have enough time to do so on October 1, 1996.

Before I proceed, Mr. President, I refer to an article which appeared in the *Trinidad Guardian* on October 16, 1996, for two reasons. One, that article has made it necessary for me to offer an apology to my Independent Senatorial colleagues; and the second reason is that I want to use it as a way of getting in a summary.

The title of that article was, "Why People Don't Listen?" with a question mark; and this was edited and the question mark was taken out, which reminds me of a famous poem by Martin Carter which goes: "Is the University of Hunger, the wide waste; Is the Pilgrimage of Man, the long march." But when people read that, they say: Is the University of Hunger the wide waste? Is the Pilgrimage of Man the long march? Because they do not understand our language. In our language, Mr. President, Why People Don't Listen? is a question; and it was converted into a statement. But worse than that—that is only my grammatical sensibilities—there were three photographs of Independent Senators put just under that headline, in such a way as to give the impression that my Independent Senatorial colleagues were not listening.

I wish to state here that there was no such intention on my part. I did not select the photographs. I did not say to put any photographs. This was purely an editorial decision. The article was, in fact, a response to another article in the press where

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[SEN. PROF. RAMCHAND]

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there was a title to the effect that Independent Senators did not blame booksellers; and giving the impression that my colleagues were disagreeing with what I had said. In my article I reported what the Senators actually said in order to show that they, in fact, had been listening, and they were not being listened to. What I said about them was—and it is a good summary—I maintain that our large booksellers concentrate on the captive school market and do little to create and encourage the growth of a reading public.

Whether the effective discounts they receive is 20-25 per cent as they claim, or 33 per cent as I conservatively said, or 50 per cent and more, as Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt said she could demonstrate, a non-profit bulk-purchasing agency would obviously be cutting out the middle man and reducing the price. Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt did not go so far as giving the booksellers wrong. Sen. Daly felt they were exploiting an existing situation. Rev. Teelucksingh said they should not be blamed, meaning they were not the only ones to be blamed.

Mr. President, I was pointing out that although my colleagues could be construed as having said the booksellers were not to be blamed, they were not really saying that the booksellers were not to be blamed. They were saying there were lots of other factors in the case. So Mr. President, I take the opportunity to apologize to my colleagues for this accident.

On the question of blame, Mr. President, I did find it strange that many people rang me up and asked why I am blaming the booksellers. One part of the article was aimed at them. Since it is quite an amusing episode, I would like to read the first part where I dealt with the blame. I quoted from a novel by Daniel Defoe in which a woman, Moll Flanders, had just stolen a necklace of gold beads off a child's neck; and she goes on to commend herself for not killing the innocent. She says, "You know, I am not too bad, I did not kill the child." And she even manages to think that she has done a good deed, and this is what she says: "I had given the parents a just reproof for their negligence in leaving the poor lamb to come home by itself, and it would teach them to take more care another time". That is like saying, if a woman looks pretty, it is her fault. You could rape her.

Do not blame the booksellers. Let us not cut ice with me, Mr. President.

4.00 p.m.

In that article, I made a kind of summary and since the hon. Minister of Education has referred rather ominously to a statement to be made to the CXC's response, I just want to repeat what I said about the CXC, because it is very

germane to what I have to say about making our own textbooks and developing our own printing industry.

I complained in the article that everybody picked on the saltfish picong and quite a few picked up on my criticism of the CXC—because everybody likes to read to see who gets lashed for appointing CXC officials to produce an anthology of prose and an anthology of verse which would become the prescribed text for the English B syllabus throughout the region. I said, "It is bad educational practice for the body that lays down the syllabus, sets the exams and marks the exams to have its own officials producing the one and only textbook." I said, "It is insider trading and monopolistic practice, the worst form of standardisation you can think of." Later on, talking about the possibility of cultivating the local printing industry, I said that, "If the CXC were going to produce a text to be used in the whole region, that text should be printed by local printers and that the people who could be induced to invest the money would be local businessmen and therefore, the CXC's giving of the contract to produce the CXC text for the region to a British publisher was an uncreative business decision and a betrayal."

Mr. President, in the first part of my presentation, I dealt with the economic issues and in part two, I want to talk about the place of the book in education and the place of the book in electronic communications, in particular, I hope to put the notion of standardization into perspective.

As early as 1992, in writing up the report of the Cabinet-appointed Committee for Making School Books Affordable and Available, there were some general comments of the changing place of the textbooks in education. Later on, I want to make a distinction between the book and the textbook. The textbook is a very special animal which has to be produced in a very special way, but I should talk about that later on. In this report, there were some general comments on the place of the book and these comments occur at paragraphs 15, 16 and 17. It is a commonplace—

Mr. President: Sen. Ramchand, I just want to caution that your reply must deal with issues raised in the Senate as a result of your initial contribution and must not be used for the purpose of extending your original speaking time.

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: I thank you, Mr. President. Most of the points that I will raise, as the one I am going to raise now, electronics, came about as a result of my presentation and things about the nature of the textbook came about as a result of my presentation. If I do not put it in the form of saying, "I am replying to this", or "I am replying to that", I am sure the hon. President will not be misled.

It is commonplace that with the rise of the electronic media, audio-visual means have been playing a greater part in the media and new possibilities are suggesting themselves to schools and educators all the time. These changes have an obvious effect on the status of the textbook and they are having a significant influence on the mind and on the attitudes of the young. I think we can begin to speak about a mindset associated with the electronic media.

In the actual presentation, Mr. President, I said that when these proposals were made in 1992, we did not appreciate that the time would soon arrive when one could pay to make two or three CD-ROMs containing all the books one would want permanently in one's library; that one could link up the computers in the school system and one could link the school computers to the national archives and the public library system; that one could equip the schools with enough computers and reading places for students to sit and access on the screen, material available in other countries, other libraries of the world and other data banks all over the world. This is why I welcomed Sen. Daly's amendment to the Motion.

Mr. President, we are looking at the textbook in the context of a very complex scene where all kinds of other media are jostling for a place in the educational process, so we cannot any longer think that the textbook is the one and only. In talking about the book in the primary school which has again come up in the debate, I referred to something that was in the report although I did not read it, and I would like to go to that now, because it also touches on the Common Entrance exam which has figured in reply to what I said.

The place of textbooks in the primary school, especially during the first four years, requires some comment. Not many will disagree with the view that in the early school years, the child should be given opportunities for self-expression, for the development of the culture of the feelings and for learning through projects involving activity at home and in the school, in the classroom and outside of it. Such a regime would have less use for textbooks than the present one. The orientation towards the 11-plus exam gives a killing prominence to the textbook.

It is worth considering that the money spent on textbooks, extra lessons, private schools at this level, would go a longer way and do more good if directed towards upgrading primary schools and creating in them an atmosphere of emotional development and self-expression in forms like music, art, poetry, handicraft and other creative directions. Such an attitude with the question of early education would be consistent with the view that in countries like ours, the primary school ought to be equipped to make up for some of the deficiencies in

family life and housing conditions and to provide a certain degree of emotional sustainment. It is tempting to suggest that the abolition of the 11-plus and the devising of a new system of primary education requiring no textbooks at all, would be the best way to deal with the high cost of textbooks at this level.

4.10 p.m.

Mr. President, the hon. Minister has announced the Government's intention, with a revitalized textbook review committee, to deal with the problem of books in the primary school, and he said that at a later stage they would turn to the secondary school. The secondary school is a drain on the economy. That is the place where the most money is spent and where the most distortions of our educational system take place.

At the secondary school, many teachers have fallen into depending upon the selected textbook to dictate to them the order in which material should be covered. They depend upon the textbook to give them lesson plans and tests. What is certain is that in many cases, the textbook becomes the subject. You are not teaching literature, you are teaching this anthology; you are not teaching chemistry, you are teaching this chemistry book. That is a very dangerous and expensive thing to happen and it is happening in the secondary school, so I want to urge the Minister not to wait too long before looking at that situation.

There have been a number of contributions which have insisted that you cannot discuss the textbook in isolation; that you have to look at the whole educational system. Previous speakers have referred to the breakdown in the educational system. I speak about a deterioration in the educational system. So when you start to think about textbooks, at the same time you have to be looking at the whole educational system. You cannot just make a textbook to fit the present situation.

When I was going to school—not university; although I think we would have been quite justified in calling our schools universities; our students call the university, ‘school’, it is a measure of the deterioration in the system—we wrote an examination called the Higher School Certificate Examination. You wrote three subjects and a paper called GP. If you fail GP, you fail. If you fail one of the three subjects you do not get a certificate, because somebody conceived of those two years in the sixth form as a comprehensive system, that you had to get a certificate for having participated in the school with your fellow-students and with the teachers. You were getting a certificate for that participation and for the development of yourself and your skills that would have taken place in those two years.

The deterioration of our system began when that was abolished. Anybody could write one A'level this year and another one next year, another one later on, and you could accumulate your A'levels, and at the same time they said, GP does not count; it is not really an A'level subject anymore; you could get GP as an O'level. So people are winning island scholarships, getting a bare pass in GP. If you cannot speak or write your language, you cannot think. Thinking is connected with language.

So the whole system began to deteriorate. Then somebody had the bright idea to democratize the system, and we have 21,000 students being placed in secondary schools, but 13,500 of them going to junior secondary schools—I remembered, Mr. Minister—and just about 3,000 go to the so-called prestige schools. So you have an educational system where there is a lot of cuffing, kicking, butting, biting, scratching, beating, breaking, bruising, wounding, mutilating, seducing, eloping, raping, cursing, drinking, gambling, noise-making, music-playing, gun-making, knife-sharpening, cutlass-grinding, stick-binding, miscarriages, abortions, illegitimate babies, AIDS, herpes and other venereal diseases. That is what we have. That is part of the junior secondary school system that the majority of students in this country have to go through. Then you wonder why there is pressure on the jail; on the hospital; on the welfare system; why you cannot walk the streets?

Education is terribly important. The textbook has a role to play in education. You could invent the best textbook in the world, but if you do not look at the educational provision, you would be spinning "top in muck".

The point I am trying to make is that the question of the textbook has to be seen in the context of a desperate educational system. You are dealing, not only with what is being taught, but who is getting a chance to go to school and what kind of school they are going to. What we call an educational system—anybody can attest to this—we do not have education towards educational goals; we have education towards examinations. So the purpose of primary school is to pass the common entrance; the purpose of secondary school is to pass CXC and A'levels, and the purpose of that is to get into university. Our education is an education for examinations. The textbooks have a role to play in getting rid of that travesty.

During contributions, Members have spoken about the syllabus; they have spoken about prescribed books; they have spoken about curriculums, but I am not too sure that even if people know what they mean by these terms, that an understanding of these terms has operated in the creation and in the setting of our textbooks.

I do not want to spend a long time getting into a big educational discussion, but I just want to say that a curriculum implies an educational programme lasting a number of years. You have to have a curriculum for the seven years of your secondary school; you have to have a curriculum for all the years you spend in your primary school. You do not just sit down there like the Brazilians playing in mid-field and then when you spot the opening, common entrance come, and you spurt in and score. You have to work your way through a system that educates you. You have to be guided by those curriculum goals and the syllabus is a set of books that you have chosen to contribute towards the fulfilment of some of those educational goals. So if you have a situation where the textbook is the subject and mastering the textbook and writing the examination is the purpose of the system, then you have impoverished your educational system as absolutely as it is possible to impoverish it. The syllabus only makes sense in relation to a curriculum.

I am very happy to hear the hon. Minister saying that they are taking very seriously the need to make our own textbooks and our own learning and teaching material. I am very impressed by his suggestion that the White Paper on education is Government's policy and that they are as concerned with the curriculum as they are with setting this or that book. Because if you do not make the connection, you would be just like the economy. The World Bank has its own curriculum and gives you a syllabus. The IMF have their own curriculum and they are giving you the syllabus and the book list. You have to do what they say. You do not devise your own curriculum. It happens in the economy; it is happening in the educational system.

So the proposal that we make our own textbooks; that we develop the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre, that 19-acre site in the way the hon. Minister suggested it is likely to be developed, I take that as a very forward-looking set of proposals.

4.20 p.m.

The textbook has to be seen in relation to a syllabus which has been created by people who have worked out a curriculum. This is why the textbook has to be seen in the context of educational planning and which is why I was not unsympathetic to Sen. London's amendment, but I know that the proposals in the Motion do have a strong relationship to wanting to see changes in the educational system.

Mr. President, I hope it is becoming clear that the dependence on foreign publishers, which the Minister spoke about, is one of the things that distort and

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warp our educational system because the people who manufacture those books—according to their own notion of what we should learn in our schools—are dictating our educational policy through those foreign textbooks.

The Minister gave so much verbal satisfaction. At least he said that they were going to do things, but whether they would implement them—which he says is the distinction between this Government and the last one, that this Government would implement—and if I could miraculously believe that, I would not have bothered to make a speech. I am just trying to drive home the points and remind him, and the Senate, of what he has said and, maybe, I would send a summary to the papers of what he has said to make sure that they get it right.

Mr. President, I am not just sitting down after 10 minutes because I feel it is important that these things be said straight out, that this is what the Government is planning to do. I refer to standardization as the Minister spoke about it. Obviously, one cannot have a free-for-all with a million books and different classes and teachers using whatever they like, whether good, bad or indifferent; some process has to be gone through to decide that this is a more useful textbook than that for reasons of economy, to make sure that the second-hand trade can go or that siblings could use the books. One has to have a certain amount of standardization, but one cannot standardize unless one's textbook is created according to certain agreed standards. The two words are not really related here but one cannot standardize unless one has standards.

So, if one looks at all the textbooks that are floating around and then tells me to choose three for Form IV, I would be in serious trouble. One would just be asking me to choose three out of the flotsam and jetsam. These books that are floating around have not been produced by what I call a textbook development committee and which the Minister is calling a national committee. Incidentally, I welcome the suggestion that such a national committee will be set up. It really would be a most forward-looking and productive thing if it could be done.

One cannot standardize even if there were such a committee, because it would be in some kind of trouble if it just looked at what is there and said "from that we are going to standardize". That committee has to "build" the books and go through a process of consultation with the teachers. It has to be aware of the needs and feelings within the community and then come up, with great humility, with what it thinks of as its textbooks. I say with humility, and it will have to build that humility into the making of the textbook because it would require what I spoke about last

time, the ring-binders, so the changes can be made as we realize we need to alter this and that because it does not work.

So, Mr. President, it is not that the notion of standardization is a bad thing in itself. One cannot standardize unless there are properly conceived and produced textbooks around that would allow one to make choices that will not impoverish.

Mr. President, I am trying to speed up because I know we want our tea. *[Interruption]* I may have to take a little time after the tea-break, but I am hustling into my final point about the textbook and the making of the textbook.

The last time I spoke about the ideal textbook there was some comment about it. A textbook is different from a book. When I want to cut the booksellers out I just want to cut them out of the textbook trade. The booksellers have a function. They can bring in other books that are not textbooks, have them available in the bookshops and encourage children to read outside of the textbook. So, the textbook is a special kind of animal which contains the essentials of a subject. Because it contains the essentials of a subject, it is not subject to the vagaries of the publishers' decision that they need to give a new jacket so they need to have a revised edition.

If it is properly made up, a textbook dealing with the essentials of a subject would not need to be revised as often as some of our foreign publishers would have us believe. It deals with the essentials of the subject. If one is doing a textbook of poems it would have to have some aim as to how to read and study poems, and all the poems in there will be dedicated and selected to show the different types of poems and the different kinds of approaches to poems necessary.

The textbook would have to be flexible. One cannot say this is a book for Form I—and here is where we have to look at the whole question of the curriculum again. If there is a curriculum one might have a textbook that is devised to work for three years within the curriculum. There would be a student in Form I who really, in terms of literature, is a Form III student, so the book being used in Form I must have material to allow that student to read ahead. There might be a student in Form II who is incapable of what one thinks of as Form II work and would be much more comfortable to take a little run up and start with Form I work. So that book would start that student back at Form I and he could come up.

We are at the edge of redesigning our textbooks and we have to break out of that notion that there is a textbook for each class. In redesigning our textbooks we may well need to consider those kinds of levels and that kind of flexibility. We also

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have to think about levels of social experience, regional variations and very importantly, in relation to the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre, if there are some fellows making a textbook down there and there are the video men, the radio men, the computer men and the internet men and women around, they will be able—let us hope they would be broadminded enough—to see the need to integrate material into this new kind of textbook that would encourage the children to use those other media. There should be pages designed in such a way that it would be as if one were using the computer.

So, the textbook has to be conceived and constructed in a context that would allow all the other aids to learning to play a part in the making of the textbook. That is why I am quite pleased to hear the Minister say that they are looking at that, but I want the Government to look at that as a pretty short-term thing and not something down the road when all of us are dead or killed.

4.30 p.m.

In the end, the textbook after all, is only one device. It is, if you like, an educational script, and just as year after year a play can be performed by different actors on different stages in different ways, so the textbook, as a script, must have built into it the flexibility that will allow it to be performed in the appropriate way by the teachers and the pupils who are using it in a particular place. We have to get away from the old notion of the rigid rule in textbooks; we have to get away from the notion of the unstable textbook that changes every three years; we have to get away from the regimented notion of the textbook, as this is Form I, II and III. We have to build into our textbook, by some kind of miracle, the ability to be precise and direct and the ability to be loose and flexible at one and the same time.

I just wanted to remind hon. Senators that this problem has to be seen in two main ways; the short-term and the long-term. The short-term will call for much planning and thinking, but in the end it is our cheapest and our best way. The long-term will call for the designing and fabricating of textbooks for use in this country. It will call for making a distinction between the “textbook”, that special animal, and the “book”. The textbook will call for a reorganization of the educational system and it will call for a recognition of the importance of the role of teachers in the system. One commentator in talking about the current teachers dispute said that he would like teachers to get more money but he would also like them to be more trained—and I agree.

Part of the reason for many people not wanting to give the teachers more money is that they feel half of them are not properly trained—but there are

distinguished teachers who need the money. If we are going to deal with the question of textbooks and the teachers are going to be the conductors in which these textbooks are being used, then we have to enter into a programme of teacher/training and upgrading our teaching facilities—the Minister is saying he said that, I am glad—I want that but we cannot think of the textbook simply as that rigid animal.

I am very happy that this debate took place. I knew that all Senators considered it an important subject and their contribution showed it. There have been many opinions and suggestions. The Minister has been most gracious in his reply. I have a feeling that I am knocking on an open door when I say that I hope that this honourable Senate will accept the Motion which is before it.

Mr. President, I beg to move.

Mr. President: Honourable Senators, there are two proposed amendments to Sen. Prof. Ramchand's Motion. The first from Sen. Daly, which I shall now propose.

The question is that the Motion be amended by adding at the end of the Resolution and after the words, "such increases" the following words "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."

Question on amendment (Sen. Daly) put and agreed to.

I shall now propose Sen. London's proposed amendment. Before putting the question, I just want to mention that there was a typographical omission in Sen. London's proposed amendment. The word "and" was missed out. It should be "and other measure".

The question is that the Motion be amended by deleting the word "and" in paragraph four, line three, and replacing it with a "comma", and by deleting the full stop after the word "increases" in line four and adding the words "and any other measure which would impact positively on the education system in Trinidad and Tobago.

Question on amendment (Sen. London) put and negatived

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

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That this Senate urge Government to implement some or all of the recommendations of the said Committee, and to take immediate steps to deal with increasing cost of school textbooks and the hardships arising from such increases, and to include in those steps the reduction of the use of schoolbooks by the introduction of the electronic means of learning as an equally important means of learning at the appropriate level in the education system.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark): Mr. President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Friday, November 1, 1996 at 1.30 p.m. at which time we shall deal with the two Bills that were introduced today for the First Reading. That is, the Motor Vehicles Insurance (Third-Party Risks) (Amdt.) Bill, 1996 as well as the Arbitration (Foreign Arbitral Awards) Bill, 1996 dealing with the Association of Caribbean States headquarters.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate Adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.38 p.m.