

*Leave of Absence*

*Tuesday, May 05, 1998*

**SENATE**

*Tuesday, May 05, 1998*

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Mr. Vice-President:** Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence from today's sitting to Sen. Rev. Daniel Teelucksingh.

**PHARMACY BOARD (AMDT.) BILL**

Bill to amend the Pharmacy Board Act, Chap. 29:52, brought from the House of Representatives [*The Minister of Health*]; read the first time.

*Motion made*, That the next stage of the Bill 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 Princes Town Regional Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1992. [*The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Princes Town Regional Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1993. [*Hon. B. Kuei Tung*]
3. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Environmental Trust Fund for the year ended December 31, 1997. [*Hon. B. Kuei Tung*]
4. Forty-sixth Report of the Salaries Review Commission of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Hon. B. Kuei Tung*]
5. Fiftieth Report of the Salaries Review Commission of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Hon. B. Kuei Tung*]
6. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Accounts and Financial Statements of the Rehabilitation of Access Roads and Reconstruction of Bridges Programme for the year ended

December 31, 1997 as required by Loan Contract 700/OC-TT between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Inter-American Development Bank. [*Hon. B. Kuei Tung*]

7. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Accounts and Financial Statements of the Environmental Protection and Rehabilitation Programme for the year ended December 31, 1995 as required by Loan Contract No. 857/SF-TT between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Inter-American Development Bank. [*Hon. B. Kuei Tung*]
8. University Students Guarantee Loan Fund—Statements of Activities and Audited Financial Statements for the year ended December 31, 1995. [*Hon. B. Kuei Tung*]
9. University Students Guarantee Loan Fund—Statements of Activities and Audited Financial Statements for the year ended December 31, 1996. [*Hon. B. Kuei Tung*]

#### ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

#### **Tobago House of Assembly (Authorisation of Salaries)**

- 23. Sen. Cynthia Alfred** asked the hon. Minister for Tobago Affairs:

Could the hon. Minister advise this Senate:

- (i) who authorized the present salaries for the Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries of the Tobago House of Assembly?
- (ii) why is the minority leader in receipt of the same salary as a representative without portfolio?

**The Minister of Tobago Affairs (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job):** Mr. Vice-President, section 25(2) of the Tobago House of Assembly Act, No. 40, states, and I quote:

“For the better performance of its functions, the Assembly is hereby empowered to do all such acts and to take all such steps as may be necessary for, or incidental to the exercise of its powers or for the discharge of its duties...”

It is in this context that the Tobago House of Assembly, in a bid to properly and immediately discharge its duties, decided to pay interim salaries to its members while awaiting the Salaries Review Commission's Report on the salaries, allowances and conditions of service of its members and senior staff.

Members of the Senate are advised that the minority leader in the House of Assembly is not in receipt of the same salary as a representative without portfolio.

**Sen. Alfred:** Mr. Vice-President, supplementary question. Could the hon. Minister state what is the salary of the minority leader?

**Dr. The Hon. M. Job:** That salary will be in the Forty-sixth Report of the Salaries Review Commission Report of Trinidad and Tobago. I do not have the figure in my head, Mr. Vice-President, but the report is on the table.

**Sen. Shabazz:** The hon. Minister says that the minority leader is not in receipt of the same salary as a representative without portfolio but he is saying that he does not know what the other salary is. How has the Minister concluded that it is not the same?

**Dr. The Hon. M. Job:** Could you repeat the question please?

**Sen. Shabazz:** The hon. Minister is saying that the minority leader is not in receipt of the same salary as a representative without portfolio. In the same light he is saying that he does not know what the member's salary is. Since he does not know, how has the Minister concluded that it is not the same as a representative without portfolio?

**Dr. The Hon. M. Job:** Mr. Vice-President, I was quite clear in what I said. The information provided to me a while ago was that the members of the Senate are advised that the minority leader in the House of Assembly is not in receipt of the same salary. The report is here and that is information that we can verify without much difficulty.

### **Tobago House of Assembly Salaries Review Commission—Remuneration**

**24. Sen. Cynthia Alfred** asked the hon. Minister of Tobago Affairs:

Could the hon. Minister advise this Senate:

- (i) whether the Salaries Review Commission has settled remuneration for members of the Tobago House of Assembly.

- (ii) If the answer is in the affirmative:
  - (a) would the Minister please say what is the monthly remuneration of each member of the Assembly and;
  - (b) from which month did each member receive his/her remuneration?
- (iii) If the answer is in the negative, could the Minister please state how soon the Salaries Review Commission is expected to complete its deliberations?

**The Minister of Tobago Affairs (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job):** Mr. Vice-President, the Forty-sixth Report of the Salaries Review Commission is now laid and the information sought by the question is in the report. So there is not much I can offer except to suggest that Senators have the report to peruse and to do what they will with it.

**Tobago House of Assembly  
(Constituency Offices)**

**25. Sen. Cynthia Alfred** asked the hon. Minister of Tobago Affairs:

Would the hon. Minister please state when the representatives of the Tobago House of Assembly are likely to have offices set up in their constituencies?

**The Minister of Tobago Affairs (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job):** Mr. Vice-President, as mentioned a few minutes ago, the Forty-sixth Report of the Salaries Review Commission is now laid and it is therefore anticipated that the conditions affecting those constituency offices will be a matter of urgent attention, as soon as the report has been dealt with in the normal course of affairs.

**TRINBAGO UNIFIED CALYPSONIANS' ORGANIZATION (INC'N.) BILL**

*Question put and agreed to,* That a Bill for the incorporation of the Trinbago Unified Calypsonians' Organization and for matters incidental thereto, be now read the first time.

*Bill accordingly read the first time.*

**ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS**

**The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark):** Mr. Vice-President, today we should be dealing with Government

Business. However, based on agreement between leaders of the Independent and Opposition Benches, we have agreed that today would be Private Members Day and I seek leave of the House to deal with Private Business today instead of Government Business.

*Agreed to.*

#### AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

**Sen. Prof. John Spence:** Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

*Whereas* the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has emphasized the need to diversify the economy; and

*Whereas* there has been a commitment to the development of the agricultural sector;

*Be it resolved* that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago intervene in appropriate ways, including adoption of the following measures:

- i. Expansion of the school feeding programme to encompass all primary and secondary schools and tertiary level institutions;
- ii. Division of the Caroni (1975) Ltd. Citrus Farm into 25-hectare blocks for lease to private farmers;
- iii. Development of 2,000 hectares of cocoa on state-owned land for lease to private farmers in 25-hectare blocks;
- iv. Provision of loans to the agricultural sector through commercial banks on a similar basis to those provided to the tourism sector.

Mr. Vice-President, I once again have to apologize to my colleagues who may have heard me speak on the agricultural sector before, for perhaps repeating things I have said in the past. Some years ago when I first started talking about the agricultural sector, it was shortly after Jeffery Stollmeyer met a rather tragic death. Jeffery Stollmeyer had been a Senator before me who spoke on the agricultural sector. Shortly after his death, there was aired on the television, a programme which highlighted his life. In that programme he said, "Well, John Spence is now in the Senate speaking on agriculture, and I would say to him that he has to say the same thing over and over and over again if it is going to have an effect." I looked upon that as a voice from the hereafter which I have to obey, so I have continued to obey it for the last few years.

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Basically, Mr. Vice-President, I tried in various presentations I have made, to distinguish between the Ministers of Agriculture and the government. Looking back at the *Hansard* record of some past presentations, I noticed that I said on one occasion that two of my previous university colleagues had been Ministers of Agriculture and I have had the task of perhaps, making some criticisms of the government at the time of their tenure, but yet feeling that they as individuals must certainly have tried their best to enhance the agricultural sector. Those persons were Dr. Brinsley Samaroo and Dr. Keith Rowley.

**1.45 p.m.**

Here again, I have a former university colleague as Minister of Agriculture, Land, and Marine Resources and once again I believe he is genuinely trying his best to enhance the status of that sector. My fear is, in spite of his efforts, the Government has not responded in a way that I would think appropriate in order for the sector to advance.

My thesis is that the agricultural sector has over the years, declined to the extent that it would no longer on its own initiative, recover from that decline. There needs to be deliberate Government intervention and that is why the Motion I have here is worded in this way. I make an analogy to the days in which Trinidad and Tobago's private sector was not interested in investing in heavy industry and perhaps it is still reluctant to do so. In my opinion, Trinidad and Tobago would never have had the large industrial base it now has, which is so important to our economy, had it not been for the intervention of the Government in projects in the Point Lisas area.

We may be critical of the amount of money lost in various enterprises there, perhaps the Government held on to them for longer than it should, but nevertheless, I do not think there could be any doubt that those initiatives have led to a substantial industrial gain for Trinidad and Tobago. Now of course, we see the private sector in the form of CLICO, investing in heavy industries. Thus, that initiative has been followed up by the private sector here. It has got to the stage where we need to see some deliberate interventions on the part of the Government to trigger the potential and initiative of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I am not going to be very extensive in the presentation this afternoon, because I want to hear from the Government side, what actions are being taken by this Government which will push the sector forward. I have not been able to glean from what is available to the public, that the initiatives, such as they are, would

necessarily push the sector forward. I want to hear from them the logic behind the improvements they hope to see and the measures they are now taking.

The last time I said I was going to make a short introduction, because it was on agriculture, I spoke for an hour. I hope that I do not fall into that error again this afternoon.

Going directly to the Motion, the first item I suggested that might be used as a direct intervention—which I have mentioned on numerous occasions before—is the use of the School Feeding Programme. This has the tremendous advantage of doing a social good and at the same time making a developmental thrust. It is not often that one is able to combine those two objectives. Frequently one has to give increases in old age pension, poor relief, in the facilities available for health care of the elderly and so forth, reliefs of various kinds of social services without direct effect on production. We can have other social activities like education and health, which of course would have indirect effects. But here I believe is the possibility of a direct effect on increasing production in our country.

It has to be done, in my opinion, in a very aggressive way. It cannot be done in incremental increases over a period of time because I do not think this would have the dramatic effect as I think we need to have in, as an example, the agricultural sector. It may lead to a gradual increase in productivity if we take it incrementally over a large number of years, but my thesis is that we need to illustrate to the population in Trinidad and Tobago, firstly, that we are serious about agriculture and are prepared to give it a large push to make it shift, also that by so doing we will have the immediate effect that will serve as an example.

To do this, therefore, in my opinion, we must decide to make a substantial increase in the expenditures on the School Feeding Programme. Our objective should be a complete school feeding programme for all the school children in Trinidad and Tobago. I would include, not just school children but persons who are enrolled at tertiary educational institutions. I believe that the thrust we make, particularly at the junior levels, will have the long-term effect, if the menus are planned so that they maximize the locally produced agricultural products, and illustrate properly balanced diets. I have no doubt that the existing School Feeding Programme does just that, but the fact is, we need to expand it substantially. If it does these things then it will also have the effect, in the future, of getting these children accustomed to looking for locally produced foods and meals cooked in our own way rather than the imported McDonald's or Kentucky Fried products

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which many of us believe are not quite as good in the long-term for our health. I believe this can have a very educational effect on society as well.

The argument is sometimes used that if you give everybody meals, except for the very poor ones who need them badly, you would be incurring an expenditure on persons who do not need money. If you look upon the process, not only as a social service but also as a developmental thrust to the agricultural sector and an educational tool for influencing the population as a whole to eat local, then I think one can justify the expenditures in that way. Of course, if a system can be worked out that those who can afford it would pay a nominal charge, I do not think that one should make the charge so big that it would be a discouragement to the children at school who eat the meals, I do not see any difficulty in that. The main thing is that the system must be set up so that all the children are encouraged, indeed required, to have their meals at the school cafeteria and there must be the strong link with the agricultural sector.

Mr. Vice-President, the second issue I proposed for ensuring direct Government intervention is using Caroni (1975) Limited in a way to lead a developmental thrust. If one goes back to the 1979 Sugar Rationalization Report, this is precisely what it was intending Caroni (1975) Limited to do. Unfortunately, this was never implemented. Even when the government changed in 1986 I remember at that time—at least one or two of those persons who were in that government had been associated with that report—I suggested that now is the opportunity to get it done. Even in 1987 that thrust was not made, then, of course, we had the Tripartite Report and both reports look as though they have not succeeded in the way intended. My proposal is that we create a cadre, get some 60 farmers out of the state farm that is now Caroni (1975) Limited.

While I said there needs to be a governmental thrust and I am pushing for Government's intervention, it is not that I believe we should set up more state enterprises. I am not by any means arguing that we should establish enterprises. Indeed, in the Caroni (1975) Limited thrust, I am suggesting quite the reverse; we should stop treating that large acreage of citrus as a state farm which clearly is inefficient and, which, in many instances, praedial larceny alone must account for a large portion of what would have been profits. We know in Trinidad and Tobago that anything belonging to the Government, we believe belongs to each of us. Therefore, we do not think it wrong to steal from a state farm. We may have more conscience if we steal from private farmers who are of more modest means.



My thesis is that we should select a suitable acreage of land—and I believe that 25 hectares is an acreage that could make a good livelihood for an efficient farmer if citrus is his crop. If this is successful then we can demonstrate that it is possible in the private sector in Trinidad and Tobago in a crop like citrus to make a decent livelihood.

I believe there is a technical reason of which one should be conscious, at least why this thrust may be necessary. It is my understanding that there is a virus disease which has come into Trinidad and Tobago that could devastate the whole 3,000 acres of citrus, because it attacks the root stock on which these trees now stand. If this is indeed the case, and the virus has been found in this plantation, some experts believe it would spread through and kill many trees. I am a bit sceptical myself that, indeed, the virus we have here is as devastating as it is in some other countries, but that is beside the point. If some of the experts are correct, this could happen.

One of the ways to address that problem is to try to give those trees a new root stock. This could be done by a process of enarching, wherein one takes three trees of the new root stock, plant them in a triangle around existing plants and graft them on top or at the side of that plant. Eventually the new root stock will take over the feeding of the plant and the original root stock may die or be killed, and it would not matter.

I cannot see Caroni (1975) Limited carrying out the process of enarching each of its current 50 multiplied by 3,000 trees with three plants each and that total acreage, whatever that last sum comes to. It is conceivable that individual farmers on 25-hectare blocks might do that because a lot of it they would do themselves. Any bright, young farmer will either do his own grafting—he would certainly supervise it—probably raise his own seedlings, and the whole process would be much less expensive than if it were done in a state farm, paying state wages and with state conditions of work and so forth. I think it is important that we move away from the state farm concept in Caroni (1975) Limited with that citrus area.

If we were to lease those 25-hectare blocks—and I believe that leasage should be sold not given away—my calculation is that each could be sold for about \$250,000, which means that for the total acreage of land, Caroni (1975) Limited would get an income of about \$16 million. The loans would be provided by the Agricultural Development Bank, and so, the person leasing the land would be obligated to two different agencies: the ADB for his loan secured by the option to lease on his farm, and the terms of the lease for Caroni (1975) Limited.

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It has been suggested that one has to wait for a change in the Agricultural Small Holdings Act in order to proceed in this way. I cannot see the rationale for that because the lease is such as Caroni (1975) Limited could make it, and I cannot see—and I would like it explained—why it cannot make a lease between two private individuals and which the ADB would recognize in order to give the loan.

With that \$16 million, Caroni (1975) Limited could then develop another area of agricultural activity which in turn could be used to develop farmers on size holdings that would be appropriate for making a decent living, perhaps in an acreage of citrus. If it means that total acreage would slump the market, then perhaps they could go on to an acreage of cocoa. Later on we would discuss the possibility of developing cocoa acreage. Perhaps they should go on to another enterprise, buffalypso or some other enterprise which they could then—not run a state farm—but divide up for private farms.

On that score, it seems to me we have to understand that if we are going to liberalize and become internationally competitive, one prerequisite is that our farmers must have a much higher level of skill than they now have. This is something which I think people are reluctant to talk about. I sense a reluctance because there is always the feeling that one is being critical of small farmers or one is saying that they are no good, and that university and ECIAF graduates are superior. Nothing of the sort! In fact, if you are going to be internationally competitive, the skills needed for running your farm are different and those are skills that would be imparted by ECIAF or UWI. Indeed, the farms you are going to be competing against through imports, from other countries, are going to be run by persons who are trained in that way.

I am not saying that you should select only ECIAF and UWI graduates for your 60 farmers, but certainly you must have a good levelling of persons with that sort of training in order to create a cadre of farmers who are going to really take you into the 21st Century and be competitive on an international basis. So, encourage private forests; have fiscal measures.

This has the effect by itself, if you are going to do it properly, of increasing the competence of your farming community and thereby perhaps they are going to be more competitive.

### **2.00 p.m.**

I had suggested that there should be a development in cocoa. In 1992, I think it was, the then government set up a task force which was asked to look at the cocoa

industry. What I have suggested here is basically the report of that task force. I understand recently from private talks with some senior members of the Ministry, that this may be revived again. If it is, fine; I am very glad. But again the proposal was—and I have adopted it now and I firmly believe it is what we should have been doing over the last five years because six years have gone by since then—that we should plant 1,000 acres or 50 hectares a year over a five-year period. If we had done it by now we would have had the 2,500 hectares.

The proposal envisaged was that the government should plant the farms and bring them into bearing. Again, this is an encouragement because of the low level of agricultural activity and the loss of interest and the need to attract people into it and show them that there can be a living to be earned. If you have brought your trees into bearing you can demonstrate the income and sell the option to lease. That sale price would be based on the cost of bringing it to five years or whatever time you felt was best in order to sell it. It will be useful, as we had suggested in that task force report, if you could involve the prospective farmer in the process of establishment of the farm. We suggested that rather than being done by government, labour and bureaucrats that what one should do is contract out the establishment of these farms to private entrepreneurs—either more than one farm or single farms, whatever—and encourage those contractors to perhaps employ the prospective farmers in the course of their contracts in establishing these farms. Therefore, from the time the farm is being put down the farmer to be would become interested in how that farm eventually would perform.

Again, I believe if we were able to increase the acreage under cocoa in that way, not only would we be setting up commercial farmers, but we would be re-establishing and reviving an industry which has certainly declined considerably over the last few years. The cocoa industry is in serious danger of disappearing altogether because we have a market for fine flavour cocoa in the world and when you get below a certain level of production you lose your market of persons who are buying your superior cocoa from you and you may not even be able to market the residual quantity that you have, whatever its quality.

Of course, if you set the farms up deliberately in that way and you space them geographically to suit, you can then have central fermentaries, an idea which is still being discussed within the Ministry. It is ironic that it was a Trinidadian named Gregor Monsuren when he retired from the Trinidad Government service who went to Jamaica to set up their central fermentaries. The only central fermentary in Trinidad has been one in Tobago which is no longer in use. We never were able to

achieve that in Trinidad largely, I believe, because a co-operative somehow does not seem to work in Trinidad and Tobago. Let us hope it may do so in the future.

The establishment of such an acreage of cocoa would not only, as I said, be again creating new farmers—and these must be skilled persons because to get a reasonable income from such an acreage of cocoa one must not be doing things as we have done them in the past. One must be using new varieties, new intensive systems of production, closer spacing, more trees per acre and so forth.

I know of at least one farm of 50 acres done by a businessman, not necessarily a university graduate, who is doing extremely well. He has a profitable farm of 50 acres using new systems of production which were devised right here in Trinidad and Tobago but never adopted by the university; for what reason it is difficult to say. I think because there has not been a demonstrated effect. If one can demonstrate the effect of a new system of production by setting up 60 farmers in that way one could have the effect of other farmers adopting it. I always believe that the Caroni (1975) Limited rice production system was the one that stimulated the rapid increase in rice production in Trinidad and Tobago and served as a demonstration to those private farmers who went into the Nariva Swamp. I am not talking about the fact that they have gone in illegally and the effects of their cultivation may have been adverse and so forth. I am talking strictly of the fact that they showed the initiative to use a new system of rice production which could be competitive against rice imports, whereas a normal rice farmer system of production in Trinidad and Tobago can only exist if it is heavily subsidized and one does not know how much longer it will be possible to continue to subsidize our crops in that way.

The third point is the possibility of creating private farmers and re-establishing the cocoa industry. I would caution here that it is extremely important to plant new acreages of cocoa—and I repeatedly refuse to use the word although it may have slipped out in passing just now—rehabilitate because in Trinidad and Tobago rehabilitation means planting young cocoa in old fields and that does not work. We spent 25 years in Trinidad and Tobago with a rehabilitation board. I said this before in Parliament, I spoke to the man who conducted that programme for 25 years just before he died and asked him what he thought of that programme and he said it was a complete waste of time; a waste of 25 years of his life. Rehabilitation does not work.

I examined a student some years ago who had done a rehabilitation project in the Economics Department of the University of the West Indies. His conclusion

was that the costs that were incurred, let alone the results, were greater than if the farmer had planted new plots of cocoa. So, please, no rehabilitation of cocoa, we must have new plantations of cocoa. Even if you are renewing an old farm you do not rehabilitate it by putting new trees into old fields but you plant a block at a time until you renew your whole crop. There are technical reasons for this. If you put new trees into an old field the diseases and pests from the old trees will go into the young trees making it more difficult for them to grow and you will find it more difficult to tend them because they are scattered about.

Finally, Mr. Vice-President, I made the proposal—and this came up because I listened to the Minister of Finance in some of his presentations—that we should provide a window through the commercial banks, perhaps in parallel with that through the Agricultural Development Bank, of loans to farmers on a similar basis to that which investors in the tourism industry may get. This came about because in talking to a farmer who also happens to have an interest in the tourism industry, he told me that he is paying a lower rate of interest for his hotel development than he was for his farming enterprise. This seems to be extremely strange. Of course, what has happened over the years is that the Agricultural Development Bank loans have moved from 3 per cent to 12 per cent and I believe they may be going to 14 per cent. At least, now that the prime rate has gone up it means the lending rate of the Agricultural Development Bank might go up as well because they are now under the guidelines that they must be more aligned to commercial rather than subsidized rates.

It would seem to me at this stage—I am not suggesting that we should close down the Agricultural Development Bank. I am suggesting we should open a parallel window through the commercial banks which would allow those farmers who can meet the requirements of the commercial banks at least to be able to take advantage of lower rates of interest that might be offered in that way. I think the basis is that the banks do not have to pay any tax on the profits they make from loans to the tourism sector.

Those are the measures I had suggested specifically. But, of course, Mr. Vice-President, it does not end there. What I have said is “appropriate ways” including those four major methods. In the past, in making presentations of this sort, I have tended to be rather general and I have made suggestions similar to the first three of these that I now make but I have not been specific. Now I am being quite deliberate and saying to the Government, these are the things I believe ought to be done. On this occasion it is not my intention to accept any modification to this

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Motion which may appear to dilute it. If the Government does not like it then they can vote against it.

What has happened repeatedly in the past is that—it is a game that we play; not just this Government but previous governments as well. Every time there is a private Member's Motion one plays a little game in trying to see how one can make an amendment which more or less will keep what is in the original Motion but will deflect its major thrust. On this occasion there will have to be a vote and I will call for a division.

There are a number of other things that I think we could do if we really want to enhance the agricultural sector. I will mention some of these now. In the area of forestry all of our forestry, until now, started in the 1940s has been done by government planting forest. Mainly the private forests have been the extraction of naturally occurring trees rather than the deliberate planting of private forests. At least one private entrepreneur in Trinidad and Tobago has shown—and I have repeated his name frequently in the Senate. He is never given the recognition for what he has done, even now, and that is Elton Richardson who has planted 1,000 acres of mahogany in Toco and shown that in spite of the insect pest, visipila, which damages the growing point of mahogany, it is possible with the right culture to establish mahogany. This is a very valuable timber. I think in Brazil there has been a moratorium on the cutting of natural forests of mahogany and there is now a reaction, at least in Europe, to the use of timber that is taken out of natural forests. There, then, is the opportunity to come in for planted forests because if you are renewing the forest you are planting it yourself and you are not destroying natural forest and, therefore, it is a green product that you are producing for sale and this, of course, gives you an advantage in selling the product.

Funnily enough, mahogany is a plant which in certain localities, at least in Trinidad and Tobago, grows quite rapidly. I say in certain localities because Dr. Richardson's estate was in Toco but it may be a much wider area than that, that we can plant. Indeed, he is now converting his citrus farm in Cumuto to forestry. I myself, on five acres of land, have planted 200 mahogany trees for my grandchildren because I believe that this is a crop that, in the future, will be much more valuable as the demand goes up in the world and the supply from the natural forest is reduced. Therefore, we must be given incentives for private forests.

I would like to say something about the way that the Agricultural Development Bank treats forests with respect to Dr. Richardson's experiences but I have not discussed the matter with him, therefore, I do not feel it possible for me to give out

his private business; just to say that I do not think that the bank, at the moment, understands the gestation period for forestry products. In other words, you cannot treat a crop that will take 25 years to mature in the same way that you would treat lettuce or tomatoes which are going to mature in three months, or even citrus that is going to start giving you full bearing in eight years. It is a completely different order of business and, therefore, your loan portfolio has to be structured with that in mind.

Eventually, of course, the payoff will be very big if the forest comes through. Indeed, Dr. Richardson is now harvesting his mahogany. I spoke to him a couple of nights ago and he told me he is at last getting substantial income from these mahogany trees and, of course, since they have been planted over the years, the growth will continue and so his income will continue. So, encourage private forests; have fiscal measures.

### **2.15 p.m.**

It is such a disappointment to find the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism not here, because much of what I am saying, of course, involves money and, therefore, it would have been very useful had he been here to listen, especially as the next item that I am going to talk about involves tourism, which is also in his portfolio. This really indicates to me the lack of real concern, initiative, savvy, I do not know what. I will describe to you what has happened over the last couple weeks and perhaps you, Mr. Vice-President, can advise me on the right words to use, to try to get a different level of thinking in order that we may act.

Recently, we had in Trinidad and Tobago a seminar put on by the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO), headquarters in Barbados. This, I think, was called "Sustainable Tourism". That was the theme. I happened to be interested in tourism in Tobago, particularly, because I see the whole island of Tobago being threatened by tourism, so I have an interest there. I decided since it was sustainable tourism, that I would try to attend this meeting—\$790, a substantial sum to be paid by a retiree. But, nevertheless, I rang up first to get the programme.

When I got the programme, to my horror, there were sections on tourism and energy; tourism and manufacturing; nothing on tourism and agriculture. So I rang Tidco from the top to the bottom and asked, "What is this about? Why energy?" "Oh, we think perhaps there may be oil spills or something." Why not have a thing on tourism and the environment? Then you can say energy. I asked, "Are you sure

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it is not turning off the lights in hotel rooms if you want to save energy? Tourism and energy.

Then, tourism and manufacturing I can understand. Sure, because some of the manufacturing products may be into the tourism industry, but not tourism and agriculture.

So I phoned through to Barbados to the Caribbean Tourism Organization. Mr. Holder was engaged in a meeting, discussing the conference I was told, so I left a message saying, "I really think you ought to have something on tourism and agriculture if you are talking about sustainable tourism." Of course, I offered even at that late stage, if they needed an input and they felt I could be useful to them, please feel free to call on me. Of course, nothing. I did not pay my \$790 because I did not think it was worth my while to go to the conference since I was not going to hear anything about the agricultural sector.

Now, I understand that nobody from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources attended that conference. Now why were the people in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources not alerted in the same way that I was, when we see in the newspaper an advertisement from Tidco on tourism on sustainable development? Why did it not trigger something in one of the members of staff of the Ministry to do what I did, phone Tidco, phone the Caribbean Tourism Organization, agitate? Of course, I can imagine the response from Tidco and from the Caribbean Tourism Organization. Who is Spence? Why should we worry about him?

But think of the difference if the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources had phoned Tidco and said, "Look, we really feel that you have to link to the agricultural sector, because this is another avenue or outlet for our farming community." Mind you, it is bad enough that Trinidad did not do it, but the Caribbean Tourism Organization is an organization that covers all the little islands which are having trouble selling their bananas in Europe, that are looking for the last 10 years through "diversification programmes", because I do not know what they are doing in these programmes. Yet, nowhere is there, as I say, that reaction, because that is what I got, "Tourism and agriculture, let us see what there is on the programme. Nothing."

So, Mr. Vice-President, I really am sadly coming to the conclusion that whereas we talk and we talk, and we say that we are interested in agriculture, the fact is that as a country we really have turned off. That is why I keep on talking



and talking and talking in the hope that occasionally it may trigger that reaction in somebody, even if it is because I push and say things—which, yes, they might not like to hear—in order to get that reaction.

Another area which affects the agricultural sector is that of research. Now, for many years we have talked about reorganizing the research sector. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to do it within the bureaucracy and, so, since I was Dean of Agriculture in 1975 and I was asked to sit on a committee to look at the Research Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, there has been this talk of having a separate research entity and taking the whole Research Division out of the bureaucracy.

I think the expenditure is now approximately \$20 million; I suspect it is more than that, probably \$22 million for Centeno only, which does not include the research in the Livestock Division and in other areas. So, we have a substantial expenditure. Why do we not at least get an annual report? I believe the last annual report from the Research Division was one of which I still have a copy, when I was at Centeno in 1954. I have not seen a published report since then. Really.

So, if you have a research sector on which you are spending \$20 million, should you not have an annual report which tells you about the research activities; the papers that are being published; the results they have got; the farm visits that have been paid; the new crops that have been tested; and so forth? But, nothing. It is very difficult to get statistics about the agricultural sector. I myself, this morning, was speaking to someone at the Central Bank to get one set of data from the Central Bank. They are all sourced at the Central Statistical Office, but the Central Bank, the Central Statistical Office and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, Planning Division, all interpret these data slightly differently.

Okay, if the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources interprets the data in a certain way, why do we not get a report from the Ministry, from the Planning Division which sets out the data, the results? If there are claims being made about increased production and increased GDP and so forth, I tried this morning to get the 1997 additions to the GDP, the Central Bank told me 1.8 per cent; the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources said it is 3.7 per cent. Whichever it is, of course, this is a minuscule change in the agricultural contribution to the GDP and it is probably an annual fluctuation, not a genuine increase of any magnitude, so if the presentation by the hon. Minister comes along subsequently, I warn in advance that I will not be impressed by slight fluctuations in the agricultural contributions in the GDP.

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What we should be looking at targeting is a substantial increase. If we are now 2.5 per cent of GDP, we should be targeting 5 per cent in 10 years' time. In 1962, the agricultural contribution was 10 per cent. Now, it is true that the rest of the economy is also advanced, so in some sense it has been diluted by the growth of the rest of the economy, but there is also a real and substantial decline in the agricultural sector as well. So, both components have got it to fall from 10 per cent to 2.5 per cent. So let us at least give a target against which we can measure our progress.

For research, and I must again link this and the next thing I am going to talk about, training, with my proposal for a university for Trinidad and Tobago, which I suggested should also have the research component including the Research Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources; Caribbean Industrial Research Institute; Institute of Marine Affairs and so forth. Unless you take that Research Division out of the bureaucracy, forget it. It is approximately \$20 million a year down the drain. Not that the people themselves are not bright young people; they are all quite bright; they are all qualified; but it is impossible to operate in a bureaucracy.

You will find that 90 per cent of that contribution goes to salary. So, if you want something done, you have to offer to pay the gasoline bill of the officers and pay to buy the chemicals and so forth. It may be a little better now, but basically it has not changed. A large proportion of that budget goes to salaries and you cannot run an outfit like that. It must be taken out of the bureaucracy into an autonomous institute by itself, or along with something else.

Now, for myself, if one does not want to put it into a big technical university with industrial research and so forth, then I would link it with the Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry. I also talked to the people at the Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry this morning and I believe that we could run the Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry entirely with the teaching staff from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources at Centeno. They sit next to each other. They do give some odd lectures but, by and large, the people who are in research are in research, and the people who are in teaching are in teaching.

Quite frankly, it should be like university teachers; they should all do both, teaching and research, and also be involved in some specialist extension activity. So certainly, both the training at Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry and that of the activities of the Research Division could be enhanced by

giving those people some teaching to do. Nothing is more salutary than having to stand before a class of bright young people to try to tell them something about your subject, when some of them in the audience, in fact, may be brighter than you. If research people have to do that, it keeps them on their toes for doing their research as well. They have to keep up in their subjects in order to teach and so forth.

With respect to the other part of training, that is the university. There, again, quite frankly, I myself am exceeding this point. I have not spoken publicly about it before, but recently at the university, there has been a change during the hon. Minister's term of office, in which the Faculty of Agriculture has merged with the Faculty of Natural Sciences to form one faculty. I think this really is a disaster as far as agriculture goes. I think this is the end of the agricultural faculty as a whole. I was Dean for six years and saw that faculty really extending itself both locally and internationally. How could one merge it with the Faculty of Natural Sciences and hope for it to keep its identity? How can one Dean oversee those two faculties, either one of which is a full-time job? To save some money, all of which has gone to pay the 27 per cent increase for academic staff. It is a disaster. At the same time that was being contemplated, the university—

**Sen. Prof. Ramchand:** Thank you. I wonder if the hon. Senator knows that it is even at risk for the argument for the university of Trinidad and Tobago in the sense that the kind of merger he is talking about has occurred in other faculties. The Faculties of Management and Education have now been merged and the disciplines English, French, Spanish, Creative Arts and Linguistics now form one department within a mega-department called the Humanities and Education.

**Sen. Prof. J. Spence:** Yes, well no doubt, Mr. Vice-President, but my immediate concern is agriculture.

When the university was making this decision, at the same time it had a group of advisors to advise them on the future of the Faculty of Agriculture, and these advisors said, "Look, please hold with your decision until our report is in." In fact, the university did not hold. While they were being advised as to what to do and I spoke to the people in that advisory group, all of them felt that this merger was not a good idea, but eventually, they had to write a report which says how to make the best of the merger, because they were not able to influence that decision.

This was during the hon. Minister's time when he was in the Faculty of Agriculture. Perhaps he sought that merger, I do not know. I certainly did not

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think it was a good idea. I do not think it is a good idea. I am still to be convinced and nothing that I have seen since the merger occurred, has allowed me to think otherwise. How we are going to recover from that, I do not know. I will not refer to other recent activities that are tending to cause problems at the university, perhaps which you are not aware of, Senator, because you were not in the country at the time.

Some of us are trying to help as much as we can with the Botanic Gardens because these days botanic gardens are no longer just recreational areas, but are very much concerned with conservation. So, a group of us has got together and called ourselves "The Friends of the Botanic Gardens". I have been trying to see the hon. Minister to tell him about the activities, and basically what we are hoping to do is to ensure that the conservation thrust of the Botanic Gardens is enhanced.

Now, this is not to say that we are usurping the functions of the leadership in the Gardens. All we are trying to do as a non-governmental organization is to help with whatever is planned in their normal immediate planning and to see if the resources are easily available from the Government, whether we can perhaps help in obtaining resources from outside. One aspect of that with which we are concerned, is the continual reduction in the size of the Gardens by alienation of the land for various purposes.

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

The first trust, I suppose, was the building of the President's house which later became the Prime Minister's house, that excised a large part of the Botanical Gardens; the Ombudsman's office excised another part; the Emperor Valley Zoo excised a part and, more recently, there has been a proposal to excise another 5 acres for the expansion of the Zoo. That, some of us feel, would be very unfortunate for the future of the Botanical Gardens because in time, of course, the Zoo would want to expand. That is why some of us have suggested that perhaps what we need to do is to have a different sort of zoo somewhere in Central Trinidad, covering a larger acreage where the animals could roam more freely than they could around the Queen's Park Savannah.

Just two final points, Mr. Vice-President, I may just run into my spare time if it is given to me, but—

**Sen. Mark:** Sen. Prof. Spence, could I get some clarification before you wind up? Based on your experience, what is the relationship, if any, between the

University of the West Indies and the farming community? Do you think there is a need for an enhanced role between those two forces in this country?

**Sen. Prof. J. Spence:** Mr. Vice-President, that has always been a very delicate question. I can tell you, for example, many years ago when I was Dean of the University of the West Indies, some students, as part of their training programme—this is many governments back—decided to give some extension advice directly to some farmers. However, they were sharply rapped over the knuckles by the then Ministry of Agriculture. They were told that was not their business, that it was the business of the Ministry of Agriculture to relate to farmers, and the university must relate to the ministry. As I said, it is a delicate area to tread.

Of course, there has to be co-operation. The co-operation and research is much easier to achieve because that does not usually involve dealing directly with the public. There is an Extension Department in the University of the West Indies but it is basically used for training extension officers. Many persons in the ministry would have taken courses run by the Extension Department—they do a postgraduate diploma and so forth—rather than dealing directly with farmers in Trinidad and Tobago.

The answer is two-fold, one, it is a regional institution, so it has responsibilities outside Trinidad and Tobago. However, whenever it acts to the farming community in Trinidad and Tobago, it must do so through the local ministry to ensure that it does not cross wires, because the university may be promoting something which is not Government's policy. However, speaking from a national point of view, I think we could use the university more than we do for our local needs.

Talking about new products, again, quite frankly, apart from the horticultural industry and mainly anthurium lilies—which we now export—there have not really been a great deal of new products in Trinidad and Tobago—that I know of—over the last few years; most of the things we have always done. I suppose one could say that the growth of papayas has been expanded considerably due to our technological breakthrough in the varieties used and the higher resistance to diseases. We have certainly produced more papaws now than we did in the past and some are even exported. We export a certain measure of hot peppers and that, again, may be more than we did in the past. We always grew peppers but not quite on the scale that we now do. There has not really been any new enterprise.

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Mr. Vice-President, I have found a new enterprise, which I am taking every opportunity to promote; jam made from dwarf pommecythere, which Senators may taste over the tea break. The big advantage of the dwarf pommecythere or dwarf golden apple—it is an introduced plant—is that it bears all the year around. If one has to process a product in a factory, then it is a great disadvantage if it is a seasonal product.

When I spoke to one of our local manufacturers about making jam from pommecythere, he said to me: “You know we do not make a single-strength jam because we cannot get any one product all year around so we mix many different things together and reapportion changes throughout the year.” I said: “You do not have to do that with the dwarf golden apple because it bears all year around.” The second thing is that it is a little plant about that high, or it could be kept to that size, so that it is very easy to harvest. Here we have a heavy bearing product which bears all year around and is very versatile in what it could be used for: jams, drinks, ice cream, sorbet, kuchela, whole pickled fruit for school children. It has any number of uses. Anything one could do with the big golden apple one could do with the dwarf golden apple. Any Senator who wants to have a plant, I am willing to provide one. I am on a one-man mission to promote dwarf pommecythere, because I think it is an excellent product.

The problem in many of our crops is the production side. For example, at one time passion fruit was going to be a good product in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute (CARIRI) produced an excellent drink from the passion fruit. The problem, however, is in the growing of the fruit; difficulties arose because they could not grow the passion fruit properly because of diseases. I have grown the dwarf pommecythere on about a quarter acre on my little five-acre plot. I have been growing it for three or four years now. It does get some of the gummosis like the big trees, but by and large, it does not go down with it.

**Dr. Mohammed:** Prof. Spence, whilst you are turning out to be an excellent salesman, would you mind telling us the susceptibility of the dwarf golden apple to gummosis? Have you had any problems with gummosis in your plantation?

**Sen. Prof. J. Spence:** That is precisely what I was saying. Although the dwarf trees do get gummosis, they seem to be much more tolerant than the large plants. The big pommecythere trees—sixth-foot trees—get gummosis very badly; the whole tree could be killed and, indeed, a whole branch may be killed. I have had the gummosis disease on the dwarf trees—as I said, I have a quarter acre planted, they are about four feet by three feet apart, so they are very close—and while an

odd branch might get the gummosis disease, the trees are not killed. That branch continues to produce quite as profusely as if it did not have the disease. I believe if one is getting any problem at all with the gummosis disease, one must be careful to keep the weeds down and the atmosphere around the plants free of humidity. I do not believe there would be a problem with the gummosis disease.

Mr. Vice-President, I was talking about this in the context of new products. Again, my problem is that we do not seem to have the imagination to look for new areas of activity. We talk about niche markets, we talk about the fact that we cannot get into traditional markets because they are all too competitive, so we need new products and new niches to exploit. However, we do not seem to have the wit. That is why I find the dwarf pommecythere so exciting; it is easy to produce, easy to harvest, bear fruits all year around, small plant and makes an excellent product.

Finally, Mr. Vice-President, I make a point, in general, about how we might help ourselves with respect to food. Again, I have had, first in 1987 and in early 1998, motions on "Grow more food", as I call it. For example, let us take the passion fruit and the dwarf pommecythere, there should not be any family in Trinidad and Tobago in which the children go to school without fruit, at least with those two plants, because one is small and because the other could grow on a vine between one's neighbour and oneself. No matter how poor one is in Trinidad and Tobago, children should not be sent to school without a fruit because one has the wherewithal to provide it oneself. However, this needs a bit of encouragement from the Government. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources should be teaching persons about this, telling them that it is possible to do this, and showing them how. We have a lot of time now—I was a bit naughty, I was going to say perhaps we could see a little less of our certain personalities on TIC and a little more of the agricultural department telling farmers what to do. But let us talk about the latter and not the former.

In the United Kingdom now, which is an industrial country, well off, with the economy booming, there are still, what one calls, allotments. Land is provided by the government to individuals who want to provide their own food. I have a Barbadian friend living in Cambridge who does not buy potatoes, lettuce, cabbage; he grows it all on his land, and he is in his late sixties.

In Trinidad and Tobago, again, we could demonstrate that to individuals. We hold conferences, committees, commissions, and Heavens knows what, and talk about alleviating poverty. The poorer someone is, the larger proportion of one's

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income one spends on food, and yet *ad nauseam* I have talked in this Parliament about using the resources of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to teach persons how to grow some food to help themselves.

**2.40 p.m.**

We can do it in a very substantial and extensive way. That is the attack on poverty; a real, deliberate immediate attack on poverty instead of these grand commissions, conferences, consultations and seminars; or the Minister of Finance having to find \$10 more for old age pension and the like. I am sorry, but I am too old. That is my problem. We did it during World War II. Many people grew their own food during World War II because they could not get it in by ship. It was not a question of foreign exchange, they could not get it in by ship and they did it. What is it? Are people different now? Are we so different from our forefathers? I do not think so, really, if it comes down to basics. I think we can be persuaded.

Mr. Vice-President, I am anxiously looking forward to hearing what the Government side has to say.

I beg to move.

*Seconded by Sen. Prof. Julian Kenny.*

*Question proposed.*

**Sen. Prof. Julian Kenny:** Mr. Vice-President, I was up at the North Coast with the Minister on other matters and it is rather tiring and I have had a bit of an identity crisis; I am not quite sure who I am. This morning when I woke up I thought I was Sen. Prof. Spence. Had I been Sen. Spence, I would have had a problem because I really was not prepared to speak. I do not know whether it is a conspiracy by the media, but one of the media, in an editorial referred to Sen. Prof. Spence when I think they may have been referring to Prof. Kenny, so I am very confused about my identity. I think I must thank you for directing me back to myself.

Mr. Vice-President, I was actually preparing to speak on Sen. Prof. Spence's Motion and about 3.30 p.m. on Sunday was reading a magazine which I received here in the Senate. I would just read a part of what I was reading which was taken from *Caribbean Affairs*, First Quarter, 1998, Vol. 8 No. 1, page 92. It states:

“We do not seem to have developed that degree of political maturity that there are any issues in public life today which we can approach in a non-partisan way. This is something I have complained about repeatedly in debates



on crime, the drug problem and other things. We do not seem able to ever have a bipartisan or non-partisan approach to a problem.”

These words are actually taken from a debate—not in this Parliament but in a previous Parliament—and are the words of Sen. Martin Daly. In fact, he has repeated this over and over.

I make the point because every Private Member’s motion which we have proposed has always ended up with some sort of an attempt being made to modify it with an amendment here or there that, in my view, is certainly totally unnecessary. I hope that we look at the issue which Sen. Spence’s—I have got the name correct—Motion clearly directs us to as to what our debate ought to be.

Mr. Vice-President, we sit here and I know that there are many front-line speakers whom I have not appreciated, until I listened to the radio; it is only then I realized that Sen. Williams is such a spirited speaker. I was hoping that we would have this kind of spirit in our debate from everyone because we really have to get to the heart of the issue of this particular Motion. We are looking towards the future of the country and to finding innovative means of forcing development.

I would like to add one specific suggestion to that raised by Sen. Spence. I am not suggesting that we add a number “5” to it, but I would like to take you back to the sea, which forms a part of my life. I frequently sit looking out to the sea, pondering on what the sea yields to us. I reflect on the times when Sen. Spence and I worked in the same ministry—I worked in the fisheries. I fear that this is a suggestion that goes as far back to the 1950s.

Mr. Vice-President, permit me to go back a little in our history when there was a Fisheries Division in the then Ministry of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries. There is still one now which is very active; with a lot of research going on, I am told, yet we do not see the fruits of the expenditure of this research over the years. Indeed, the production or yield of fish from the sea remains essentially at the levels that they were when I was Senior Fisheries Officer—it is just a few thousand tons of fish.

Not only that, there is clear evidence now of the depletion of stock in the Gulf of Paria, particularly. We know we have had a long history of activities, almost bordering on warfare between our fishing fleets and the Venezuelan Guardia—this has involved gunshots, killings and so forth. Our fishing industry remains in a sort of animation. In fact, very much of what you see is now what went on when I worked in the Fisheries Division in the 1950s.

**2.50 p.m.**

In the mid-1950s we made a specific suggestion to the Ministry, and this has been repeated over the years, almost like Sen. Prof. Spence repeats his suggestions over the years. There is an extensive area of continental shelf, larger than Trinidad, to the east of us. There is a bit of effort aimed at exploiting this. A few boats operate out of Matura, a few out of Ortoire and a few from Guayaguayare but they operate with the kind of gear used in the Gulf of Paria and periodically there are tragedies.

Mr. Vice-President, a specific suggestion has been offered over the years by technical people and the proposal is for the establishment of a fishing port, a sheltered harbour on the east coast of Trinidad and here is where there are problems with our politicians taking a perfectly sensible proposal and manipulating it for writing manifestos, “we are going to do this and that”.

The specific proposal is that we have a fishing port on the east coast of Trinidad, somewhere. What happens is the minute this gets into the political realm we have to have a ferry port to Tobago from Toco. There was never any such suggestion. It has been taken up by the political directorate of the day, “we are going to build a ferry port at Toco.” It is sheer lunacy to think of a ferry port at Toco especially a ferry port that is going to carry freight. It just simply does not make sense and, indeed, the studies done by people who know have pointed out that a ferry port to handle a Panorama is a no, no.

Over the years we have been talking ferry port/Toco, when the suggestion about the actual development of the fisheries on the east coast which is a small fishing port that offers protection against the bad sea condition, this has simply disappeared. Nobody has made a technical study.

Mr. Vice-President, may I point out that if you had a fishing port of the kind that you see around Europe and North America, possibly at Balandra, maybe at Point Radix—I do not know, the technical studies have to be done—but one of the pluses of having a fishing port is that you could have—and I am sure the Brigadier will appreciate my suggestion and perhaps get some movement on it—a coast guard station. I do not mean for one of the big ships, but for something fast to get out there for rescues, to chase other people who should not be there, and for fisheries patrol.

Why have we spent four decades without actually examining the proposal? My suggestion is that when we are considering this Motion, one of the steps we might

take is a thorough technical evaluation of the possibility of establishing a small fishing port which is basically a break-water to give shelter and some shore-base facilities, electricity, an outstation for the coast guard for small vessels, perhaps, a helicopter pad and there we have surveillance of the east coast. Then, it opens up the east coast of Trinidad to exploitation of stocks which are out there and which are still quite abundant. Indeed, some of the entrepreneurs have moved away from the pirogue-type fishing craft which is totally unsuited to the east coast and they are now operating slightly larger vessels from Port of Spain.

The idea is if there are better fishing crafts which are better adapted to those conditions in the east coast then, our entrepreneurs will start investing more money. Much time is wasted when you bring your catches back all the way to Port of Spain. If you are on a port on the east coast, let us say Balandra, you can just get it onto a truck and it is on to the market.

Mr. Vice-President, things have changed. We know that the Venezuelans have chased us out of the special fishing zone. One knows the reality of what was agreed to with Venezuela; that there is no special concession. All that we have agreed to is the Columbus Channel which is a common fishing area for Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago and, of course, that part of the gulf which is already demarcated for our fishermen. The little pirogues continuing the exploitation are simply not going to be afforded any opportunity of growth.

I watch from the North Coast and I watch the Venezuelan boats sailing up in pairs. They come all the way from Venezuela and where do they go? They go around our East Coast to the south-east and they start their fishing and then move back. They are, in fact, not supposed to be there. We cannot ascertain, and get out there because we do not have the gear, the ships but they can be seen. No one is going to tell me that a Venezuelan fishing boat fishing from the Paria peninsula is going to go all the way out to the East Coast and is going to get out of our exclusive economic zone and into international waters. This is absolutely nonsense. They are going there because they are allowed. People break traffic lights because they are allowed.

This is one thing like Sen. Spence. In fact, I would like to rename him. There is a little figure in American folklore who is called Johnny Applesseed who went around the country throwing out apple seeds as they moved West. I hope Sen. Spence does not mind me calling him Johnny Pommecythere.

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Mr. Vice-President, there is just one wish I would like to make of you. I wish to praise the Ministry of National Security for the way in which things were brought together on the North Coast of Trinidad over the past weekend. It was really quite remarkable to see just by chance—everyone has knocked the 999—the communications specialist who was testing the equipment happened to be at Blanchisseuse.

I sympathize with the Brigadier. When I go to a police station, sometimes I do not get the most collaborative or civil of responses. Fortunately, there is this man called Thomas, a striking man, who realized that there was something serious and he followed us down and decided a helicopter was required.

I really commend the Ministry of National Security and, in particular, Sgt. Thomas, and a few other persons, including Dr. Hoyte who was there on the spot otherwise the loss of lives would have been far greater.

Mr. Vice-President, I seem to be still on a reasonably even keel. I do hope that officers of the Ministry of National Security, the next time we meet on my property, do not address me as Professor Julien. Thank you.

**Sen. Nafeesa Mohammed:** Mr. Vice-President, after listening to Sen. Prof. Kenny on the events of the last weekend, we all would like to commend him for the manner in which he and his family extended themselves at a time when so many people were involved in a tragedy.

In commending the Ministry of National Security with respect to the very quick response we call on the Minister of Works and Transport for an equally quick response in getting the particular landslip fixed as soon as possible. I am sure he has already visited the area, and some actual works will take place.

### **3.00 p.m.**

We on this side take the opportunity to commend Prof. Spence for the Motion that is before us this afternoon. It is indeed a very timely one which would cause us all to focus on some real issues. I know Prof. Kenny quoted from the *Caribbean Affairs First Quarter, 1998 Vol. 8 No. 1* and he made specific mention of the need for a non-partisan approach with respect to some issues. We on this side have no difficulty with the Motion before the Senate. We support the call being made by Prof. Spence.

While Prof. Spence was piloting the Motion the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources got up. I could be found guilty of making a political

comment, but his question about the gummosis disease rang some alarm bells in me. Having just come through the mealy bug affair to froghopper, I hope we are not heading into gummosis to prevent Prof. Spence's new industry from taking off. I urge the hon. Minister to allow Prof. Spence to further develop his commodity.

We are very fortunate indeed to have Prof. Spence in Parliament today. He has been here for a number of years and has been involved with the agricultural sector. He has the experience of three different governments in power and dealing with policy measures from them. We hope that as time progresses some of his recommendations would be implemented regardless of who is in power. Many of them make tremendous sense.

The Motion states:

“Whereas the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has emphasized the need to diversify the economy; and

Whereas there has been a commitment to the development of the agricultural sector;”

I think we recognize or acknowledge the fact that the present administration, as well as the previous administration and the NAR administration have all emphasized the need to diversify our economy. We acknowledge the fact that for a number of years we have been very dependent on the energy sector and as time progresses we have all been talking about diversification. We acknowledge there is a need for diversification. I recall in January of 1996, in the first budget contribution of the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, he made a specific statement about the new government's commitment to diversify the economy.

We have seen over time that much of the policy measures which have been enunciated are very similar. This was a very striking fact when the hon. Minister made his first budget contribution because he proceeded to enunciate many of the policy measures which were carried out by the former PNM administration. By and large, we all want to see a diversification of agriculture. We are accustomed hearing about the need to maximize employment opportunities and we should all be conscious of the need to reduce our food import bill.

With these objectives in mind, we find that over time many programmes have been recommended with a view to achieving these goals. However, the problem has been in terms of the implementation of these recommendations. I think we accept that over the last decade we have had to undergo a period of structural

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adjustment. For this reason many of the policies have been similar. The consequences seem to be similar as well.

I remember looking through a document with which Prof. Spence was involved. It was an action plan for agriculture which was enunciated in 1993. In that plan the comment was made about the fact that our country and the government seemed to be moving apart. We are now in 1998 and that fact continues to exist. In fact, we seem to be moving further and further and more rapidly apart. This is a reality of which all our political leaders need to take note.

I say this in the context of all the talk about levelling the playing field. The reality is that the playing field is not level. With all the talk we would have expected, especially now, with the present administration in power, that some new initiatives would have been put forward by this Government with a view to levelling the playing field. We are not experiencing any real change in terms of the agricultural sector.

**3.10 p.m.**

Mr. Vice-President, in Sen. Prof. Spence's Motion, the first item in the discussion on diversifying the economy and in commenting on the commitment to the development of the agricultural sector, advocates the expansion of the School Feeding Programme to encompass all primary, secondary and tertiary level institutions.

When we look at the origin of the School Feeding Programme, we see that at the time of the conceptualization of this programme it envisaged a national programme that would have ensured that every school child would have been able to obtain at least one balanced meal per day. I would just like to refer to a statement made when this programme was being enunciated. It is one which comes from the 1978 budget speech. It deals with the intent of this programme. It was said that:

“The programme must be based on local foods except where it is absolutely essential to resort to imported foodstuffs. The programme is not only for the physical health of the child but also for the economic health of the farmer. It is largely to this end that the new loan arrangements have been worked out for the Agricultural Development Bank;”

So, Mr. Vice-President, the intent of this programme is certainly a laudable one.

In 1978, a School Task Force was appointed to look into the setting up of this National School Feeding Programme. In this report, which was presented in November, 1978 by the School Task Force, a detailed analysis was made of the patterns of our population growth and school distribution in relation to the population.

This report also went into some detail in terms of the conditions that exist in our schools, in order to facilitate a programme of this type. It looked in great detail into the different types of systems that could be put in place with respect to food preparation. A discussion took place as to whether there should be on-site kitchens, a central kitchen, food preparation centres, pre-packaged units or contract catering, in terms of the whole system to be used.

In this report also, a major obstacle in terms of the implementation of a National School Feeding Programme was identified and this obstacle relates to the need for facilities for the procurement, processing, storage and distribution of raw materials. The report went on to propose a plan for the National School Feeding Programme and it went into the code of hygiene that would be required. That was in 1978.

Today, we have a School Feeding Programme in place. The present programme, I understand, extends to all Government pre-schools, primary schools and some secondary schools, particularly the junior secondary schools. The system that is used in the distribution of meals is one that depends on the principals identifying those students who may be in need of a meal. I understand that approximately 77,000 meals per day are being catered.

The system that is in place seems to be based on the contracting of caterers for purposes of supplying these meals. This programme started in the 1980s and, sometime in 1986, when the programme was centralized, food was actually being prepared and distributed from Chaguaramas. Mr. Vice-President, you would appreciate the logistics of having to distribute meals in a very short space of time from such a distance to schools throughout the country.

In 1986, because of the amount of wastage and spoilage that was taking place, the programme was shut down for a while. We know that in 1986 the government had been changed and the programme had not been restarted until 1989. With the reopening of the programme in 1989, we would have started to undergo all these structural adjustment measures. In 1991, another Government came into play and there was a move to widen the social safety net, so the programme was expanded after 1991.

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With respect to the programme today, I am sure all efforts are being made to expand it and we will commend the Government if they are able to increase the number of meals supplied to our school population. I am taking into account what Prof. Spence is calling for in his Motion, which is basically an expansion of this programme to cover not just primary and secondary schools, but tertiary institutions. However, Mr. Vice-President, we need to be a bit practical. If we want to expand the programme, there is need for us to put certain types of infrastructure in place. The obstacle which was identified in the 1978 task force report continues to exist even today.

When we look at the day-to-day operations of the School Feeding Programme as it exists today, the system is one whereby caterers are contracted after a tendering process takes place. I believe that there are over 70 caterers presently on contract throughout Trinidad and Tobago. My information from persons who are involved directly in the agricultural sector, particularly in the Central Market in Port of Spain, is that very often caterers come to the market to buy raw materials. If one wants to provide a balanced meal, all efforts ought to be made to buy produce, particularly local ones, which will certainly redound to the benefit of farmers. Caterers who buy in bulk can go to the market and that will now stimulate the demand for our local produce. That stimulation of demand will now encourage our farmers to produce more.

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

In this way, we ought to have an incentive and so increase our food production in the country. The reality is that the linkages may not be working as efficiently as they ought when we look back from 1978 coming through the years, at the time when this programme was being conceptualized, what was being advocated, and it makes sense, is that what was then the Central Marketing Agency, and I believe that agency is now merged into what is called NAMDEVCO, National Agricultural Marketing Development Corporation—the idea was to have that agency provide the link between the farmers and those persons preparing the meals for our School Feeding Programme. So that, if that system is allowed to function or operate efficiently, then we can all be confident that there will be tremendous benefits that will redound to the benefit of our farmers. The reality is however, that that system is not functioning as envisaged.

We have heard much talk in this Chamber about the Debe market. I know attempts have been made to have some activities carried out in the Debe market. I myself have personally been in the Debe market and in many respects it continues



to be underutilized. Yes, there are some people who are there vending, mainly retailers during the week, but the problem—and you can ask any farmer in this country and I am sure he will agree with it—is that in Trinidad and Tobago we need a proper market for the farmers in this country, a proper wholesale market with proper facilities, proper cold storage facilities and other infrastructure to really encourage our farmers to be able to produce and have appropriate marketing facilities in order to sell their produce.

I have raised this in the context of the School Feeding Programme, because we know that NAMDEVCO was sometime ago moved from North Trinidad and it is now operating in the South, and more particularly, the Debe wholesale market. I wonder, what role, if any, is NAMDEVCO playing in relation to providing that important link between the farmers of the country and those persons involved in the School Feeding Programme. If there is a role being performed, we certainly would advocate that more efforts be focussed on stimulating that kind of linkage. It is an important factor, because it will assist. If our caterers have to go to market to buy their produce for the School Feeding Programme, assuming a caterer goes to the market, my information is that these caterers are paid a certain price for a box of food, whatever the contract price is, obviously, like any other business person they would want to have a return based on what expenses they are putting out; they would certainly want to maximize the profits. We have to ensure that there are standards being met, so that if someone goes to market he or she will not be buying the cheaper quality goods which may well be rejected goods, but in fact, will buy raw material or produce that is of a good quality. What systems do you have in place to keep tabs on what is really happening?

The other point is that when the School Feeding Programme is on, it is a fact that it boosts the market situation with respect to agricultural produce, but from the time the programme is closed, we have a glut in the market. I make specific mention of what happens when schools are closed as opposed to when they are reopened. Invariably, especially during the July/August vacation time, farmers who are engaged in farming and selling their goods in the market suffer tremendous losses, because with no demand there tends to be a glut, prices are low, and they have very little incentives. When school reopens, maybe two to three weeks after, the programme is restarted and then there is some kind of stimulus being created, so with demand and supply prices will fluctuate.

Mr. Vice-President, in other countries, a lot of attention is paid towards price control, and perhaps, we in Trinidad and Tobago need to do something to ensure

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that our farmers will always be guaranteed a certain minimum price for their produce, and so they will be encouraged to produce instead of having to suffer the kinds of losses. Our farmers in this country are subjected to tremendous hardships and risks, and prices and the marketing system are certainly two of the key problems which need to be addressed. If one really wants to make an impact in the agricultural sector, I would urge this Government to please try to do something with respect to improving the marketing facilities for the farmers in the country and, indeed, with respect to the price mechanism, whatever can be done to give further protection so our farmers will be encouraged to produce more.

The other reality is the need for proper facilities. One needs cold storage facilities, one needs facilities to dry produce or perhaps to chill them. With the School Feeding Programme, I do not know, in terms of examining those persons who tender for these contracts, whether efforts are made to ascertain the conditions that exist in those areas where the food is being prepared. Because, it would be a sad day if we have people preparing meals and they buy produce—let us say on a Monday they go to the market and they buy 50 bundles of bodi; is it that by Thursday they will go and buy more vegetables or do they keep them for the week, and in what condition will they be at the end of the week? So these are areas we can look at to create a further incentive.

In 1978, with the conceptualization of this programme as well, apart from advocating a more enhanced role for what was then the Central Marketing Agency, what was being advocated was the establishment of a storage and distribution corporation with a food manufacturing corporation, and that would have provided the linkage that was necessary. So as we have NAMDEVCO, let us see what can be done to enhance this particular link. The fact of the matter is that if we have an expanded School Feeding Programme that is working efficiently, we know that it is bound to increase the demand for food and we know that it will filter down and redound to the benefit of all our farmers in this country. So let us see what we can do to put in more infrastructure in place to deal with this.

Mr. Vice-President, the second area of concern with respect to Prof. Spence's Motion relates to the division of Caroni (1975) Limited Citrus Farms into 25-hectare blocks for lease to private farmers. Throughout 1997, Caroni (1975) Limited was so much on the agenda in terms of national discussion, I think we all recognized that there is need for a proper land use policy. Given the limited agricultural land at our disposal, we all recognize that we need to have a proper policy to make good use of our agricultural lands.

I would like to refer briefly to the *Action Plan For Agriculture*. Prof. Spence was then a member of the team that came up with this action plan and this document is dated June 1, 1993. In outlining some measures to reverse what, in that plan, was identified as a crisis in agriculture, the team recommended the leasing of lands now occupied by Caroni (1975) Limited and other state lands for suitable farming and, indeed, individual farmers in medium-sized holdings. And there is the thrust of Prof. Spence's Motion here today. We certainly have no difficulty with this particular recommendation.

If we were to look at the *Tripartite Report* on Caroni (1975) Limited, this report stems from a committee that was appointed in 1992 in which the Government, Caroni (1975) Limited and, indeed, the labour unions had come together to study the situation at Caroni (1975) Limited. This report, I would just like to refer to page 14, section five, which deals generally with diversification. In terms of the committee's examination of the operations at Caroni (1975) Limited, mention or reference was made to the fact that the company's current holdings at the citrus farms amounted to 3,024 acres of land. At page 16 of this report, under the heading, "Land Development", the committee specifically recommended the establishment of a land development and land management unit within Caroni (1975) Limited as part of the Diversification Division. This division's functions would be to administer all land matters to rationalize the whole system of landholding and to generally manage the lands that fall under Caroni (1975) Limited. I think at that time a valuation had actually been done with respect to the land assets of the company and the committee also looked at the development of lands which were idle or abandoned and reference was made to the need to revise or review the Agricultural Small Holdings Act.

Now, after this *Tripartite Report*, at that time negotiations were taking place with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) for an agricultural sector loan, and many times we have discussed or made mention of certain aspects of this loan. The reality is that in 1996 the loan was actually signed by the present administration and there are several conditionalities that are attached to the disbursements with respect to this loan. I am sure the hon. Senators would remember that not too long ago, I think it was in February of this year, a specific question was asked with respect to the status of the implementation of these conditionalities. I have to raise the issue because we know that one of the conditionalities attached to this loan was the implementation of a land use action plan and that plan included the transfer of 2,000 acres of Caroni (1975) Limited

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land to private farmers, as well as 7,000 acres of other state lands. It also called for a revision of the standard agricultural lease. Now, when the previous administration was in power, no one can deny the fact that with respect to working towards the fulfilment of these conditionalities there was, in fact, an action plan with respect to the implementation aspects of meeting these conditionalities. This land use development plan was, in fact, very high on the agenda.

**3.35 p.m.**

Now, when my colleague, Sen. Vimala Tota-Maharaj, answered the question which was asked in this Chamber in February of this year, her answer was made in Parliament and I would like to refer to the document which was provided where at page 7, specific mention had been made with respect to the land use action plan, because we were asking about the status of the implementation of this particular conditionality.

In her response, she indicated that with respect to transferring at least 2,000 acres of Caroni (1975) Limited lands, and 7,000 acres of other state lands to private farmers, Caroni (1975) Limited had already identified lands to be transferred to private farmers, as well as 3,794 hectares of state lands which had been completed and awaiting the final approved survey plans in order to grant standard agricultural leases.

Mr. Vice-President, what is of concern to us is that no indication has been given with respect to when this particular plan would materialize. When would these leases come into being? Prof. Spence made mention of the fact that whatever legislative amendments are being contemplated, they should not keep back the preparation of these leases. It seems as though everything is on a go slow in terms of the implementation of these conditionalities. We really have no idea, there is a lot of talk, but no idea of when these matters would actually materialize.

All we are advocating is that this Government should be a little more proactive and try to drive the process. It is obvious why things seem to be slowing down, or in fact, coming to a halt because we have enough evidence to confirm that in terms of the management of our agricultural sector, a lot of mismanagement and inefficiencies are taking place. In fact, I would go so far to say that it amounts to bungling incompetence and one just has to look at the history of the froghopper disease and know of the kind of incompetence of which we speak and where it exists.

**Dr. Mohammed:** I would like to ask the hon. Senator to produce that evidence she is speaking about.

**Sen. N. Mohammed:** Mr. Vice-President, in law there is a maxim that is often used by lawyers, it is called a *res ipsa loquitur*—the thing speaks for itself, and one just has to go back a few months ago, read the newspapers and one would see all the evidence with respect to the sugarcane industry, and the losses which our cane farmers are experiencing as a result of the froghopper disease and we know that this system of pest control which was advocated by the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources in Trinidad and Tobago has resulted in a disaster in the sugarcane industry. That is why I am urging caution with respect to the Minister interfering with Prof. Spence's jam production.

Mr. Vice-President, another area of concern is that the inefficiencies and the mismanagement we are talking about are not just inefficiencies and mismanagement, but we have had enough evidence to prove deception and other issues which I would not go into at this time. I have to make mention of another area of concern when we are talking about Caroni (1975) Limited and the implementation of the measures which are necessary.

We all know that Caroni (1975) Limited, far from becoming an economically viable enterprise which has been the objective of previous administrations, has now gone back. It is almost a political football where it seems that for political purposes, the decisions which are needed to run Caroni (1975) Limited efficiently are not being taken. We know it is in fact a constituency for some of our politicians, but the reality is that we have seen where it is now, or has been moving back to a situation of dependency on the national Treasury and we have to be concerned about that. It is so obvious in terms of the mismanagement and all that is taking place.

Last year, when this issue was high on the national agenda, we would all recall that an independent agency had been appointed to review the financial viability of Caroni (1975) Limited and I have a report which is now formally known as the Price Waterhouse Report with respect to Caroni (1975) Limited and it is very evident in terms of the land development plan. I would just like to refer to page 8 under section 3 of this Price Waterhouse Report. In relation to the tripartite agreement it makes mention of the fact of Caroni (1975) Limited's failure to effect required changes as evidence and it points out several areas of this failure. It says

specifically that virtually nothing has been done in respect to land development. This report was produced early last year.

On page 9 of the report it goes on to state:

“Caroni (1975) Limited continues to operate in a deficit. No significant reduction in cost has been realized, estate canes still account for approximately fifty per cent of tonnage process and diversification and operations continued to absorb valuable resources of the organization without contributing to overall viability.”

**Sen. Prof. Spence:** Mr. Vice-President, I want to repeat Sen. Prof. Kenny’s plea for the discussion to be a bipartisan one and trying to move the agricultural sector forward. I would be very distressed if my attempts to move the agricultural sector forward were used for political criticisms.

**Sen. N. Mohammed:** Mr. Vice-President, I do take note of Sen. Prof. Spence’s concern and it certainly is not, and was not my intention, to make it into a partisan issue. If we are talking about moving the agricultural sector forward, it is clear that certain decisions have to be made and we are looking at a report which has looked at the viability of Caroni (1975) Limited and we are talking about the land use plan and the need for rationalization and the fact that nothing is being done, contrary to what other public relations statements are being made. I have to link it not just to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, but I wish to make the link as well, to the board of Caroni (1975) Limited.

I was taken aback recently, when, notwithstanding the evidence pertaining to Caroni (1975) Limited and the mismanagement and all the reports of corruption in the newspapers, that the same board had been reappointed just recently. I have to raise this issue because only recently, I was made aware of the fact—and this is a matter which I would like the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, as the person who is in charge of Caroni (1975) Limited and who, if he is serious about making that company economically viable, has to look into ways and means to get this company on its feet—that just about two months ago, several members of the board went on a trip to Florida supposedly to look for a market. We would like to know who were these members, at what cost, and what benefit had they brought for the company.

**Dr. Mohammed:** Mr. Vice-President, on a point of order, Standing Order 35(1)—

**Mr. Vice-President:** The Standing Order refers to the issue of relevance, and I ask the Senator, when making her contribution to bear in mind the Motion before us as it relates or refers to Caroni (1975) Limited is very specific. The aspect of the Motion which deals with Caroni (1975) Limited talks specifically about the division of the citrus farm into 25-acre blocks. I will like the Senator to focus her attention, insofar as Caroni (1975) Limited is concerned, and limit it to that area and not stray into other aspects of the company's operation which are irrelevant to the Motion which is before us.

**Sen. N. Mohammed:** Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. As we speak about citrus I would certainly be guided by your ruling. I really do not wish to stray from the issue, it is just that when we are dealing with Caroni (1975) Limited and the division of citrus farms into blocks for lease to private farmers, we have to be concerned at the rate and pace at which these changes are taking place and we want answers from the Government; not like lemons, we want some real answers we want it to account as a Government of transparency and accountability and all the other public relations words they like to assume unto themselves. Be truthful to the nation! Perhaps they need to look at the meaning of the word truthful. Be honest!

**Mr. Vice-President:** The speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. N. Mohammed:** Mr. Vice-President, we call on the entire Government to be truthful to the nation.

I shall now move on to the other part of Sen. Prof. Spence's Motion which deals with the cocoa industry. Sen. Prof. Spence in his presentation, referred to the 1992 task force on the cocoa industry and I came across a newspaper clipping from 1995, because we are talking as well, in this Motion, about the development of 2,000 hectares of cocoa on state-owned land on lease to private farmers in 25-hectare blocks. The point I am making is that we on this side have no difficulty.

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When we look at this newspaper clipping which I came across in the *Trinidad Guardian* of April 18, 1995 on comments which were made by the then Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources which deals with new life for the cocoa industry, it states:

“...because of the long gestation period required for cocoa, it may be necessary to revive abandoned estates which would be productive in a shorter period of time.

It was hoped also that with the plan to bring an additional 5,000 acres of state lands under cocoa cultivation, new young farmers would be attracted to the industry.”

The minister continued:

“...the Ministry’s programme to improve agriculture, revolves around a youth programme in schools and the distribution of state lands for new farmers, as part of the overall ‘youth window’ agricultural strategy.”

Mr. Vice-President, I also came across another newspaper article published in the *Trinidad Guardian* of April 21, 1995 on page 9 and the headline is, “Putting cocoa back in the sun” and this particular article refers to comments in relation to the strategic plan which was enunciated by the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board, and, in particular, its plans to deal with improving the quality of cocoa and coffee and the increased production and export, improving the yields and, in fact, the role of the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board.

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

In this particular article there are certain comments made as well by Sen. Prof. John Spence, where he was advocating the very same thing that we are debating here today with respect to that plan to distribute the lands into plots. We would like to know, Mr. Vice-President, bearing in mind what was going on and, in fact, I would just like to comment as well on a reference in that article that was made to comments made by the then Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, who in winding up the debate on the amendment to the Agricultural Development Bank Bill in the Senate on Tuesday, April 19 stated:

“...a programme such as the one outlined herein was to be established starting with Non Pareil Estate.”

We would like to know, since the government has changed and there is a new Government in place, what is happening with this particular programme that is being advocated by Prof. Spence.



Mr. Vice-President, I would also like to make reference to page 9 of the *Review of the Economy 1995*, a budget document, where mention was made with respect to cocoa and coffee. It states:

“Following a decline in 1994, production of cocoa reached almost 1.8 million kilograms in 1995.”

We know that not too long ago in this Chamber when the budget was being debated and we looked at the *Review of the Economy 1997*, we saw clear-cut evidence that cocoa production has, in fact, fallen over a period of time. So we want to know what is happening; what is this Government's position with respect to the cocoa industry. I came across another newspaper article, this time published in the *TnT Mirror* of Friday, January 16, 1998. The headline is, “Cocoa crisis boiling over”. In this particular article, the question is asked:

“Has Agriculture Minister Dr. Reeza Mohammed deliberately set out to destroy the ailing cocoa and coffee industry?”

This is what the Cocoa and Coffee Growers' Association (CCGA) executive believe in light of a new downgraded system of purchasing cocoa beans.”

Mr. Vice-President, several comments were made there and the spokesperson from that organization asked whether it is the Government's plan to talk about improving agriculture but secretly killing it, or is it that Minister Mohammed cannot just perform as a Minister? I am merely quoting from a newspaper article. We know we will hear a lot as this debate unfolds; we are accustomed to it but, one, we want the Government to be very truthful and let us know where things stand in relation to the agricultural sector. What is happening with respect to this task force report on the cocoa industry?

Mr. Vice-President, on another point, the last part of Prof. Spence's Motion deals with the provision of loans to the agricultural sector through commercial banks. We also heard that he found out that, in fact, in the tourism sector some concessions are, in fact, being given. The tourism sector is benefiting from lower rates of interest through the commercial banks, and if that is the case with respect to the tourism sector, we too would like to advocate that similar loans be granted to the agricultural sector. Whether these loans are to be granted through the commercial banks or the Agricultural Development Bank, that is another issue because we know that there are many issues that will have to be examined.

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We know that under the former administration, with respect to the Agricultural Development Bank and the negotiations for the Inter-American Development Bank loans that were taking place then, that efforts were being made to restructure the Agricultural Development Bank. We know that a youth credit facility was, in fact, being encouraged and when this Government came into power in that very first budget debate, the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources also indicated that they would be continuing with that programme. We would like to know what is happening with respect to that facility.

Generally, Mr. Vice-President, we appreciate and recognize the need to have the financial institutions support the agricultural sector. It is an important ingredient for stimulating agriculture in the country because we need access to credit, especially for young people in the country. Very often they may approach an institution and the question of collateral may arise. When you are dealing with crops, we know that there are many risks that are involved and we know that certain support services ought to be provided to minimize these risks and to assist in the development of crops.

The long and short of it, Mr. Vice-President, as Prof. Spence pointed out, he made mention of the bureaucracy and referred to the fact that there have been numerous reports over the years. And yes, I am sure if one goes to the library at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources or right here in Parliament, there would be numerous reports dealing with various aspects of the agricultural sector. We have a lot of information. If previous administrations failed, we are asking this Government to learn from the mistakes of the past and, especially with respect to the agricultural sector, to become more proactive and more involved in driving the process so that all the various programmes that have been enunciated, we can achieve a greater measure or rate of implementation.

For example, in this year's budget we heard a lot of talk about an agricultural incentives programme and the Minister of Finance announced this measure as though it was some new initiative by this Government. The facts are there for all to see; there has always been an agricultural incentives programmes in place; it was initiated under the PNM administration and we recognize that there was a need to review the programme. There was talk just two or three months ago. We would like to know what is happening with respect to this agricultural incentives programme.

Mr. Vice-President, the long and short of it is that we want a Minister of Agriculture who is capable, who has the ability to run the Ministry and, indeed, the

agricultural sector in a more dynamic and efficient manner. Instead of all the “ole” talk and public relations, we want to see real growth and improvement in the agricultural sector so that our farmers throughout the country and those persons who are involved in the agricultural sector will be involved in the process and will be able to reap the benefits that will come about and so improve the economy of Trinidad and Tobago so that we can become more self-sufficient with respect to our food production so that we can cut on our food import bill.

When last have you heard the present Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources speak about cutting the food import bill? That certainly does not seem to be on the agenda and these are real matters that should be on the agenda. These should be the focal point so that whatever we are doing and whatever measures we are implementing, we are going to strive to achieve these objectives. It is all well and good to come and enunciate them and say these are the strategies and policies of your administration, but we want real action. As I have been putting it, we should have been experiencing an agricultural revolution under this administration. Instead, what we have is many of the programmes that we left being derailed and instead the agricultural sector is, in fact, in decline. One just has to look at the *Review of the Economy 1997*, and one would see where production is; so many sectors with citrus, sugar cane, cocoa have been on the decline and that speaks volumes about this administration’s handling of the agricultural sector and, indeed, the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, it is a time for action and we call on this Government not to treat this sector in the same way they are treating the actual document called a *Time for Action* that was put together by those prominent leaders in the Caribbean in the form of the West Indian Commission, where we have seen that *Time for Action* also being derailed in recent times by the present Government. We do not wish to see a similar disaster taking place with respect to our agricultural sector. So we call on this Government for action, please, in terms of our agricultural sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

**The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Sen. Vimala Tota-Maharaj):** Mr. Vice-President, before I commence my contribution this afternoon I would just like to reassure Sen. Nafeesa Mohammed that at present the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is not an absentee Minister. He is well aware of what needs to be done at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and he is doing it,

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whether or not they are unpopular decisions. As we know, some people resist change, some people resist development and this Minister has held his head high and has “band his belly”, so to speak, as the saying goes, and he is moving forward to carry the sector forward. We have been accused of being a Government of public relations. We at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources do not work on public relations, so if the hon. Senator is not aware of what is happening at the ministry, we can apprise accordingly.

Mr. Vice-President, with respect to part (iii) of the Motion, I must compliment Sen. Prof. John Spence for his continued commitment to the view that Trinidad and Tobago needs to place emphasis on the development of its agricultural sector. Sen. Spence has been loyal to the concept of diversification of the economy through well-structured programmes in agriculture. He has held this tenet through the reign of three successive governments.

Trinidad and Tobago enjoys a niche market for its fine flavour cocoa in the international market. This niche market is being threatened to a large extent by two factors: namely, one, the quality of cocoa beans traded and, two, the quantity of beans traded in the international market. This Government is cognisant of this and is already taking the measures necessary to arrest the decline in the domestic production of high quality cocoa beans.

**4.05 p.m.**

Mr. Vice-President, I have been informed that the domestic cocoa industry has been provided with numerous input subsidies over the years and at least two rehabilitation schemes have been implemented. These endeavours, however, did not achieve the stated objective of enhanced domestic production. Production of beans, in fact, declined from approximately—and it is unfortunate that Sen. Mohammed is not present right now—5 million grammes in 1975 to less than 2 million kilograms in 1995 when this Government assumed office. In 1977 domestic production amounted to approximately 1.7 million kilograms.

At this point, I would like to emphasize that during this period 1975—1995, the government in power, at that time, did not put any emphasis on cocoa production, germ plasma, preparing and providing the farmers with the young cocoa plants to do work on their estates. We have evidence to prove that. In an effort to preserve the comparative advantage this country enjoys at present in the international market, investment into cocoa fermentaries is being encouraged. Let me correct the statement made by Sen. Spence. There is, in fact, a pilot fermentary in operation in the Sangre Grande area on the Manickchan Estate and it is being

fully utilized by the cocoa farmers. There is an intention to put fermentaries across Trinidad and Tobago. There is a well-functioning fermentary in Sangre Grande.

The establishment of cocoa fermentaries will facilitate the processing of wet—

**Sen. Prof. Spence:** Mr. Vice-President, just for the record, I was not suggesting that there were not fermentaries in Trinidad and Tobago; every cocoa estate has fermentaries. What I was referring to were central fermentaries, run by a farm, to which a large number of farms send their produce.

**Sen. V. Tota-Maharaj:** Mr. Vice-President, that is exactly what I am speaking about, this is a central fermentary, it is a project of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board and the private farmer. It is a pilot project which is extremely successful. Small farmers account for approximately 80 per cent of the cocoa beans produced in Trinidad and Tobago. Thus, the establishment of cocoa fermentaries will maximize the current production of high quality cocoa beans from small farmers.

In an effort to support this programme, the revised incentives programme proposes that entrepreneurs be offered a subsidy of TT \$10,000 to assist in the establishment of a cocoa fermentary. To assist cocoa farmers, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources also provides a refund of 50 per cent on the cost of insurance and freight for machinery and equipment. Seedlings and clones are offered at a subsidized rate of a dollar per plant. Grade one cocoa beans at present enjoy a guaranteed price of TT \$955 per kilogram. In the revised incentives package the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources proposes to increase the guaranteed price of grade one cocoa beans to \$12 per kilogram.

To stabilize and retain our world market share there is also a need to significantly increase our total production efforts. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has submitted a project proposal to the Ministry of Planning and Development for the establishment of new cocoa hectarage and rehabilitation of cocoa estates. This has already received Cabinet's approval and the project targets 2,000 hectares over a five-year period, 400 hectares per annum. This proposal has already been included under the list of projects for funding under the Eighth European Union Development Fund. This project is estimated to cost TT \$12 million.

With the establishment of the increased hectarage of cocoa and the rehabilitation thrust, it is expected that the current production of approximately 2

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million kilograms of cocoa beans would be doubled within the next seven years. Increasing the hectareage of cocoa on state lands at present is constrained by the availability of state lands. However, Government proposes to identify lands which can be earmarked for cocoa cultivation. Some of these lands are presently under the purview of Caroni (1975) Limited.

In keeping with the company's policy for diversification, lands would be leased to the prospective cocoa entrepreneurs. This would be facilitated by the new Agricultural Small Holdings Tenure Act referred to as ASHTA, which was recently approved by Cabinet and is now with the Chief Parliamentary Counsel for finalization before presentation to the Parliament. This Bill seeks to reform the law governing land tenure rationalization and occupation of certain agricultural holdings.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources in its operational plan 1996—1999 has proposed that 500 farmers would be trained in the production of cocoa seedlings, farm business management and improved techniques for enhanced bean quality. These training programmes are scheduled for the Ministry's 1998 programme of work. It is also proposed that the establishment of the 2,000 hectares of cocoa would be undertaken with the financial assistance from the Agricultural Development Bank. The ADB has loan funds available for use by cocoa farmers who would be encouraged to exploit this facility in the Government's attempt at rehabilitating and re-invigorating the domestic cocoa industry.

On the point raised by Sen. Prof. Spence on the rehabilitation of estates, I beg to differ, as it has been proven on one of our model cocoa estates that the rehabilitation has been successful on old cocoa estates where planting of young cocoa trees between the older trees has taken place, and the cultural practices which are now quickly evolving have indeed proved successful. I would also stress that training for cocoa farmers has been taking place since this Government has been in power, and farmers attend workshops and training sessions with personnel of the Ministry and visit estates, so they are well aware of what changes need to take place and what adjustments they need to make in their cultural practices.

Mr. Vice-President, I move on now to the division of Caroni (1975) Limited, the issue raised by Sen. Prof. Spence concerning breaking up citrus farms into 25-hectare blocks for lease to private farmers. We are well aware that Sen. Prof. Spence has been one of the strongest advocates for the diversification of the agricultural sector, both in and out of this honourable Chamber. One would also recall that he was chairman of the committee to consider the rationalization of the sugar industry in 1978, this point was raised earlier. Among the recommendations

of that committee was that Caroni (1975) Limited should implement an agricultural diversification programme.

One component of the Caroni (1975) Limited diversification programme is its venture into citrus production. Between 1984 and 1990, some 1200 hectares of citrus comprising 847 hectares of oranges, 316 hectares of grapefruit and the remaining 60 hectares mainly with portugals were established by the company. This venture into citrus was at a time when the local industry was in secular decline. It is also instructive to note that the contribution of Caroni (1975) Limited to citrus production is steadily increasing. During 1996—1997, 83 per cent of the citrus deliveries was supplied by the company, up from 71 per cent in 1995—1996. This trend of increasing citrus production by the company will continue as more trees in the orchards attain full maturity. Given the fact that the company has been faced with certain problems with respect to its citrus project, the proposal for the subdivision of its citrus holdings into 25-hectare blocks for lease to private farmers, should be given consideration.

The proposal being debated in this Chamber concerning Caroni (1975) Limited's citrus plantation, not only fails to address some of the critical problems affecting the company's citrus projects and the industry as a whole, but is also fraught with certain difficulties.

Mr. Vice-President, one of the critical issues affecting the local citrus industry is the aspect of marketing. At the present time, the Co-operative Citrus Growers Association (CCGA) is the major market for citrus. The other local market being sales to vendors which involves self-harvest. The latter yields a net return per crate which is significantly higher than the price paid by the CCGA. However, there is much room for expansion in the fresh fruit market.

Exporting is another avenue for marketing our citrus. However, to compete more effectively in the sophisticated export market, a proper export preparation facility involving grading, waxing and packing has to be established.

Certain issues were also raised about the role of National Marketing Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO), which, under the last government, was a white elephant. It remained closed and became quite delapidated. Under the tenure of this Government, the refurbishment of NAMDEVCO took place, and contrary to certain comments that it is not serving its purpose, those who venture down to NAMDEVCO, the market in Debe on a Thursday, Friday or even on a Saturday evening, will see that it is a hub of activity. Therefore, some of the reports which were mentioned earlier are a little deceiving.

**4.20 p.m.**

**Sen. Mohammed:** Mr. Vice-President, the hon. Senator remarked just now that the comments made on the National Agricultural Marketing Development Corporation were a bit deceiving. I do not recall in any of my contribution that I pointed out that I had personally visited the compound at Penal and it is a fact that during the week some retailing activities are taking place. But in terms of a wholesale facility we are sadly lacking and I will maintain the position that I have adopted already with respect to that market being a white elephant. It was created in 1989 by the then NAR administration.

**Sen. V. Tota-Maharaj:** Mr. Vice-President, I beg to differ with the comments made by the hon. Senator and I would like to invite her down to the market one day at 4.00 a.m. during the work week also to see what actually takes place at the National Agricultural Marketing Development Corporation. It is now finally earning its keep and I would like to also stress—

**Dr. Mohammed:** I will pick her up and take her.

**Sen. V. Tota-Maharaj:** The Minister has offered to take the hon. Senator down to the National Agricultural Marketing Development Corporation. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

**Sen. Mohammed:** With all due respect, I appreciate the kind gesture of the hon. Minister but I wish to decline his offer for my own safety and protection. [*Laughter*]

**Sen. Daly:** On a point of order, Mr. Vice-President, both Members are slightly misleading the House. I do not think this Bajan love is quite what Sen. Prof. Spence had in mind when he talked about bipartisanship.

**Dr. Mohammed:** I can take her down there for wholesaling now. I want to wholesale her.

**Sen. V. Tota-Maharaj:** Mr. Vice-President, we are trying to keep the politics out of this afternoon's sitting but we are politicians so we must; it is part of our nature now.

It was also mentioned that the National Agricultural Marketing Development Corporation evolved more or less out of the Central Marketing Agency. We have tried in this Government to keep those two issues totally separate because the Central Marketing Agency in its time was rife with so-called corruption and it did



not serve its purpose. The National Agricultural Marketing Development Corporation, on the other hand, with the restructuring that took place when this Government came into power, is now functioning as it should; as a facilitator. Only recently a web site was opened which helps the farmers. They are already utilizing the web site and they are being trained, so the National Agricultural Marketing Development Corporation is finally serving its purpose.

Mr. Vice-President, much has been mentioned about the Tripartite Agreement, Caroni (1975) Limited and the focus did shift from citrus to other issues which I would not like to elaborate on this afternoon. Perhaps when the Minister comes to speak in the honourable House he will answer those questions which were raised. However, when Sen. Mohammed spoke about the level playing field, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is presently trying to undo the damage which was inflicted upon the sector many years ago. This slow movement and neglect of the agricultural sector did not occur and did not begin two and a half years ago. We are slowly and steadily moving the sector forward. I apologize if we have not been doing enough public relations at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to let the country know what we are doing. We are a Ministry which does not just talk the talk; we walk the walk.

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

**Sen. Dr. Eastlyn Mc Kenzie:** Mr. Vice-President, I would like to fully endorse the Motion as proposed by Sen. Prof. Spence and I would like to make a few comments. I am happy to note that at this stage there has been no hint of an amendment to the Motion and I guess that we would sail very plainly with what we have before us.

Mr. Vice-President, let me say that I have had some experience with the School Feeding Programme in Tobago as an education extension officer. Within the last two or three years of my tenure there the School Feeding Programme came under my portfolio, so I have some sort of experience in that area and I would like to share some of those experiences with this honourable House.

I looked at the question of diversifying the economy and I want to say that we have seen evidence where this has begun in the country and when it comes to agriculture, it just means that we are trying to improve and increase what is happening. When we tie the School Feeding Programme to agriculture, we see where much use can be made of the local produce versus the imported food. In so doing we do two things: we save foreign exchange and stop supporting foreign employment.

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I also looked at the first part of expanding it to encompass the tertiary level institutions. I want to put a special plug for the trade schools. The youth camps are already residential so they do their own school feeding, if you want to call it that. But the trade schools where we have young people between the ages of 15 and 21 and some of them are coming from very poor families, I want to put a special plug that if you have to start an increase, that you remember, Mr. Minister of Education, to put in the trade schools.

I also thought that at the level of employment there could be a link between the Unemployment Relief Programme and agriculture on state lands. I think this is something we could think about; the Unemployment Relief Programme expanding or probably putting the Unemployment Relief Programme into agriculture on state lands. I say again we could increase the use of the prisoners as we already have under the Ministry of National Security. I know for certain in Tobago they have a link with the prisoners trying to feed themselves with their vegetables and so forth. I am saying that we could improve and increase this type of activity.

What I did when I was in school feeding was ensure that the menu for the term was brought to me and we sat and discussed it and saw how much we could include the use of local foods into the preparation of the menu sheet that we had on a revolving basis. But, Mr. Vice-President, we have had some disincentives to linking agriculture to the School Feeding Programme. I would just briefly enumerate some of them. One: the price per lunch is \$5.00; the government pays \$5.00 per lunch. We have to be realistic. When the fee is so small it encourages the suppliers to go for the food that can stretch, as our parents would say. So they would go for rice and macaroni as against plantain and dasheen and that type of thing. I am just talking about ground provisions. One buys a pound of sweet potatoes for about \$2.00 to \$2.50 and \$3.00 when it is scarce. Probably the hon. Minister of Education would not know this because somebody probably does this type of shopping for him. I want to put a plug in to have the females working alongside the male Ministers. I made that plea sometime ago when we did the budget, begging the hon. Minister of Finance to put. Sen. Williams at his side to work together because she has the background in accounting and finance. Therefore, I am making a plea to strengthen what I have seen with the hon. Parliamentary Secretary working alongside the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and I am hoping that we would find a female assistant for the Minister of Education to put some sort of female touch into the matter.

The cost of ground provision is exorbitant versus the cost of rice and macaroni and especially in terms of how far it could stretch, so we need to look at that.

At one time when we had much pigeon peas in Tobago I asked the caterers: "Why do you not have more pigeon peas here?" They had peas but they had lentil peas and they explained that with pigeon peas, if you put one spoonful it is about 20 grains whereas if you put one spoonful of lentils it is much more; it is the same nutrition but at the same time it encourages you to go into the area where the food could stretch more. So you boil a little lentils and it goes further and it is very much cheaper than a pound of pigeon peas which is sold for \$7.00 and probably on the wholesale market you may get it for \$5.00, versus a pound of lentils which goes for probably just \$1.00. We have to look at these things as disincentives.

Another disincentive was the time it takes to prepare certain foods in bulk. Your rice would cook faster and it is finished but when you do the ground provisions not only do they take longer to cook but then you have to take a long time to get them ready for presentation because they have to be peeled, sliced and so forth. Therefore, with \$5.00 per meal this could be a disincentive to using the local foods. I think this was another reason but which I did not like and which I would ask the hon. Minister of Education to see how much we can change the tastes of children through the School Feeding Programme. Many of them do not like vegetables, fish and so forth. Let us give it to them and not, as some people tend to do, say the children do not like that, do not cook it. I say no, let them eat it. We have to go somewhere along the lines where our grandparents said you either eat it or you lie down next to it. We probably have to do something like that.

We look at the fear of parents who tell the children do not eat the cabbage or tomatoes, they have too much chemicals. Therefore, one has to look at the production base in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to assure our people that the vegetables are not laced with chemicals because there is a fear among parents who tell the children do not eat the salads they prepare for you because they have too much chemicals.

Finally, Mr. Vice-President, praedial larceny. The farmers tell you plainly when they plant somebody else reaps their ground provisions, cut off their bunches of banana and plantain and steal their produce. Again, you are sitting very near to the hon. Minister of National Security, see how you can work together to get him to stop these thieves from digging up and harvesting people's produce. I know he is a man of action. He does not speak much but he is a man of action and I am sure that he will have these bandits on the run.

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**4.35 p.m.**

I am sure that the Motion as brought by Prof. Spence—I am not versed in the other areas such as the division of the lands, but we have heard much about that—in looking at the disincentives, if we try to minimize them, we would also be propelling this thought of using more of our local produce than the imported stuff.

Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark):** Mr. Vice-President, before moving to adjourn the Senate, may I take this opportunity to inform my colleagues that we would not be meeting next Tuesday. When we meet on the 19th, we want to deal with a Bill to amend the Waterworks and Water Conservation Act and we would also be dealing with the National Library and Information System Bill on that particular day. We will start at 10.00 in the morning and go until 8.00 in the evening, rather than come another day. We want to avoid the Senate meeting twice a week from that particular period, so we will start at 10.00 a.m. and leave at 8.00 p.m.

The following week, we have already gotten support from Sen. Prof. Spence and Sen. Nafeesa Mohammed to forego Private Members' Day on that day, May 26, 1998 when we will deal with the Bill to amend the Interpretation Act and the Pharmacy Board (Amdt.) Bill, 1998. So, we will deal with two bills on May 26, 1998.

We are giving advance notice that on May 19, 1998 we are continuing with the National Library and Information System Bill and the Waterworks and Water Conservation (Amdt.) Bill is going to be introduced by the Minister of Public Utilities. The following week, we will deal with the Pharmacy Board (Amdt.) Bill and the Bill to amend the Interpretation Act.

I therefore beg to move that the Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday, May 19, 1998, at 10.00 a.m.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Senate adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 4.38 p.m.*