

**THE**  
**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
**IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD**  
**AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON NOVEMBER 27, 1995**

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**SESSION 1999 - 2000**

**VOLUME 19**

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**SENATE**

*Tuesday, March 14, 2000*

The Senate met at 10.30 a.m.

**PRAYERS**

[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

**CONGRATULATIONS**

**Mr. President:** Hon. Members, on behalf of Members of the Senate and on my own behalf, I offer congratulations to Sen. The Hon. Lindsay Gillette on his temporary assumption of office as Head of Government. [*Desk thumping*]

**HIS GRACE THE ARCHBISHOP**  
**THE MOST REV. ANTHONY PANTIN**  
**(DEATH OF)**

**Mr. President:** On a very sad note, however, I record the passing on early Sunday morning of His Grace, The Archbishop of Port of Spain, The Most Rev. Anthony Pantin. Were it not for his demise, the late Archbishop would have, on Saturday of this week, been celebrating the 32nd anniversary of his consecration. He was a truly tremendous individual, possessed of very great humility; a man of peace, a man of goodwill, a man of friendship, who provided guidance not only to his church but also to all of Trinidad and Tobago. He was truly a man of inspiration.

The late Archbishop was well known for his humour and for the various anecdotes which he never failed to deliver to those who knew him closely. Not only would the Roman Catholic Diocese and followers of that faith miss this very, very great son of the soil, but every Trinidadian and Tobagonian will really remember him, as we say, as a “true, true Trini” who served this country with honour, dignity and distinction. We pray that Almighty God will see that his soul is well reposed and may he rest in peace. Members wishing to pay tribute may do so now.

*His Grace The Archbishop (Death of)*

*Tuesday, March 14, 2000*

**The Minister of Public Administration (Sen. The Hon Wade Mark):** Mr. President, on behalf of all Government Senators in this honourable Senate, I extend our deepest sympathy to the Roman Catholic family and indeed the entire national community on the sudden passing of one of this nation's greatest sons and leaders, His Grace, Anthony Pantin, the late Archbishop of Port of Spain. I know that we will always remember the late Archbishop, Anthony Pantin, as a man who walked very closely with his God and whose influence, sympathy, love and compassion extended beyond the Roman Catholic community, for the late Archbishop saw his fellow human beings not by denomination, not by race, not by class and not by colour but as beautiful children of God.

We will always remember the late Archbishop, Anthony Pantin, as a fearless Christian soldier who courageously served his Master. His firm belief that there was a spiritual side to every issue truly narrowed the view that the Church and State are totally separated from each other. In fact, he was of the firm view that the church must be involved in the affairs of the State. He saw this as a way to live out Christian beliefs. Through his life's service he strongly advocated that every citizen of this land must become consciously involved in alleviating the many social problems which continue to plague our beloved country.

Mr. President, at the youthful age of 38 years the late Archbishop Pantin became the first national to occupy the top position in the Catholic church in Trinidad and Tobago. At his induction he promised that he would serve faithfully and would, in his best way, champion the cause of the ordinary man, and he did. His life's service is truly a reflection of the promise that he made on December 22, 1967. We on this side would remember how he championed the cause of the vagrants, the homeless, the voiceless, the defenceless, the jobless and the socially deprived members of our society.

Our nation will truly miss the late Archbishop, Anthony Pantin, who was indeed a great citizen of this country. He fought the good fight; he ran the race to the end. He was an extremely committed man of the people, a great listener to the cries of the poor and deprived and a caring and sharing Shepherd of God. May Almighty God bless and protect him and may he find eternal peace and rest in the Almighty's Kingdom. Thank you very much.

**Sen. Nafeesa Mohammed:** Mr. President, it is often said that the way you live in this world so you shall die. On Sunday last the soul of our nation was rocked with the sad news of the sudden passing of His Grace, The Most Rev. Gordon Anthony Pantin. Sad as this loss may be, however, there is a great deal for which we should be thankful. It is reported that His Grace died very peacefully in

his sleep from heart failure and we thank Almighty God for blessing him with such a peaceful departure from this world.

For more than 30 years the local Roman Catholic community was blessed with the very dynamic, fearless and stable leadership of Archbishop Pantin. At the very young age of 38 Father Pantin became the first local person to be appointed as Archbishop of Port of Spain. He was a man of the people and for the people, and he never hesitated to express his views frankly and fearlessly, even if it meant chiding high officials. Whenever our country was caught up in turmoil, His Grace never hesitated to get involved in the national issues. He had a keen sense of humour and maintained a strong interest in the youths of our nation.

He was a man who epitomized qualities of honesty, integrity and morality, qualities which all our leaders will do well to emulate. Most of all, His Grace maintained an openness to other people's faith and this led him to establish the Inter-religious Organization which is today one of our country's most respected and influential bodies. The only race the Archbishop saw was the human race. Archbishop Anthony Pantin transcended the racial Rubicon in this country and was loved, admired and respected by Trinbagonians of all backgrounds, regardless of their colour, class, creed, race or religion.

He was a man of character, character which is described in I Kings 3:12 as "a wise and an understanding heart". Our nation has lost a truly great son of the soil and we of the People's National Movement extend our deepest condolences to the entire Pantin family, a family that has been serving Trinidad and Tobago for so many years with distinction. We also extend our condolences to the Roman Catholic community of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. President, I also seize the opportunity to extend condolences on behalf of the Muslim community and, more particularly, the San Juan Muslim Ladies' Organization. As it is often said in times like these, verily it is from God we came and to God is our eventual return. May Almighty God bless Archbishop Pantin and reward him for his very many good deeds that he performed whilst he was alive in this world. Thank you.

**Sen. Prof. John Spence:** Mr. President, on behalf of Independent colleagues I express our condolences first of all to the family of Archbishop Pantin and to the Catholic community then to the country as a whole. So much has been said about Archbishop Pantin in the last few days and will be said over the next few days that I feel quite inadequate to speak about his life and achievements.

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[SEN. PROF. SPENCE]

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I would just say that I always found an inspiration from his sermons. Often I have said I would like to have been able to follow him around the country at his services just to listen to his sermons. Whether he was speaking at the University during the annual nine-carol service or just speaking on some other occasion, he always was able to be very appropriate and inspiring in what he said. I would describe him in words that I have not yet heard used—although there have been many superlatives—as a saintly man. I am not suggesting that he was a saint or should be canonized but that he was saintly in the way that he carried out his duties and in the way that he lived his life.

So again, Mr. President, I would express condolences to his family, particularly—an outstanding family—brothers, sisters, who made outstanding contributions to Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you, Sir.

**Mr. President:** Any other Member wishing to pay tribute is also permitted so to do.

**Sen. Prof. Julian Kenny:** Mr. President, I, too, join Members of this House and, on behalf of the citizens of this country, extend condolences to the Pantin family.

Mr. President, I have had a connection with Tony Pantin. We both attended the Belmont Intermediate School. We were in the same class, thereafter we went to St. Mary's and were in the same class for a while. I think he was rather brighter than I was. One of the things that those of us of that generation—we are just a few months apart—remember about the times and the Catholic Church, however, was the seeming rigidity of the church in its relations with the society.

**10.45 a.m.**

It fell to Archbishop Pantin to loosen things once he assumed his position of leadership. It is not only in the ritual which has changed from the old Latin masses that we remember, in fact, Tony Pantin, and I both served as acolytes. I served at the Girls' Industrial School in Belmont and, I think, Tony was at St. Mary's College. We went there daily and we are all familiar—I mean I can still recite the Latin masses as we all did, but it fell to him to transform this and he has, in fact, initiated this major transformation.

Mr. President, Archbishop Pantin was very active, he initiated and he was instrumental in establishing the Inter Religious Organization. I once had an invitation from the Inter Religious Organization to speak to them on matters of the environment, in particular, the population problem. It was Archbishop Pantin

who introduced me—and you know the church and science have been in constant conflict—“this is my classmate Julian, he went into ecology, while I went into theology.” Thereafter, I gave my address and I have never had as positive a response from an audience of clerics where I gingerly tried to explain the problem, and Archbishop Pantin was the one who led all the questioning. He never for a minute was critical of any viewpoint that I expressed.

Mr. President, there are certain things about his life that we, as a nation, ought to adopt. He was a man of great compassion, especially for the weak, the dispossessed, as everyone has said. Let us not also forget that he had this great abhorrence for violence, particularly, state violence.

Mr. President, thank you.

**Sen. Martin Daly:** Mr. President, thank you for the latitude which you have given us. I am not qualified to speak about the principal function of His Grace, the late Archbishop Tony Pantin, but as someone who is a passionate believer in the art of disagreement, especially with Governments, I would like to remind persons how often, the late Archbishop Anthony Pantin was called upon to mediate in times of trauma in this country. He had empathy for what took place in 1970. You have heard him tell the story many times, and it was repeated on television recently, about how he was treated when his car was in the middle of a demonstration in 1970. He has told the story repeatedly, I would not repeat it.

Mr. President, in 1990, he was called upon again to mediate and the interesting thing on both those occasions that he was called upon, he was first asked to mediate, by what one might consider the anti-establishment or rebel forces and such was the character and diplomatic skill—which is what I would like to talk about—of the man that even though theoretically, at any rate, and by order of protocol and by his status in the church, he was an establishment figure, he enjoyed the trust and respect of the anti-establishment forces in the society. I only trespass on the liberty which you have given us to emphasize something which I do not believe has been emphasized about the late Archbishop, and that was his considerable diplomatic skill, and the respect that he enjoyed from persons in all walks of life, even where there were forces that at the time of his intervention, or his intervention was thought to threaten the stability of the society.

I would also like to join with Prof. Kenny in reminding persons that he was an ardent abolitionist, that is to say, he was ardently against the death penalty, and when recently the death penalty—I happen to disagree with him—was to be

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carried out, he did what he conceived his duty, and repeatedly visited the jail in order to see, what, if anything, he could do to comfort those who were facing the death penalty. There again is an example of the way in which his activities, if you like, his secular activities were thrust upon him. It was not really part of his function to mediate in times of political trauma. It shows that in respect of those secular functions that were thrust upon him, what a skilful diplomat, negotiator and mediator he was. I think, it is very important to remember him for that, too, because at the moment in our country, those who hold high office, when they tend to have views that may not coincide with those in authority, they tend to be scathed as enemies and otherwise. I think it is very, very important for us to recognize the value of figures, who in theory, rise to high positions in what might be described as the establishment and were able to bridge these gaps. So at the risk of repetition, I would like to commend to the country, the example which the Archbishop gave as a mediator and a diplomat.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

**Sen. Muhummad Shabazz:** Mr. President, I really rise to say that I will always remember the Archbishop of Port of Spain, Archbishop Anthony Pantin. There were certain things I remember about him. The Archbishop was my Dean in school. One of the things that maybe I liked most about him, besides his humility and the way he was, is the fact that he was one of the Deans who did not really like to beat. I had to go to him at times and he was always encouraging and trying to show how you could become better and do better, and I liked that about him, not only that, he would listen.

I remember once I had a situation in college and after I had explained it to him, he listened and went along the way that I wanted him to go because he found that the argument that I had put forward was good. There was something else about him. There was a line in our college song that says, "Fearless and strong go the boys of St. Mary's College". What I remember about Archbishop Pantin was that he was one of the persons who at a national level, when he spoke, you really could have believed that he was not defending any other interest; he spoke truthfully and honestly and that what he said is what he meant.

Mr. President, there was another thing about him that I liked. When one looks at all the spiritual leaders in the country, I am one of the persons who felt, if we had a spiritual crisis in Trinidad and Tobago, the person on whom you could depend most of all was Archbishop Pantin. I felt that he was somebody that you could have believed what he said you could have taken his advice and followed it

because one felt that there was something spiritual about him, and that he was really pure and strong about what he was doing.

Everybody talk about how he was a humorous person who gave jokes and so forth. I would really like to say this because most times when I remember him, I remember him this way. One day, we were together in school and one of the boys was coughing and I remember Father Pantin jokingly saying, if you die now, you are all right because you have your coffin already. *[Laughter]* I never forget him. Every time I remember him, I remember him in that joke too and I remember him that way. I will always remember him and I will always love him. He has in some way guided my life, not only Father Pantin, but I remember his brother Gerry and others. It was a way that his family had and he stood out and made that way in the best way that he could. From my family and me, and all on this side, and probably, for all the other members of school, we really will always love and remember Father Tony Pantin.

**The Acting Prime Minister and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Lindsay Gillette):** Mr. President, a lot has been said of this great man, and really I do feel inadequate, but to describe him really, I have two things to say. He was a godly man and he really saw things through the eyes of God, and not as through the eyes of man, and he was a good man, a very, very good man. One of his famous sayings really, as you go to him for advice, he would always say, it was all God's work. Hopefully with his passing, maybe we could realize that we are only here for a short space of time, and the greatest respect we could show to this man really is to pray to him now, as he is up there that we will one day be a peaceful nation.

Eternal rest grant unto him O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. Amen.

**10.55 a.m.**

**Mr. President:** I know that many, many people would like to pay tribute, but we have to put a limit to it. We had two and I think the Reverend wants to say something, and I will permit him as the last person.

**Sen. Rev. Daniel Teelucksingh:** Thank you very much, Sir. We need to spend some time to tell the story of our heroes and I am very happy that you have allowed us this kind of freedom.

I join with all other colleagues in this Senate in honouring him whom we may call, "The Beloved Archbishop of Port of Spain". Trinidad and Tobago has lost

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one of its best-loved and most celebrated sons in Archbishop Pantin. The hallmark of his ministry was his unmistakable humility and sincerity which made him the people's priest. He celebrated the life of a faithful servant of God whose ministry and work has been a great blessing and inspiration, particularly to our young nation evolving through those early years of independence and republicanism. A worthy Archbishop, indeed, of our capital city; a man of peace who stood tall during the socio/political disturbances of the turbulent 1970s and of 1990.

His infectious humour, his pleasantness and simple lifestyle, and his keen awareness of the cries of the poor, made him a true shepherd of his people. He graced the priesthood with a piety and spirituality that made him the "pastor par excellence". We extend condolences to the Pantin family and to the Roman Catholic community in this Archdiocese.

May his soul rest in peace.

**Mr. President:** Hon. Members, the Clerk of the Senate has been instructed to send appropriate letters of condolence to the bereaved family, as well as to the Catholic community through the Vicar-General of the Catholic Archdiocese of Trinidad and Tobago.

#### PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Tobago Regional Health Authority for the year ended December 31, 1996. [*The Minister of Public Administration (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Tobago Regional Health Authority for the year ended December 31, 1997. [*Hon. W. Mark*]
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Tobago Regional Health Authority for the nine-month period January 01, 1998 to September 30, 1998. [*Hon. W. Mark*]
4. Report of the Supervisor of Insurance for the year ended December 31, 1997. [*Hon. W. Mark*]
5. Second Annual Report of the Police Complaints Authority for the period May 01, 1997 to April 30, 1998. [*Hon. W. Mark*]



**ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS**

**The Minister of Public Administration (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark):** Mr. President, I seek leave of the Senate to deal with “Bills Second Reading” at this stage of the proceedings, instead of “Motions”.

*Agreed to.*

**EDUCATION (AMDT.) (NO. 2) BILL**

*Order for second reading read.*

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar):** Mr. President, I beg to move,

That a Bill to amend the Education Act, Chap. 39:01 be now read a second time.

Mr. President, on August 12, 1996, the then Minister of Education, Dr. Adesh Nanan, appointed a committee to make recommendations for the establishment of local school boards at government schools. This report was thereafter presented to Minister Nanan in February of 1997. The report was taken to Cabinet. Cabinet made certain recommendations and a Bill was drafted. The Bill and Regulations were, again, taken to Cabinet and Cabinet proposed that the Bill and Regulations be put out for public comment.

The then Minister of Education then invited public comment on the Bill and the Regulations and the comments that were received, were incorporated into the Bill and Regulations, and that is the Bill and proposed Regulations which are before this honourable Chamber. The results of discussions held with the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association from its comments on the Bill, and others, are incorporated in the amendment.

This is just one of several measures that Government proposes to take with respect to the decentralization of education and restructuring of both the Education Ministry and the education system. Essential aspects of the report are:

- to strengthen and promote school-based management;
- to promote links between school and community;
- to bring education management closer to communities;

in a bid to make the Ministry of Education itself more effective and the schools themselves as well.

*Education (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill*  
[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

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The local school boards that are proposed by the Bill, in my respectful view, would have a profound influence on the way schools will be run, on the linkages between the schools and the communities, and will go a long way in addressing matters concerning the state of the schools' plant. It is part of Government's policy of promoting decentralization in a school-based management of the education system.

The concept of local school boards is not a new one in Trinidad and Tobago. It has its origin in many earlier education reports which date back to the Moynes Commission in 1919, to the Maurice Report in 1959; to the Local School Boards Committee of 1987. So that the concept has been there for quite a while but, to date, nothing has been done in terms of implementing the idea, or establishing local school boards in our schools.

The primary notion of the proposed local school board is rooted in the concept of broad-based participatory planning in education at the local level and that is the scenario in which local communities and local interest groups will have a direct input in what is essentially an important part of their lives and all our lives, that is, the education of the children of the nation.

The effort towards decentralization has been occupying, and continues to occupy, the minds of education administrators. Whilst there are numerous reports and recommendations over the years for community participation in this way, very little in terms of implementation—except in the case of a pilot programme for local school boards in primary schools in 1988—was attempted.

Since 1988 to the present, there has been a rapid expansion of Government's secondary school sector in the education system. The general belief is that the system has outgrown the original structures put in place for supervision and management. Indications are that decentralization, community and stakeholder participation are the keys to effective management. It is anticipated that the successful establishment and operation of these local boards would encourage and further develop a community spirit which is geared to accepting responsibility for the general education in our communities.

The underlying philosophy for the establishment and operation of these boards is rooted in the belief that local boards will enhance the capability and the capacity of schools to achieve their objectives through the involvement, not only of the key stakeholders themselves, but also cross-sectional community, individual and interest groups, in managing the schools.

If we look at the proposed Regulations that are attached to the Bill, the Bill itself is very short—

**Sen. Montano:** Thank you, Minister, for giving way, but I have just been able to clarify that none of us received the Regulations, so as you go through, I will be grateful if you would take your time and read them out for us so at least we will know what you are talking about. We really do not have anything at all.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Well, that is most unfortunate. I would ask the Leader of the Senate or the Clerk, because the Bill itself is so simple and really, the substance, or the teeth of it, is in the proposed Regulations. So, I think we would be at a disadvantage. It is really within the proposed Regulations.

**Sen. Yuille-Williams:** You are quite right, Minister.

**Mr. President:** May I make a suggestion, please? Since one of the Members has asked, hon. Minister, if you have a copy, perhaps you might wish to read it while copies are being made for Members. I understand a copy is available from which photocopies are going to be made, so the Minister may wish to read the Regulations out while copies are being made. Perhaps, they may be circulated before she is finished.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. President, I have asked one of my officers to make it available. Perhaps, we can do this stage of it and then we decide what to do next. So that a copy will be circulated to Members shortly. I do apologize. I am not sure why they were not circulated in this Senate.

I am saying then that when we look at the Regulations attached to the Bill—and this is where we now do not have a copy of the Regulations so, perhaps, we can take a few moments with this whilst your copy comes to you.

These Regulations are, in fact, not part of what this honourable Senate is required to vote on. The Regulations are to be made under the Education Act to give effect to the amending Bill that is before you. The Regulations are regulations proposed. They will be made under the Act under powers given to the Minister under that particular Act. What we propose to do is bring them back for your perusal, provided that this Bill is passed in this Senate. So, if the Bill is passed, the procedure is only after that amended Bill becomes law, can the Regulations be put forward.

However, as you know, and as I have indicated, these Regulations give the flesh to the bone that is the amending Bill. When we look at the Regulations themselves, we see that Article 3(1) says:

- (a) “A Board constituted by Order made under section 23 of the Act shall comprise—the Principal who is an *ex officio* member; and
- (b) no more than nine other members drawn from among the following groups, namely:”

So, what the regulations are giving us is a composition of the local school board.

**Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt:** Can you read that again?

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Sure.

- “(a) the Principal who is an *ex officio* member; and
- (b) no more than nine other...”

These others are proposed as follows:

- “(i) a member of the school staff other than the Principal;
- (ii) a member of the union most representative of teachers nominated by the union;”

So, a union member.

- “(iii) two members of the recognised Parent-Teacher Association of the school, nominated by the members of that Association, at least one of whom must be female;”

So, principal *ex officio*; another member of staff who is not the principal; a member of the union most representative of the teachers; two members of the Parent-Teacher Association, one of whom must be female.

- “(iv) a representative of the past pupils’ association, if any, of the school nominated by that association;”

And I intend to amend those Regulations to include:

- “a representative of the student council, if any, of that school nominated by the council.”

### **11.10 a.m.**

At the time when these regulations were drafted, we had not looked into the whole issue of the student council. We have now agreed to have a member of the student council. *[Interruption]* Yes, Ma’am.

**Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt:** Thank you, Mr. President. I wonder if the hon. Minister could let us know what was the thinking behind making the Principal,

who currently is equivalent to the General Manager or the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the organization, *ex officio* and putting one of his subordinate teachers on the board itself, which would then make the subordinate teacher superior to the CEO, which seems to be an organizational principle not much to be desired in the development of organizations?

**Sen. Daly:** Mr. President, may I? They are getting them? I am sorry Sir, we are debating regulations which I do not have.

**Mr. President:** For the information of Senators, I am told that this Bill was first laid on January 21, 2000, when the regulations were attached to that Bill.

**Hon. Senators:** No.

**Mr. President:** This is what the Clerk tells me. I have just sent to my office to check to see whether the papers of January 21, 2000 included the regulations. But in any event, be that as it may, copies are being made for Members.

**Sen. Daly:** Mr. President, could we ask the Acting Prime Minister to break that logjam, Sir?

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. President, the hon. Senator was not in the Chamber when the issue was raised by Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt about the regulations. Copies are being made and will be circulated shortly.

On the question raised by Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt, perhaps at the end I could come back to that, because some of the other things I will say could help to explain what she has asked.

These are the persons who will comprise the local school board and other persons nominated by the Minister, as the Minister deems necessary, after consultation with relevant interest groups and stakeholders within the community. There are nine members: the principal, *ex officio*; a member of the school staff other than the principal; a member of the union; two Parent-Teacher Association persons, one of whom must be female; a representative of past pupils' association; a representative of the students' council of the school, if any. You will know that we have been taking steps to establish in every school students' councils, because it is our respectful view that there must be a voice for students and they must be involved in whatever is taking place in the schools.

We have begun work on that, with respect to students' councils. The Ministry is involved, actively, in taking steps to have these students' councils set up in our schools, so one member from that students' council for each school and persons nominated by the Minister to comprise a board of nine persons or more than nine.

**Sen. Alfred:** Could I ask a question, Mr. President? What happens if there is no past pupils' association or students' council?

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** It says very clearly—and I am sorry, again, it is not before you—“if any”. I quote:

“(iv) a representative of the past pupils' association, if any,…”

So if there is none, yes, it does not stop the board from going through.

**Sen. Dr. St. Cyr:** Mr. President, a very brief question. If it is not the intention to have these boards comprised entirely of women, might I suggest that, at least, one of the members of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) should be male?

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** In the same way that we have indicated that at least one PTA person must be female, if you wish we can say at least that one must be female and one male, if you so desire. The thinking that we had is that it was clearly to ensure that we had a mother from the PTA, that there was at least one mother on the school board. Most times the principals are males, as we know.

**Sen. Alfred:** No.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Yes, of course. The majority of principals in this country are males. Not in Tobago, but we are talking about Trinidad and Tobago. We would see it there. We shall consider the hon. Senator's comment. Part II of the regulations states

“(2) The Board shall appoint from its membership, persons, other than the Principal, to be the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman.

4. The term of a Board shall be no more than two years.

5. (1) Where a member is, by reason of illness or otherwise unable to perform his functions as a member of the Board, the Minister may by Order, appoint another person to act as a temporary member during that period.”

The regulations go on to set out what would be the functions of the school board.

If we look at Part III of the regulations:

“Duties and Powers of the Board

“19. (1) The Board shall have the duties and powers, including but not limited to those listed...to manage the school—

(a) in the development of a strategic plan for the school;

- (b) in the conduct of an operational and environmental audit of the activities of the school;
- (c) in the development and implementation of school improvement plans;”

As you would know, at the moment, there is an entire project being administered by the Ministry of Education which is known as the “SIPS Programme”, School Improvement Plans. Under this programme schools are asked to come up with their plan for school improvement. Based on that plan, the Ministry of Education, through the Fourth Basic Education World Bank Programme, is funding that plan; of any school, to the tune of \$90,000. It is the first time that moneys are actually being given directly to schools to be spent on plans drawn up by the particular schools. So far, I think we have distributed to over 91 primary schools. The thrust is that all primary schools in the country will have access to the funding under the SIPS Programme. The important point is that the school community itself is empowered to come up with the plan, thereafter, to implement the plan and even, thereafter, to account for the spending of moneys. It is the first time, I am saying, that the schools in the country are actually being empowered in that way to plan, implement and to account.

The school boards will be able to assist in the development and implementation of the school improvement plans; whether it be under the SIPS Programme or otherwise.

- “(d) by receiving information, complaints and expressions of concern and hope from the public concerning the school and its members, and to make recommendations as they see fit and relay them to the competent authority;
- (e) by encouraging, promoting, sustaining and fostering mutual understanding, good fellowship and co-operation among the Minister, staff, parents, pupils and other persons associated with the school;”

Remember we are saying that the local school boards will assist in managing in these ways.

- “(f) by requesting the assistance of local government bodies and other agencies to assist in the maintenance of the school.”

We have seen over time, the tremendous difficulties we face in our schools with respect to maintenance, minor repairs and major repairs. Our school plant is very old. There are schools that have been built so many years ago. Maintenance has

not taken place at the rate that it should have and of the quantity or quality that it should have. The school plant itself is in a bad way. There is no question about it.

Whilst it is that we are engaged in building more schools, as you know, the existing plant also needs a lot to be done. So it is that local government bodies, for example, can assist within the community. These school boards, if they are there within the local community, will have a feel and will know and be able to liaise and act instantly.

I was amazed, when I went into the Ministry of Education, that things were happening in schools and the ministry did not know it until I read it in the newspaper or until I saw it on the television screen. The flow of information and, therefore, the central authority does not work. It is not working. There must be a level of decentralization where there is responsibility locally within the community and not just at the level of the ministry.

At the moment if something goes wrong in the school, the principal is the frontline person. The principal would contact the school supervisor, who would then contact someone at the ministry. That process—believe it or not, again because of school plant, again because of the lack of equipment and the technology that would give us instantaneous communication—does not reach us. Perhaps sometimes it is too late, schools are shut down; loss of school time.

It is my respectful view that if the local school boards are there on spot, they can start liaising with the relevant authorities and taking action in a faster manner.

“(g) by liaising with all relevant agencies in order to ensure that the school is adequately served with water and electricity;”

How many times we see our schools shut down because there is no water?

### **11.20 a.m.**

There are some schools that as soon as they go in for the day and there is no water, they send everyone home. There are some schools where the manager in that school, the principal, vice principal or a teacher, would pick up the phone and call to say, “We have no water, truck some water in,” or “When are we going to get water, what can we do?” But it does not happen in some schools. In fact, in some schools you wonder whether they are most happy when they traipse in the morning and there is no water, so they can send everybody back home. Sometimes you wonder if that does not happen in some schools.



In others, I am saying that they would wait, they will call. If there is a local school board, again, with this authority, to liaise with those relevant authorities on spot—we know when we walk in that there is no water or electricity, someone would take that upon himself or herself because they are concerned. That body of persons who are stakeholders can take that interest forward and put it through.

**Sen. Montano:** Exactly how many schools are we talking about at the secondary and primary level?

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** The proposal is for the school boards to be in all government schools.

**Sen. Montano:** How many?

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** I can give you that in a few minutes, I cannot remember off hand; all government schools.

**Sen. C. Alfred:** Including government-assisted schools?

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** No, the government-assisted schools already have a system of school boards in place. That is a very interesting question. Again, perhaps, this is where the school boards in the government schools—not the church schools or the assisted schools—perhaps could take precedence from the government-assisted schools. There is the perception, whether we want to face the reality or not, that those schools do better by far, than the ones that are purely the government schools. Perhaps, one of the reasons—and I am sure that is not the only one—may be because they have a system of school boards in place.

Of course, the last time I said that people became a little upset, so let me say very clearly, that is one of the reasons. The other reasons are clearly to deal with values-based education, religious education within the schools and the kind of discipline that takes place in those government-assisted schools and the church schools. In fact, as you know, within the ministry we have been moving to bring in a values-based curriculum, we are looking into that. If I had my way, and I intend to take this proposal, it is my respectful view that some kind of religious education should take place in all our schools. It should not only be in the assisted schools or the church schools, but there is a separation between the state and religion.

In the United States, for example, their constitution is very clear. So that in the government schools in the United States there is no question of religion, it is a secular institution, it is an institution of the state and religion has no part. However, you would have been reading and seeing that President Clinton, within

the last couple months, has been making a strong bid for finding a way around the constitutional provisions to bring religion into the schools in the United States.

It is my respectful view that in the government schools, in addition to local school boards, of course, this is one way, we need values-based education. There is no way that the system will survive without values-based education. When I became Minister of Education, that was one of the first things I talked about. We have moved forward with it, we have not just talked about it. Someone within the ministry has been contracted to develop a values-based curriculum. That person will be meeting with various interest groups, the Inter Religious Organization and others to develop a values-based education curriculum for us.

So, there is a system of local school boards—coming back to it—in the assisted schools. If we get this legislation passed the assisted schools are not mandated to follow the pattern that we have set out here, but if they wish they can so do. At that moment, this is for all government schools, primary and secondary.

Mr. President, continuing with the functions of the local school boards:

- “(i) by mobilizing community support for the school;
- (j) by strengthening community relations with specific bodies and individuals in the community;
- (k) by making recommendations for the better performance of the school in the assessment of school plant;
- (l) in preparing short, medium and long term plans for capital improvement and the upgrading of plant and equipment;
- (m) in the development and implementation of a maintenance programme for the plant and equipment of the school;”

I mentioned this already. That maintenance is so vital. The ministry sometimes does not know until the thing has actually shut down that there is a problem in terms of maintenance. You may say that we need to do something, to get our act together at the ministry level. I am saying that is true but, at the same time, we need to decentralize and let the communities also have a say in what is taking place and in planning for what will take place.

Other functions include:

- “(n) in the development and implementation of plans to improve the security of the schools;”

We have heard a lot about school security in recent times and times not so recent. May I say very clearly that the ministry is very concerned with respect to the security, safety and welfare of all those in the nation's schools. We have spent over \$12 million in terms of improving security in the schools: phase one of high-risk schools is taking place; phase two, another 45 schools. So about 90 schools now have improved security systems. Phase three of that programme we intend to implement very shortly, where in another 50 schools security will be introduced as well, in terms of personnel. Again, we come back to, that it is not just the guards or security, it has to do with a lot of matters. We cannot deal with all of them at one time. This is one measure we feel can assist us in terms of school security as well.

Other functions include:

- “(o) by promoting fund raising activities on behalf of the school and controlling the expenditure of funds so raised;
- (p) by making recommendations for the better performance of the school to the Minister through the Permanent Secretary;
- (q) in taking such other action which may redound to the benefit of the school.”

Basically, here is the composition of the school board as set out in the proposed regulations, and the powers and duties of those school boards. The regulations also contain provisions relating to appointments, revocation of appointments and procedure within the functioning of the school boards.

This is basically what is before this honourable Chamber. There are some concerns that have been raised and, in fact, I just opened the *Newsday* and I saw that the Trinidad and Tobago United Teachers' Association (TTUTA) had raised such matters with us. In the *Newsday* of Tuesday, March 14, 2000, at page 15 it reads:

“TTUTA cautions about local school boards

TTUTA IS alarmed at some of the existing provisions of a Bill, scheduled for debate in the Senate today, which seeks to amend the Education Act and establish Local School Boards (LSB) for Government schools.

In a release, TTUTA explained that LSBs have a role to play in assisting with the maintenance and repair of plant and equipment, fund raising activities and the establishment of relationships with the community. It noted that the proposed

amendments seem to facilitate the exceeding of these functions and allow these Boards to direct and control the operations of teachers and the school administration.”

With the greatest of respect, I have for you the powers and duties of the boards. I do not see that this is, in fact, a matter for concern as raised within the proposed regulations.

The article continues:

“This is evidenced by the notion of conducting an annual performance appraisal of the operations of the school,”

Mr. President, you would recall that I read within the regulations, clause 19(1)(b), that the school boards will assist to manage the school:

“in the conduct of an operational and environmental audit of the activities of the school;”

That is the only thing I see within the regulations, but TTUTA’s concern is that there is “the notion of conducting an annual performance appraisal of the operations of the school”.

“TTUTA also stated that LSBs should not have the authority to interfere with the autonomy of the supervisors, principals and teachers as agents of the Ministry of Education in curriculum or other pedagogical matters.”

It is very clear that in terms of curriculum matters, the school boards have no direct influence. They can make recommendations and suggestions, but they cannot, from what we have put in the Bill, actually determine the curriculum or any other pedagogical matters within the school.

TTUTA also says:

“In addition, LSBs should in no way interfere with or usurp the powers of the teaching Service Commission and in no way diminish the responsibility of the State for the full funding of public schools.

TTUTA made these concerns known to the Ministry of Education since July of 1999.”

It is true. When the Bill was put out for public comment TTUTA did send their concerns in. It is very clear, in my respectful view, from what we are proposing that at no point in time do we intend to usurp the functions of the Teaching Service Commission with the school boards, in anyway; they are totally distinct

functions. Not even the Ministry of Education can influence the Teaching Service Commission.

In my respectful view, TTUTA's fears can be allayed because the local school boards, as envisaged, as set out in the regulations, can in no way impinge, influence or deal with service commissions, so they will remain as they are, an independent body.

As you know, Mr. President, within this Parliament we had dealt with the issue of parliamentary committees to deal with service commissions and so forth. I must tell you, again, that I am overwhelmed by the number of persons who will write or come in to say, "I have applied for a teaching job since,"—I do not know how many years, "I have received an acknowledgment eight years later, seven years later, six years later now; I have not had an interview; I do not know what is happening." Then you have the strange phenomenon where the schools are saying that they do not have teachers, but we have thousands of applications for teaching jobs of qualified persons and there are schools without teachers. Perhaps, that is a logjam that we have to give one of our colleagues to unlock; I do not know; but there are thousands of applications.

What I have done, since going into the Ministry of Education, is ask the ministry to prepare for me a proposal based on suggestions I made to them—that I want to take to Cabinet—for computerization of the records of the ministry. Those records, believe it or not, are still not computerized. So our intention is to put all applications on computer. What is the status of each application? What is the plant out there in terms of teachers? How many teachers do we have in schools? What are their qualifications? Where are they? I could not if you ask me, in all fairness, give you an accurate count on those numbers.

**Sen. Prof. Spence:** Mr. President, I just wanted to clear up a point. The applications do not go to the Ministry of Education, so your computerization would not touch that issue? I thought they went directly to the service commission.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** There are certain things that the ministry has to do. The applications go, but then if you are given a teacher registration number those things are with the ministry. So there will be parts of it that will be with us and, therefore, we will be able to track them.

I will tell you something else, there are people who say—I could not give you, at this point in time, an accurate reflection of those numbers, and it would be through no fault of anyone at the Ministry of Education. It will be because there

are manual records of thousands and thousands of people. The only way that the human mind and hand can deal with it, is to put it in the computer so we can have a clear indication of what is there.

There are people, for example, who say, “I have applied and I have inquired about what has happened to my application, I have received my teachers registration number and so forth, and nothing.” “I applied in 1990 and there is someone who applied in 1996 and that person has been given an interview and that person has not only been given an interview but has been employed.” In the ministry, when I make queries I get a reply, “We are now processing 1991 applications, that is where we have reached.” How can we really say, is it true that someone in 1997 has jumped the queue before you? I cannot say. The only time we can say that is when these records are totally computerized. Then we can have lists that we can check and verify.

As it is, a file can be lost so easily. The person with the 1997 file cannot find it, so that I can never verify that you have hired a 1997 person when you have told the people who applied in 1992, “I am dealing with 1991.” This is not only at the level of the Teaching Service Commission, it is also at the level of the ministry. It is just too much paper, it has to go into the computer.

I have strayed a bit but the local school boards have nothing to do with the Teaching Service Commission. They cannot usurp any of the functions of the Teaching Service Commission.

Some of the points raised by TTUTA, again, in my respectful view, we would like to—*[Interruption]*

**Sen. Yuille-Williams:** Before you go on, as you are talking about the duties and powers of the local school boards, could you clarify for me, I think it is in the regulations, it is the development of a strategic plan. You said that the local school boards would not interfere with professional duties and services. What, therefore, will the boards do in terms of the strategic plan. The strategic plan with the local school boards, what areas would that encompass? You are saying that it is not the professional areas or the curriculum, but they are supposed to develop a strategic plan, it is a little open—

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** The strategic plans have to do with school improvement plans. So that, again, if they develop these plans they could only come by way of suggestions and recommendations, it cannot be that they mandate the teachers, the principal or the ministry that this must be done. Of course, we will be guided by consensus; it is the way of our democracy. If it is there is a local

school board and community interests who are suggesting that something needs to be done in this avenue, it will be given due consideration.

**11.35 a.m.**

I am not sure if that answers your question at all. There was the issue raised by TTUTA with respect to School Supervisors. Again, the School Supervisor is a very important person in the whole process of the school, in the business of the school and in the way the schools function, so the school boards again are not to usurp the functions of the School Supervisors. I have already said not principals, not the ministry, not the Teaching Service Commission.

I look forward to your comments and suggestions.

**Sen. Montano:** Before you wind up, could you answer my first question as to the number of schools about which we are talking, and secondly, what is your estimate of the cost of running these school boards?

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** We envisage that members of the school boards themselves will be given a stipend very similar to stipends that are given to persons who serve on boards generally. There is a classification of moneys that are paid to members on boards generally, so it is not envisaged that persons who serve on local school boards will be given a salary as such.

In fact, since this has come out, many people have been calling and saying they are interested in serving. What I intend to do is to advertise in some way to know who are interested and the schools they may be interested in. There was a view by some who felt that we should name the kinds of persons we would put on the school board, and I said it was not possible to do that because it may well be in some areas in schools—in my constituency for example or in Cedros or Toco—where the kind of personnel that you say we must have one of these and we must have one of those may not be available within that community. So whilst we may look to try to put certain types of professionals within that structure, I felt it may be wrong to mandate that such a person be on the local school board if that person will not be available in the community at all.

**Sen. Prof. Spence:** I have two points, one pertaining to what the Minister had just said. I thought that there are some schools that do not have local catchment areas, therefore the school board does not have to be local either. Just to address your point, perhaps it could be possible not to mandate, but at least to name the sort of person that you might want on such boards.

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The second one is not to do with the Bill, but the hon. Minister mentioned the joint select committees, could I enquire what has happened to the joint select committees? A little while ago I suggested that one of the first things I might suggest was the paving of the savannah, perhaps that is why they have been killed.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** I am sorry, who did we kill?

**Sen. Prof. Spence:** You mentioned the joint select committees, I wondered what had happened to them, and I further suggest perhaps they might have been killed because I suggested that they might investigate the paving of the savannah.  
*[Laughter]*

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** I am sure the hon. Senator really does not want me to comment on that. I am not sure I have killed anything, quite frankly, so I am sure you do not want a comment on that.

In terms of the numbers, there are 70 Government Secondary Schools and the technical report of the committee which was originally set up suggested \$1200 per month per local school board.

**Hon. Senator:** Per person?

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** No. Per board. There are stipends, there are persons who serve on very important state boards and I am saying there are categories of moneys that are located for those boards, per month, per local school board. That is what is proposed. I do not know if the Minister of Finance could—there is a category of fees, of moneys that has been agreed even before our time within the Cabinet, in terms of moneys given to persons who serve on boards, and there are nine persons.

Mr. President, I beg to move.

*Question proposed.*

**The Minister of Public Administration (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark):** Mr. President, having regard to the fact that the regulations have not yet been received by Members of the Opposition and the Independent Benches, and having regard to the fact that they would like to make an intelligent contribution to the presentation made by the hon. Minister of Education, I would like to propose, with their consent, that we suspend or defer debate on this matter to another sitting of the Senate, and with consent and agreement, that we allocate the rest of the evening to Private Members' business.



We have agreed that Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt has a matter on the Order Paper, and with agreement, we will allow her to introduce her Motion, and subsequent to her introduction and presentation, we shall adjourn to next Tuesday with consent and support.

**Mr. President:** Hon. Senators, there are two issues. Firstly, I apologize to Senators for the lapse by the office for not attaching a copy of the regulations with the Bill that was sent out to Senators. Are Senators agreeable to further consideration of the debate on the Bill being deferred to another sitting of the Senate?

*Agreed to.*

#### ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

**Mr. President:** In terms of the second issue, I think I will put it by way of a motion because of the change in status. That the Senate now deal with Private Business instead of Government Business and Motions.

*Agreed to.*

#### FEMALE PARLIAMENTARIANS MATERNITY BENEFITS

**Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt:** Mr. President, I rise to present the Motion standing in my name.

*Whereas* the terms and conditions under which Members of Parliament serve do not include any provision for conditions of maternity for female Members; *And Whereas* there are several female Members in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago who are of child-bearing age;

*And Whereas* the House Committee of the House of Representatives as far back as May, 1998 proposed group medical benefits (including maternity) for all Members of Parliament;

*Be it resolved:*

That Parliament direct that the Salaries Review Commission re-examine the terms and conditions of Members of Parliament with the view of including provisions dealing with maternity.

Mr. President, this would be a very short introduction to the Motion because I think that the intent of the Motion is perfectly clear. If I can spend a couple of minutes to go into the background of this, it seems to be fairly obvious that when

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the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago was set up, it was not envisaged by the worthy gentlemen who set it up that there were going to be female members of Parliament, and, therefore, normal conditions that apply to the female of the species, that do not apply to the male, were not taken into consideration.

When it became obvious after a while that there were going to be female Members of Parliament, obviously, the worthy powers that be did not conceive—if you will excuse me for using the term—that there would be women of child-bearing age amongst Members of Parliament. This was an oversight and perhaps one that needs to be corrected. It may be a very simple matter and an obvious one, but I think that underlying it, is something which is considerably more serious and that has to do with the whole question of the equality of genders in the society. If we do not have it in something as august as the Parliament of our country, then we have to start taking a pretty serious look to see whether or not we really do have equal conditions for human beings of different genders otherwise in the country.

We have had many discussions recently about equality and opportunity in employment, the ILO Convention on equality and employment is one to which we had paid much lip-service. When it comes to things like maternity protection there is a convention that we had ratified—we had, in fact, passed legislation through Parliament—the Maternity Protection Act which is now in force. It went through Parliament in 1999. However, the latter covers employees of Parliament, not Members of Parliament and as it has become quite evident, there are instances where Members of Parliament do face the question of maternity and it is not something that we cannot keep delaying forever and forever because babies do not wait.

Mr. President, it is also true that there are still pockets in our national lives where laws and practices that cover citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are not equal for both men and women. Sometimes we just become so accustomed to the situation that we are not aware that they exist. Like certain provisions of the National Insurance Act which I will come to during the course of the debate, but it is important, and I think it is important this year in particular that we take a look at them because this is an election year, and I think that in an election year it would be very interesting to watch the selection committees for the different political parties and note whether or not they select numbers of women candidates in equal proportion to the number of female voters in the country.

When Nelson Mandela from South Africa finally got out of prison and became Prime Minister of that country he had a vision. He is a man of vision, a

man of integrity and he is a man who has considerable concern for human and civil rights—insisted that 50 per cent of the candidates who ran in the elections after he came into office must be female. I would be looking, and I am sure a number of other people would be looking with a great deal of interest to see whether or not there are any political leaders in Trinidad and Tobago with the vision, integrity and commitment to human rights that Nelson Mandela had, and we will be watching to see whether the percentage of candidates put forward by the different political parties reflect the percentage of women voters in the country. It would be most interesting to take a look at.

In the meantime, I would like to bring the attention of the Senate back to the fact that it was almost two years ago that the House Committee in the House of Representatives proposed group medical benefits for all Members of Parliament. We have heard over and over again about the slowness with which various government commissions operate. We have heard the hon. Minister of Education give us some interesting comments on the Ministry of Education and the Teaching Service Commission. The Salaries Review Commission does not seem to work any quicker than any of the other commissions and the recommendations of Parliament at that time were ignored. I realize that the mills of the commissions grind slowly, but they are not grinding very fine in this particular incidence and, therefore, I am appealing to both sides of this honourable Senate and to my colleagues on the Independent Benches to support this Motion .

**11.50 a.m.**

In doing so, I would like to particularly thank Sen. Prof. Kenny and Sen. Prof. Ramchand for giving way and allowing me to present this Motion for reasons of expediency before their Motions were debated. I realize that it would be a very short debate but, nonetheless, I am very grateful to both of them.

Before I close, I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Independent Senators, to congratulate Sen. Lindsay Gillette on his appointment as acting Prime Minister. It is always a great honour for those of us who are in the Senate, when one of our Senators does achieve, even if it is just for a very short period of time, to such high office.

Thank you, Mr. President.

*Seconded by Sen. Prof. J. Spence.*

*Question proposed.*

*Adjournment*

*Tuesday, March 14, 2000*

**ADJOURNMENT**

**The Minister of Public Administration (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark):** Mr. President, I would like to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday, March 21, 2000 at 1.30 p.m.

With agreement, I reserve the right to speak on that Motion on the next Private Members' Day, which is the fourth Tuesday in the month of March.

**Mr. President:** Hon. Senators, is the Senate in agreement that further consideration of the Private Members' Motion be deferred until the next Private Members' Day?

*Assent indicated.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Senate adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 11.55 a.m.*