

*Leave of Absence**Tuesday, July 25, 2000***SENATE***Tuesday, July 25, 2000*

The Senate met at 1.31 p.m.

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

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, leave of absence has been granted from sittings of the Senate to the following Senators: Sen. Joan Yuille-Williams from today's sitting and Sen. Lindsay Gillette during the period July 20—26, 2000.

SENATOR'S APPOINTMENT

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I have received the following communication from His Excellency the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago:

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency ARTHUR N. R. ROBINSON, T.C.,
O.C.C., S.C., President and Commander-in-Chief
of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

\s\ Arthur N. R. Robinson
President.

TO: MR. DAVE COWIE

WHEREAS Senator Lindsay Gillette is incapable of performing his functions as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, ARTHUR N. R. ROBINSON, President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, DAVE COWIE, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from 25th July, 2000 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Lindsay Gillette.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President
of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the
Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 20th day
of July, 2000.”

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS (ENTERPRISES) COMMITTEE
(Appointment of Member)**

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I have appointed Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand, a member of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee in place of Sen. Philip Marshall who resigned a few weeks ago.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Sen. Dave Cowie took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

JUDICIAL REVIEW BILL

Bill to provide for an application to the High Court of the Supreme Court of Judicature for relief by way of judicial review and for related matters, brought from the House of Representatives [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

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

Question put and agreed to.

ASHTANG YOGA ASSOCIATION OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO (INC'N) BILL

Bill for the incorporation of the Ashtang Yoga Association of Trinidad and Tobago and matters incidental thereto, brought from the House of Representatives [*Sen. Nizam Baksh*]; read the first time.

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

Question put and agreed to.

**EDUCATION
(PHILOSOPHY AND PURPOSE)**

[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [April 4, 2000]:

Be It Resolved that the Government explain its philosophy of education with special reference to the question: "What is Education?" and "What is Education for?" [Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand]

Question again proposed.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Mr. President, I thank hon. Members of this Chamber for the opportunity. When Sen. Prof. Ramchand filed this Motion for debate several months ago, little did he or we know that it would be part of a very widespread debate on education in Trinidad and Tobago such as we have been witnessing throughout the country in the past several months and, more specially, within the last month or two.

The wider debate, in my respectful view, underscores how close education is to the hearts of all of us, all the people of this country. It underscores how vital we all view education for our children and for our nation. Many issues that have been of concern for many years have risen to the forefront for discussion at this time.

Mr. President, if we are to look at what is education and what is education for, which is at the heart of the Motion filed by the hon. Senator, it seems to me that we cannot speak about what is education and what is education for, if it is, firstly, that there are children in this country who have no education whatsoever. Therefore, the first issue, in my respectful view, has to be the placement of students in a school, in an institution for learning.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the statistics for learning—Mr. President; I am sure you will forgive me the slip from the other place—Mr. President, for the many years that we looked at the Common Entrance Examination, officials of the Ministry have compiled statistics which show us clearly that for almost every year in the past, about 8,000—10,000 children remained unplaced after the Common Entrance Examination.

So, it was in 1990, 28,478 children wrote the exam; 8,271 remained unplaced. In 1991, 29,403 persons wrote the exam; 8,943 remained unplaced. If we look at the years 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995 which are one, two, three to four years immediately before this Government came into office, we will see that approximately 50,000 children remained without a place after the Common Entrance Examination each year. When we came to 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999, again, students continued to remain unplaced after the Common Entrance Examination. If you look at the results, I am saying that over the past 10 years, between 80,000—90,000 children remained unplaced after the Common Entrance Examination.

For the first time in the history of this country, in the year 2000, 29,567 wrote the Common Entrance Examination and 29,567 students were placed after the results came out. [*Desk thumping*]

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So, Mr. President, what is education and what is education for? Clearly, there was no education for those who remained unplaced. The issue for those children was not one of sacrificing quantity for quality; the issue was, clearly, they had no chance whatsoever. So, to answer the question, I want to say firstly, that Government is committed, in the first place, to ensure that every child has the place to get an education in this country. Not one child, we believe, must continue to be cast off because there was no place for that child. Not one child and not one mind should continue to be lost. So, if we are committed to our children, our priority had firstly to be to give every child a place. That is what we have done. How have we done it?

What we have done is, we have utilized places in existing schools; we have been constructing new schools; we have utilized unused places in existing schools as well and we have purchased private school places. That is how we were able to find spaces for these almost 10,000 additional children.

You will recall, Mr. President, when we announced our plans for placing all Common Entrance 2000 students, we were attacked for attempting to overcrowd our existing schools. Indeed, there were press conferences being held by those who opposed the plan to place every child. Indeed, I saw on national television, persons accusing the Government of forcing principals to take extra students. Our response then, as it is now, was that the truth would give the lie to those allegations.

1.45 p.m.

Mr. President, I have not heard anyone come forward since the placement exercise has taken place, to say that their school has been overcrowded. You remember that was the very first issue which arose, that we are forcing principals to take students; we are overcrowding our schools. I have not heard one of those persons come now to give the evidence of overcrowded schools. I have not heard one of those persons come back to say that was not true. If you look at the statistics very clearly you would see that the truth has given the lie to those allegations.

What had happened then, before I give the examples out of the list of placements, the Ministry of Education had spoken to principals; no one forced a principal to take students. We spoke to principals to determine what was their space and what was their capacity, and so with the assisted schools you would have read in the newspapers—in fact, one journalist from the *Guardian*, I think

her name is Sasha Mohammed, went to the assisted schools and gave it. She said that the assisted schools had very few changes; if they took any extra students, it was one or two or three.

For all the church schools, let us start with those, the issue was very clear: no one had overcrowded those schools. Clearly then the allegation was, well, you did not crowd those, you crowded the government schools. If you look at the numbers placed, it is very clear that there has been little or no increase in the numbers allocated. Indeed, in many cases, the numbers have been reduced.

Mr. President, they could not, at that time, see how this could have been achieved; and it was felt by the prophets of doom and gloom that the only way it could have been achieved was to crowd the existing schools. Mr. President, the statistics are clear. In the assisted schools, the investigative journalism of Sasha Mohammed has shown clearly that that did not happen.

In terms of government schools, let us look at the Caroni district. The Couva Government Secondary School, in the year 1994, 144 students were placed there; in 1995, 145—and I am giving it comparatively so that you can see what has happened. In the year 1999, 144 students; in the year 2000, 140; in that case, a reduction; slight, but still no overcrowding in terms of the hysteria that had been created about overcrowding.

Carapichaima Junior Secondary School, 480 in the year 2000; 1999, 484; previous to that in 1995, 488, and previous to that in 1994, 487. In the case of the Couva Junior Secondary, at present, 650 placed; prior to that last year, 644; prior to that, 1995, 649; 1994, 648, a very slight increase of about four or five students. Chaguanas Junior Secondary 1994, 649; 1995, 647; 1999, 644; the year 2000, 645. That is the Caroni district; okay, so we have looked after Caroni; we are always accused of looking after Caroni, so we did not crowd schools in Caroni.

Let us look at the northeast district, which is along the corridor. The Arima Government Secondary School, 2000, 109; 1999, 108; 1995, 107; 1994, 106. Where is the overcrowding? Look at Toco Composite; 1994, 125; 1995, 122; 1999, 122; 2000, 120 placed. Sangre Grande Junior Secondary, 1994, 485; 1995, 485; 1999, 484; 2000, 480.

What about Port of Spain? Mucurapo Junior Secondary, 1994, 721; 1995, 726; 1999, 643; 2000, 640; Belmont Junior Secondary, 1994, 695; 1995, 708; 1999, 644; 2000, 641; Diego Martin Junior Secondary, again, 1994, 672; I could give the other figures, if I do not you would say it is because they are high, so I will do it; 1995, 689; 1999, 644; 2000, 640. The picture is the same throughout the system in all the schools.

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We have not overcrowded or forced any principal. That is why no one has come forward. They went on national television and said that I am forcing principals to take students; I am overcrowding schools and sacrificing quantity for quality. Mr. President, it has not happened. The statistics have given the lie to those allegations. The truth will always come out. We talked about numbers and we have allocated the numbers.

Mr. President, they said further, overcrowding. When they could not prove the overcrowding after the placement results, I heard a new word, they said I was overloading the new schools. Okay, all existing schools we have not overcrowded, end of story, so, I had to do something. I could not wave a wand and do this, I must have done something wrong, so what I did was to overload the newly constructed schools. How did I overload them? How on earth can we be overloading schools that have been built and are being built for 800 students and over and, in some cases, 550 students and over, when the numbers we have allocated are far below the total capacity of those schools?

We must remember that when these schools begin, there will be no other students; they are totally new schools, so that there is no one else in the school. The school is constructed to be either an 840 school or a 450 school, and nobody else is going to be there but the form 1 students who we are placing there. Where is the overloading or overcrowding?

In Cunupia we have placed 525, in a school built for an 840; Waterloo, 526, built also for 840; Matura, 210; Valencia, 531; Coryal, we have places 133; Biche, 182; Blanchisseuse, 98; Tableland, 250; Manzanilla, 218; Debe, 286, Brazil, 182. Those are the 11 new schools. Where is the overcrowding? Where is the overloading?

Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie: Thank you, Mr. President. I just wanted to ask the hon. Minister something based on what she is saying. If a school is built for 550, and you put 550 or so, what happens next year and the third year? That is just what I wanted to find out.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: I am glad you raised it, because I can clarify that for you. First of all, a school that has been built for 840, we have not placed 840. The highest number we have placed is 525 in the 840 schools. In the schools built for a 550 intake, the highest number we have placed there is 250. What will happen next year? Obviously, next year—there are 10 further schools that are being constructed, so that next year we do not have to take this kind of intake. Those students will still have the spaces of the forms 2, 3, 4 and 5, so that the form 1 intake is going to be smaller, you are not going to get that overloading.

I repeat, the highest number in the 840 schools is 525, 526. In the 550 schools it is half that amount, below 250, that we have placed. That allows us next year to put in a smaller form 1 intake in those schools.

Sen. Prof. Spence: Mr. President, we still have an arithmetic problem; if we place 540 in an 840 school, we still have an arithmetic problem.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Yes, but that is only if you take a form 1 intake again at 500. If you take a form 1 intake that is smaller you are not going to have that difficulty. Next year we will have to work that, so we do not have that difficulty, because there is a second batch of 10 schools that are being constructed. The designs are being worked on, and those are being constructed for the year 2001, so that you would not have to take 500 in a school; you will not take that intake again.

At the moment the schools are totally empty, and in my respectful view it is not overloading, it is not overcrowding. Again, the truth—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Prof. Ramchand: Thank you Madam Minister; just for some clarification, so if 530 are taken in, that would mean that you have something like—how many form ones are there?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: There would be several form ones, so you will have about 300 spaces available.

Sen. Prof. Ramchand: So if you had 15 form ones, the following year you will have 15 form twos.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Yes.

Sen. Prof. Ramchand: Can you say what is going to happen to the 15 form twos? Will they be transferred to other schools?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: No, the intention is not to move students who have been placed there. The intention is to take a smaller form one intake into those schools, and then we will have a position where the next step is really to shift from the shift; you know that we have that as well. At some point we will be able to bring in form fours and fives into those schools. The arithmetic of that will be worked out. The priority now is that not a child should continue to be lost, and so those are there. If the arithmetic says that some of those students have to be put elsewhere, some of those students will be put elsewhere, but the point is that everybody has that opportunity now.

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Again, there are three areas, Cunupia, Waterloo and Valencia are the three schools that got the most students, but all the others are below, so out of the 11 schools, three have that large intake where we would have to make special arrangements in order to take that intake on into the following cohorts of form two, form three, form four and form five.

We have dealt with the existing schools, new schools, what else can you come with now? The allegation then arose that the private schools are totally unfit. They are not for students in this country; no one should go to these private schools; do not go there. The Ministry of Education has done the most terrible thing to place students in private schools. Mr. President, these schools have been delivering education for years. I have not heard a voice raised against them in the past.

Yes, you would say, but it is different, because now it is taxpayers' money you are spending there; but do you know that that is not true? Taxpayers' money was being spent there before, but no one said a word. It is only because we have a plan to place every child, some people are very unhappy with that. I want to thank the hon. Sen. Rev. Teelucksingh. He gave that very unequivocal statement, which shows that his heart is with the children, when he said that a school above a rum shop is better than no school at all. Some of us do not know where we have come from. We do not know where we got our education. [*Desk thumping*]

I remember the school I went to, it was called Mahase Road Hindu School. By the way, because I see some of you are still unhappy, let me tell you very clearly that the school above the rum shop is being relocated, okay, so it will take care of those concerns. It is being relocated.

Hon. Senator: If it is good, why are you relocating? [*Interruption*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: No, it is better than no school at all; that is the point that was made, and I appreciate that from the Senator.

The point I am making is that we have forgotten where we have come from. We had the chance, and we became big and educated, so now children do not belong in schools! They do not belong in schools, this is what I am hearing! What should we do with them? Leave them at home; leave them on the streets. What do you want to do with them?

Do you know what would have happened? When that child did not get a place in the Common Entrance Examination, the parents would have gone by those same private schools. Do you know what would have happened? The

parents would have paid, as they were doing in the past. How did the private schools exist before? Parents were paying to send children to those schools. Who paid? It was the poor parents whose child did not get into the secondary school who paid to send their child to school. That is why the private schools are there.

We are saying that the difference now is, that instead of leaving children at home or leaving them to roam the streets, the Government will pay to put them in the private schools; that is what we are doing. Of course, we will check if the private schools are registered with the Ministry of Education and their qualification. You would have seen some of them defending themselves in the work that they were doing, but remember always that if Government did not pay, parents would have been paying. That is how it was happening, and that is what we have done with these schools. What is the problem now?

Mr. President, they talk about White Paper; they had all this in White Paper; they forever have White Papers. Everything this Government is doing is in a White Paper. I wonder what they were doing with all that white paper?

Sen. Mohammed: Using it as toilet paper.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: None of it was implemented. There is no point in having White Papers if you do not implement them. This is the White Paper they were talking about. Do you know, Mr. President, that private schools are in here. This document talked about putting children in private schools; it is in here; this is the document.

Mr. President, sometimes I really wonder if we have the interest of the children at heart, when we talk in this manner; when we say, "Do not send them to the private schools!" They have not told me yet what to do with them. I have not heard those opposers say what to do with them.

2.00 p.m.

Listen to what is happening now. They are saying they have no problem with universal secondary education. At first, they said the children do not belong. Public opinion is there and the children are happy, so they are saying they agree with universal secondary education, but do you know what is the problem? The problem is the haste, we are doing it too fast, that is the problem now, 30 years is not too fast, Mr. President. Not one more day must pass, and not one more child must remain out there and if it is not perfect, let us work together and do it in the interest and for the benefit of the children. So do not tell me about the way we are doing it, tell me how to do it. You have not told me. All I am hearing is: "I do not like the way you are doing it, it is too fast." What would you have done? You never did it. Tell us what to do.

The latest thing now is that we are putting children in primary schools. Mr. President, there is a school known as the Beetham Estate School, yes, it was a primary school. There is a school known as the Carenage Primary School, there is a school that was built, it is almost finished now the only thing is for the sewer to be completed. The school is absolutely beautiful; it is like a university campus. Malabar and Valencia, in the whole of Trinidad, four schools. They were primary schools in the case of three. One is not primary it is not secondary, it is a new school.

What makes it a secondary or a primary school? Is it the size of the roof? Is it the size of the floor, or the desks? Show me what makes it secondary or primary. It is the curriculum in the school, the teachers, the equipment, the resources are what make the difference between primary and secondary. So when we take Beetham and, using the goodwill of the teachers and parents there, they develop the name—not me, not the Ministry of Education, they chose the name Excel. That is the name they wanted for their school because of their vision, Excel Composite School. The same thing happened at Carenage, they chose the name and those are the two schools I am being told that I am putting children in primary schools. Let me tell you something about those two schools. If you look at them, there is nothing that says primary, unless you look at the name on it. If you walk into the classroom and look at the grounds, there is nothing that says this is substandard, and do you know what is more important? In those schools, Government is committed and will put secondary school teachers to deliver the secondary school curriculum. It will put the equipment that is necessary for those schools.

Do you know what was happening in those relatively new schools? In a school built for 550 persons, there was a population of less than 200. At Carenage, it was the same thing, newly constructed schools with a capacity totally unutilized. Should I leave that empty whilst there are children with no place on the streets? Is that what I should have done? I say no. That is not an option for me, it is not an option for the ministry, it is not an option for any right-thinking citizen in this country who says give every child a chance. So I used those four schools. If you listen to the hue and cry you will believe that all over the country we are putting children in primary schools. There are 169 schools that will be delivering the secondary curriculum. Out of those we may be utilizing space from six primary schools, but that does not mean it is primary because we are going to be delivering the curriculum by secondary school teachers.

You would have seen the advertisement for the principals and the teachers. The staff would be chosen by the Teaching Service Commission and that is another hue and cry. Where are we getting these teachers? This country has very educated people who cannot get a job. Why are you angry about job creation for teachers? With all these new schools being constructed, and all these new students coming in, more teachers are going to get jobs. If you sit in your offices—I do as Member of Parliament—every day there are young persons coming in with qualifications looking for jobs. Why are you angry if 300 or 400 more persons are going to get jobs as teachers? And it trickles down, it does not end there. When you are doing construction, there will be work for people on the construction site and in addition in the community when you have to make a uniform, the seamstresses get employment. You have to buy books from the bookstore and the clothing store to send your children to school. It helps everybody. That is just one side of it, but at the end of the day it is the children who have this chance to get an education. The whole hue and cry about using primary schools is unfounded. Let us not forget that we are using just a few of them and we felt that option was better than leaving the children outside and they will get the secondary school curriculum.

That is great. Now that we have got places all over and they have been placed, I am told that I am herding them like cattle. We were not herding them when they were herded out on to the streets, that was not herding, but because you are putting them into schools you are herding them. I cannot believe this. So quality is now gone, we have lost all quality because 10,000 more children are going to get education. We have lost quality and we look at what is going to happen now.

There is a point with the primary school issue with which people are concerned and that is the age. They are asking, why are you putting secondary school children with young children? Do you not see how foolish that is? I am sorry to use that word, Mr. President. But when you know who writes the 11-plus examination. Children who are 11 and 12 years. From where do they come? The primary school. There are in standard five, 11, 12, and 13-year-olds right now, so if you have the children who have just completed who are 11, 12 and 13 alongside them what is the problem? Are they going to abduct them? Are they going to brutalize the others? They have just come out of that, they are the same age. In other parts of the world there is a whole movement called holistic learning where they are taking children from pre-school right up to secondary school in one environment. Those things are happening, but because we have done it here, it has to be wrong, we cannot be right. Why? Because we are placing every child.

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Mr. President, I complete the issue of physical accommodation because I fully appreciate the point that a desk, or a chair in a building alone is not sufficient. That is not education, but certainly it is the first step. You must have those things in order to get any kind of education whatsoever and we have done that. In terms of the physical accommodation, I know there are many concerns as to whether schools will be ready or not, how many and so forth. I can only quote the hon. Prime Minister when he said that those of us at the Ministry of Education are not God. All we can do is to do what we are doing. We will continue to work and I want you to remember this because come September, another hue and cry will take place.

Remember that there are 169 schools and centres that will accommodate the almost 30,000 students and if that is the case—and four or five of those may not be ready for the first week of September, they could be ready within the second or third week, I want you to understand that that is a possibility—we have planned contingencies that the students will be accommodated for the two to four weeks within which those schools will be completed. Do not let the four or five schools blot and blur the fact that out of the 169 that 164 are going to be totally ready. Do not let that eradicate something that is so wonderful, that gives a chance to everyone and if it is for two or three weeks, we would make contingency arrangements.

There is one school I said that will not be ready, and this is the Tableland School. From day one, I had said that it would not be ready in the first week in September. That was very clear. I had said that out front because that is what my advice is. I do not lay the bricks, the steel and the concrete, the Ministry of Works and Transport and MTS are responsible for the construction and I am advised by them that the school will not be ready, but we have made contingency arrangements for that.

Dr. Marcano advised me today that there is another school, the Fifth Company Baptist School, it has the capacity for 840 students and is almost completed. This school will take in the 200 students assigned there until the Tableland School is ready for the two or three months it may take for completion. So contingency plans have been put in place and we would accommodate the children. The vast majority of children would be in fully-ready schools and the majority will go to those schools.

How are we going to staff all these schools? Teaching Service Commission has already appointed, and again, I want to make it clear that the Teaching Service Commission will appoint according to law. I know again, there was much hue

and cry that we would be doing something against the law. We are appointing teachers according to law. The Teaching Service Commission has already identified 11 principals who have been appointed, they are on board, and in fact are undergoing training right now as we speak. There are 11 new principals for the 11 new schools which I called for you a short while ago.

There are some others that we are now in the process of identifying; these would be Malabar, the one in Carenage, Excel and so forth and advertisements have been put out for those. The Teaching Service Commission has given us the assurance that they would make every effort to conduct what they have to do within this period. So some additional teachers out of the 212 new teachers—up to last week Monday when we met with them—they have identified 141 possible teachers for the secondary schools. So staffing is to be handled appropriately by the Teaching Service Commission.

We now come to the issue that we really ought to face up to. We must stop hiding our heads and stop closing our eyes to the reality of what is happening in our schools. Every time Dr. Job speaks he gets angry, but he is totally correct when he says that the system has failed many of our students. No one talked about that for all these years and in fact, children with differing abilities throughout the system are the ones we have placed in the form one specials and the Port of Spain Model School. Those are the 2,600 students throughout the country who have performed below the 30 per cent mark in the examination. Some people ask me if it is only in Port of Spain there are children who did not perform the same as others? No. It is throughout the country so when you are talking about the model schools, talk about the form one specials which we have created throughout the country.

I am advised that the picture has been the same over the years, that there are students who have continued to do badly over the years. Mr. President, there is a report, I do not know if this report ever saw the light of day. It is a report on the IEA Reading Literacy Study conducted in Trinidad and Tobago 1989—1992. It was prepared by the National Research Committee and commissioned by the Ministry of Education. I wonder if Sen. Prof. Ramchand has seen this report. I am advised that when this report was done that instructions were given not to publish it. That is what I am advised. This report was kept covered because thereafter, nothing was done and if one looks at this report—Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie knows that the system has failed so many of us, but I do not think anyone has seen this because I am advised that instructions were given to hide the report. Do not publish it!

Do you know what this report says, and why it should not be published? They did not want to deal with the issue that there are children in this country who cannot read and write coming out of the primary and secondary schools. They cannot read and write and Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie knows it, Sen. Prof. Ramchand knows it, many of us know it, but we do not face the reality, we have not faced it because we have not been able to deal with it.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. President, all the white papers did not deal with it! Here is this report and it says:

“The IEA Reading Literacy Study was conducted during the period 1988 to 1992 in thirty-two countries including the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

The national sample, tested in 1991, was comprised of three thousand and twenty-seven (3,027) students of Standard Three and three thousand six hundred and eighty-four (3,684) students of Form Three.”

Mr. President, so in the primary level was standard three, which were the nine-year-olds and in the secondary level form three which was the 14-plus age.

“Also participating at the primary level were two hundred and forty-eight (248) teachers and one hundred and eighty-one (181) principals.”

So this was done in conjunction with the teachers and principals.

“At the secondary level were two hundred and eight (208) teachers and ninety-three (93) principals. Participating schools included Government schools, Government Assisted schools and Private schools.”

So it was a very broad-based study that was done.

“Students were required to respond to test items based on narrative, expository and document materials with which they were provided. They also responded to questionnaire items which elicited information on their reading behaviours and practices at home and school.”

And so the test was done.

Mr. President, what were the results? When the results were found and the recommendations were given it was found that Trinidad and Tobago in the study of the 32 countries—whilst there are bright students, yes—the national average in Trinidad and Tobago was well below the international standard.

The performance of the IEA Reading Literacy Study—
And I am reading from page 69 of the report.

“WHEREAS, the performance of nine-year-olds in the IEA Reading Literacy Study, as indicated by the national mean, falls far short of the international mean; and

WHEREAS, the evident superior performance of fourteen-year-olds suggests an advantage for students who were provided with a Reading Readiness programme; and

WHEREAS, the performance of fourteen-year-olds falls short of the international mean...”

And I am sure we are going to see and hear a lot more of this report which clearly showed that there was much to be done in terms of literacy in this country. But the report was hidden and nothing was done about it.

Mr. President, when we look now at the performance in CXC—I know Sen. Prof. Ramchand and many other Senators have raised this issue, but it is the same thing. At the secondary level:

“A review of the statistics on Senior Comprehensive and Composite Schools for 1999 shows that 24 Senior Comprehensive and 8 Composite schools i.e. thirty-two (32) schools in all, entered students for Mathematics and English language.

In all but one of these schools, over 50% of students could not even achieve a Grade III pass in Mathematics. The percentage rose to alarming proportions in 26 of these schools where 70% and over of students did not even obtain a Grade III. Of these, there were 4 schools with percentages of 90% and over.”

Who could not get a Grade III.

“The picture was somewhat better in English Language but frightening still to think that in 13 schools, 50% and over of students did not even achieve the Grade III pass...”

In some schools the percentage was 70 per cent who could not get a Grade III.

Mr. President, when we come now to the Port of Spain Model School, I believe that is an innovative concept to deal with these problems, but remember that school is reflected throughout the country in the form one specials. If the

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students perform within those schools, then they will go on to the regular form one. I know that question has been asked. Look at the profile! I did not ever intend to do this but because of the concerns that have been raised, I think we need to put the picture clearly.

At all times, I have said that students who did not perform the same as others, the Government will place them in form one specials, and in the case of Port of Spain because the Government did not have as many schools there, it created a whole centre to put them there, so that it can give them the remediation in Mathematics and English.

Mr. President, if one looks at the profile of the students in the Common Entrance Examination and the mark range for the essay, for example, of those 487 students placed there, I did not know that 59 got 0 in the essay; 1 got 24; 2 got 99, 3 got 39; 4 got 39, 6 got 69 and 7 got 14. I am sorry, it is the other way around, 59 got 0; 24 got 1; 99 got 2; 39 got 3; 139 which is the mode 4. If one looks at the mark range for English between 16-20, 199 is the mode there. No one got above 30—two got below 30.

Mr. President: If anybody wants to interrupt, when you stand, say whether you are standing on a point of order or for clarification, so that the Minister would determine that on a point of order she has to give way, and on clarification whether she wishes to give way.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: How much time do I have left? Five minutes?

Mr. President: You have 15 minutes.

Sen. Prof. Ramchand: Mr. President, for clarification, thank you, Madam Minister. I wonder if the Minister is in a position to tell the Senate how the model school differs from Government five-year schools or the Junior Secondary schools.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: I was coming to that in fact. I was first explaining why the Government placed students in the model school and in the form one specials. I am asking you to remember—and do not just say the model school is on its own, in the form one specials the students are in this kind of range. There are students who got below 30 per cent. I was reading the profile and these are children who have finished the primary. Do you know what people are saying? Why I am putting them there? Where shall I put them? Leave approximately 2,600 children in the primary schools? So where is the Government going to get places in the primary schools? There are others who are coming up. Where am I

going to get the places? The Government must bite the bullet; the Government must face the reality; and give the children the opportunity. This is what the Government is doing in the form one specials and in the model schools. So what are we going to do there?

Mr. President, firstly, the Government is seeking to bring on board teachers with special skills in remediation for Mathematics and English and this has never happened before with all the studies and concerns over the years. Let us get this clear, there are two issues, one is that students would not have gone to school and they do not belong in those schools. They do not belong and they would not have gone. So, the Government did not have to cater for them, that is one issue, but that is not strictly true.

As one would see, from the results that I have read from the CXC and the IEA Reading Literacy Study, some of those students went into the secondary school system. So do not say now that they do not belong there and do not send them there. They were sent there because, you see, in the Common Entrance Examination it was not a question of pass or fail; it was a question, as I have always said, of failing to get a place. So in my area in St. Patrick 92 per cent out of every 100 per cent went to secondary schools. Do you want to tell me that all 92 per cent of the children in St. Patrick are bright, bright, bright? Brighter than in Port of Spain; brighter than in the north-eastern counties; brighter than Victoria; or brighter by far than Tobago and so on?

In Tobago, 50 per cent of the transition rate went on and 50 per cent is still at home because there is no place. It is not a question of performance! Let us disabuse our minds of that concept that it is only when you pass the Common Entrance Examination you will get a place, so you discard everybody else. That is not true. You did not get a place because there were not enough schools and places and no one came with any ideas of where to place the children; leave them home and forget about them.

Mr. President, so these children went into the secondary school system scoring below 30 per cent. They went in and the Government is seeing the result thereafter when the system failed them because—do you know what happened? Nothing was done with the curriculum to deal with these students; to cater for these students with these different needs and abilities. Nothing! The curriculum is the same! They did not differentiate. There was no remediation and that is the major difference, Professor, and for the first time an attempt is being made to

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provide remedial work for these students whom the system has failed. Mr. President, perhaps, the system is not perfect. What I am saying is that these students will be given some assistance whereas before they had no assistance whatsoever.

Mr. President, so, rum shop school and now we come to *Chicken Licken* and *Goldilocks* books. When the booklist was given out at the model school there was a basic booklist. Again, I am saying misinformation is a dangerous thing; too little information is very dangerous because the whole country came away with the idea that the booklist the children were given there had only *Chicken Licken*, *Goldilocks* and *Ugly Duckling* books. No one said—in everything I have read and heard in the media for the past couple weeks and persons speaking on it—first of all that there was a basic list dealing with the other subjects; there was another list of 50 books—no one said that—from which parents were asked to choose one. So if the parents did not like *Goldilocks* or *Ugly Duckling* or *Chicken Licken*, they did not have to buy it. That is the first point. There were 50 other books. The concern was that there were no local books. There were local books on that list but we must understand and appreciate that there are not sufficient locally written books for children of that age. Perhaps, someone can look into that. I am sure Sen. Prof. Ramchand, a literary man, can write us some books. We need more local books.

2.25 p.m.

There are books on that list that are favourites worldwide. I keep saying that if the parent does not want that book, do not buy it. That is the situation. Do you know what is an even more important issue? How did the Ministry of Education arrive at that list? That is the crucial issue. The officials involved in curriculum development at the Ministry of Education are the ones who compiled this list in this manner. They conducted a study including workshops and seminars for curriculum. They had over 30 teachers of the Junior Secondary School system involved in this process working with them. Junior Secondary teachers who would have had the exposure to the students and were going to them in the schools.

Those 30 teachers sat together and looked at—not 50 books—over 200 books which were brought forward for that reading age level. How did they determine the reading age level? I am saying again that we are looking at children who scored below a certain percentage. They knew that, because in the Ministry, they knew what the results were year after year, that there were students who were

scoring so low, that they had a reading age—which is a different thing from their physical biological age—of seven or eight years old, therefore, they needed books for the reading age of seven or eight-year-olds. So, they read these 200 books and together they came up with a list and chose 50 of those books.

The intention, they tell me, was that within the school, if every parent chose one, they would get a package, a collection of books which could then be exchanged, but the parents only have to buy one. If the class has 20 or 25 students, they can share the books because there is a bulk of books that can be used, but they only need to buy one. I am saying that the basic subjects are there. What is the difference? The difference is in the curriculum for students who are below a certain ability level.

Sen. Prof. Spence: Mr. President, may I propose the Standing Orders be suspended so the hon. Minister would have more time to complete her contribution?

Mr. President: I do not know whether that has arisen at this point in time. She has 45 plus 15 minutes.

Sen. Prof. Spence: I appreciate that, Sir. Just for the fact that she may be having to rush, and so her contribution may be affected by the time.

Mr. President: I understand, but I think the Leader of Government Business is speaking to her now on it.

Sen. Daly: She needs time to talk about the Motion. *[Laughter]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Yes, I certainly do need time to speak on the Motion, but the hon. Senator, who is my colleague in law, was not here when I started my contribution, therefore, he does not understand or he did not hear what was said.

Mr. President: The speaking time of the hon. Minister has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. President, on the model school and the form one specials, if students are moving on within that, then they would go into regular form one, so they will be given that remediation work, that preparatory work that will be for them. Those are some of the issues that have arisen in the

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attempt, first of all, to make sure that people get a place to have education. Within that, an issue arose which has to do with the whole business of registration fees. If you permit me, I would just like to spend a few minutes on that before I move on with the substance of the Motion.

Sen. Prof. Ramchand: Mr. President, one clarification about the booklist. I had formed the impression that the students being admitted to the model school and to the form one specials would be interviewed by Ministry officials with a view to determining what books would be more suitable for them after which the choice would be made. So, I am wondering whether it was an accident that that list of 50 was issued to the public?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: I would not like to say it was an accident. What I do agree with is that we do intend to do diagnostic screening of the students for those who have disabilities or special needs. In terms of saying we would use that to determine which book, the books have been put into that category, as I say, for the reading age of most of the students so that any one they choose will be appropriate. Thereafter, as they read through that, remember in the class will be other books from the list which can be exchanged and used.

Remember when we spoke about reading levels? We have to understand something. Different reading levels, different types of reading; we talk about the independent reading level, the instructional level and the frustrational level. If we gave those students the form one literature books, do you know what that would cause? That is frustration. They could not read it. Instructional is also something that could be used, but again, those readers will be determined with the diagnostic screening and testing. The ones we have put on the list are what is called “the independent”.

We first have to get them interested in reading. These books were chosen specifically for them. They are colourful, they are attractive, the phonetics; children love sounds. Even that *Chicken Licken* that people are laughing about, I am told by the curriculum officers that that is one of the most popular books for children of that reading age level.

When they tell me about *Goldilocks*, I said, “Tell me why you put *Goldilocks* on the list?” They told me that when one reads *Goldilocks* there are so many real-life experiences that can be explored with children with that. We read *Goldilocks* in the class and we go from there to do analysis. For example, *Goldilocks* has gone as a stranger into someone's home. Was that a proper thing to do? Was that right to do? *Goldilocks* has gone and tried one porridge, a second and a third. If

one does not get through the first time, what does one do? Try the second time and the third time! The teacher can use that to go into analysis and life experiences.

If the objection to *Goldilocks* is another one, then come and tell us, but the curriculum officers are very clear that this can be used for development of the children. Not *Goldilocks* necessarily, but the books on the list that one can use to expand on real-life skills. There is a hidden reason people are objecting to *Goldilocks*. Sometimes we are not honest. They say the book is too foreign and it creates images that we should not have. I want to say in this country that every creed and race must find an equal place! Do not come and say you object to *Goldilocks* and not give the real reason!

Any educator looking at *Goldilocks* has no problem with it. If a parent does not want to buy it, do not buy it, but there are 50 other books. This is a book used worldwide! We must be honest and face the reality. I am not defending *Goldilocks* per se. I am saying that all the books on the list were placed at the independent reading level that would attract the children. *Chicken Licken*, they told me, was one of the most popular for children. It was chosen for colour and images so that first the child wants to read the book.

One of my colleagues asked me, “Kamla, why not give them *Treasure Island*?” I said that I would love to give them *Treasure Island*, but we can do that at another stage. They have to want to read it first. Someone said, “Why do you not give them the form one text, *Catcher in the Rye*?” How can they read that?

That is all I will say about the textbooks. I am now speaking about the registration issue that arose. I wanted to spend a few minutes on that. For years, parents have complained bitterly and nothing was ever done. I want to make it very clear that I have nothing against principals using innovative ways in order to get over difficulties they experience in the schools, but do not, when a parent comes, tell them they must pay this fee. I saw it on the camera myself. The parent held it up. It did not say anything about security, library and computer. It said “Registration Fee: \$200”. Therefore, it was a precondition that was being used for entry. That cannot happen. It is against the law.

If innovative ways were found, I am saying well done by the principals, but we sent a circular in the package of the Common Entrance results—for the first time, this was done—with respect to something that has been happening for years. If one talks to another parent out there, the parent is happy that she does not have to pay it. If one has three, four or five children going to school, and for every one

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of them one has to pay a \$300 or \$400 registration fee—the ones who are arguing now are the ones for whom it does not matter to their pocket, but for the masses of people in the country with four and five children, they cannot pay it! That is the first point.

The second point is that it is different throughout the country. One school is charging \$500, another one \$200, another one \$300. There is no uniformity! What are they doing with it? They now come and say that they are spending it on school repairs, lab fees, and so forth. I say this is fine. If it is a voluntary contribution, that is a different issue. The church schools have always raised their funding in that voluntary manner with fund-raising, and so forth. In the Government schools, some of the principals have done it in the same way. It is a voluntary contribution. That is a different issue, but do not pretend and call it a registration fee and make it a precondition for a child to get a booklist. How can they do that? How can it be?

We sent the circulars and I am hearing some people are saying that they did not know that. If they had known, they would not have done it. That has been in the law books long before my time. If one looks at it, it is not a strict prohibition. What the section says is that one cannot charge these things without the permission of the Minister. So, what does that mean? That is to put some transparency and accountability. If it is that one wants to charge for a homework book and the badge, I do not see a problem with that. Instead of making it available in the school, that is something the child could have bought in the bookstore, but the school is helping by having it available in the school.

Some schools long ago used to have the uniforms there, now they go straight out and get them in the stores. If they do the thing in process, then there is a system. One can standardize those and not have one school charging \$500 and another charging \$100. It can be standardized and there can be accountability. I want to make it very clear that I am not accusing any principal, because you see that is a further thing where a battle is being created between the Minister and the principals. I am not accusing any principal of impropriety. I have no evidence before me that there is impropriety and misuse of funds. I want to make that very clear.

What I am saying is that we are dealing with two separate issues. One is registration fees as a precondition for entry of a child into a school, and that must not happen. The other is funding and voluntary contributions that can be made. The principals of the assisted schools met with me some time ago. They raised

their concerns about the inadequacy of funding. I understand that. For over 17 years that funding has not changed and, of course, life has changed and continues to change. No provision was made for over 17 years to increase that funding. I understand that, and they brought it to me and I said, “Look, I will take these proposals to the Cabinet. I will take your concerns to the Cabinet to seek the recommendations of Cabinet”.

With respect to the government schools, we have asked them to give us proposals They have indicated that they will let us have those proposals sometime this week. We will take those, but please, I am saying there are two separate issues: registration fees versus inadequacy of funding. Let us get this straight, this is not the Government's fault that the funding has been inadequate. This has been happening over the years! No effort was made to address it. So, when they come now and grin about it and say the principals were doing all these grand things and we did not give them the money, that is a separate issue with which we will deal.

There is a third thing that is now happening. Because that issue has come up to the front—something that has been happening, as you all know, for years—they are saying that teachers must not engage in any fund-raising activities! It is like “Sorry you did that. Take that slap”. It is a kind of madness, because we have said comply with the law and do not charge registration fees, they have gone to the other extreme now and said, do not do fund-raising. That is why we have to set up our local school boards very quickly. One of the activities of the local school boards is to do funding. I know in this country, apart from a few executive members, there are teachers who are dedicated and committed to the children and will continue to work in the best interest of the children. I know it, I meet them, I see them and I speak with them. When this whole plan was put into place, we received calls from all over the country. Up to today I go to any part of the country and apart from a few prophets of doom and gloom, the majority of teachers, parents and students are happy.

I am saying we must come together to give the children a chance. That is what we must do for this to work. It is amazing how every problem in education has just surfaced and taken precedence. I say that is a good sign. Do you know why? People believe that this Government will attempt to deal with those problems. That is why it is all being put on our plate. *[Desk thumping]*

2.40 p.m.

They were not placed out there before. Everybody knew about them but nobody really took them to the Government because they knew nothing would be done and nothing was done. But, you see, we are dealing with the problems one by one. We cannot solve every single problem with one swipe of a hand but I am

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telling you our commitment is clear, children first. If it is we have to do them one by one, we will deal with those problems. We will find solutions for them, but we cannot do it alone.

What is education? It is very clear that education is not simply something that happens in the school. It is not something only for teachers in the school and in the classroom. Education is clearly to do with all that is learnt within the school and outside the school, in the home and in the society. So, Sen. Prof. Ramchand's question: What is education? First of all, we have to understand I am saying, education is in the classroom but also at home and outside.

Consequently, it is imperative that we must work as partners together if it is we want to educate our children. We must not say it is only the job of the teacher, the Ministry of Education and the Government. We cannot, like Pontius Pilate, wash our hands and say let the Ministry of Education do everything. This is a job for the total society, parents, teachers and students—all of us in the community. It is for all of us.

Formal education then is what I can speak about as Minister of Education, which is the schooling process. That is one part of education: what takes place formally in the schools.

Mr. President: The Minister has three more minutes to complete and if it is the intention to ask that we invoke Standing Order 83 for the suspension of Standing Order 40, now may be the appropriate time to do it, otherwise she will have to cease in three minutes' time.

Sen. Prof. Spence: Mr. President, I would like to propose that under Standing Order 83, we allow the Minister extra time to complete her contribution. I would ask for half an hour.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Thank you very much, Mr. President and hon. Senators, for the privilege. I hope that I can answer, as my legal friend would say, the substance of the Motion: What is education and what is education for?

I repeat, I spent a lot of time on the other matters because it does not matter what is education and what is education for if it is there were 10,000 children getting none at all. That is why I wanted to put that in perspective. Now that we have placed them and given them desks and chairs, then: What is education and what is education for?

In looking at that, we can consider the role and function of education and the education system in the country. This very same task force report, the *Education Policy Paper (1993-2003)*, which I am sure my friends on the other side will also hold up, was adopted in principle by this Government, but certainly, in implementation, only partially and certainly, with modification, as time and circumstance permit us. So, we have not adopted this wholesale, but this has been one of the documents that has been before us which we have accepted in principle.

The mission statement of the task force is self-explanatory and very acceptable. The mission statement was:

“To promote equity and excellence by providing a viable humane and comprehensive educational policy frame-work and essential ingredients of a plan leading to the attainment of knowledge, values, competencies and skills which will equip each learner to function as a useful citizen.”

I am asked: What is the philosophy of this Government? We are committed to the process and delivery of education in our schools at all levels and we are committed to the following:

1. The promotion of a standard of excellence in achievement and endeavour through the establishment of educational programmes designed to promote the attainment of knowledge, values, competencies and skills, which I think I have read before.
2. The promotion of a standard of excellence in achievement and endeavour through a teaching and management establishment which meets high standards of preparation and performance and is rewarded for so doing.
3. The distribution of available resources and services to all students in a manner that promotes equity.
4. The establishment and implementation of a system for empirically based assessment and continuous improvement of students, teachers, administrators, individual schools and programmes, as well as the educational support and management systems of our schools and other educational institutions.
5. The promotion of greater public awareness of goals, objectives, programmes, policies and operations of the public and private schools and other educational institutions.

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6. The promotion and attainment of full public support for the goals and objectives of the educational system and its programmes.
7. The promotion of greater public involvement in the attainment of the goals and objectives of the school system.

These are basically matters that have been raised in the said task force report.

There are some points, I think, in the philosophy of education, which we endorse and must repeat here in this debate. Firstly, that all children are educable and ought to aspire to become educated as far as it is possible to do so. We have heard Dr. Marcano of the Ministry of Education say it all the time, our children can learn. That is the first thing we must understand and appreciate.

Therefore, second to that is that as parents and as teachers; in fact, everyone in the society; we must also think so. Therefore, that attitude that children do not belong, they are too “dunce”, cannot hold water.

Today, I was reading the *Express*—I wonder if somebody has one—and I was so touched by this story in the *Express*. I know that in the Ministry of Education we are working; we are saying; we are doing; we must be doing something right because sometimes things come out and reach you and touch you to let you know you are on the right track. So, in the *Express* today at page 7—

Sen. Dr. St. Cyr: The *Express*!

Sen. Daly: What? The *Express*!

Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie: The *Express*!

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Yes. The *Express*.

Hon. Senator: Not the *Guardian*?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: And the *Guardian*. The *Guardian* has good things, too. The *Express*, which makes it even more important, has at page 7 by Tessa Horne, “Model School a dream come true for 15-year-old youth”. It is so touching.

“He was told by his friends that the children who were assigned to the Port of Spain Model School were ‘dunce’.

But it didn't matter to 15-year-old Ray Mc Eachnie of Picton, Laventille. For him, it is a chance to overcome his shortcomings in English and maths.

Mc Eachnie wrote the Common Entrance twice and was not placed in a school each time. After receiving his result slip and seeing that he was assigned to the Port of Spain Model Secondary, he felt this was his chance to prove himself.

‘It’s surely a dream come through...’

—true, although it is spelt “through”—

“...not having to remain in the primary school when September come,’ Mc Eachnie said. ‘Mathematics and English are the two subjects that I am weak in.’

Some children openly expressed their happiness for the chance to go to secondary school when they went to register late yesterday at the Belmont Junior Secondary School.”

We had an extended registration because after the first registration last week, out of the 487 students who were assigned there, there were about 30 who had not yet registered and had called in, so we set a second registration date for yesterday, so those students were registering, using the Belmont Junior Secondary for registration purposes. I go on:

“Some children openly expressed their happiness for the chance to go to secondary school when they went to register...

Parents have complained that the suggested reading books, such as ‘Goldilocks and the Three Bears’ and ‘Chicken Licken’, are for infants and reinforce foreign images.

Mc Eachnie said that nothing was wrong with those books if some of the children may have a little problem with reading.

Mc Eachnie’s mother, Dolly, said: ‘There are both positive and negative sides to the Model School. This system can work once we adults all give it some time to settle. There are many slow learners out there, however, people should be thankful that this year no child has to be ridiculed in front of other children because no one failed.’”

No one failed in the sense that no one failed to get a place and I found this was so touching from this 15-year-old child who acknowledges that he has had difficulty with maths and English.

The other story on page 7, headlined “Special teachers for remedial classes” by Debra Ravello Greaves, points out that:

“The Ministry of Education is looking for special teachers to conduct remedial classes in maths and English for children who have been placed in Form One Special classes at the Port of Spain Model Secondary School.”

Sen. Prof. Spence: I am not on a point of order. I would just like to call the hon. Minister's attention to another page in today's *Express*. In fact, it is on page 6. There is a very touching letter from a student in the article headlined "Goodbye, Sir, we'll always remember you". This is about a teacher who was abducted and killed. Now, in my opinion, one of the reasons this had to happen was because the chap was not paid sufficiently as a teacher and, therefore, he had to earn income by driving a taxi. I wonder if the hon. Minister would comment.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Do I understand you are saying that because he was not paid properly, he was killed?

Sen. Prof. Spence: That is my thesis.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Professor, that is a very long road to travel, that he was abducted and killed because he was not paid properly. There is another story in the *Newsday*—and I do not want to go into anybody's private life at this point in time—which you may also want to look at so that you can see both of them.

Whilst we are on this, let me on behalf of the Ministry of Education express our sympathy to his family and to all those students who were within his call. It is very clear that he was a good teacher to his students.

Sen. Prof. Spence: With respect to teachers' salaries.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: On the issue of teachers' salaries, you want me to say something on it and I would say it very clearly. The hon. Prime Minister has said it and I have said it: teachers deserve to be paid as professionals, but the business of teachers' salaries is not within the hands of the Minister of Education and the hon. Senator well knows that. It is in the hands of the Chief Personnel Officer. The negotiations are done with the Chief Personnel Officer and the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development. I cannot give a commitment on salaries and salary negotiations. What I do know is that teachers deserve to be paid as professionals and I have said it all along. The Prime Minister has also said the same thing. Why is it for the past 30 years nobody raised the teachers' salaries to the level that they want it now? Is it my fault that they want it so?

Sen. Mohammed: We did not have \$14.5 billion.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: I am sorry. Sen. Prof. Spence, I am saying to you, teachers' salaries, I agree, are salaries that must be professional salaries. At the same time, in the negotiations, I am sure teachers will agree that performance and accountability are also issues that must be conjoint with salary issues. I am sure that will happen and I know that negotiations are taking place.

Therefore, on the one hand, yes, teachers deserve to be paid as professionals. They are professionals and, therefore, they will be paid as professionals. Apart from that, I cannot tell you they are going to get \$1.00, \$2.00 or \$3.00. The negotiations are in train. I have nothing and no reason to believe that teachers will not be paid more. They deserve to be paid as professionals and Minister Mark, the Chief Personnel Officer and the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development are the ones who will have to deal with those issues. I am sorry if I cannot give you a more definitive statement on the issue of teachers' salaries.

Again, we come back to something else, with the registration fees when they said, "We are not getting enough money so we cannot comply with the law." Again, if my pay packet or your packet, when we go home, is not enough, does that mean we must go out and break the law in order to get more money? I do not think that is how the system works. There must be compliance with the law even if you do not have enough money in your pay packet. We cannot condone breaking the law if it is that one's pay packet is not sufficient. I cannot agree with that at all on the issue of teachers' salaries.

We can go back then. I was saying that there were some essential points that needed to be made. Those were that every child is educable—we all must agree with that—and the state must facilitate that process. One way, I guess, is with the issue that has been raised by Sen. Prof. Spence.

2.55 p.m.

One cannot become fully educated in a school. I think we all appreciate that no matter how long we stay in school or how long we extend schooling, some of that comes with time. As a person matures outside, through life experiences, the adult learns, so that whilst there are various stages of schooling which reach terminal points in schooling, learning and education, in my respectful view—when you ask what is education—education never has a terminal point. In schooling there are terminal points: you go from the primary, so that is one terminal point; you go to secondary, and you may go to tertiary, but education, in my respectful view, does not have a terminal point; it continues after schooling.

That is why some educators may see an essential goal of schooling as teaching students how to learn, as opposed to merely covering a particular syllabus, a curriculum. Schooling then, in brief, the ultimate goal of the education process is to help students to become educated persons. What is education for? To help students learn how to learn and to continue learning. Schooling is a preparatory stage; it forms the habit of learning and provides the means for continuing to learn after all schooling is complete.

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If I had to make a brief statement on the essential objectives of schooling, I would say that, first of all, we must concentrate on the mental, the moral and spiritual growth of the student. We must also look at the individual's role as an enfranchised citizen, eventually, and in a true democracy as ours with universal suffrage, an essential objective, in my respectful view, of schooling, must be adequate preparation for discharging duties and responsibilities of citizenship. There are particular objectives that can promote these ends.

We prepare our students, basically, for their responsibility as adults, eventually to earn a living in some occupation as well. Notice I am making the distinction between education and schooling, because we are responsible for that area of education, the schooling process. I have said already that it happens also outside the home in society; outside the school, in the home and in the rest of society. The three common pursuits would be to help children and students function as intelligent, responsible citizens; to help them earn a living, eventually, and to make both these things serve the purpose of leading intelligent and responsible lives, enjoying all that makes a human life as good as it can be.

Even though I was not here, Senators, I did read your contributions, and I know that you were saying that education should be such that the person could enjoy all the benefits of life; Sen. Prof. Ramchand, if I remember correctly, from your contribution. I agree with you; I agree with what you have put forward in terms of what education is and what it is for; I agree with those basic principles. In fact, some educators in the philosophy of education are saying that educating a person is for them to live the good life. I do not know if you remember this saying, it starts like this: "education is to live the good life". Then you go on and determine, well, what is the good life. That was something I remember from my own work in academic life, in education; I remember that as a basic line with which you started. What is education for? Education is to enable you to live the good life.

What is the good life? The good life must be the three things I have said here: to help them to function as intelligent and responsible citizens; to do something to help them earn a living and to make these things serve the purpose of leading intelligent, responsible lives, enjoying all that makes a human life as good as he or she can be. This is the ideal; we may not reach it, but it is said that you aim for the stars and you may reach the tree-tops; but this is the ideal.

Accepting that every child has the ability to learn, to be both trainable and educable, we must, within the education system, take into consideration the following concerns: we must educate all our children to the fullest possible

capability within the resources of schooling. This last objective is essential for growth and development of the society. Our finite goal is to educate every student up to, at least, five years of secondary school, through appropriated and differentiated curricular schemes, again, catering for the different needs of our students.

Our system must also have its focus on the spiritual, moral, intellectual, physical and emotional development of our students. Can I just say that something wonderful has happened. When I came into the Ministry there were, on the establishment of the Ministry, about 50 guidance officers, but there were only about 20-plus, there were just not enough. I am very happy to say that we have received the provision of funds and we have identified 12 new guidance officers, with an additional seven, so 19 new guidance officers will be appointed in the month of August. This is very important, because we will need them with the extra intake of students coming up in the new school term. I think it was really great that we were able to get, through the help of the Minister of Public Administration and the Minister of Finance, 19 more guidance officers. Of course, I am going to keep at them so we can raise the complement even higher, but we go one step at a time.

We must focus on the spiritual, moral, intellectual, physical and emotional development. Mr. President, you have heard me say over and over, it is not something that is hidden, the hon. Prime Minister says it all the time, that religion has a very vital role to play in our schools; religious education and values-based education. In fact, I told you before that we have someone now working on a curriculum for moral-based education within the schools, and that is very vital. In fact, when you hear people talking about going back to the old days, in terms of what was happening in the schools, it is about that moral and religious base that we had in our education system, which I think is so vital.

Mr. President, do you know what is interesting in this study as well, as I talk about that religious base? I know when we say that the church schools, the denominational schools, do so well for secondary performance the argument is always, “Well, they get the best students anyhow, so they must do well, because out of the Common Entrance Examination results, the best ones choose those schools and they go there.” But do you know what was interesting here? It is the primary schools as well; in this study students in the primary assisted schools—that is in the church schools—did better than the ones in the government schools.

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Is it that they got the best students from day one? Perhaps, but I honestly believe there is something good that is happening in the church schools, something we must look to and deal with. So I have dealt with ethical and moral concerns within the curriculum.

We must involve the parents to have a partnership with the school in the interest of the student's educational welfare. Again, you have seen our commitment to having parent/teachers organizations and parents involved. Again, with the local school board, when we brought the proposed regulations we had said very clearly that two members of the parent/teachers organization would be on that local school board, to involve them in what is happening in the school.

Our schools must cater to varying aptitudes and interests, cultural and gender concerns must be considered. The Minister of Culture and Gender Affairs is here, and she could tell us that it is very startling the kinds of statistics that are coming out of our schools in terms of the gender disparity in performance between boys and girls; very, very startling statistics. If we do not arrest that and deal with this gender disparity, we could have a serious problem. We probably already have it. Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt is very aware of it; that is something to which some attention has to be paid.

At one time in the Caribbean, in the developing countries, the thrust in education was to ensure that girls got an education, because the disparity was the other way around. There were more males in the system and the girls were not going to school. Now it has gone the other way; now the girls are out-performing the boys, and we really have to deal with this problem. I have a son too, many of us have sons and brothers and so forth, we have to help the boys, and so gender disparities must be given some priority within the system.

All these things I am saying are the ideals. The hon. Senator in his Motion has asked, "What is education and what is education for?" These are the ideals; it does not mean that every single one of these is happening. These are the concerns and the matters that we must attempt to address as we go through the system.

In keeping with these concerns, I would like to endorse the overall objectives of the education process in the report. That expands, basically, what I have just summarized: self-understanding, self-esteem, self-worth, an understanding and appreciation of cultural, economic, social and political backgrounds of our people and the nations of the world, and mutual interrelationships, an appreciation of rights, privileges, responsibilities of citizens in a democracy, including respect for and tolerance of others; the ability to think rationally and creatively, express

thoughts clearly in writing and speaking, and to read and listen with understanding; attitude and self-discipline necessary to meet everyday situations realistically.

What has been happening, which is a wonderful thing in dealing with a problem, I have seen Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt doing these conflict resolution seminars and anger management seminars. We need those in our schools; we need to speak on that; we need to have some of that in our schools, and start from a very early age so we do not reach where we are today. That has to be taken on. We need basic mathematical and numerical reasoning skills.

With regard to an understanding and an appreciation of literature and the visual and performing arts, we have a serious problem here. Whilst we are committed within the system to having persons teaching in the visual and performing arts and so forth, we have a serious shortage of persons qualified to teach in drama, art and music; we have a serious problem, and that is something we will have to consider. While it is there in the syllabus, we have included it in the curriculum and we are committed to having it happen, in those areas, over the years, since they were not rewarded as they should have been, we do not have enough persons qualified in that arena to assist. We would welcome suggestions from you, Senator, with respect to that, or from any of you, as to how we can further that end, in terms of the visual arts, performing arts, drama, art, music and so forth.

Regarding the ability to apply principles for sound mental, emotional and physical health, skills that allow for greater understanding and appreciation of science and technology and, again, the whole technical/vocational debate, we have had that debate, and some people have asked me—technical/vocational is one issue, there is another issue just for a second—why are we putting the children into the model school and into the form one specials. Why do you not send them to a trade school, let them learn a skill or a trade? You are telling me to take an 11-year-old child and stream him and say, “All you can do is a particular kind of trade.”

That child cannot read or write—I have shown you the scores. I am saying no, every child can learn. We must give them the remediation that we can bring up their literacy and numeracy skills. There is scientific research which has shown that children under 15 and so forth are not best physically poised to deal with and manage machinery and equipment; scientific research which says that that is not the age, the age is after 15 years.

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Concerning the technical/vocational debate, I have given the commitment that we will go back to it and have consultation on that whole issue, but I want to make it very clear, it is not true to say that Government has moved technical studies out of the schools; that is not true; Government has no intention of doing that. It is very clear that there must be a different approach to technology studies, which is what we are including in the curriculum of the new schools. It cannot be that you learn to take a hammer to hit a nail, but you do not know how to measure and figure. You have to be able to do those basic things.

When a person was a mechanic years ago, he or she would bang a car, pull a piece here and push a piece there; you cannot do that again, the cars are all digital; there is all this digital equipment in cars. So do not tell me pick them up, put them in a trade school and do not teach them to read and write, we have to give them that chance.

Mr. President: You have five more minutes, Madam Minister.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: There is much more I can say on what is education and what is education for, but I can point out, like you Professor and many of us, that we believe that the basic foundation of education is with the young ones. That is why we have spent a lot of time, and a lot of money is being spent on pre-school education. The scientific research is clear: if you do not do pre-school education you cannot really determine the education level; pre-school is it. Give me the child for seven years and I will show you the man. Those first few years are the most vital in determining the kind of citizen that we become, so we have increased pre-school funding by over 300 per cent.

The primary school is the bedrock. I agree with you, Senator, on that. The primary school is where we base our education, and there is serious reform taking place in the primary school curriculum. That is why we moved away from the tic-tac-toe of the Common Entrance Examination; that is why we have gone into free responses; that is why we have revamped, revised and reformed the language arts and mathematics curriculum in the primary schools. There are serious modernization reform changes taking place in the primary school system, because we understand that is where the base and the bedrock is.

It is not that we have just placed everybody in a secondary school; we have done that because we had to deal with them. We could not leave them in the primary system, we could not send them on the street, so we placed all of them; we bit the bullet and went ahead with those.

3.10 p.m.

We could not then leave that and say: great, everybody has a place. In the primary system the new language arts syllabus has been revised and reformed for two years now, and people are telling me that children are going to write SEA next year and they do not know anything about that. You do not know what is happening? That system went out. It is revised and revamped, it has been out for two years and the students are being prepared, and certainly the little ones coming up are not into tic-tac-toe at all. They would be into free responses, and they would be learning literacy and numeracy skills at the primary level. The Continuous Assessment Programme (CAP) is to go hand-in-hand in the primary school system to do that continuous assessment to determine the readiness of children and the special needs of children. That will be ongoing.

Mr. President, if I have run out of time, I am sorry. There are some issues I have not been able to address, but I do thank you for your patience and your time. I want to let you know that I have seen the contributions that have already gone. I have read them, I have the *Hansard*, I have taken your concerns on board and certainly, in the rest of the debate, even if I am not physically present, I will read those *Hansard* contributions and I look forward to any suggestions that you may make.

I ask you once again for us to join together hand-in-hand to ensure that we put the children first. There will be teething problems because wherever there is change—and this is serious change that is taking place—there will be teething problems. I believe and I have been saying it for the past couple weeks because I seriously believe it, that whilst there is God there is life, there is hope. We will deal with the problems as they confront us.

Thank you very much.

Sen. Nafeesa Mohammed: Mr. President, we sat here for the past hour and a half, maybe two hours and listened to the hon. Minister make her contribution, and it is rather unfortunate that it was only in the tail end of her contribution that we started to get some real substance in terms of the Motion that is before this honourable Chamber this afternoon. *[Interruption]* I am hearing the other side talking about being unkind and what have you.

Let me take this opportunity, Mr. President, to congratulate Sen. Prof. Ramchand for bringing a Motion of this nature to this very august Chamber. Certainly, the debate that is taking place today is very timely. It is regrettable

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though, that the Minister's contribution this afternoon sounded as though—with all due respect to the hon. Minister—she still had a hangover from Sunday's congress at Macoya.

Mr. President, they can say what they want. Much of what she discussed this afternoon and what she sought to rebut by way of the criticisms that have been coming in their direction over the last few days and weeks in this country is as a result of the politicking and the political points they have been seeking to score. It is very unfortunate and I say this because I have known the hon. Minister for many years. In fact, Mr. President, the Minister would agree that both she and I have been beneficiaries of a very sound education system that has been provided to this country under the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] I make reference to this because the hon. Minister is a person with whom I studied. We were students at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus in Barbados, we did law together and I distinctly remember on the eve of our first-year examination, she gave birth to her son.

Mr. President, I too recently gave birth to a son and I have to be very concerned about the future of the education system in our country, because I certainly would like my son to be a beneficiary of a very sound education system. [*Desk thumping*] I am taken with trepidation at what we have been witnessing under this UNC administration, and many of us are very worried about what is going to happen after the election of 2000 or whenever it is called. What has been going on in recent times has been the cause of much concern and certainly, the remarks and comments that are being made by the Government can certainly be regarded as misleading statements in terms of their trying to paint the PNM in a particular light with respect to the current situation in the education system.

I have taken this opportunity to intervene in this debate simply to clarify the PNM's position and to reinforce our commitment to the establishment and maintenance of an efficient and equitable system of basic education in Trinidad and Tobago. The People's National Movement is a party which is an institution in this country that was founded on some very strong principles. I have in my possession a document known as the *People's Charter* dated January 15, 1956 and in this document it states at page 50 that as part of the goals of the People's National Movement one is free secondary education for all children capable of benefiting from it. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, we all know as well that the PNM's position on education has been one based on equality of opportunity for all, and over the years, if it is one area of governance that I, as a member of the PNM have always felt proud of, it is

the terms of the PNM's legacy to this country in respect of our education system. When the PNM came into being in 1956 we know prior to that there was a colonial government in place and our country was in a state where it was now being developed.

In 1962 we obtained our independence but it is important that we put on the record the accomplishment of the PNM, particularly when we look at what transpired between the period 1956 and 1986 because today I heard the hon. Minister making references to nothing being done for 30 years as though nothing was happening.

Mr. President, it is a fact that between the period 1956—1986 some 80 new secondary schools were constructed by the People's National Movement in this country together with two technical institutes. From 8 per cent of eligible students in 1956 with respect to secondary education by 1986 this rate had risen to 72 per cent of our children being taken to new secondary schools in this country.

In 1991, when the PNM was returned as the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the then administration undertook the challenge of free education with the appointment of a very high-powered task force to look at our education system in a very holistic way and it is rather unfortunate that the hon. Minister stood in this Chamber this afternoon and made references to the report of this task force in a way as though she was dismissing it and treating it in a very haphazard way. I would like to highlight some aspects of this report of the task force that had been appointed to look at our education system in the country in order to put things in perspective.

First to begin with, when the Government took office in 1991, this task force had been appointed and a green paper had been formulated and laid in Parliament on March 12, 1993. From the record, I am informed that some 24 plenary sessions and more than 48 subcommittee meetings had been held. More than 100 memoranda were examined from individuals, groups and institutions and all the discussions that were taking place culminated in a national consultation on education which took place in Chaguaramas.

Mr. President, this task force comprised 23 members who can be regarded as the main stakeholders in education and I think we ought to give credit to the hard work and effort that went into this report by the members of this task force. For the record, I take this opportunity to call out the names of these persons so that we would see what kind of effort and approach were being taken in terms of the education system in our country when the PNM was in Government.

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The task force comprised: Mrs. Carol Keller, Chairman Dean Faculty of Education University of the West Indies; Dr. Ewart Taylor, Lecturer, Faculty of Education, University of the West Indies; Mr. Kenrick Seepersad, Director of Curriculum Development, Ministry of Education; Mr. Holson Gift, Director, Educational Planning Unit Ministry of Education; Dr. Esla Lynch, Special Educator, Mr. Justin Paul, Director, Technical/Vocational Education and Training, Ministry of Education; Mrs. Maureen Manchouck, Acting President, National Institute of Higher Education (Research Science and Technology); Miss Carol Logie, Lecturer, Faculty of Education University of the West Indies; Mrs. Edna Borde-Williams, Principal II, Junior Secondary School; Mr. Ibrahim Ishmael, Principal II, Senior Comprehensive School; Sr. Paul D'Ornellas, Retired Educator, former Principal of St. Joseph's Convent, Port of Spain; Dr. Eric Drue, Guidance Officer, Guidance Unit, Ministry of Education; Dr. Karen Moore, Guidance Officer, Guidance Unit, Ministry of Education; Fr Gerard Pantin, Director, SERVOL Life Centre; Dr. Clyde Maurice, Educator; Mr. Josh Henry, Administrative Services and Human Resource Manager, Trinidad Cement Limited; Mrs. Yvonne Pinder, Principal 1, Primary School; Ms. Savitri Pargass, First Vice-President, (TTUTA) (Professional Development); Mrs. Nella Todd, Teacher Educator, Valsayn Teachers' College; Mrs. Pamela Benson, Library Services, Office of the Prime Minister; Dr. Claudia Harvey, Acting Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs; Dr. Eastlyn Mc Kenzie, Educator, Tobago; Mr. Lennox Bernard, Secretary/Member, Curriculum Officer, Ministry of Education.

Mr. President, the composition of that team who put together this report known as the *National Task Force on Education* certainly speaks volumes when you look at the very wide cross-section of persons who are directly and actively involved in the education system in our country.

This report is a comprehensive and holistic overview of our education system with very sound recommendations and I believe it is the white paper that was actually laid in the Parliament around the end of 1994. This document was, in fact, adopted as the main pillar or plank for the PNM's policy on education when it was laid in the Parliament.

Page 46, paragraph 3.12, deals specifically with placements in secondary schools—to be based on continuous assessment and a national examination, and I would read the paragraph. It says:

“3.12.0 With continuous diagnostic testing and remediation built into the primary school system and with the administration of standardised tests at significant stages in the primary schools, (Standards 1 and III—1994-1996 respectively), the Common Entrance Examination itself can increasingly be converted into a national attainment test. (Education Plan 1985—90 p. 30).”

The paragraph continues:

“3.12.1 Placement at secondary level can then be on the basis of both continuous assessment and a national examination. This may remove some of the stress at present associated with one yardstick, the Common Entrance Examination, determining transition to, and placement in, secondary schools.

3.12.3 We recommend that the Common Entrance Examination in its present form continue until the prerequisites for change are implemented in the primary schools (that is by 1998). After this, placement at secondary level is to be on the basis of both continuous assessment and a national examination.”

Mr. President, this was indeed part of the PNM's policy on education and when today we are hearing the other side taking credit and boasting that they abolished the Common Entrance Examination, it is simply to score cheap political points.

3.25 p.m.

Mr. President, certainly, we are committed to the abolition of the Common Entrance Examination but it is in a certain context. According to this White Paper it was, in fact, envisaged that a prerequisite for change was that certain things had to be implemented in the primary schools by 1998, and after, placements would be based on both continuous assessment and a national examination. We have to ask this Government: Have these prerequisites been met under this administration? This administration has been in Government for nearly five years.

Mr. President, in this report, there is an action plan as part of the appendix in this document that deals with the transition from primary to secondary schools, and in terms of the concerns at page 82 of the report it says:

“Systems of Examination and certification

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Improving the impact of systems of assessment, testing, examination, and certification on teaching and learning.”

Recommendations:

“Phasing out of the Common Entrance and the development of tests norms on the local population...”

And no doubt

“Introduction of a National Certificate in Secondary Education Level I.”

And it goes on. The target date was between the period 1993 and 1998.

So, Mr. President, we of the People’s National Movement have been committed to the phasing out of the Common Entrance Examination, and about the time the PNM demitted office in 1995, many of the recommendations of this White Paper were, in fact, being implemented; and to come in this Chamber and say that nothing was being done, and do as if we were sleeping on this White Paper is far from the truth. It is misleading; it is wrong; and to prove it I have in my possession a copy of the *Hansard* report from the budget debate in 1994. It is dated December 6, 1994 when the then Minister of Education, the hon. Augustus Ramrekersingh in his budget contribution—and this debate was taking place in the Senate—made reference to some of the things that were happening in his Ministry in terms of the implementation of this White Paper.

Mr. Ramrekersingh did, in fact, indicate that the White Paper had been adopted by the then government as part of the PNM’s policy and he went on to say, in part of his contribution dealing with primary schools, that the computerization of schools had been initiated and that they were attempting to introduce computers in primary schools, starting with all government primary schools.

So that when the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development stood in this Chamber sometime ago, and boasted about computerizing the schools and so forth, it was nothing new. This is work that was started by the People’s National Movement. All we are asking is that the recommendations and the work that had been going on, the Government should try to be consistent and try to get the system working in a very efficient manner, instead of just trying to play politics with the system.

When the Government comes and talks about the revolution in education that it has effected, with all due respect, the only revolution that I can glean that this Government has attempted to effect in the education system was the replacement

of the former Minister of Education with Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*] I had great expectations when Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar was appointed as Minister of Education. We thought that we would have seen a very serious approach being taken with respect to improvements in our education system. It is regrettable that she has allowed herself to fall into the politicking that is taking place with her organization and, particularly, by no less a person than the hon. Prime Minister himself. When one looks at what has been happening in education over the last five years, what one would see is that the major pronouncements on education have been coming from the Prime Minister.

Mr. President, imagine, I saw a documentary on television recently with the Prime Minister in a classroom, surrounded by schoolchildren, boasting that he has effected a revolution in education; he has computerized the classroom; he has standardized the textbooks; and he has done this and that. It simply reaffirms and reminds me of that great book known as *Animal Farm* and the characters. This is the kind of government that is in place. The Government is opposed to anyone criticizing its members, even if it is a constructive criticism in order to keep them on their toes and to ensure that there is governance. I was shocked to see the hon. Minister of Education standing in this Chamber today and quoting from the *Daily Express* newspaper. It is very encouraging. At least, it shows that the Minister is prepared to allow freedom of expression and freedom of the press in our country. I wish her well and hope that she is not chastised for it.

Mr. President, in Minister Ramrekersingh's contribution in this Parliament on December 6, 1994—if I may be permitted to quote a few lines from his contribution—he says:

“Perhaps, I should say a word about the common entrance examination. I want to cast it in a different light. We have taken the decision that we should use a different method of moving students from the primary to the secondary level. Instead of the single examination on a single glorious morning, we will use continuous assessment. We have calculated that it would take about a period of four years to have the process completed. Groups of people are at work doing the details.”

And he moves on:

“Associated with it is the question of the availability of secondary school places. At present we send forward about 70 per cent. We have to move towards 100 per cent transition.”

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Mr. President, this confirms that the PNM has been and is committed to providing free secondary education for all in this country, and we are still committed to that policy. [*Desk thumping*] And the Minister continues:

“That means the provision of more school places, which we are doing and I would come to that under physical facilities through three methods; provision of new schools, extension of some existing ones and arrangements with suitable private schools for placing persons. In the long run, whether we have places for all, what is important is that all secondary schools must become high performers, otherwise some persons would always prefer to go to this school rather than that school because they feel they have a better chance.”

Mr. President, that is clearly an annunciation of the PNM’s policy, the direction and the work that was taking place under the PNM and that is not all. I know some people do not like me to quote from this document that I have in my possession, but I have to quote from it. In recent days, we have been hearing as though nothing was happening in education, and there was this White Paper and nothing was being done. This is far from the truth. We have a list of so many achievements and things that were happening in education prior to the 1995 general election. It starts off at page 12 of the PNM Manifesto of 1995. As much as they do not like me to quote from it, I have to because it is a very informative document for the history of this country. It says:

“A comprehensive review of the education system was completed. The White Paper on Education (1994—2003) formed the basis for a National Consultation on Education in 1994.

Proposals for a new system of transition from Primary to Secondary School were developed and discussed at a National Consultation in 1995.

VAT on all books was removed.

A National Curriculum Council has been established.

Primary Schools syllabuses have been revised and updated...

Computers have been provided to 150 Primary Schools.

An action plan to improve the levels of literacy and numeracy is being implemented.

Primary Schools libraries have been upgraded and books provided.

Post primary centres have been established.”

3.35 p.m.

We have to ask the hon. Minister who is now out of the Chamber, what is the status, what is happening with the post primary centres? Is it that they have thrown them out, they have abandoned them and are now replacing them with a model school? It continues:

- “• A National Council for Early Childhood Care and Education has been established and rationalisation of this sector is taking place in collaboration with NGOs.
- The number of Sixth Form places has been increased.
- The National Certificate of Secondary Education (Part 1) has been introduced on a pilot basis in 25 schools.
- A complete review of Technical-Vocational education has been undertaken.
- A pilot programme in Technology Education is being developed...
Books have been provided to needy students of Primary and Secondary Schools.
- The School Feeding Programme has been expanded from 54,000 meals three (3) times per week in 1992 to 77,000 meals on a daily basis-Primary, Secondary and Pre-school.
- Repairs/refurbishment have been done to approximately 400 schools at a cost of over TT\$50 Million.
- Ten (10) Primary Schools have been constructed and by the end of 1995, six more will be under construction.
- The Lakshmi Girls’Hindu College is being re built and expanded.”

I am sure Hon. Vimala Tota-Maharaj will testify to this.

Sen. Tota-Maharaj: No, I cannot.

Sen. N. Mohammed: Mr. President, it continues:

- “• Tranquility Government Secondary School is being rebuilt...
- The Corinth Teachers’ College has been re-established.
- Scholarships have been given to teachers to pursue the Bachelor of Education Programme...
- Computer training has been introduced for teachers and computer education has been introduced at the Teachers’ Colleges.”

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Mr. President, I can go on and on. These were significant achievements under the PNM and in conformity with the White Paper on Education, and for the record, we have to put it in.

Sen. Tota-Maharaj: All that began under NAR!

Sen. N. Mohammed: Mr. President, I think the hon. Senator is a bit confused these days with what is happening in St. Augustine to say that all these achievements took place under the NAR. [*Desk thumping*] Certainly, if any achievements took place under the NAR administration, and I am sure they were many, we laud them for their efforts, and we too would like to laud this Government for its improvements in the education system.

What are we seeing? We are seeing a disaster facing us in this country in terms of their inept handling of the education system, especially in recent times. They are rushing simply for political mileage, just as they are rushing to open the airport on August 30 instead of August 31, 2000 in time for the general election in this country.

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

They want to have an opening but the airport will not really come into operation until sometime later this year or maybe next year. Hear the excuse! They are afraid of vandalism. That is why they have to open it in August. Such utter rubbish! It is cheap politics! People in this country are not stupid and it is in the same vein that they have approached this education system and this current rush to provide places for all by September 2000 in this country.

Mr. Vice-President, the hon. Minister was in this Chamber and we have not heard a single word from her about the World Bank loan to construct the secondary schools. We know for a fact that when the PNM administration demitted office in 1995, negotiations had taken place with the World Bank with a view to construct four new secondary schools in an effort to accommodate more secondary school students. In that thrust to provide free secondary education for all, we were in the process of constructing these schools.

You know, one of the glaring realities right now is the fact that this school building programme has indeed been delayed. Of the four schools, I think one was supposed to be in Diego Martin, one in Cunupia, one in Tobago, and one probably in the northeast—I cannot recall—only in one school, I think, some kind of work took place. That is the Cunupia school.

The Government needs to come with clean hands and be open and transparent. Is it true that the Government was seeking to replace the approved construction firm, Watson Construction Management Service Limited—to replace that firm that had been earmarked to get the contract to build those schools—with MTS and with TIDCO? I read recently where TIDCO is now being chaired, or is likely to be chaired, by the new politician and political figure in our country. The man with the money, the great Mr. Jack Warner. *[Laughter]*

Is it true that efforts were being made to give TIDCO and MTS the contract to build these new schools? Is it true that the World Bank in April 2000 refused to sanction that change because at all turns they were bypassing the competitive tendering process? I see the new Minister of Works and Transport sitting here in this Chamber and he would know about bypassing the competitive tendering process, with all due respect.

This is a very vital part of the operations of our country. In order to have good governance, good checks and balances are needed in our system. The tendering process is a very significant part of ensuring there is transparency and fairness in the way things are being handled. The policy and the thrust of this Government is to bypass these processes at all corners, simply to give their friends and financiers these plum contracts and for them to benefit from these limited resources of our country.

Mr. Vice-President, is it true that the cost of the construction of these new secondary schools was approved by Cabinet in May 1999 at \$128 million, but by November 1999, the cost jumped to \$183 million? More than that, by May of 2000, the new cost is now \$238 million, and it is rising. Where is the money going? Why this sudden jump in the cost of the construction of these new schools? What is happening? Why is it that with all these mega projects this Government has undertaken, there is the situation where the cost has been escalating?

Mr. Vice-President, it is clear. It is just like the airport. It has now escalated. It has gone up. It has crossed \$1 billion in terms of the estimated cost for this airport, and they want to talk about what we did or did not do in terms of education. If we had the kind of money available to us like they have available to them now, when we were in government, certainly we would have reached the target date of 1998 to have secondary school places for all in this country.

It is a case where in terms of their operations as a Government, they are undertaking projects that will simply benefit a few individuals and groups. It is not the people of the country they are concerned about. They are not genuinely

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concerned about the welfare of the country and the children of this country, because if they were genuinely concerned, they would have been committed to providing quality education for all in this country. That is what we are about. We are not going to be playing politics with the education of our children. Our record is there for all to see. When it comes to education in this country, the PNM has left a legacy that is very hard for others to follow. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Vice-President, we heard some talk about the model school. At first it was invisible. We did not know where this school was. Then we heard it is going to be in a warehouse. I happen to have a copy of the booklist here and some of the books we see are *Chicken Licken*, we heard the Minister talk about it, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* and the *Gingerbread Man*. I, myself, need to put my hands on these books.

Sen. Gangar: Go to the model school!

Sen. N. Mohammed: The hon. Minister is telling me I should go to the model school. With all due respect to him, I would like to know if he, as they boast and laugh here, will be prepared to send any of his children to the model school? I wonder whether the Minister of Education, herself, will be prepared to send her son to the model school. We are not as fortunate as the hon. Attorney General's and the Prime Minister's children to be sent to England to get their education. We are stuck here in Trinidad. My little son has to go to school right here and I want the best for him. I want quality education for him.

I even heard a caller on one of the television programmes talking about "Junior Sec" and "Senior Sec" and now they are talking about "Kamla Sec". I wonder if the model school is the "Kamla Sec", with all due respect to the hon. Minister. Clearly, Mr. Vice-President, this Government is sacrificing quality for quantity. The PNM was chastised for this approach when they introduced the junior secondary schools in the country, and now the same people who chastised, condemned and criticized the PNM in the days when they were in Opposition, today we are seeing that they are taking this thing in a direction that is really at the end of the day, we are hearing the experts in the field saying it is disaster facing us in this country.

Mr. Vice-President, with all due respect to the hon. Sen. Rev. Daniel Teelucksingh, last week when he made his comments, I had just stepped out of the Chamber. I have a personal difficulty with all due respect to what the hon. Senator said and what the hon. Minister said about a school being above a rum shop, and a school above a rum shop being better than no school at all. I personally have a difficulty with that. I feel repulsed by it! We must have some standards.

Another point I wish to make, in this Chamber, whether we like it or not, is that we on this side of the Chamber belong to a political party. We are in the business of politics, just as the Government is in the business of politics, and our role here as the Opposition party, is that we are the official and legitimate Opposition in this country, and our role is to keep the Government on its toes.

We are here to provide checks and balances in our system of democracy. That is why our comments and criticisms on the recent interventions or approaches by this Government with respect to the education system have been in an effort to ensure that at the end of the day we have good governance. If they are talking about improving the education system, we are certainly committed to seeing it and we will support any measures that will bring about improvements in our education system.

It is very misleading for them to go around this country and to politick and try to score cheap political points and to try to beat the PNM into a position to give the impression that the PNM is against the concept of free secondary education for all. That is our commitment, that is our philosophy, and what we would like to see is that they carry out that philosophy in a manner that will be beneficial to the entire country and not in this “vaps” way they have been doing, simply because elections are approaching, coming around the corner.

For the last four years they were busy playing golf all over the world and now on the eve of elections they are coming here to talk about education for all and they abolished Common Entrance, trying to take credit for things as though they were the initiators of it. Far from it! The White Paper is there for all to see. The White Paper is a piece of paper that they have been treating like toilet paper in this country. The Minister stood here and talked about adopting it in principle.

I remember when the former Minister of Education, the hon. Adesh Nanan, indicated in this Chamber that the Government was adopting the White Paper as its policy on education. What has happened over these five years? What has happened? They have derailed nearly all the recommendations in that White Paper. What is going on with the Continuous Assessment Programme? We were putting things in place. In order to remove or abolish the Common Entrance we had to put systems in place, and the Continuous Assessment Programme was designed to relieve the students of that hardship; the stress and trauma associated with an examination on one day. It would have been a period of continuous assessment during their development in primary schools.

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Mr. Vice-President, they come and boast about abolishing Common Entrance as though there is no examination in place. The children next year still have an examination to write. All that has happened is that the name has changed. What is clear is that the support systems and the infrastructural work that were supposed to have been put in place before they abolished the Common Entrance have not been put in place.

3.50 p.m.

There was a pilot project on stream with respect to the Continuous Assessment Programme. What has happened to it? These are issues the hon. Minister should have tackled in her contribution here today.

Mr. Vice-President, do you know what is sad? When the PNM left office in 1995, the budget then was \$7.5 billion. We know that certain economic reforms were being attempted in an effort to improve the financial resources of our country and the budget then was \$7.5 billion. Today, this Government, as a result of the very sound economic policies that were left behind by the former PNM administration, [*Desk thumping*] has been operating on autopilot and has inherited an economy in which it can now boast the budget has reached something like \$14.5 billion. That is the amount of money they have available to them, Mr. Vice-President. With that kind of money, one would have thought that with all the recommendations in this White Paper, there would have been haste on the part of the Government to implement these recommendations in a very holistic and constructive manner.

But no, in typical UNC fashion, in everything they do, there has to be some “curry cueing” and some corruption in it. Imagine, \$14.5 billion and they have \$1.2 billion they can waste on the airport where much of that money is going into the pockets of a few friends and financiers. There are so many, we can go on. The hon. Minister Carlos John is here and he can remember all too well what took place with the Miss Universe Pageant and how many millions went down the drain. We are still waiting to see the multitude of investors who were supposed to come as a result of that investment. Where are they? If we in the PNM had those kinds of resources available to us—

Hon. Senator: Those kinds of resources!

Sen. N. Mohammed:—certainly education would have been high on our list of priorities and on our agenda and on the agenda of this country. It is hypocritical of them to come in this Chamber to talk as though they are the ones who have been effecting a revolution in education. The only revolution they are really

effecting is the collapse and destruction of our education system in this country. That is what history will record on the United National Congress party in Government, as the legacy left behind by them when they demit office in the not too distant future.

Mr. Vice-President, we, on this side, are all very committed—and I am sure everybody in this Chamber—to seeing an efficient educational system in our country. We acknowledge that there are problems. In order for us to confront and tackle these problems, we need to come together in a meaningful way because we are all committed. At least we, on this side, are certainly committed to improving the system.

The hon. Minister took some two hours for her contribution.

Hon. Senator: One and a half hours.

Sen. N. Mohammed: I believe Dr. Morgan Job spoke some time ago on this Motion and we are still waiting to find out what is this Government's philosophy on education. What is it about? What is the meaning of education to the United National Congress? That is what this Motion is all about. That is what it is seeking and we are still waiting to find out. It reminds me of Sen. Prof. Kenny's Motion that we completed here not too long ago. Some of them spoke and, to this date, we are still waiting to find out what are their policies.

Mr. Vice-President, we heard mention being made of the situation involving teachers and the improvement of terms and conditions for our teachers and what have you. Again, it is not as though over the years no improvements took place, but given the limited resources that were available at the time, that would have been the determining factor for what terms and conditions our teachers got. We all acknowledge and appreciate the fact that if we want our education system to be improved, we have to ensure that we make adequate provisions for our teachers—

Sen. Job: For real.

Sen. N. Mohammed:—to ensure that they are able to operate and carry out their profession with very appropriate terms and conditions.

When you look at the waste that is taking place under this administration—the millions of dollars—they acknowledge that it is not their money. It is coming from the Treasury; it is coming from taxpayers; it is not coming from their pockets. So, if they have to get some public relations advice, it is no big thing to hire a firm from England to get the public relations advice on very simple things. No big thing. That is how they are operating because it is not their money at the end of the day. But you see, it is the people's money that is involved here.

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When it comes to the situation involving our teachers, I remember in 1981, when in this country, it was the nurses and the teachers who were demonstrating against the then PNM government. It is not as though they have not agitated over the years and, certainly, as a result of their agitation, they were able to get better terms and conditions.

Today, when there is any legitimate group in this country, be it a labour union or what have you, if they dare to open their mouths, well we know what has happened to some of the leaders. They have been silenced. As Mr. Panday used to say, "Some will sell their souls for a mess of pottage, a jacket and a tie." Nowadays, I have to say a seat in the Senate, too.

They are unable to handle people speaking out and people expressing their views if it is contrary to their position and that shows a kind of governance that is frightening, because with the resources of the Treasury available to them, it shows where our democracy is at stake here. The minute you open your mouth and criticize, you are being victimized, ostracized and punished as though you are not entitled to comment. The media can testify to the suppression of the fundamental right of the freedom of the press in this country and not just the press, the trade union movement. Recently, look at what happened. Attempts are being made to silence them, Mr. Vice-President. But you see, we are a legitimate group in this society—

Mr. Vice-President: The speaking time of the 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: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President and hon. Senators, for extending my time, but I can assure you I am not going to abuse the privilege here this afternoon.

The fact of the matter is that at the end of the day, with respect to the Motion that has been brought by Prof. Ramchand that deals with the education system and that gives us an opportunity to talk on our education system, the debate is certainly a timely one because of what we have been seeing unfolding in our country in recent times and, certainly, we on this side, are a responsible organization in this country. We are the official Opposition in the country. We are the alternative government. It is only a matter of time before we return to

government and return this country to good governance. [*Desk thumping*] It is the people of this country who will determine that and come September, when the backlash starts to take place, then we will hear the voice of the people.

I heard the hon. Minister in her contribution today trying to “take front before front take her”. She started off in her contribution by talking about those who would come in September to complain about this and that. I feel sorry for the hon. Minister because I know in her heart, she is genuinely committed to quality education, but she had a mandate because the hon. Prime Minister is the one who has been making the pronouncements on education in the country. He is like the Minister of Education and whatever he says, they have to jump high and get it done regardless of the consequences. I know that is the position of the hon. Minister. She must be very mindful and cognizant of the problems inherent in the haste with which they are approaching this transition in our education system. She is an intelligent person and she must be mindful of the consequences and the haste with which they are moving to implement this transition. It is unfortunate that she has allowed herself to fall into that trap, because I know she is a strong person and she can fend for herself and I hope to God that they will be able to find the solutions when September comes.

Only yesterday, a parent was telling me her child who is going into Standard 5 has not gotten his booklist. School has closed and that child did not get a booklist because of the new examination they have to write and they are uncertain about what they will be using in terms of material for that. So, to come here and try to score political points and rush into this free secondary education for all by September of 2000, it is clear for all to see that it is cheap political expediency on the part of this administration. If they were serious about making this transition, since 1998, all systems would have been in place to start that transition, because we know that certain infrastructural things had to be put in place.

Listen to the irony of it. They are talking about new schools. We have heard that they are building 10 new secondary schools now—seven are almost completed and the rest will come. All right. So, they are lumping everybody into the form ones wherever they are. They even have a special form one.

Sen. Shabazz: Centre of Excellence.

Sen. N. Mohammed: I am wondering after form one, where are these children going? With the special form one, is there going to be a special form two in the school as well? Is there going to be a special form three? Is that how the school is going to be operating? If so, tell us. That is why I asked the question:

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What is happening with the post-primary centres which we had established? They have abandoned them. Or is it that under the guise of this new system, it is really the post-primary system they will be operating by placing the students elsewhere?

I have spoken to several people—teachers in particular—and with these new schools, I have to ask the question: What about the training of teachers to staff these new schools? Do you have a full or sufficient complement of teachers to be able to teach in these schools? I am aware of the fact that teachers in existing schools may have applied for transfers and what have you. But, are you taking new teachers on board? What steps are you taking to train them? We would like to know about these things in terms of that.

Sen. Mark: But she told you.

Sen. N. Mohammed: Well, it is unfortunate. I really cannot recall the hon. Minister's reply. All I do remember is Mr. Jack Warner offering the Centre of Excellence to house 5,000 students on one side and 5,000 students on the other side. It is like a herd of cattle. [*Interruption*]

It really reminds me of 1990—"On The Road to Italy". Well, we are on the road to disaster under this UNC administration. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: You mean the PNM.

Sen. N. Mohammed: As you mentioned PNM, nowadays when we look at the UNC, we are seeing as though the UNC gone PNM, too. [*Laughter*]

Sen. Brig. Theodore: We are not that bad. No.

Sen. N. Mohammed: It is rather regrettable that the hon. Minister has been allowing herself to be used in this manner, going about in this very hasty manner to make this transition from primary to secondary school with this principle of free secondary education for all. We are committed to that very noble objective. We have no difficulties with it but we know for a fact, in terms of achieving that goal, it is a process that has been going on for years and it will not happen overnight. If they had stuck to the White Paper on Education, they would have seen where all the stakeholders, the people who are directly involved in the education system in this country, have put their thoughts together and made their recommendations. Instead of just adopting them in principle, this Government should have been vigorously implementing the recommendations of the White Paper. But not so, it has been a case of "vaps" government where and when the

“vaps” take the hon. Prime Minister and he makes some pronouncement, that is what their policy has to be and that is what it is. But as a party, we cannot as yet glean what their philosophy is in terms of education.

Sen. Shabazz: They have none.

Sen. N. Mohammed: It seems as though they have none and all they are doing is simply to score political points for the sake of staying in power. That is all they are obsessed with and what we in this country would like to see is good governance. We are here to keep you on your toes to ensure that that is what you give us in this country.

Our country has limited resources and they ought not to be playing with the lives, especially with the future of the children of our nation. That is a great sin that you are inflicting on our nation and we appeal to you, in the last few days you have left in office, to stop the plundering and get on seriously with the business of good governance by ensuring that whatever little resources we have left in the Treasury, that you try to spread it in a way that all the people of Trinidad and Tobago will be able to benefit.

4.05 p.m.

I am not saying to come with an election budget, Minister of Finance. I know that is what they want you to do, to bring a budget simply for the campaign of 2000, but we hope you will be sufficiently responsible to ensure that when you demit office, hon. Minister—because we have been reading in the newspaper that you are contemplating migration; whether it is true or not, I know that you are a person who listens and you have a heart and a soul and you are strong; last week you were flexing your muscles in this Chamber, so you will be able to withstand the temptations and pressure being put on you—the budget is not one to score cheap political points. [*Desk thumping*] We want you to ensure, hon. Minister, that the little resources, whatever money you leave for us in the Treasury, you try to spread it out in a manner that will be truly meaningful and beneficial to the population of this country.

The Government seems to be surrounded by a group of people with very large business interests; we know of it, but at the end of the day, it is the people below, the masses, the people whom the hon. Minister sits with at the stadium and enjoys the steelband music and so forth, people like that, who are the ones who would have thought for the last four to five years, under this Government, that they would have benefited in a meaningful way. Instead, they are being treated just like a herd of cattle. They are just being pushed in. Like the school places for all,

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just pushing them and housing them, whether it is in the Centre of Excellence or wherever it is, but with no genuine effort at ensuring that measures are put in place so that at the end of the day we can boast that we have an education system where there is quality education and an education system that is accessible to all. We want quality.

The Government has boasted about a total quality nation. Mr. Vice-President, with all due respect, the haste with which they have been going about changes in the education system is certainly showing a case of total quality madness on the part of this administration, and we want them to put a halt to that. They have a few days left; if they want to leave a legacy behind for our country they should try to leave a good one, where in the next 5, 10 or 15 years our children will be able to look back and say that they have been able to benefit from a good and sound education.

I stand here today in this parliamentary Chamber, proud to be a member of the People's National Movement, because I can boast of the fact that I am a beneficiary of a good and sound programme for education under the People's National Movement; it was a case of equality of opportunity for all.

If, as they are quick to say, there was some kind of discrimination in how things were dealt with, then I wonder how it is that Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar benefited from a virtually free education at the University of the West Indies? How is it that Minister Ganga Singh benefited from the same, because he was another person who studied law with us? Former Sen. Carol Cuffy Dowlat was also a beneficiary, that is where the equality of opportunity for all came from, and, of course, my very dear colleague, the former Senator, Penelope Beckles. We have all been recipients and beneficiaries of the very sound policies, on education in particular—[*Desk thumping*—]—under the People's National Movement.

Whether it was the former PNM administration, the fact remains that in the future the PNM will continue to remain committed to ensuring that in this country there is that opportunity in the education system and that we provide quality education for all in this country.

With these few words, Mr. Vice-President, I thank you for this opportunity to participate.

Sen. Dr. Eastlyn Mc Kenzie: Mr. Vice-President, I would like to begin by congratulating Sen. Prof. Ken Ramchand for bringing this Motion to this Senate. When he brought this Motion some months ago and we saw the delay in debating it, I am sure he must have felt a bit impatient; but now there seems to be a timeliness about the Motion.

At that time, I listened very well to the hon. Senator when he introduced the Motion, and he made it abundantly clear that he wanted to hear nothing from the Government side about the number of schools built, about the number of school places given, and that type of matter. He thought that he wanted to hear strictly about the policy on education and the objectives of providing an education for all in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] With that in mind, I confined my preparation, at the time, to dealing with non-formal education, and trying to take education out of the narrow confines of schooling and widening the concept further.

Mr. Vice-President, let me begin by congratulating the hon. Minister of Finance, because without his consent, approval and his magic wand to find the money, all this boasting about free secondary education for all could not be possible.

Sen. Daly: But they fired him for that! [*Laughter*] Give him a Gillette razor for that.

Sen. Dr. E. Mc Kenzie: So hats off to you and thank you very much for finding the money.

I want to say very clearly and honestly and genuinely, I believe that every citizen in this country would be happy if all children in this nation would get free pre-school education of quality, free primary education of quality and free secondary education of quality. I am sure of that for every citizen, regardless of where you have come from or who you are. So I will not swallow any sort of pill that there are some people who are against free secondary education for all.

What has concerned many of us, including me, is the concept we have of secondary schools. Our concept of a secondary school is an institution where children who attend that school would be children who mastered the basic primary skills after seven years of primary education; the type of basic foundation in mathematics and the language arts that would allow a good teacher in a secondary school to build on that sound foundation; that is our concept. When we read the report on the removal of Common Entrance Examination, that is what has caused us to be very concerned, because what does it say? It says that, with time, we have been putting more and more children from the Common Entrance Examination results into secondary school.

Listen to some of the statistics, Sir. The report on page 28 says that in 1962, 9,507 wrote the examination, we placed 3,368; in 1963, 20,007 wrote, we placed 3,377. We jumped 10 years to 1973, by that time our Junior Secondary Schools

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would have been on stream; 34,296 children wrote the exam; we sent 15,299; in 1983, 28,343 wrote the exam, we sent on to secondary school, 18,846; in 1992, 30,960 wrote the exam, we sent into secondary school, 20,577; and in 1997, 28,961 children wrote the exam and we sent 20,893 into secondary school. So we have been increasing the intake into the secondary school with time.

What has the Task Force said? They have said that as we increased, we also took into these secondary schools children who had not mastered the primary school basic syllabus, and we were placing a number of children who did not have the basic foundation to build on, in the secondary schools. We know the result because we allowed them to go through a system: the same syllabus; the same teaching strategy; the same teaching method for all of them, and to come out at the end of five years, whether you were slow, whether you had the basic foundation, and all of them did the same Caribbean Examination Council Examinations (CXC).

We could have told you what the results of CXC would have been from the results of the Common Entrance Examination, because you could have easily gone and said the top so many children would come out with five passes or more; you did not have to do a CXC exam to find out what the results would have been. That is what we have been doing.

We have another problem, which is very important. When you look at the Task Force report there is something as a raw score converted to a standard score, and this is one of the things that I think the hon. Minister—she has left with her technocrats and she has left with her television cameras. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

Mr. Vice-President, in my humble way, I prepare what I have to say. I take time; what I do not know I investigate it, I seek help. When I come here to make a contribution, I am in serious business.

Sen. Daly: We could see that.

Sen. Dr. E. Mc Kenzie: When you convert the raw score to the standard score, you would see where a heavier weight is put to science and social studies and essay, as against the score for mathematics and English. Therefore, you find that if you have two children who would have scored the same total points, the one who scored more in science and social studies could be 9,000 places ahead of the child who scored higher in mathematics and English.

What it is saying to me, in my humble analysis, is this, that here we could have in the “mod-el” school—I want to make it clear why I am saying “mod-el”, because I do not want people to tell anybody that I said the muddle school, because there are people who are confusing the “mod-el” with the muddle. I want to make it clear what I am talking about.

You could have in that school, children who would have scored higher, who would have sat in a class with a child and that child knows, “But I happen to be brighter and was beating that child in test all the time, and here it is that child is going to this Junior Secondary or whatever school and I am going to the ‘mod-el’ school; so how does it happen?” That is unfortunate because of the conversion. The Clive Pantin Task Force warned against this, and asked the Government to do something about it to ensure that the right children were placed in their right schools.

What I would like to suggest is that before these children are allowed to be put down in a class, the 15-odd classes you will have—not only in the “mod-el” school, but even in some of the Junior Secondary schools where you have children who made “Ds” and “Es” in the Common Entrance Examination—they should be tested in various forms.

4.20 p.m.

From my experience in Tobago, we have had children who began in the normal primary schools, it was found that something was wrong and they were brought to the special school, the Tobago Council for Handicapped Children Special School. The children were given individual attention, because there were six children to one teacher, they picked up and went back into the mainstream of the primary school and did well.

So there may be children among those children whose problem may not have anything to do with learning *per se*. We have had children—and I am sure if Sen. Winston John were here he would support me—from normal primary school who were not performing. We brought them into our special school where there were people who dealt with children with vision impairment and hearing impairment and it was found that the child was not hearing well. The child was fitted with a hearing aid and sent back to the primary school and is excelling. So I am saying we need to do various tests on these children to ensure that they are well assessed and use the strategy of education that will bring out the best in them.

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This has nothing to do with teaching you know, it has to do with the facilitation of learning because if we confine ourselves to teaching, we will go to lecturing and this is where I am very sceptical about A'level graduates with three subjects and subject specialists from the university going to teach my child who cannot read and write. [*Desk thumping*] This is not about lecturing, it is about the facilitation of learning, and we have had the experience of them in our normal top secondary schools bringing graduates fresh out of university and they cannot facilitate learning. They could teach because they could lecture and they could tell you what they know, but they cannot facilitate learning and there is a difference. I hope the message would be taken.

Mr. Vice-President, there was a curriculum task force set up to deal with problems in the primary schools and they came up with about 14 variables impacting on the performance of children in the primary schools. Some of them were teacher problems, physical structure, learning problems with the children, parent problems, diets, and nutrition. We are talking about the activity fees that some schools charge. Some schools have breakfast programmes for their children. The children are hungry although their stomachs are full because they are eating the wrong things and being fed the wrong things. There are teachers coming out of those primary and secondary schools cooking, begging, doing all sorts of things, so, many times the fee is not a registration fee and I disagree and object to the schools that call it a registration fee. What we have in Tobago is an activity fee and I will talk about that in due course.

Mr. Vice-President, the public has reasons to be concerned and we must not dismiss them as if they do not like the Government or they do not want children to go to school. If all the children could go to a good secondary school I will be one of the happiest persons in the world. So do not blame the concerns of parents as people who do not want this and do not want that. That is not true and it is not fair.

The hon. Minister spoke about private schools and they were there all the time. Of course they were there doing an excellent job. In fact, some parents preferred to pay to send their children to private schools whether pre-school, primary school or secondary school rather than have them in the system. Nothing is wrong with that, but I can tell you, Mr. Vice-President, if the hon. Parliamentary Secretary for health will be honest, she will tell you the concerns we had about a private secondary school in Tobago where all the children who were placed there, the parents went for a transfer. Why? When the school was assessed to take in children, it had an excellent staff. With time, the staff left, the

turnover was fast and there was only one qualified person there, the others, some had three subjects and so forth. The school is under investigation and this is the point. And we cannot say blindly: rather than none, any. I disagree with the concept of rather than no school, any school, and anywhere. [*Desk thumping*] I disagree with my colleague. I am in total disagreement. I will prefer my child to remain in the primary school if the child has a second chance. I will prefer my child to go to the school-leaving class if the child does not have a second chance, rather than go to any school above a rum shop.

I will tell you why. I do not know what your rum shops in Trinidad look like because I have never seen them. I will tell you what the rum shops are like in Tobago. There are men who urinate in front of anybody, anywhere, against any wall; there are people who “cuss” the biggest bad words, obscene language at the top of their voices; there are those whose wives come in dragging them out because they have the money for the food buying rum; there are those who, when the girls and young ladies pass, shout the most obscene remarks. Is that what I must expose my daughter to? “Leh she stay home.” [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: Where is the Minister?

Sen. Dr. E. Mc Kenzie: Another thing that bothers me is we are saying and the Minister has said—and I agree with her totally—in some instances some of our children, even though they are in the regular secondary schools need some remedial work in the first form. That is okay. But how in heaven’s name if you are giving them remedial work in the first form and they have to do CXC, or whatever examination you are going to have, a “tech-voc”, NEC, whatever, then you cannot say that they have five years because they have taken up one year getting the remedial work straightened out and then they start the secondary school syllabus in the second year. I will give you an example.

We have bought places at a very good secondary school in Tobago. They have realized that some of these children who were placed in that school through the Common Entrance Examination results, those very children wrote the entrance examination for that private school and failed it. The school could not take them based on its entrance examination, but inasmuch as the Tobago House of Assembly bought the place for them, fine, they can come to the school.

Secondly, after the children went through the first form, they say they have not passed the first form in that school, and if they were going to the government school and were being promoted automatically, that does not happen in that school. So the child is kept back in the first form and repeats, so at the end of five

years that child has not gone to form five. Will the hon. Minister or somebody tell me who pays for the fifth or sixth year? Or is it after five years, whether the child gets to form three or form four, out he goes. Somebody must ask the hon. Minister to come on the television and tell the nation whether my child who is 10-plus and wrote the examination at 11 years and has another chance, rather than go to any school, I have the authority to say keep my child in the primary school and let him repeat and get a sounder foundation in an environment that is cheaper than sending the child to a secondary school. I wanted to hear that.

Mr. Vice-President, that is what I would like to know. So the concept and strategies used in the model schools need to be used in some of the secondary schools because the same children who made grade D and grade E are those who are placed in the secondary schools. We have it in the Task Force Report and we need to look at that. I would also like to know what do we do with those children who are now in the system, who, if we had our model school would have been there, but they are already in the system and they are now in form one, form two, form four, what are we to do with them? It is the same thing. We are going to push them in, and we are going to put them out. We have to decide what we are going to do.

Another question I wanted to ask was whether the model school would be a feeder school. In other words, after the first year, and you have done the remedial work and evaluated those children, would those children who now would have come up after a year, be placed in a regular secondary school to continue and be placed in form one? I wanted the hon. Minister to answer that. Can we transfer the children who would have been those who should have gone to the model school and would have been placed in a private secondary or one of our regular secondary schools? When these principals discover that these children should be reading Fluff and Nip, could they then ask that they be transferred to the model school for remedial work? These are some of the things we need to ask.

I come to the question of who will teach. I want to know the classification for these teachers. If they are going to be teaching Fluff and Nip in the secondary school—which is primary school work, if that is what you are going to teach, then you are doing primary school work in the secondary school.

Mr. Vice-President: I am assuming that your contribution would take a while longer.

Sen. Dr. E. Mc Kenzie: Not too long, Sir.

Mr. Vice-President: I am in a dilemma to decide whether we should break for tea and continue afterwards.

Sen. Prof. Spence: Let us continue.

Sen. Dr. E. Mc Kenzie: Mr. Vice-President, even if I go for another 10 or 15 minutes, I am sure everybody would—

Mr. Vice-President: Sorry for breaking your stride. Please continue.

Sen. Dr. E. Mc Kenzie: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I have the nod of approval.

Concerning the classification of teachers I would like to know how we are going to deal with this, and I will tell you why. There are teachers in primary schools with degrees, teaching primary school work, and if we are going to take teachers with degrees to call the school a secondary school, but it is primary school work going on, how are we paying these teachers? Do you see how we are looking for confusion with the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association (TTUTA)?

Mr. Vice-President, it is something that should be well thought out. I spoke very briefly on the activity fee, but the activity fee that some schools collect is necessary. I talked about the breakfast, the diet and the feeding programme.

With regard to the library, I will let a secret out of the bag. There is an Independent Senator, who, when he has finished reading his *Economist*, *Newsweek* and other magazines, I tote them to Tobago and carry them to a secondary school library. They cannot buy them, they cannot subscribe to them, and they do not have any money. So some of these schools have to charge an activity fee to help. I am against them saying it is a registration fee. People happily give their books to the library because they have none. Why do we not at times leave people to manage their schools? We cannot take away the management.

4.35 p.m

Mr. Vice-President, I do not agree with breaking the law and, probably, there should be some limit, but let us not condemn it as if it is something so terrible. There are the libraries, sports and schools sometimes have to supply teachers. The school my daughter attends had no teacher for mathematics and the school had to hire and pay a teacher. I knew former Sen. Agnes Williams used to volunteer and teach accounts in a school.

Sen. Daly: She has more time now. *[Laughter]*

Sen. Dr. E. Mc Kenzie: Mr. Vice-President, some of these schools really go to the limit. They need uniforms for school sports, sporting implements, and especially our Tobago schools where children have to travel in order to participate in competitions. Some of the schools are left out of national competitions because they cannot afford these expenses.

Mr. Vice-President, I now want to turn to what I had really intended to speak about when this Motion was first debated and that is the non-formal education sector in this country. Education is much wider than that and when we confine education to schooling, what we are doing very subtly, is leaving out parents; leaving out priests; leaving out politicians; and leaving out godparents *et cetera* from being involved totally in the process of education. So we must ensure that when we talk about education, schooling is a very small part of it. We must not diminish the significance and the importance of things outside school education.

So, what is really education? What is it? Several definitions have been put forward for education. We have heard education is life; we have heard that education is for economic development; and we have heard all sorts of things. One of them that sticks in my mind says, education is what remains after you have forgotten everything that you have learnt at school—*[Laughter]* and it says a lot. Education is so wide and broad that we need to really conceptualize it out of the confines of school. What is it for? My notes tell me, it is for conscience; it is for knowledge; it is for skill; it is to create; it is to invent; it is to change; it is for us to earn to live well; to like oneself; to build self-confidence and self-esteem; it is for adulthood and parenthood; statesmen and women; leaders; followers; partners; and voters.

Mr. Vice-President, it is a contributor to self and national development in many ways. It is our art, posters, drama, jingles, dance, song, steelband and sports. It is everything. It is to educate the whole mind; it is to keep our minds open; it is to base judgment on facts; it is to meet the challenge of free choice; to keep abreast of new knowledge; to prepare for new occupations; to ensure social stability; to direct social change; and to enlarge our horizons to see the view.

Mr. Vice-President, education is desirable on more grounds than the necessity to promote economic development. We must see education as one of the most important instruments of social change hence we cannot divorce it from wider considerations of social policy. Education permits the development of the human personality, which is the ultimate aim of all programmes of social and economic development.

I say again, we see education as the medium through which people are produced who transform society. It involves human aspirations and practical realities; it makes people better equipped to serve themselves and society as individuals and family members; as workers in the community; as leaders and innovators; and as local and world citizens and contributors because education would have improved their basic knowledge; their intellectual and manual skills; their powers of reason and criticism; their values and attitudes and motivations; their powers of creativity; their cultural appreciation; their sense of social responsibility; and the understanding of the modern world. Therefore, lifelong education should be what we are aiming at.

Mr. Vice-President, we would see the outcomes in terms of people's lives; their value systems; and their competence. I am saying lifelong education because if we do not continue this process of education through one's life—and we are going to deal with adults who in later life would be old enough to work, vote, fight and marry—we will not complete the cycle of continuous education commenced in childhood.

Mr. Vice-President, more than the academic skills—and that is why I say, we cannot confine education to schooling—and the acquisition of those skills and subject matter, education must be seen to include the acquisition of occupational household skills; the development of esthetic appreciation; analytical modes of thinking; formation of attitudes and values and aspirations; and an assimilation of pertinent knowledge and information of many sorts.

There has been the saying—and I know that Minister Job always says this—that we are poor because we lack education, but we have to widen our concept of poverty to include poverty of mind—not only poverty because we do not have money—through which all our efforts will be stillborn. We have to widen our idea of wealth to include the creative spirit without which there is no development.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to say to the hon. Minister of Finance and to Sen. Nizam Baksh, my very good friend of over 30 years, we toiled together in the field of community development, and when I speak of education being wider than schooling, I think that people like Sen. Nizam Baksh should be one of the persons used as a resource for Government's education policy. All those children who would be coming out of secondary schools and who would have gone out of there, it is the adult education—non-formal sector of education—that will rescue them from a life of decay; a life of crime; a life of frustration and everything else.

Education (Philosophy and Purpose)
[SEN. DR. MC KENZIE]

Tuesday, July 25, 2000

I want to take the opportunity at this point to congratulate the hon. Sen. Finbar Gangar and hon. Sen. Job for that mobile welding unit that was installed in Roxborough to teach our young people who are out of school to gain a skill by which they could improve themselves. It shows that we can do things if we want to. I want to give the Minister the kudos.

Mr. Vice-President, it is non-formal education that makes this country famous. If you go to England, the United States of America or Europe and say, Brian Kuei Tung, they will say, “Who he?” If you say Kamla Persad-Bissessar, they will say “Who she?” But if you say Russell Latapy, Brian Lara or Ato Boldon they will know them. They did not learn that in school. That was out of school. If you say Desperadoes, Invaders, Skiffle Bunch or whoever, everybody knows them and that is the type of education that you do not get in any school. That is why I am stressing the non-formal sector of education.

Who knows us and for what? They know us for our sports; they know us for our culture and carnival; they know the Signal Hill Choir—just this morning I heard on the radio that Toronto is wooing the Signal Hill Choir to come and sing. Big, big thing in Toronto, five radio stations and all sorts of things! They know us for calypso, steelband, Minshall, Saga Boy and Tan Tan; they know us for Tokyo; they know us for our television productions.

4.45 p.m.

I am saying give tax incentives, hon. Minister of Finance. I do not know how many more budgets you will give, [*Laughter*] but what I do know is that knowing you as I do, you do not stop what you started. So, you will finish this. I want to appeal to you, Sir—and I note that in times past you have acceded to requests coming in—to give tax incentives to businesses, corporations, organizations and the churches and so forth, to continue with training, education and development of young people in whatever field, be it sport, culture, television productions.

Give them tax incentives. Say to them, “If you train so many people, you could get a tax break of so much”. Let us make it important. Let us make our people and these organizations feel important that we know you are contributing to what is happening. Let us make them feel that their contribution is significant.

I will tell you something. It will ease the job of the hon. Minister of National Security. It will ease the job of so many people who have to rectify what has gone wrong in the schooling system, in the parenting system. Let us embrace our parents and make them feel we are all in this together. Let us not take too much of the responsibility away from them and make them feel that schools are day-

care centres; that schools are places where we just get rid of our children. Let us make them realize that they can place barriers in the way of their children, and the pain of seeing our young ones go astray, the cost of bringing them back on track, we cannot count. Let us educate in the broadest possible sense.

Finally, Mr. Vice-President, let me ask the hon. Minister of Finance, Sir, I saw you on television with your statement on the nurses. I agree with you totally and I support you wholeheartedly. I know how you feel about people who are professionals, who do a good job. I know you have to find a lot of money to put in place what the Government has now put in place as far as education and secondary places go. I want to appeal to you, find the money and pay our teachers well. [*Desk thumping*]

Do something for them, because I will tell you that when you and I went to school, the distractions and the problems that teachers face today, we did not know about them. We had no Internet. I had no television. We did not know the problems. We had no cocaine, no drugs. The problems that teachers face—and I taught for eleven and a half years in primary school—I know what it is.

I go to a secondary school every Friday morning up to now and still teach, and I could tell you, our children are hurting, our teachers are hurting even more, because they feel very helpless when they see situations that they cannot handle. They feel very helpless when they think that despite their very best efforts they still cannot bring some children around. Pay them well. Treat them well. Put the physical infrastructure, the technological infrastructure in schools to ease their problem, and make their lot easier.

I will tell you, Sir, that you will rest a happy man. You will rest a happy man. Parents of this nation will be happy. Citizens of this nation will be happy, and those of us who are getting old would feel confident that as we get older, we would feel safer and happier, because we would not believe that children who have been well treated, whose learning was facilitated by good teachers, well-paid happy teachers will turn on us and harm us.

Mr. Vice-President, I want again to say to Sen. Prof. Ramchand, thanks for this opportunity. I want to say to the Government that I hope we can put our heads together, because all is not well. I know in Tobago—I did not want to contradict the Minister and put her down because she was in full flight. She has a problem with the Pentecostal school, she is saying that everybody is placed all over. That is not true, so rectify that problem. Let us not expose it too much. Rectify it.

Education (Philosophy and Purpose)
[SEN. DR. MC KENZIE]

Tuesday, July 25, 2000

Mr. Minister, if it is one thing you should do before you do not present another budget after this one, *[Laughter]* is to ensure that you leave good footsteps on the sands of time when it comes to the education of our children. God bless you, thank you very much. *[Desk thumping]*

EMANCIPATION GREETINGS

The Minister of Public Administration (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark): Mr. Vice-President, before moving to adjourn this honourable Senate, let me just take the opportunity to indicate to fellow Senators that next Tuesday is the first of August, Emancipation Day in Trinidad and Tobago. We would like, on this side, to take the opportunity to extend to the national community a very happy Emancipation Day next week Tuesday. As we are on education, we know that emancipation is a period, and as the world has known, if we want genuine emancipation freedom, our ticket to liberation is education. Our ticket to freedom is education and enhancement of skills throughout. Mr. Vice-President, on our side, as I said, we would like to extend to the national community a very happy Emancipation Day next week.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Public Administration (Sen. The Hon. Wade Mark): Mr. Vice-President, I just want to inform fellow Senators, as well, that having regard to the fact that we will not be sitting next week Tuesday, we will want to make up again for Private Members' Day that we have lost in the last three to four weeks and we are proposing that we meet on Thursday at around 1.30 p.m. to deal with, for instance, Prof. Spence's Motion on agriculture, since Sen. Prof. Ramchand will not be in the country and we want to continue Private Members Business on Thursday.

The following Tuesday we will meet at 10.30 a.m. when we will deal with the first four Bills on our Order Paper and the Constitution (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill, as well as the Citizenship of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (Amdt.) Bill. If we cannot complete those Bills on Tuesday, we will come back on Thursday, because we want to give fellow Senators an opportunity to take at least a week and a half off so that they can go somewhere and relax themselves for the August period. The faster we can complete our agenda, the quicker we will be able to get some vacation.

Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Thursday August 3, at 1.30 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.54 p.m.