

*Leave of Absence**Tuesday, May 04, 2004***SENATE***Tuesday, May 04, 2004*

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

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

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, I wish to inform you that the President of the Senate, The Hon. Dr. Linda Savitri Baboolal, is at present acting President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for His Excellency the President, Prof. George Maxwell Richards who is out of the country. During the absence of the President, the Vice-President of the Senate would preside over the sittings.

Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. The Hon. Danny Montano, Sen The Hon. Knowlson Gift, Sen. The Hon. Rennie Dumas and Sen. The Hon. Christine Kangaloo from today's sitting of the Senate

SENATORS' APPOINTMENT

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from His Excellency the President, Prof. George Maxwell Richards:

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency Professor GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, T.C., C.M.T., Ph.D. President and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/ G. Richards
President.

TO: MRS. JOAN HACKSHAW-MARSLIN

WHEREAS Senator Rennie Dumas is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, 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, JOAN HACKSHAW-MARSLIN, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from 4th

Senators' Appointment
[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

May, 2004 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Rennie Dumas.

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 30th day of April, 2004."

"THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency Professor GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, T.C., C.M.T., Ph.D., President and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/ G. Richards
President.

TO: MRS. MAGNA WILLIAMS-SMITH

WHEREAS Senator Knowlson Gift is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, 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, MAGNA WILLIAMS-SMITH, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from 4th May, 2004 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Knowlson Gift.

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 30th day of April, 2004."

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Sen. Joan Hackshaw-Marslin and Sen. Magna Williams-Smith took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1993. [*The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill)*]

2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1995. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1996. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
4. Annual audited financial statements of National Commission for Self Help Limited for the financial years ended September 30, 2000 and 2001. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
5. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Deposit Insurance Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2003. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
6. Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year 2003. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
7. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on a special audit of the segment of the National Road Enhancement Programme (NREP) administered by the Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (UDECOTT). [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
8. The Freedom of Information (Exemption) (No. 2) Order, 2003. [*The Minister of Community Development and Culture (Sen. The Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams)*]

Statutory Instruments Committee

The Minister of Community Development and Culture (Sen. The Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams): Mr. Vice-President, may I also advise that the Statutory Instruments Committee considered the Order and found that there is nothing to which Senators' attention should be drawn. The minutes of the committee were circulated to Senators.

Sen. Wade Mark: Mr. Vice-President, on this particular matter that is before the Senate, I believe that it violates the principles of good order as it relates to the retroactivity of this Order.

Mr. Vice-President, if I may inform you, there is a matter before the courts of Trinidad and Tobago that is supposed to be heard sometime on May, 14, 2004 and I feel that this matter—

Sen. Jeremie: On a point of order. If there is a matter before the courts, I do not think that my friend, Sen. Mark, should be referring to it.

Sen. W. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, may I just continue?

Mr. Vice-President: Please.

Sen. W. Mark: Essentially, what has happened is that the Government is attempting to undermine the system of justice in the country and, therefore, we are saying that this is in complete opposition to the same section—

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: Could the hon. Senator give way for just one minute? I am not sure what the Senator is referring to. Is it the Freedom of Information (Exemption) (No. 2) Order?

Sen. W. Mark: Yes. So, all I am asking is that this matter be withdrawn because it is illegal; it is against the spirit of Standing Order 68(1) that deals with retroactivity. We should not be passing or approving any Orders that would be retroactive. If you look carefully at this Order, you would see where it is retroactive from December 2003. We believe that this Order violates the spirit of Standing Order 68(1). We call on the Government to withdraw this matter.

Mr. Vice-President: Okay. May I just correct the Senator? It is not dated back to December, but it is dated back to the date on which it was published in the *Gazette*, which is February 03, 2004. This is a matter that came to my attention before I came in here and I sought advice on it. I was informed that you may move a Motion to nullify it, but it must be laid.

Sen. W. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, I want to serve notice that I would be following your advice and I would be laying an appropriate Motion to have this Order annulled.

AGRICULTURAL CENSUS ORDER

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move the following Motion:

Whereas it is provided by section 5 of the Statistics Act that the Minister may by Order direct that a census shall be taken in Trinidad and Tobago, or any part thereof of any class of inhabitant and that the Order may specify—

- (a) the dates on or before which the census is to be taken; and
- (b) the matters in respect of which information is to be obtained in the census:

And whereas it is provided by the section that the Order be subject to affirmative resolution of Parliament:

And whereas the Minister has on the 8th day of March, 2004 made the Agricultural Census Order, 2004 directing that an agricultural census be held between the 1st day of May, 2004 and the 30th day of September, 2004:

Be it resolved that the Agricultural Census Order, 2004 be approved.

Mr. Vice-President, the Agricultural Census Order 2004 and its accompanying regulations have been presented to this honourable Senate for affirmative resolution as is required by law. The legal authority to undertake this agricultural census is governed by the Statistics Act, Chap. 19:02, of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. It is necessary to have the Agricultural Census Order 2004 approved by both Houses of Parliament and the accompanying census regulations 2004, governing the conduct of the Agricultural Census issued for public comment.

The census regulations do not only provide the particulars of items to be collected in the census and the duties of staff engaged in the enumeration, but reinforces the confidentiality provisions of the Statistics Act.

The conduct of the Agricultural Census 2004 would mark Trinidad and Tobago's participation in the World Censuses of Agriculture Programme to be undertaken in the decade 2000—2010. It is my understanding that agricultural censuses are usually conducted by most countries at intervals of approximately 10 years. However, the last census on agriculture was conducted in Trinidad and Tobago in 1982, more than 20 years ago.

Mr. Vice-President, as you are aware, significant changes have occurred in the national economy since 1982 and, in particular, within the domestic agricultural sector. This Senate, therefore, would appreciate that there is a compelling need for empirical data to provide a clear determination of the performance and future of the agricultural sector.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has placed great emphasis and importance on the development and revitalization of this sector of the economy, and recognizes the need to diversify the economy away from the dependence on the oil and petrochemical sectors.

The development of the agricultural sector has been identified as one means of diversifying the economy and, consequently, the stimulation of a sustainable agricultural sector, as one of the country's national goals, has been clearly articulated in the Government's Medium Term Policy Framework 2002—2004 and the strategy includes and I quote:

Agricultural Census Order
[HON. C. ROBINSON-REGIS]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

“Generating sustainable increases in output, income and employment in the agricultural sector.”

Consequently, the sustainable development of the agricultural sector would contribute to another important goal of improving the social and economic conditions of persons living in rural areas and in ensuring the reduction of poverty. These goals are consistent with the Government’s principal aim of improving the quality of life of all our citizens which the vision for achieving developed country status by the year 2020 advocates.

Concerted attention is therefore being given to strategies and an action plan for the development of the agricultural sector as one of the economic sectors for emphasis in the Vision 2020 exercise, which is currently underway.

The critical need for accurate, timely, up-to-date and relevant information on food and agricultural production and the use of our land and water resources are of paramount importance.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources requires agricultural data and statistics for agriculture planning including:

- (a) policy formulation;
- (b) analyzing the role of agriculture in the national economy;
- (c) estimating the demand for agricultural commodities, in relation to our nutritional requirements and determining the levels of agricultural production for national food security.

The agricultural census is the instrument which would provide the requisite scope of relevant information on a uniform basis about the country as a whole, and about individual regions and communities—remembering that we have not held a census since 1982.

The Agricultural Census 2004 is to provide a complete count of farmers engaged in agricultural production, primarily for sale, and would provide the following information:

- (1) The number of farmers in the country and the characteristics of agricultural holdings.
- (2) The number of agricultural holdings by size, location, land tenure and utilization.

- (3) Comprehensive and up-to-date information on agricultural land area, crops, numbers and kinds of livestock, poultry and beehives, irrigation, water, agricultural machinery and equipment.
- (4) Quantities of agricultural production and sales to facilitate a determination of rural incomes.
- (5) Farming practices generally.
- (6) Basic data for the formulation and implementation of a comprehensive integrated system of food and agricultural statistics.

Mr. Vice-President, the Central Statistical Office (CSO) of the Ministry of Planning and Development would be responsible for the conduct of this census with the active support and participation of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and the Agriculture Division of the Tobago House of Assembly.

The census is being conducted with vigorous technical support from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), under a Technical Co-operation Agreement on Agricultural Census and Statistics signed by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in August 2002. Under this agreement, the FAO has provided consultancies and training to the CSO in the following:

- (1) The planning and implementation of all activities of the 2004 census.
- (2) Image scanning technology, which would enhance the processing on census data and facilitate the provision of preliminary data within six months of completion of the fieldwork. This particular point is of extreme importance in circumstances where, with regard to the Population and Housing Census 2000, there has been some considerable delay in getting the results of that census out to the population. So, that image scanning technology that has been provided by that technical co-operation agreement is of particular significance because we expect to get the results out much more quickly than we did with the Housing and Population Census 2000.
- (3) Training of staff in the use of image scanning technology for the census.
- (4) The conduct of a pilot agricultural census survey.
- (5) Questionnaire design, frame development, sampling and methodology consistent with best practices.

- (6) The integration of a gender and development approach in the design of the census.

Mr. Vice-President, through this agreement, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has donated one image scanner, which is the modern technology for collecting data electronically on which the CSO staff has already been trained, and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has funded the acquisition of another scanner for this census.

The technical assistance for this census has totalled US \$232,000, and it is an important benefit of this technical assistance programme as designed, since there is the enhancement of the capacity to implement a system of improved periodic surveys using the scanning technology. There is also the introduction of appropriate data collection and statistical analysis and methodologies that would include a gender approach. This is a very significant development in statistical design and the ability to collate this data and extract it in such a way that it has a gender approach and to be available to the public at a much earlier time.

As I said previously, the Agricultural Census was preceded by the Population and Housing Census 2000. The outputs of that census have been the Preliminary Census Report published in 2001 and the Community Register published in April 2002. That register has provided information on the population by gender, number of buildings, dwelling units, households, business places and institutions at the detailed enumeration district level and by community, city, borough, regional corporation and by parish in Tobago.

The 2000 census data are now available, providing comprehensive data on population by age, sex, ethnic group, religion, education, disability, economic activity, income fatality, marital status, housing and household items. A database called the redatum, which is the retrieval of census for small areas by microcomputers, has been created using the Population and Housing Census data. Every effort is being made through the Ministry of Planning and Development and, more specifically, by the CSO to improve the ability of this office to obtain statistics and to deliver statistics in a timely manner to the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

In fact, the UNECLEC has provided assistance to the CSO in the creation of this redatum 2002 population census database. In addition, the UNECLEC has ensured that the staff of the CSO has been trained; they have assisted in the development of a web server computer-base application, which is now being tested and would be on the CSO website by mid-May of this year, to facilitate widespread electronic access to the census data.

Mr. Vice-President, the strengthening of the national statistical system is a priority of the Government. To this end, the CSO would be one of the key agencies to receive early attention in the Inter-American Development Bank Assisted Public Sector Reform Initiation Programme. The loan agreement for this programme, which totalled some TT \$30 million, was signed in March of this year. Under this programme, an appropriate model for the institutional strengthening of the CSO would be identified along with a comprehensive plan of action for transformation of the CSO into a modern and relevant institution, empowered and positioned to cost effectively provide information to all users of this information.

Sen. R. Montano: I do not understand that.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: I am sorry you do not understand the complicated language. If I knew that, I would have said it in more simple language for your purpose. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Vice-President: Please, let us continue without interruptions.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Vice-President, I am trying to be as straightforward as possible. I am sorry the Senator does not have enough grey matter to understand but I would continue. The restructured CSO—do you understand that?—would be in a position to deliver efficient and effective information that they collect and collate in a relevant and timely fashion.

Sen. R. Montano: What does that mean?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: I am sorry that the Senator does not understand efficient, effective, relevant and timely. The CSO would also be able to deliver reliable and high quality statistical information on the economic and social conditions of Trinidad and Tobago.

The specific objectives of the restructuring programme are to define the institutional model by which the CSO would operate. This would include the organizational structure, the functions, the processing of information, the programmes, the systems that are used and all the technology that is appropriate to ensure that the information is disseminated in a timely manner.

Mr. Vice-President, with regard specifically to the Agricultural Census 2004, a significant amount of preparatory work has already been completed. As I said previously, the guidance of the FAO has been paramount in ensuring that the information that is collected and the information that is disseminated, would redound to the benefit, not only of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine

Agricultural Census Order
[HON. C. ROBINSON-REGIS]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

Resources and the Tobago House of Assembly, but to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, under the Estimates of Expenditure for the Development Programme for 2004, \$5.5 million have been allocated to the CSO for the conduct of this census. In addition, an Agricultural Census Advisory Committee chaired by the Director of Statistics of the CSO, and an Agricultural Census Steering Committee chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources have been established to ensure the efficient planning and execution of the census. In addition to this, an Agricultural Census Unit has been established and staffed by statistical mapping and computer personnel to undertake the day-to-day planning and implementation of activities associated with the census.

The data set of up-to-date relevant agricultural statistics is critical to decision-making for the agricultural sector.

Sen. Prof. Deosaran: I was wondering whether the Minister could tell us whether the questionnaires have already been prepared, and if there is one that Senators could look at?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: The questionnaires have been prepared. I do not have one, but if during the course of the debate I could get one, I would pass it to Senators.

Mr. Vice-President, the Agricultural Census is of critical importance to the socio-economic development of Trinidad and Tobago. As a consequence of this, the CSO has developed a modernized comprehensive national agricultural statistical information system. The Ministry of Planning and Development and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources are of the view that this statistical information system would move this country's census collection and the development of agriculture, into the realm of other progressive countries that have used agriculture as a major basis of development of rural economies. Mr. Vice-President, I repeat that this Agricultural Census 2004, is in keeping with the World Programme of Censuses on Agriculture during the period 2000—2010 and I, therefore, seek affirmation of the Agricultural Census Order which has been placed before this honourable Senate for approval. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Sen. Dr. Jennifer Kernahan: Mr. Vice-President, thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this debate today on the Agricultural Census Order 2004 made by the Minister under section 5 of the Statistics Act, Chap. 19:02.

Mr. Vice-President, I sat in amazement while the Minister made her presentation, because she made some extremely startling disclosures as she introduced this Order.

The Minister informed us that the last agricultural census was made in 1982, and that normally these censuses should be conducted every 10 years. That means that a census should have been done in 1992 and in 2002. The PNM government was in power for the both years, and they did not exercise such a census and, therefore, the Minister has admitted to extreme dereliction of duty on the part of the PNM government with respect to agriculture.

The Minister went on to say that the information obtained from these censuses is extremely important to access policy and so forth. So, what the Minister has really told us today is—in spite of all the flowery words, the Government's expressed support for agriculture, and the importance of the agriculture sector in the economy and the importance of developing agriculture to diversify the economy away from the oil and gas base—that they have absolutely no information on agriculture since 1982 and, therefore, they could not have assessed any type of policy decisions that were made and implemented to see where agriculture is going. So, in spite of all the flowery words and all the fancy phrases, the PNM Government, through the Minister in her opening salvo, has admitted that they have done absolutely nothing for agriculture over the last 20 years or so, and there is nothing they can do to take that back at this point.

Mr. Vice-President, any government with a clear vision for national development would be very clear that national development must be based on sustainable agricultural development; it must be based on high agricultural productivity; self-sufficiency and a clear policy for food security, because food security is basic to all other economic activity. You cannot have a population that is malnourished and suffers from all kinds of infectious and chronic diseases because of lack of access to nutritious food.

Mr. Vice-President, if we understand that and if we agree with that, we would understand that a national agricultural census is an important collaborative and participatory assessment and planning exercise, if conducted with the required frequency in order to understand where and how your policies and programmes have impacted on the sector, and how you need to redeploy, reorganize and refocus. Such an exercise—in normal circumstances in a country where the Government really cares and does not pay lip service to the issue—would normally reenergize, revitalize and re-motivate the entire sector. It would be an exciting time for agriculturists and producers, because this is the point at which

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. DR. KERNAHAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

we would assess, as a nation, what strides we have made; what works and what does not work and how far our farmers have come; what levels of production we have reached and so forth and we would understand how to redeploy and redefine our resources and our objectives.

In the present climate in this country, I fear that the very opposite is true, because the situation in our farming sector—agriculturalists, practitioners, veterinarians and input suppliers—is actually at the lowest possible point that it could reach. I am not sure that it could go any further, because we have just seen tremendous blows delivered to this sector by this Government with the summary retrenchment of over 10,000 sugar workers; with over 7,000 canefarmers in dire jeopardy; food crop farmers have been brutalized along the East-West Corridor. The Agricultural Census should have been an exciting and energizing time where people could have participated freely and willingly, but I do not know to what extent the agricultural practitioners are going to co-operate with this Government in conducting this census.

2.15 p.m.

They are very disillusioned, unhappy and feel marginalized and discriminated against. The general attitude would be, why bother? What is the point? “Yuh comin to mamaguy us or what?” You have done nothing for agriculture. You have admitted that over 30 years have passed and you have refused to conduct these censuses to understand what is happening in the sector. What are you coming for now? You have already decimated this sector. This would be the general attitude of agriculturists when the enumerators go to interview them. It is a very sad and negative situation. This is one for which there is no easy answer at this point in time.

Thousands of people have a vested interest in the development of agriculture in this country. There are people who work in the transport, research, development and technical aspects of agriculture; there are also input suppliers and agri-processors. The data shows that agricultural contribution to the GDP is about 1.5 per cent. The farmers in this country are claiming with just cause that the contribution of agriculture to the GDP is underestimated because food, beverage and other products are calculated to the manufacturing sector instead of the agricultural sector. We have to look at that. When there are thousands of people with a vested interest in how this sector performs, you can see that there is a huge negative economic impact when the Government is in dereliction of its duty to promote and develop the sector and do the necessary technical work. You

are impacting negatively on a whole set of people outside the immediate farming environment. One of the saddest aspects is, that the total neglect, denigration, decimation, destruction and marginalization of the sector is taking place in a world environment that is very challenging, to say the least.

We are facing the coming of the Free Trade Association of the Americas (FTAA) supposedly in 2005. This would mean very serious challenges for our farmers and exporters. When we talk glibly about facing the challenges imposed by the FTAA and increasing the competitiveness in the agricultural sector, it is instructive to understand what has happened in other countries that have been exposed to this institution. The FTAA is an expansion of NAFTA from North America to all countries in Central and South America excluding Cuba. Talks on the establishment of this institution began in 1994.

I will give you an example of the sort of challenges that our farmers would face with the coming of the FTAA in 2005. Global Exchange is an organization that has done much research and brings information on matters of this kind. This is what they said:

“The Agreements Will Hurt Family Farmers

NAFTA has been a disaster for small farmers in the US and Mexico. By favouring the interests of agribusiness corporations over the needs of family farmers, NAFTA’s model of export oriented agriculture has slashed farmers’ income. Between 1995 and 2000, the prices US farmers receive for corn declined 33 percent, 42 percent for wheat, and 34 percent for soybeans. No wonder that since NAFTA went into effect 33,000 small farmers in the US have gone out of business now more than six times the pre-NAFTA rate. In Mexico, the price farmers receive for corn has plummeted to 45 percent in three years as agribusiness giants dump their subsidized corn there. At least half a million farmers have left their land. The FTAA threatens to make this crisis worse by encouraging even more overproduction.”

This is the reality of small farmers in Mexico and the US who have been under the system of NAFTA. This would be our reality, no doubt, as NAFTA expands to Central and South America including the Caribbean. When I speak about global challenges this is what I speak about. Facing these challenges would be extremely complex. You have to mobilize, educate and make your people understand what is involved. You have to unite your people to face these global challenges with the coming of the FTAA. What is happening in this country? Instead of mobilizing, uniting and organizing our people to face these challenges, we are undermining

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. DR. KERNAHAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

the core base of the producers and farmers who would be in the front line of this battle for survival. If you undermine, depreciate and refuse to give support to your front line soldiers in this battle for survival in the milieu of huge transnational corporations that can produce goods and dump them in our market as they have done in Mexico, way below production costs, how would you survive in an environment where you do not have the forces to react, produce and say that this is our country; we are nationalists and will produce food?

We have to mobilize the population to support the farmers by buying food locally. This is a time when we have to develop a nationalist outlook more than ever. We can no longer afford to go on with the old culture of business as usual by importing the fancy goods and services from foreign lands, or we would not survive the new era. This is the dilemma that this Government faces. I believe that the Government understands that. But there is self-interest involved here. They see these front line soldiers in the battle for sustainable agricultural development as their enemy because traditionally, they have not supported the government. Because of narrow, short-term personal self-interest you would destroy the front line forces that would be your bulwark against the influx of foreign products and continue business as usual and jeopardize the economic security of the country because of your short-term political self-interest.

I believe that it is very clear to all those who have considered and pondered this problem that we are in a bind. Unless this Government gets serious about national development and the good of this nation and forget about how many more years it can stay in power; how many more elections it can steal; how many more guns it can introduce into our political environment; how many more thugs, criminals and bandits it can get to support it in order to win successive elections; unless they get serious about national development and where we are going as a people, we would have a serious problem.

One does not have to do a census to understand the pain and marginalization of the agriculturists in our country. It is clear for all to see. The irony of the situation is what they have done. They have redeployed thousands of agricultural workers. They have told them to learn beauty culture, pipefitting and whatever. They take young inexperienced people into the system; tell them that they are apprentices and the hope of the future in agriculture, that they would carry the burden of agricultural development and food production. What nonsense! What shortsightedness! Agriculture is not only a science. It is an art. You must have a passion for agriculture; feel that love for the earth, land and its cycles. Nobody can teach you the hundreds of years of experience collectively that our farmers

have in agriculture. You cannot teach experience. You cannot pay someone \$50 to learn that experience. It is ridiculous. It is ludicrous that you would decimate your hard core depository of knowledge and bring young people and pay them \$50. It is just an excuse for building another support base.

The Government uses every excuse to take our hard earned money from oil and gas to shore up their support base, so that the young people would say that the PNM is doing something for them; they are earning \$50 a day with YAPA and they love PNM. How are you going to throw away hard core knowledgeable people and bring young people and pay them \$50 a day to be apprentices in agriculture? Even the young people, the children of farmers in this country are leaving agriculture because they have seen the brutality meted out to agriculturists in this country. They do not want to stay. Young people would be attracted to any sector because they see that it is profitable. They would not be attracted for any other reason but that. If they see that they can make a sustainable living out of agriculture; that there are incentives, technical and economic support; that it is relatively easy to get a piece of land; there is technical support to set up families and make a good living out of honest decent hard work, they would do it.

When you put those young apprentices in the agricultural sector and they see how farmers are actually on their knees—it takes over 14 and up to 20 years to get an agricultural lease. If you do not have an agricultural lease you would not be considered a farmer; be enumerated or given any incentives and the support. There are thousands of people like that. I know people who have lived and died waiting on agricultural leases in this country. At the same time, the PNM has discontinued the UNC's Programme of Accelerated Land Distribution.

You are putting those young people only to convince themselves that that is one area they would never get into. If the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources feels that he is encouraging them to stay in agriculture he is making a sad mistake. When you see the hardship and farmers paying \$2.35 per cubic metre for water—and livestock and diary farmers use tons of water because sanitation is so important—they do not make. It is impossible. Our farmers are fighting with one hand tied behind their backs. There is absolutely no support other than flowery words from this Government because they are on the wrong side of the fence. No words or expressions of solidarity would change that. This is the reality.

We have to make a radical change in direction if this country is not going to perish in flames. There is a connection between the lack of development and neglect in the agricultural sector. What happens to the rest of the society? We

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. DR. KERNAHAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

have seen reports that show that our population has a high level of malnutrition. The 1997 report showed that 13 per cent of this population was malnourished and this was extremely high in the context of the relevant figure for the Caribbean and Latin America that showed 12 per cent. We were above the average for the Caribbean and Latin America. When you talk about malnourished you are talking about under development; the lack of development of brain power; people who would perform below their potential; people who would not fulfill the sort of expectations that society has for them at school and other levels. When you talk about people like that you are talking about angry people who feel that society owes them something because they are not able to reach their potential and access the wealth that they see all around them. You are talking about people in this environment who feel they should turn to crime and pick up a gun. As the old saying goes, "A hungry man is an angry man." This is the connection that we have to make. We cannot see these things in isolation.

After 35 years of paying lip service to agriculture, what are some of the results of all this interest and caring that the PNM has had in agriculture? We are seeing an urbanization of the population and a loss of labour from the agricultural sector into urban environments because people are no longer able to sustain themselves in agriculture. A good example of that is the fact that when National Flour Mills stopped processing coconut oil, farmers migrated from Mayaro and Cedros and these places are now ghost towns because the basis for their livelihood has been undermined. The figure shows that migration away from agricultural areas has affected both men and women. In this document, Caribbean Labour Statistics Labour Force Economic Activity Trinidad and Tobago, we see that in 1991, 38 per cent of the total population was involved in agriculture and by 2001, it was 29.9 per cent. With respect to the female involvement in agriculture, in 1991, the labour force involved in agriculture was 7.7 per cent and by 2001, it was 4.9 per cent. You are seeing a definite trend away from agriculture into the urban environment.

There is a steady decline in the agricultural GDP. The contribution has come from over 5 per cent to about 1.2 per cent at this point in time. As I mentioned before, there is a higher than average incidence of malnutrition in the population in the Caribbean and Latin American.

There is a startling deforestation process in our country. Just recently, there were alarming headlines in Vessigny and La Brea where the villagers woke up one morning to find their forest and dam gone. Animals were dying all over the place; there was no habitat for them and beekeepers lost thousands of dollars.

Over the last 20 years we have seen a steady trend of deforestation from 55 to 50 per cent. This is done in the name of development. You have to balance development with how you treat the environment. In the first instance, you must have respect for the people who live in the environment and talk to them. Development is supposedly for people. You cannot come like God above and say, “This is for your good; take it or leave it”. You have to talk with the people; get a feedback and ideas from them on how they see development and their interests being served. The people in Point Fortin and La Brea have a history where they are lamenting the fact that they no longer have a beach at Clifton Hill. They have experience with development and they know what it is. You have to make them understand what you are going to do and get their approval and support.

This Government has a history of paying lip service—with “we care”—to the people. In that particular instance was that horrendous image of bulldozers, trucks and backhoes descending on these people like a plague and stripping their environment bare and leaving them wondering if they were living in South Africa under Botha. This is what is happening in this country in 2004. There is no point in the minister coming here and mouthing all these platitudes for support in agriculture and the environment. They have been exposed and everybody knows who they are and what their mission is.

We have to maintain some level of sanity in this whole mad rush for globalization and to comply with the rules of the global environment. Even the World Trade Organization (WTO) gave us that leeway which allows us to hold back and take measures in the interest of our national development, irrespective of the agreements that have been signed on a general basis.

I would like to read from a document, the *Draft Ministerial Declaration Revision November 2001*.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Excuse me. Can you repeat what the document is please?

Sen. Dr. J. Kernahan: *Draft Ministerial Declaration Revision November 2001*.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: What ministry?

Sen. Dr. J. Kernahan: This is a WTO document. The ministers drafted what they agreed to in 2001. Under agriculture this document says the following:

“We commit ourselves to comprehensive negotiations aimed at: substantial improvements in market access; reduction of, with a view to phasing out, all forms of export subsidies; and substantial reductions in trade-distorting domestic support. We agree that special and differential treatment

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. DR. KERNAHAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

for developing countries shall be an integral part of all elements of the negotiations and shall be embodied in the Schedules of concessions and commitments and as appropriate in the rules and disciplines to be negotiated, so as to be operationally effective and to enable developing countries to effectively take account of their developing needs, including food security and rural development.”

This draft definition has recognized that developing countries have to take certain steps to secure their policy of food security and rural development. It is incumbent on this Government to take every possible opportunity, having signed up under the WTO rules, to protect our farmers and local agribusiness industries. We are at liberty under the green box and blue box to subsidize our farmers in different ways. We have to take the opportunity to ensure that our farmers survive in this very hostile, stressful environment. We are calling on the Government at this point in time to take cognizance of the fact that this draft declaration allows them to take certain steps to protect our food security and develop the rural areas in the country.

We understand that it is important to take a very serious assessment of what is happening in agriculture. A census that is efficiently done has tremendous importance for this country. In the taking of the census we would understand our capacity to produce food in this country. That is extremely important. When you talk about food security you must have a very clear idea of your capacity in terms of human resource, infrastructure and your food storage capacity. This is basic to the knowledge of any government that is serious about the sector. The census would give an idea of whether the capacity to store food has increased or decreased over the given period of time. That is extremely important.

You would also get an idea of your future capacity to produce food. Based on what you have and what you want, you can extrapolate and determine what you want your future capacities to be given the state of your internal environment. The census would give you an idea of the status of your infrastructure; access roads and bridges; the ability of farmers to market their produce in a hygienic and comfortable manner. The status of the infrastructure is so important. The UNC administration, in the short time that it had been in office, built over 12 rural market outlets for farmers in this country. We opened the huge facility at Macoya in 2001 because we understood the importance of this infrastructural facility to the farming community. There is no point in developing and producing and there is no hygienic and comfortable outlet to market the goods.

The census must give us an idea of its profitability. If it is not profitable it would not attract young people, not even the YAPA students. After they make six months they would leave. This is what the PNM Government does not understand. You cannot throw money at everything. Money is not the solution for everything. You cannot bribe young people into agriculture. They have to see that it is a profitable sector and they would be able to make a good sustainable living for their families and themselves.

The census should give us an idea of the efficacy of the subsidies and support systems that the government would have put into the sector over the years in question. The smaller farmers complain that they are left out of the subsidy programme and the larger farmers monopolize it. We have seen it in the reports in the international agricultural environment where the small farmers suffer the most, while the large agribusiness enterprises attract all the subsidies, technical and economical support from their governments. This is an international phenomenon. When you take a census you would see where the subsidies have gone; what people have done with them; how much advancement they have made and you would know how to reorganize the focus of the subsidy programme. The data gleaned must give a basis for the reallocation of subsidies. Since this census has not been done for over 22 years, subsidy programmes administered by the ministry have been going on in the same old way with no assessment of whether the money is being used properly. There is no assessment.

A census would tell you how to access the money that is being invested in agriculture. As little as it is—only 2 per cent of GDP is being allocated to agriculture and it must be properly utilized so that there is equity across the board among the farmers in accessing subsidies. It is a known fact that the systems of the small and medium-sized farmers are generally most efficient. They should be targeted very heavily when introducing the subsidy programme. You have to keep analyzing, assessing and fine-tuning these programmes to ensure that you get value for money.

The efficiency by sub sector, size and product mix is another aspect that you would develop out of the census. At present, with goat and sheep, a sub sector of the livestock industry, the farmers complain that although we import \$25 million worth of sheep and goat products into this country, they access only 1 per cent of the market. A tremendous handicap to them is praedial larceny as it is to all other areas of the agricultural sector. Another handicap is the seasonality of the demand for these products. Apparently, the Muslim community has a great demand for these products only at certain times of the year. An assessment would help you to

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. DR. KERNAHAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

guide farmers into the appropriate product mix that would enable them to have a stable income throughout the year. This is the technical support our farmers need.

The Sugarcane Feed Centre is an important institution and one of the best-kept secrets in this country. They have been and are doing yeoman work in research and development in new integrated systems of farming that would enable our farmers to be sustainable and get an income that is accruable to them throughout the year instead of being seasonal.

One important thing that this census purports, is to analyze the trends in the use of chemical fertilizers, weedicides and insecticides. That is critical to the health of all the people in Trinidad and Tobago. There is a serious problem in this country with the overuse of chemicals by farmers who perhaps do not know better and feel that more is better. These farmers are very often manipulated and pushed into these situations by unscrupulous sales people who bring these products into the country and want to disseminate them as much as possible.

The cultural and educational levels of farmers in this country, as the census would show, are not as high as they should be. Most of them have not attended secondary school. The last census showed that most farmers were between 45 and 55 years of age and a very small number of farmers between the ages of 20 to 25 years. You have the profile of the average farmer in this country. It is a middle-aged person who has not accessed secondary education and technical education in farming but has the knowledge and experience of years of practice in agriculture. This is a serious issue that has to be addressed.

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, the Senator's speaking time has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. Dr. J. Kernahan: The National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO) undertook to take samples of farmers' produce from different retail outlets in Trinidad such as Chaguanas, Debe and Port of Spain because they are now involved as an intermediary in taking the produce and helping the farmers to package and export. Because of the strict sanitary requirements with respect to pesticide levels in developed countries and relatively small countries such as St. Lucia and Barbados, they have to do random testing at different points. They have found that over 50 per cent of the farmers' products are in excess of the minimum pesticide level that is accepted. This has

serious implications for the health of the people in this country. You would reject these products for export but they would end up on the local market and we would happily consume them without any idea of the deleterious effects they would have on us.

To make it worse, with all the caring the Minister has expressed for the agricultural sector, the Pesticide Board of the Food and Chemistry Division is not constituted. There is no Pesticide Board as we speak. The function of the Pesticide Board is to monitor what is happening with pesticides and keep abreast with which pesticides are banned from different countries and are still imported here. When I worked in the private industry, every year any agri-processing industry had to give a comprehensive report with respect to what products were used and where they were stored. This is important for the health and safety of the product of the agribusiness. You can understand the implications for the absence of a pesticide board. I call on the Minister to investigate this situation and put it right because it would have dire implications for the health of the people.

The concept of a national agriculture food and health institute has been bandied about and called for by the stakeholders since 2000. We are now in 2004 and the Minister comes to Parliament and professes to care about agriculture. When we were in government very serious steps were taken. We initiated steps to put such a body in place because it is so important. It would not only have implications for testing products that leave our shores but it would also ensure that our farmers are not embarrassed and their goods are not turned back because of high pesticide levels. It has implication for all the so-called cheap food that is being brought into our country. Unless we have the institution to test our food we cannot demand testing of foreign foods. You see the importance of setting up the institution to face this globalized and challenging environment. If they are going to tell us that we cannot export to them because we have certain deficiencies, why are we allowing any Tom, Dick and Harry to go to any part of this world to import products into our country and we do not know what we are eating and drinking and the standards used?

When we left, serious steps were being taken to set up this organization. At a farmers' forum in March 2004 this issue was discussed and they are suffering very badly from this lack of a focused approach in agriculture. If you say that you care about agriculture, these are the institutions that the agriculturists are calling for. Why are you not giving them the technical and social support that would enable them to function? These farmers do not want handouts or stipends to produce. They need technical support. Give them that and they would do what

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. DR. KERNAHAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

they have to do because they have the knowledge, experience and will to do it. You do not have to buy or bribe them to do it. The Government does not understand this. They feel that if you throw money at everything it would eventually work out and they would get another five years, and another, ad nauseam. We are demanding that the Government takes steps to set up this organization because the farmers are calling for it. They are suffering because they cannot function in this globalized environment.

I spoke about integrated farming systems and alternatives that might enable our farmers to face the hostile environment that is imminent. One of my pet peeves is that when this Government did a census in 1970, Caroni (1975) Limited inherited one of the largest herds of buffalypso in this country. By 1998, it was actually wiped out by brucellosis and nothing was done to revitalize or take care of this stock. Through Dr. Steve Bennet our country was regarded as one of the leading exponents in the art of rearing buffalypso for meat and milk. In India, over 25 factories have been set up to process the meat of buffalypso. Latin America and Venezuela have taken our research and knowledge and developed buffalypso and those farmers have developed sustainable agricultural enterprises. The buffalypso is languishing in the land of its birth. This is a shame and a crisis situation. We have opted for temperate livestock which gives low production and is unsustainable. We have neglected the tropical livestock because of our colonial mentality: Nobody told us this is the way to go.

Over the past 30 years the Government has allowed such an important resource to languish while our farmers are scattered all over the place and are unable to develop sustainable livelihoods. You have the whole gamut of the forward and backward linkages of this product. It is processed and developed for meat, milk and cheese which would carry agriculture GDP right up; put money in the hands of our farmers; promote rural development, social and gender equity and so many desirable economic indicators. They are just sitting on it and we are depending on the importation of the so-called cheap food that is dumped here at the expense of our farmers.

If we continue to import food in this manner—the food import bill is over \$2 billion—alienate and destroy the knowledge base for agricultural production in this sector; rape and destroy our environment of teak and the goods that we have; to pollute our rivers and streams with unrestricted and untested use of pesticides, where is our country heading? With the demographics that I have quoted, by 2015 it is estimated that over 79 per cent of this population will live in the urban areas as opposed to 63 per cent in 1975. We are becoming an urban society; one

that does not produce its food, is dependent of foreign supplies of food and ignores its resource base to feed our people, while we are supporting the farmers of distant lands. When we use our depleting resources of gas and oil and import and build a culture and taste for imported products, it is not easy to turn that around. When people are accustomed to eating caviar it is harder to go back to buffalypso.

When we promote this foreign lifestyle which is unsustainable because we are doing it based on a wasting asset—we are not diversifying. The non-oil sector grew by 0.6 per cent last year. When our wasting asset is finished we would have nothing to fall back on. When we no longer have \$2 billion and \$3 billion to import food, what would we eat? How will we survive in the cities with malnutrition, crime, hunger and violence? Now there is much food in the groceries; subsidies are being given out and everybody gets a stipend to do any old thing in this country. There are CCC, CCP, YAPA and HYPE. Money! Just come and you get it! You can access it and survive. When the free money, largesse and free rides are over our children and grandchildren will pay the cost of this criminal activity by this Government.

Thank you.

Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosaran: Mr. Vice-President, on the face of it the Motion is a rather simple one. It is a required exercise in our national development. The Minister was quite proper in laying the purpose and in her view, the benefits from this exercise. The Minister would appreciate the concerns that some of us have with respect to the question of agriculture.

I see this census in the context of the Minister's statement as an SOS for agriculture. It is no secret that agriculture, sadly so, has been on the decline and has reached a state of utter stagnancy starting from the last 20 years. There are several reasons but I do not think that now is the appropriate time for me to detail the circumstances and genesis of that decline and stagnancy. Agriculture needs to be put in intensive care. It is suffocating and being strangulated. It is mainly for that reason the optimism which the Minister exuded this afternoon is very welcome. The state of agriculture is one step away from being a corpse. I believe that the last Senator outlined some reasons which did not start last year or the last two years.

This stagnancy and sad decline in agriculture has a lot to do with the way we view economic development in this country and succumbing to the glory of oil

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. PROF. DEOSARAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

and obscuring the dignity of agricultural development. It is a colonial pattern, it seems to me, to ignore agriculture, perhaps because it had formed once upon a time the basis for indentureship and slavery. If that is the case, it is a matter of false pride and a very self-destructive tendency to surrender to the glamour of oil at the risk of the dignity of agricultural labour and development. That is putting it very briefly.

The problem with agriculture is not mainly wages and acreage. It reveals a psychological deficit promulgated by one government after another. If you are an agriculturist or a farmer, your status is immediately lower than that of an engineer, lawyer or white collar worker. That is the dividing line. In my view, especially when I look at the questionnaire to which I would refer in a short while, the problem is also psychological, not only political in terms of ethnicity and differentials in party support, but also the degradation of agriculture is unfortunately linked to the psychology of colonialism which we practise so very well in this matter of agricultural development.

3.15 p.m.

I listened quite intently to the erudite presentation by the Minister who has the capacity to stimulate; in fact, she has aroused my intellectual curiosity to the point where I requested the questionnaire. I want to take this opportunity to thank her very much for her kindness, although I believe it should have accompanied her presentation for the benefit of all, because the questionnaire is the instrument of delivery; the questionnaire is the heart of the matter. So through you, Mr. Vice-President; thank you very much, Madam Minister.

Mr. Vice-President, the success of the census, and in the Minister's words, if the results are going to be used to gauge the performance and future development of agriculture, the extent to which the results are valid, meaning, are you getting what you are looking for, and to the extent to which it is reliable, meaning, that the answers are correct and to that extent, would the Government policy rise or fall. So you would, therefore, forgive me if I spend a few minutes on certain aspects of the questionnaire.

In fact, I have to hold it with two hands; it seems so heavy. It is a questionnaire 30 pages long and at first glance it looks like a million questions. Necessary, I admit, and this is no criticism of the technicians or the experts, it has to cover scope as well as depth. So it is a problem but a necessary problem. But there are some worrying issues especially when we deal with the farming community, some parts of which are burdened by the problem of illiteracy. I

believe that is where the handbook produced by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) would be very useful.

Let us take the second page, Mr. Vice-President. It is quite useful, it is what we call the demographic basis of the census and then there is “Name of the holder” and then “To what ethnic group do you belong.” It is very interesting, “African, Indian, Chinese, Syrian, Lebanese, Caucasian, mixed, other.” [Laughter] Well, I think it is an interesting question. It is not only important but it would give us a moment to reflect on how our historical circumstances have moved from one point, even before 1982 when the last census was taken, and where we are at now in 2004.

We have to understand how the country moves, meaning, the different sexes, the different ethnic groups, and sometimes the different social classes. The latter, of course, would form the subject of another imminent debate. I would like to know how many Caucasians are in agriculture. Or, if they are, are they confined mainly for the production of flowers: roses and ferns? If so, are they playing the pivotal role of exporting? Are the other ethnic groups still, largely so, planting rice, cabbage, dasheen and cassava mainly for local consumption? To me, Mr. Vice-President, that is an important piece of information that the planners should know. We would like to know the extent to which tourism has captured or capsized agricultural development in Tobago.

These issues are vital for us to know because the document should not be used solely for economic planning and public policy, it is good for researchers, teachers, especially, if one wants to use the data for community colleges at the different levels in the post secondary education system. The people who go to those schools and those who are involved in agriculture are of different ethnic backgrounds. This information would certainly help them to locate themselves and to look at their respective futures. So it is a useful question especially for a census.

Mr. Vice-President, as I go along in this way I am trying to be helpful, not necessarily critical. What is critical is the exercise itself and because of the importance of it, I believe, even though we have just received the questionnaire, we would like to be as helpful as possible, in terms of looking at what the results would be used for. I must thank my colleague, Sen. Mary King, for pointing out this to me. Item 2.4 on page 3—this is a bit unfortunate because I understand the questionnaires are nearly completed but perhaps the Minister might find a way to deal with this as a supplemental question when the people go out in the field, though I also noticed that the census, presumably, had started on May 01.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Vice-President, if I may, just to allay the Senator's fears, in the circumstances where the legislation is very specific in that before the conduct of the census both Houses of Parliament must approve the Order and the Regulations. According to law it must be approved by affirmative resolution. As a consequence of that even though we have said we would have wanted the census to start on May 01, because of exigencies of the House, we have had to wait, so the census has not started. We are trusting that it could start by May 15, 2004, given the circumstances of what has happened in the House and so forth.

So any suggestion that you make with regard to the questionnaire we may be able to take it into consideration at this stage. I am not giving the undertaking that we will, but we may be able to do something.

Thank you.

Sen. Prof. R. Deosaran: Thank you very much, Madam Minister. The point I am making on 2.4, on page 3—the question is: “What is the main other economic activity of the enterprise?” There are four options. I was wondering, Sen. King, whether you could have a No. 5, including research, because we do know of some holdings which conduct some research. Research does not have to be laboratory research or rocket science research but it shows a seminal effort in people analyzing their vocation so as to improve it. I think whatever description one might give to research in that sense, especially in agriculture, it tells you the spirit that exists in this regard at the level of agriculture. I think that might be a point the Minister might wish to consider.

There is an interesting matter at 5.7. In my respectful view, Mr. Vice-President, governments have failed, not maliciously but perhaps unwittingly, to seize this problem of agriculture by its neck and to make it work for national development. I think part of the major reason is the one I referred to earlier on. We are therefore hoping this census and its data serve as a catalyst: let us see ourselves at present; where could we go forward positively; what are some of the things holding back the agriculturists and the Government as a whole?

There is a gross differential in wages. I am concerned, not only as a citizen but as a researcher, as a social scientist, especially someone who knows about the genesis of criminal behaviour and the role of relative deprivation in fomenting resentment against the system, and people feeling so deprived that they lose connection with the mainstream society and they feel alienated from the rest, because some others are getting so much more than they are getting. I refer to the

energy sector, Mr. Vice-President. We deny nobody the right to a higher wage but if it comes to a point where that higher wage is having deleterious consequences on other important sectors of the national economy, a responsible government ought to stand and make the picture clear. Nobody should be insensitive enough to put a constituency or any parochial interests before this wider picture because we would live to regret it as we are beginning to do with the strangulation of agriculture.

Of course, I do not want to get more deeply into the subject but I think it is enough to say that those who have ears to hear and eyes to see should both hear and see well in this particular matter. We are heading down the road to civil strife with this gross rising differentials in wages in this country.

I would have liked to see a question; perhaps it is here and if it is already here, please forgive me for my oversight—in terms of the agricultural transformations taking place in the agricultural community, the extent to which somebody who calls himself an agriculturist also has other means of income. [*Interruption*] Yes, it is in 5.7, but in a vague way. I would like to know what are their other occupational incomes, not what percentage they get from farming. I would like to know whether the other percentage comes from driving PH taxis, or from being a policeman because that is the diversification. The diversification in its overall sense means not only planting tomatoes, cabbage, dasheen and yam; it also means the occupational diversification that is affecting the agricultural community. You can get a signal as to whether your occupation in agriculture would be sustainable, durable or not, so you want signals.

The Minister did speak about having the census data used for future development so your questions therefore must reflect that objective, in my view. If you look at question 21.5—and the previous speaker did raise the issue—we are eating and drinking poison in this country through the extravagant use of fungicides and weedicides and, sadly, we do not know.

I do not have to quote the reports I have seen from Cariri and different agencies responsible. There is a unit on Frederick Street which has to do with chemical analysis—[*Interruption*] Food and Drug. Come on man, they have got to get busy and tell the Government what is the picture like out there in the gardens of Aranguéz, Caroni, Toco, Mayaro and so on. When I pass and look at some of those places every man, woman and child has on his or her back a spray-can. Mr. Vice-President, if you see the labels of the bottles on which the spray-can depends, you will recognize the veracity of my concern. We eat the cabbage because it looks green but it looks green because it is polluted with the weedicide.

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. PROF. DEOSARAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

The tomatoes look red not because they are genuinely nutritious but because they are polluted with weedicide. This is dangerous! We are being slowly poisoned but we do not know it! The doctors suspect but they also have to depend on the chemical laboratory analysis, which we should have much more of by the Food and Drug Unit on Frederick Street.

Just as an aside, Mr. Vice-President, I passed there last week and looked at this place, it is dilapidated; the sign is falling off, one would never believe that is the Food and Drug Unit on Frederick Street, an important unit like that. But more than that they have staffing problems. Of course, I do not want to get too deeply into that because it might take us into wider terrain.

The Minister is serious enough and I believe her, in terms of trying to get agriculture back on the move, working together with the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. I am hoping that she would take the indication I have given on the role and importance of the Food and Drug Unit and revise it in terms of question 21.5 because there is something serious happening here to the population who are becoming innocent victims of this massive widespread use of insecticides, fungicides and weedicides.

On question 23.7: "State the problems encountered in the marketing of your products. More than one circle cannot be shaded. Loss of market, high cost of transport, post harvest loss, low prices, lack of market space." If I were a farmer I would circle all five because this is a disaster area—the marketing of the people's labour. All you have to do, Mr. Vice-President, even if you have to get a ticket to come from Tobago to the Port of Spain market and see the congestion, the hardships; what is almost physical brutality on those farmers waiting in their cars stretching for miles around the corner, through the Priority Bus Route. They have to reach there between 1 o'clock and 2 o'clock in the morning with their foodstuffs. That is not the only place. Tears almost came to my eyes when I saw those poor people.

This census has to be used to ameliorate those hardships otherwise what is the point? It cannot be just a statistical endeavour with a pretty report on the shelf. It has to reach the flesh and blood and the human suffering, all of which are involved historically and contemporaneously with the issue of agriculture in this country. This is not only a technical exercise for intelligent people to conduct, this is a matter of almost life and death for the farmers themselves. It is for that reason I am taking this matter very seriously. There are families I know who depend on

agriculture for their livelihood and I welcome the census. It is, of course, unfortunate that since 1982 nothing has been done but the Government must be commended for taking the initiative even at this stage. Other governments should have done it, and they could have done it.

Mr. Vice-President, in terms of land, this census should tell us more precisely how much agricultural lands, since 1982, have been taken away and given to other purposes: private housing developments; large conglomerates, or for squatting. I hope this census tells us, more exactly, where so much of our agricultural lands have gone and to what purpose; how much is left and to what purpose would it be put? That would mean that the data would be put to good use in terms of the reflection and projection for national development.

Of course, I hope the field interviewers are well trained because I see you are asking: "What percentage of your crops is used." I do not know if they would use a calculator. How could they estimate what percentage of this is used for that, 25 per cent or 50 per cent? We know it would be an estimate but I believe the interviewer should make sure these questions are answered in the way they are intended to be answered. A word like "harvesting", I do not know how many farmers in Trinidad would understand the word "harvesting" in the context in which it is used, but that is the role of the field interviewer to elaborate and explain.

For some of us who have experience with this length of questionnaire—as I say you have so many things, even in fine print that are necessary. I could imagine Mr. Ramgoolam sitting to answer this from somebody from the CSO. It is a trying experience. I am prompted to suggest, although it is for their benefit that perhaps a fee be given to those farmers, some measure of comfort or some incentive. I do not think it could be answered as altruistically as what we expect. I have been in the business for some time and I can tell you, it is not a bribe, but if you could consider giving them some stipend or something that would ease their discomfort, I think, Mr. Vice-President, that might go a long way in getting a fuller account of what you are searching for.

People suffer from questionnaire fatigue, they start answering very good, they take their time but by the time they reach the third page, it is yes, no; yes, no, because they want to finish and go to sleep, they want to finish to go and eat, they want to finish and, perhaps, go in the toilet, which is a more urgent demand on their physiology than hunger. So there are practical problems which I am trying, with respect, to suggest to the implementers.

I have confidence in the Minister in terms of these matters. I am quite sure she will explore the possibility, if not with all positive results, but that she will

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. PROF. DEOSARAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

explore the possibility. I hope this census leads to, perhaps, once again, the establishment of a national register of farmers in accordance with all the details you have here; small farmers, big farmers and so on, more precisely than what CSO traditionally gives us. It is very unfortunate, I must be frank about it, that agriculture has been used, undeservingly so, for narrow political purposes. Perhaps it is coincidental and very unfortunate that most of our farmers live in the areas dominated by one ethnic group. But we look forward like optimistic patriots that we would extricate ourselves from those colonial humbugs, as it were, and we would have a free society based more on meritocracy than our ethnic background, especially when an industry like agriculture has to suffer through narrow political electioneering.

Mr. Vice-President, as one of my final suggestions for those of us who know about this business of having data and reports and a lot of money being spent on such reports, this one should not remain on the shelf for too long. I do not mean passing the report to Parliament or making an announcement on the Government Programme. I would wish that the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources establish a well equipped unit of soldiers, as it were, to take different parts of the results very deeply into the communities that matter. They should not only depend on the TV for this type of, what I would call, not only mass education but mass mobilization. Let them know how important the results are; let them have this mirror onto themselves so they would know what they have said, how it reflects upon them and to use it as a paradigm for motivating the farming community or, at least, taking them out of intensive care. I am quite sure the people at the CSO and in the ministries would be able to develop that suggestion much more than I have time to do now.

Mr. Vice-President, we have to depoliticize agriculture. The statistics must have nothing to do with politics and neither should agriculture. As long as we keep agriculture under the heavy, ugly hand of ethnicity, for so long would agriculture, against our national interest, suffer.

We have ignored agriculture for different reasons; one being the wage differential, and it is getting worse. The wage differential would get worse. I have not seen any great sign of hope in having a better balance between those who work in agricultural communities. I would not even refer to CEPEP and URP; the thing is obvious.

How would the Minister motivate our farming communities, especially the smaller ones who depend on their livelihood for their children and single mothers

who depend on farming or agriculture for their livelihood? I am not speaking about the big agriculturists who are now purchasing lands, “*vaille que vaille*” in hundreds of acres, snatching it from agricultural development and building those expensive houses, which few people could afford. Mr. Vice-President, the country is being stifled from one end to the other. We are going to pay a heavy price for all this neglect, whether committed wittingly or unwittingly; soon enough we are going to be paying a very heavy price for this. While we keep chattering about globalization and being on the cutting edge of this and that, and of the knowledge economy—I do not see why the knowledge economy cannot be linked to the agricultural economy. That means you would improve the knowledge base of the agriculturists through the particular area for one of research, understanding and information, such as exists in the proposal I just made, to take the results across the country without fear or favour. Do not only go in the UNC areas or in the PNM areas; treat everybody as somebody when it comes to agricultural development.

Mr. Vice-President, the income from oil would not reduce poverty; the income from oil would aggravate poverty by creating wider disparities between those who already have high incomes and those who have less. That is the reality of the economics of this country. We would have to depend on agriculture if we want to close that poverty gap or if we want to make the poor more sustainable and independent. It is agriculture but, of course, we would have heard this several times before. That is why I welcome the opportunity to make my intervention. I commend the Minister for the way she has presented the Order but I think this is perhaps her last chance—this is the last train to San Fernando—to take agriculture from the intensive care unit and put it on a track of firmer sustainability.

Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President.

3.45 p.m.

Sen. Robin Montano: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. You are not supposed to hear crosstalk, and therefore you would not have heard me asking the Minister, when she was making her contribution, if she understood the big words that she was using. I was doing so for a purpose. I really hoped that when we were talking about agriculture and an agricultural census, we would have had something more meaningful—something that we could all understand—instead of hearing about all these programmes with the Central Statistical Office and they are going to do this, that and the other; the information, the management and the structures—all these wonderful words.

I was hoping that we would get down to basics because I was taught that if ever you want to understand a problem, you should go back to basics. The first

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. R. MONTANO]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

problem I see, as my friend Sen. Dr. Kernahan has said, looking at the report of the Auditor General for the fiscal year 2002 to September 30, 2003, the percentage of total expenditure of this country's budget on agriculture was less than 2 per cent—a lousy 1.9 per cent. Bells go off in my head and I say: What is going on?

Then I look at the last agricultural census, the 1982 agricultural census, and I see that sugarcane formed 32 per cent of the crops that were produced by this country in 1982. We all know that this Government has licked up Caroni (1975) Limited. What will happen to that 32 per cent? I would have thought that on a day like today when we are discussing the census and what is going to happen, we would have heard something about this enormous 32 per cent that is now going to be missing.

I was listening to the lovely language—the one thing you have to say about this Government is that they know the words to all the tunes; unfortunately they cannot play the music. We are getting the words left, right and centre—beautiful, beautiful words—but we are not getting any action and there is, as I said before in other debates, a total and complete disconnect.

The Minister came back with this nonsense about Vision 2020, but again she has not told us about the benchmarks for Vision 2020. “This census is a great thing for us to go forth for Vision 2020.” Well, hello, you are going to Vision 2020 in agriculture. All right! What are your benchmarks? You have been in office since December 2001. It is now May 2004. Let us just stick with agriculture. You had decided that you would be producing so much by 2004; by 2008, you will be getting so much; by 2010, you will be getting so much and you will be doing this; you will have so many people in this section of agriculture; so many people in that.

As I understand it, the purpose of a census such as this—we are asking and we will support this afternoon—is to fine-tune policy so that you know whether or not your policies are working. You put in certain initiatives and you know whether they are working or not. As my friend, Sen. Prof. Deosaran has said, you do not need a census to know that the marketing of the products is a total disaster. Why are we asking the question here? Anybody can tell you that the marketing is a disaster.

If you have policies that you have instituted, then the question becomes relevant because now you have instituted the policy. If you know that you have done certain things with the marketplace—you have done certain things to present

goods, to make them come to market and all the other relevant questions—and now you are doing the census to see whether or not the policies you have sought to implement are working, and if they are not working, why are they not working? If this one is working and this one is not, why not? This is what you are doing, but you do not hold a census out of the blue and say you have not had a census for 22 years so you will have one because it looks good and it will make people think you are doing something. Pull the other one, it has bells on it!

You do not do something just for the sake of doing it. You do something like this for the purpose of achieving something—when you have a policy and you want to see if it is working. If you have no policy, what are you hoping to achieve by the census? The Minister has not told us. In her presentation she said beautiful words, big words. I was teasing her: Do you understand what you are saying? What does she do? She pronounces the words slowly as if it would help. So what? So she knows big words. She knows how to string a sentence together with big words, but does she know what she is talking about? A simple basic question: What is she hoping to achieve with this? Can she say it in one sentence? I was taught by my old English professor at university that if you cannot say something in one sentence, you cannot say it at all. You know what? He was right. In one sentence, What are you hoping to achieve with this, using small words?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Information.

Sen. R. Montano: Does not that sound great? Information. To do what with the information? I think sometimes that I have landed on another planet.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Will the Senator give way? Plan.

Sen. R. Montano: What?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Plan. To do what with the information? Plan.

Sen. R. Montano: Plan what?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Another word? For the future. That is a sentence. Information; plan for the future.

Sen. R. Montano: Information; plan for the future. Great! Does anybody here, Mr. Vice-President, understand that? I will give way. You say information planning for the future. Great! Now what are you going to do about this 32 per cent for sugar that has gone down the drain? What are the plans? I keep on saying that there is a total and complete disconnect between this Government and the society. There is only one reason for politics. There is only one reason for

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. R. MONTANO]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

government and that is to make life better for the governed. There is no other reason. It is not to make life better for the government.

What did they plan and achieve after the 1982 census? They were in power in 1982, so what was the planning that came out of that and what were the policies? I thought that we could at least have had the benefit of hearing something on that. Hopefully we still will, but let us hear about it. I do not want to hear big words like “planning”, “information” and “data”. Those sound great, but I want to know precisely what you are going to do. What sort of plans are you coming with? It is just like Vision 2020. What are your benchmarks? Oh, Vision 2020 is a process. Really, but you say that you want to achieve developed society status by 2020. What do you mean by that? To this day, I have never heard a proper answer and then they say ask a proper question; talk about something else. Why? Because it is embarrassing. Now we come here and we say that this is important. What is not important is filling us up with big words. What is not important is that you come here and you “cofuffle”. You bring a whole bunch of snowballs down on people’s head and say: Do you not understand? No, I am sorry. Explain it to me! It is like the story of the emperor with no clothes and everybody looks at the naked man walking down the street and says: How beautiful his clothes are! Look at the ermine, the fur, the jewellery! Until a little boy says he has no clothes. Everybody then realizes the simplicity of the child and they have to laugh. Talk in plain, simple English.

Let us understand what you are about and then we can judge. But you come here with the big words about the CSO, “performance” and “information”. [Interruption] No, “CSO” is not a big word; the CSO, the performance, the information, the management of the division; the structural reformation, that sort of thing. [Interruption]

Look, Mr. Vice-President, everybody in this Parliament understands my point except them. They understand the point, but they do not want to answer it, for a very simple reason. If they answer it, then people will begin to see that they are devoid of any real content.

You ask a question about the respondent’s ethnicity—whether he is Indian, Caucasian, African, mixed or other. Why is this important? I have been to Brazil. In Brazil, there are people ranging in colour from both ends of the spectrum. The vast majority is coffee coloured in Brazil, but if you tell Pele, the world’s famous footballer, that he is an African or that he is an African-Brazilian, he would get angry. He would say that he is Brazilian.

Are we perpetuating the divisions in our society? Why are we doing this? Why is it important? I cannot see a reason why it is so important, unless of course we are looking to create further divisions; unless you want to know where the balance or imbalance lies and you want to continue the discrimination that this Government has become so infamous for. Is that why you are doing it?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Will the Senator give way? Thank you very much. Mr. Vice-President, let me say from the outset—not to wait until I have to give my conclusion—that the United Nations is asking for this kind of information. The ILO is asking for this kind of information. The Human Rights Committees are asking for this kind of information. The FAO, who assisted us in structuring this questionnaire, demands this kind of information. This information is not abnormal information when getting historical data. I do not know if you understand the word “data”? When getting historical information, if you do not understand “data”; this information is quite normal in terms of assessing the kind of population and the demographics of the population with which we are dealing. I do not know what is the small word for “demographics”—the spread, the area, the split. I am so accustomed to using a word like “demographics” that I am sorry if you do not understand it. Sen. Prof. Deosaran, who is accustomed to obtaining statistics—I was going to say collating, but that might give you some problems—has indicated that this kind of information is not abnormal, so do not try to make it an issue when it is not an issue.

Sen. R. Montano: I am sorry. First, I do not see that this is a normal thing. Secondly, because somebody from outside tells me I have to do something—George Bush told us that he wanted our support for Iraq—do we have to do it? I do not buy that.

The point is: What are you hoping to achieve with this census? What policies are you hoping to test? This is what it is all about. You can go ahead and obfuscate. Do you know what that means? It means “to cloud”, “to hide”—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Cloud? You mean like “nimbulous” clouds?
[*Laughter*]

Sen. R. Montano: No, no, no. It means “to cloud, to hide, make unclear”. In any event—

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, whereas we appreciate a little humour, I would really prefer if you would allow Sen. Montano to complete his contribution.

Sen. R. Montano: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

Mr. Vice-President: Please direct your contribution to me!

Sen. R. Montano: Mr. Vice-President, thank you so much for your protection. I was more or less reaching the end of what I wanted to say.

What is important and what this honourable Senate and the country should be told is what exactly, and not nebulous words like “information”, “planning” and “data”—but specifics. What exactly are you hoping to achieve? Tell us this in the simplest language, so that we know what we can expect from you; so that we know what standards to hold you to. We will then know whether or not, according to your words, you are succeeding or failing. When you come with things that are all over the place and there is nothing that anybody can go away and hold their hat on, when we come to criticize and say you have not done this or that, which you promised to do, you can say you did not promise at all. Look at what we promised—and you can spin it around.

The time has come for politicians on all sides to stop hiding behind words and statements that can be taken in other contexts and for the politicians of this country to be very specific about what they say and mean and what they are going to do. The time has come for the public to hold all of us accountable and to say: You said you were going to do this and you have not done it; or, you said you were going to do this and you have delivered. The time has come for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago—whether it is a PNM government, a UNC government or an ABC government—to keep faith with the population and for its policies and intentions to be crystal clear, so that there can be no mistaking, no misunderstanding and no twisting of its words. This is what we ask and this is the standard to which we will hold ourselves, this Government and any other government.

Thank you very much.

Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for giving me an opportunity to speak on a subject that all the previous speakers have agreed is a most crucial one at this stage in our development.

I welcome the census in principle and commend the Minister—I hope Sen. Montano does not feel that I am too bright—on her very clear presentation. I see the census as a gesture indicating an interest perhaps in the development of agriculture. I say a gesture because, although the contribution was clear, I agree with Sen. Montano that there was not enough of a policy being articulated which would make use of the census.

This information would be useless if it was not related to the planning and development of land. Week after week one is complaining. Where is the Planning and Development of Land Bill? It would be useless, if it were not associated with a comprehensive training programme in agriculture and with a decision that in the ordinary primary and secondary schools, agriculture should also be emphasized. It would be useless if we did not know anything about the Government's plan to support agricultural research in the country. It would be useless if we did not see some thinking about the kind of small country we are and the need for the use of a technology appropriate to the size of the country.

I am very frightened by one of these questions, the one that asks about machinery and equipment; tractor, bulldozer, all kinds of mechanical aids for cutting grass and so on. I do not think that this country can afford to go into large equipment. We need to find the right size of tractor; we need to develop cooperatives where there is a big piece of equipment, to be shared by different people. We need to know that the Government has considered the size of the country and has thought about the kind of machinery and equipment it would use and what arrangements it would make for the full utilization of the pieces of machinery and equipment that are brought in.

I welcome the census as indicating a need to develop all the regions of the country. We are suffering from a depopulation of many of the rural areas, leading to overcrowding in inner cities, pressure on housing, crime and violence—you do not know who is living where—and vagrancy. Many of the social ills at the present time have to do with the fact that people are leaving the countryside and going to the urban areas where they have to steal and live under terrible conditions. I do not think I have to spell the point out.

I would like to see a very clear connection between the Government's thinking about agriculture and its willingness or intention, as Sen. Prof. Deosaran has pointed out, to deal with the problem of poverty. You will not solve the problem of poverty in this country, unless you develop agriculture. I agree totally with that point.

I hope, Mr. Vice-President, that we would really think hard about how the development of agriculture can help us to solve the crises that are now threatening civilized life in this country—the unemployment, the crowding, the pressure on the roads, pressure on housing, the kidnapping. All of these social ills are connected to an unsettlement that has taken place in the country—a drive or a drift to the urban centres and a despising of the kind of work that can be done in the country; the loss of a sense of a connection to the land; the loss of respect for

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. PROF. RAMCHAND]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

work. These are the things that make a people belong to a landscape and that make a place really belong to the people. Agriculture gives us a stake in our native land. There are long traditions of a connection between culture and agriculture.

Mr. Vice-President, I really wish I had another 30 years to live. I would take advantage of whatever they were offering and live on a farm. Then I could read my Shakespeare, read my Wilson Harris for part of the day and plant my stuff. I would love to be a farmer. I cannot think of anything more dignified than being an educated farmer.

We need to let people understand how valuable farming is and let them understand that education is not the enemy of agriculture. When you are educated, you do not have to say you have finished with that. When you are educated, you should say, "Ah, now is my time. I am an aristocrat on the land because I have my mind and I have my body and I am going to work this thing." I really wish that the Government would do as Sen. Montano asked—adumbrate an overall policy to which this census is going to be related.

Some years ago the previous government brought to this Senate something called the Tourism Development Act where they spelt out a number of incentives they were willing to give for tourism projects. At the time of the debate, I said it was more necessary to have a bill spelling out the incentives to agriculture than the incentives to hotel projects. Incentives to hotel projects are really for the big boys. Incentives to agriculture are for anybody in the society. I agree with Sen. Prof. Deosaran that too many people are buying up 100 and 200 acres of land and pretty soon, if the Germans do not take it, our capitalists will take it. Ordinary citizens will not get their two, three or five acres of land to do some farming. We need to encourage small farming in this country.

Mr. Vice-President, there are other issues involved. Sen. Dr. Kernahan spoke about food security and self-sufficiency in food. If you go back to the *Hansard* and read some of the things Mr. Jeffrey Stollmeyer said, some of the things that Sen. Prof. Spence said and some of the things I myself said, we have been singing this tune, we are getting hoarse and nobody is taking it on. Now the world is at war with itself and we will find that all the stuff we want to import, we might not be able to get it because the Iraqis are killing the Iranians and this one is killing that one. Everybody is killing himself, nobody is planting anything and we are going to starve. In a world that is at war, there will be shortfalls in production and if you do not have your own thing growing, you will be under heavy pressure.

Even if the rest of the world were producing, we still need a measure of self-sufficiency. Fuel prices and transport costs are going up. Apples are not going to be cheaper than oranges for much longer. It is shocking to hear farmers. “I see you are selling apples and grapes now”, and they say, “It is easier; it is cheaper and I make more money when I bring in a container of grapes and apples than if I try to plant because I do not have roads, fellows are stealing my things; the cost of fertilizer is too great; I cannot get chemicals to beat off the insects and it is too much hard work. It is easier to import.”

I do not know. I am a kind of tough, draconian man. I would make it harder to import. While I do that, I will give incentives. I will help you to grow your own stuff. I think we really need to think hard about some of these issues.

Government after government whores after foreign investors. They are wooing them here to exploit natural gas and oil. We do not want people to exploit oil and natural gas. They are not taking any risks. If I am going to whore after a foreign investor, I am going to tell them to come here to develop industries based upon our agricultural production so that oranges would not be rotting half the year and we cannot get anything for the other half. It is the same with mangoes and so many tropical fruits. I have two pommerac trees and I do not know what to do with pommerac. You tell people come and take pommerac. No, put it in a bag and bring it for me. That is the thing about farming.

When Dr. Williams first came into power, everybody laughed when he wanted to can toupri tambou. There is nothing wrong with canning toupri tambou. If you can toupri tambou, I will never buy water chestnuts. You can use toupri tambou instead of water chestnuts in all your Chinese foods.

Jams, jellies, condiments, perfumes, cosmetics, local Viagra—[*Laughter*] We have bois bandé. People are buying Viagra. We should be selling bois bandé instead. People are coming here taking the bois bandé and making something else and people right here are buying it back.

If you know how it makes me sick to pass around the savannah. [*Interruption*] I do not know about it. I only hear about it. If you know how sick it makes me to walk around the savannah, to see what our coconut industry has come to. We have reduced the coconut industry to water nuts. You go in the supermarkets, you get coconut milk powder from Thailand; coconut cream from other countries and soya bean oil. It is becoming harder and harder to get coconut oil.

A few years ago, I had to fight a great battle in the newspaper when I used to write my column, trying to establish that the temperate world was “bad talking”

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. PROF. RAMCHAND]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

coconut oil as having all kinds of cholesterol and I had to use information from the United States Congress that when the lobby tried to get the United States Congress to put a label on coconut oil saying that it was harmful, Congress said, “No, go back and do the research”. When they did the research, they found it was not true. There were people at UWI in Jamaica who established that coconut oil is not bad for you. My mother used to rub me down with coconut oil all the time. She used to fry fish with coconut oil and I feel that that was good for me. I do not have any heart problems.

We have to understand the richness of our agriculture and our vegetables. I am coming to more than economic reasons why we have to do that. I cannot resist talking about the disgrace concerning the sugar industry. I will go to my grave not understanding why it is cheaper to import sugar than to produce it. I do not understand the economics that say it is cheaper to import sugar than to produce it. *[Interruption]* No. *[Interruption]* I do not know what they were doing. *[Interruption]* I hear you all were going to do that too, so do not come with that.

For years people have been making huge profits from rum. That does not count as Caroni profits; it is not counted as profits from the sugar industry. So the sugar industry, which is the poor man, is making rum makers rich. The sugar industry, which is the poor man, is making sweet drink manufacturers rich and nobody is looking at the value of the sugar industry to the other industries in the country. Nobody is asking why the sugar industry is self-sabotaging—that it is not producing rum. Why are we not taking advantage of the finest cocoa in the world? They let people in Holland do it to produce all these chocolate liqueurs. Why can we not do that?

We have the best coffee in the world—Arabica coffee. The Jamaicans are buying our Arabica coffee and mixing it with Blue Mountain coffee and selling it as Blue Mountain blend. Do you know that Blue Mountain Blend tastes better than Blue Mountain coffee although it costs less, because our Arabica is there in forming it with our quality coffee? Why successive governments have failed to encourage agriculture for economic and cultural reasons is a great mystery to me.

When I came back from studying abroad, I put a ban on my household—no apples, no grapes, no foreign fruits in the house. Up to now, the only time I eat apples and grapes is when I get them free. If you are stupid enough to buy it and you give me, I will eat it. When I go to tea from the Senate, I always take a grape or two or a slice of apple because I do not buy it. The fact is I heap my plate with pineapple and pawpaw because I like them better. I just want to go home and tell my wife I got some grapes

today. That is why I take the grapes. [*Interruption*] I sometimes put one or two in my pocket, yes. It is weird that the fruit we produce is neglected by us in preference to three-month old apples which have no nutrition; six-month old grapes that have no nutrition. I do not know why we take them.

Sen. Prof. Deosaran says agriculture is being throttled and stifled and is in intensive care. Intensive care? It is not in intensive care because nobody is caring for it. It is languishing on the floor outside the hospital. Nobody is taking care of it. Do not talk about the vegetables and do not talk about forestry and forest products. Look at what they are doing with the teak industry. People import our teak and use it as a veneer on other types of wood and they are selling it as teak furniture. We have the real teak to produce teak furniture and we sell it to foreigners.

Some years ago, the scientists at UWI did research on flour and they found a way of cutting the wheat import bill by 50 per cent. You could mix yam flour with wheat flour. Encourage your farmers to grow the yam. Give them something to do. Let them grow the yam, guarantee them a price and you could hardly tell the difference between the blend of yam flour and wheat flour and wheat flour alone. You can make good paratha; you can make good fried bake; you can make good fat bake with yam flour mixed with wheat flour 50/50, and nobody has taken it up.

Part of our problem has to do with the inherited lifestyle. It is colonialism and the colonial mentality that is operating and making us neglect agriculture the way we do. The other day I went to the supermarket—and I have to advertise it—I saw Holiday Foods plantain chips. If you eat that, you would stop eating potato chips. If you eat that, you would not even make plantain chips at home. It is wonderful. Let them bring potato chips, but the markets will push them out if we encourage the people who are making the plantain chips.

Mr. Vice-President, I do not know if you go to cricket. A lot of peanuts are sold. I do not know from where we are importing the peanuts, but this country should be growing peanuts.

We are talking about a policy and a census and I believe that the census would be quite useless if the Government does not do this development and planning of land and work out a policy for the kind of crops we want to encourage, not only for import substitution, but also for greater nourishment, taste and quality.

This is my last piece of diatribe, although it is not the end of my speech—I see you are looking at the clock—so I would just finish this point. When we were small, especially when I was at college, we had a teacher who knew we all came from poor backgrounds and he made some cages in the dormitory and taught us to

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. PROF. RAMCHAND]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

“mind” chickens. We used to have to cut water grass, buy dry corn and chip coconuts to feed the chickens. Amazingly, these chickens used to lay eggs and these eggs used to hatch into chickens. There were layers; there were chickens you could eat. Now I hear that we have a poultry industry for which we have to import feed; we have to import the baby chicks; we have to import the layers. What kind of industry is that? It is an assembly industry. Chickens like they do not walk about. I am going to talk later about the pesticides and the fertilizers and so on and the force feedings.

Go to Maracas Bay; there are nice strapping fellows. They have breasts. I am sure they have these chicken breasts from the chicken that they are eating. The population is being deformed by this reliance upon the force-feeding that goes on in the poultry industry. If we develop our agriculture and we develop our own industries, I am sure the food supply would not only be more secure, but also it would be healthier.

Mr. Vice President, I think you would like me to stop now. I would continue after tea, unless you want me to spend another 15 minutes.

4.30 p.m.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, you would recall that under item 3, I announced that I had given permission to the following Senators: Hon. Danny Montano, Hon. Knowlson Gift, Hon. Rennie Dumas and Hon. Christine Kangaloo to be absent from today’s sitting. Two Senators were later sworn in. I just received the instruments of appointment for the other two Senators. I am seeking the consent of this honourable Senate to proceed to have those two Senators sworn in at this time.

Agreed to.

SENATORS’ APPOINTMENT

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from Her Excellency the President, Dr. Linda Savitri Baboolal:

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By Her Excellency DR. LINDA SAVITRI BABOOLAL,
Acting President and Commander-in-Chief of the
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/ Linda Baboolal
Acting President.

Senators' Appointment

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

TO: MS. BONNIE-LOU De SILVA

WHEREAS Senator Christine Kangaloo is incapable of performing her duties as a Senator by reason of her absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, LINDA SAVITRI BABOOLAL, Acting 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, BONNIE-LOU de SILVA, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with immediate effect and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Christine Kangaloo.

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 4th day of May, 2004."

"THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Appointment of a Temporary Senator

By Her Excellency DR. LINDA SAVITRI BABOOLAL,
Acting President and Commander-in-Chief of
the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/ Linda Baboolal
Acting President.

TO: MR. FRANCIS PAU

WHEREAS the President of the Senate has temporarily vacated her Office of Senator to act as President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago:

AND WHEREAS the Vice-President of the Senate is acting President of the Senate:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, LINDA SAVITRI BABOOLAL, Acting President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 40(2) and section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, FRANCIS PAU, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with immediate effect and continuing during the period that Senator Dr. Linda Savitri Baboolal has temporarily vacated her Office as Senator.

Senator's Appointment
[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

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 4th day of May, 2004."

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Sen. Bonnie-Lou De Silva and Sen. Francis Pau took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

Mr. Vice-President: At this time we shall take the tea break and resume at 5.15 p.m.

4.37 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.15 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

AGRICULTURAL CENSUS ORDER

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: Mr. Vice-President, I do not propose to contribute much more to the length of today's sitting. I had hoped to welcome Senators De Silva and Pau on behalf of the Independent Senators. I am sure one of my colleagues will do so at a later stage.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to look at the questionnaire for a moment. I agree with one of the previous speakers with respect to section 1.2, which asks: "To which ethnic group do you belong?" I find that an offensive question and wish it could be deleted. If the ILO and the FAO want such information, let them come and do their own research. It has no place in our census.

Sen. Prof. Deosaran: Mr. Vice-President, could I just clarify one thing? I wonder if the Senator knows that the census for the whole country rests heavily on the asking of ethnicity? This includes the national census which we have just completed.

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: Yes, and I equally propose that. But, I am not going to make a big deal. I really feel that we have to find a way of enumerating, that would not embed these ethnic classifications, which are physically and literally becoming more and more irrelevant anyway.

I welcome sections 17, 18 and 19 of the questionnaire. Section 17 deals with production problems, which include praedial larceny, flooding, poor or no access roads, and difficulty in obtaining labour. Section 18 goes into detail about praedial and other larceny. Section 19 deals with water supply and irrigation.

While the questions are very clear and they will provide information, I have to agree with Sen. Robin Montano, we do not need a census to find out that these are

problems. For years, these have been problems and it is lamentable that nothing has been done about them. While I do not congratulate the questionnaire for originality, I hope it is a token that something will be done at last. I hope that the Government would not wait for the results of the questionnaire to deal with this. I have already commented on section 21 and do not propose to go much further.

There is one emphasis in the questionnaire that I am not too happy about. I am registering this now, because it is consistent with what I have been saying earlier. In the particulars of the Order 3(2), it states:

“These Regulations apply to holders of—

- (a) lands which are being used wholly or partly for agricultural purposes;
- (b) two or more heads of cattle or pigs...or
- (c) a flock of at least twelve head of poultry...which are being raised for commercial purposes.”

I agree that we need to focus on agriculture for commercial purposes, but it is consistent with the position I have taken previously and consistent with the needs of the country: that we should, perhaps, use the census as a way of finding out which householders have space to do their own vegetable garden. We should find a way of encouraging citizens to have their own gardens and fruit trees in their yard. It has been many years since I bought citrus, tomatoes or eggplants. I just used a little piece of land. These are unseen parts of the economy that contribute to the stability of the economy. There are persons, with whatever little space they have, who are planting stuff for their own consumption. Modern economies concentrate so hard on trade and commercial exploitation that we often forget if you grow it and use it, that too is a saving and a valuable part of the economy. Saving is earning.

In closing, I welcome the census. Just to repeat what almost everybody else said, we would really like to see this census being related to a whole number of other planning projects. Thank you very much.

Sen. Brother Noble Khan: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I, like my previous colleagues, will like to congratulate the hon. Minister on her very sterling presentation. It was a very erudite presentation and a subsequent display of pedantry, with fair respect for flexibility, that is, for not being longwinded in what she intended to say, particularly with the interchanges that took place, while other colleagues were making their contribution.

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. BRO. KHAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

Of course, we heard of timeliness, but I would like to comment that it is better late than never. We also heard of accuracy. Keep it correct. Relevance obviously raises questions of what is a policy: the announced policy, not what is displayed. It is the actual policy, when it comes into being. These are some of the things that attracted me, particularly when it came to the question of data collection. Of course, we know that the planning process must begin with a firm information base. This is elementary and accepted. The need for data collection is indispensable. I view what is before us in that light.

We have heard that the last Agricultural Census was held 22 years ago. It was in 1982, if my memory serves me correct. This, obviously, gives some indication of the urgency with which agriculture is being looked at over the period of time, as far as priority is concerned. I strongly suspect too that it would have continued into the doldrums, which it is obviously in. When we think in terms of truth-prompting, this project is being funded by international agencies which, obviously, have an interest in agriculture; seeing that it is so closely linked to poverty. Addressing questions of poverty is one of the challenges at the global level. We also had some indication of the input in the creation of this questionnaire as not being truly of our own ilk or liking.

The first thing that struck me on the form that was circulated was the question: "To which ethnic group do you the holder belong?" I will share what occurred in my mind when I saw that. I think it may have some relevance. Some time ago, a survey was held in Trinidad and Tobago by a person who was referred to as an anthropologist: someone from the North doing surveys in our country and other parts of the Third World. This examination was being done. I guess there were questionnaires such as these. You know how these academic things are done. This examination was being done in the Penal area. A next academic raised questions and enquired from the anthropologist, about the scope of work that was being done. Part of that work involved tracing a Penal family into different parts of the world: Germany, the United States of America, et cetera. The academic who raised those questions said that it was true, a survey such as this took place some time earlier among poor blacks from the southern states of America. That study came up with some elements that, more or less, put persons in a certain classification. This stereotyped people. This was, obviously, negative.

We have heard of international connections. To what use would this be put, especially in a sensitive situation? Everyone here is familiar with the fact that there is a strong element of sensitivity when we think in terms of the political composition of the poles in our country and the high element of ethnicity that is mentioned. This is one of the things that refreshed my mind.

Like everybody else, we have heard of the early days of pioneer status and how the impetus was tried in agriculture. With respect to tourism, there was the backward linkage that took place, where hotels were supplied with food.

We all had a hearty repast. One wonders how much local input went into what we just had. In that time frame, from then to now, one wonders how far this agricultural backward integration has really permeated our economic base.

Within recent times, we have had the question of Caroni (1975) Limited without any firm plan. What is before us is a census. The question of land use would obviously come to our mind. I seem to recall the first land use capability study took place over 30 years ago. I guess if we were to await the arrival of more funding agencies, we might then have an update of the land use. In the meantime, I do not think we could be very proud of what has taken place, as far as the actualities of land use are concerned.

In the 1960s, Wallerfield was used for farming. Much has been said, but I have a personal experience with persons who have been involved in farming. There were successful farmers who made it. There were persons who worked and were able to educate their children. They too had a good living out of it. On the other hand, there were some who very early—I worked in the public service and an internal auditor called me one day and said: “Noble you want to make some money?” I said: “How?” He said: “You go to Wallerfield and you would get some cattle to buy.” I was shocked when he told me that. That was the first indication I had of this type of activity taking place in Wallerfield. That was his way of telling me of the irregularities that were taking place.

We know in many other areas, there were persons in agriculture who were total failures. This was not because of the people themselves; the one thing we have trust in is our people. It is a question of the direction and leadership. Even with the Wallerfield experience that I have mentioned, it seems to me that we did not have our things on the right footing. Even our own conceptuality failed. If it were successful we would not have been in the position we are in today, as far as agriculture is concerned.

We know we are getting pressure on the global scene. Our colleague, Prof. Ramchand, made a point, in his own inimical way, of why we do not have a proper local product. Again, we have not met that challenge. Of course, very often, we make notions of how we should go and what we should do. We could attempt to perceive or conceive them. Obviously, very often, we have not come to grips with it. To get a definition, though we might try exhaustively, might still

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. BRO. KHAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

very often be evasive. This challenge continues. Very early, we heard and saw some of the most fertile lands being utilized for purposes other than what is acceptable. Some of the fertile lands in Diamond Vale and the East-West Corridor are not being used for planting. There may be lands not too far away, which could be used for other purposes.

There is the question of land use and updating those, when we do have it. We still have to face the decision-makers or those who are in decision-making positions to see how we should go about this. This is part of the very oblivious position in which we find ourselves, when it comes to the use of our land resources.

Trinidad and Tobago is approximately 2,000 square miles. The question of our land use is very critical, not for ourselves, but the next two or three generations. There is a trust which some of us hold. I suspect that all of us hold that trust that has been given to us, not only because we belong to this venerable and holy house, but to every human being. What we have, what comes into our possession and what we are supposed to be over, is something that we should treat very sacred and move on. To put it in a very simple language—I learned when I was a boy—whenever you leave, you must leave it in a better state. If you have to cut a tree, make sure you plant one or more than one. This is against the land. Our ancient traditions have instilled that in us but we seem to be drifting away from that.

With respect to the connection which we have with the earth—I am speaking with respect to land and agriculture—the further we go from it, the further we go from ourselves; our very soul. If we continue along that path and treat it with some element of disrespect, of recklessness, there will be a terrible price to pay; be it here or over there. These are important aspects, definitely for those we would have left behind.

This is very important, against the background of which we are speaking. I am sure some of us will recall that very early, when we started, I raised the question of postings in the public service. There was the question of education and teachers, particularly, in agriculture and forestry. I am not ascribing any blame or shortcoming on anyone. That is the furthest thing I would like to be associated with. I know after one year, we were told in this honourable Senate that some posts were recreated in the forestry department and young men and women were able to get employment. These were persons who had undergone training at the tertiary level and were ripe and ready to work. Within the period of one year, our system was such that it took that period of time to have a facility available with respect to the filling of these posts. I do not know if it is a question of urgency, the lack of urgency, the bureaucratic process, or our own motivation towards these

ends: our decision-makers. I felt happy when I learned that these posts were filled and young people continue to work in these areas.

Three weeks ago, three of us were in the Aripo lands, a protected area. This is one of the most fragile and sensitive areas in our country, as far as the environment is concerned. One must have a permit to go there. Three of us went in with one of the persons who controlled the area. We saw the abuse of certain parts of the area. Thank God it is still in a healthy state. This is one of the better areas which is under some form of control. One of the trees we saw that was desecrated was what our colleague referred to as the bois bandé tree. I do not know what is the urgency for the debarking of this tree. You could see that it was professionally done. These people know what they are about. This is just by the way. I think they would be taking that into consideration when they patrol again.

There is the question of the national parks. This emerged out of the international connection. For a couple of decades we have heard of the pressures from the international organizations. We heard that this is a direct linkage. There are the questions of poverty and the environment. They are interlinked.

By the way, I do not know where we are going with respect to how we use our lands. If we allow our souls to go by this disconnect, where will it lead us? Will it lead us to a culture of death or a civilization of what we are seeing taking place: the murders and rapes. These are symptoms of our society. If only one were to take place, we would have to be cognizant and take the corrective action. Very often, the root cause of these things are very deep-seated and may have an interlink. The processes of our history have brought us to this stage. These are not easily addressed. Obviously, a connection with the land is most important.

If you were to go into the forest, the river, or by the seaside to relax and try to make a connection with the invisible and Supreme, you would feel that tranquility that would overcome you. It is important that we care for these large vestiges that exist within our country. I do not know the extent to which this census will lead us. Obviously, it will identify, I would suspect, our national parks and areas such as that. It is important too that—even as this sentence seems to be generated out of the international collection to which I have alluded—we have to wait until these parks and the position they are to assume by the change in our laws and the staffing, we must ensure that the trust to which I made reference is really met. We motivate ourselves in the true form of that which will take us to the end, so that we would have these things going.

These are important aspects. The fact that we have brought this matter before us will allow us to refresh our memories. We have to live with nature. It is

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. BRO. KHAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

important that we keep that connection with the animate and inanimate. The question of what is wrong and what have I done will be asked, even from the inanimate. I am speaking in another language that is not very interactive. We will definitely be answerable for the interaction that we have with what God has created. I mentioned trust. These questions will definitely arise. The misuse and abuse of it will definitely—as I have touched before—have their repercussion, leading to a culture of what we have before us, which is to build a society in which we can feel safe; not because of the absence of the unsafe things, but safe in that we are creating something and moving it forward. This is some of the thought that come to my mind when I reflect on this matter that is before us. The movement of this would inform us.

I am sure everyone else here would strongly give his/her support. The apprehension is the direction in which it will lead us, if it is just another exercise in mouths paying lip service and putting things that should take a high priority on a backburner for other priority areas which may steam high ego or self perpetration. These are some of the things that will definitely arise. Though I expressed it, I do not think the question will arise only from me, but from any right-thinking person in the country.

I thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for allowing me these few moments.

Sen. Basharat Ali: Mr. Vice-President, I had not proposed to speak on this Motion because, basically, I am very much in support of it as a necessary planning tool, especially with the long lapse of time since the last one was done.

However, I did have some reservations. I wanted to congratulate the hon. Minister on her presentation, but I am a bit reluctant because two weeks ago I was described as a saviour of the Government for voting in support of the amendment to the TTPost legislation. I was, more or less, hailed as a hero. Hon. Minister, reluctantly, I congratulate you on an excellent presentation.

5.45 p.m.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sen. Ali, if I may, please do not let that stop you from heaping praise on me. [*Laughter*] Please feel free and be effusive with it if you care to.

Sen. B. Ali: Through you, Mr. Vice-President, I take the advice of the hon. Minister, but I am very careful because last Wednesday after the Equal Opportunity Motion from Sen. Wade Mark, I was misquoted by—I say it is the *Newsday*. Everybody knows it is the *Newsday* which said that I said that sexual

discrimination was not addressed in the Equal Opportunity Act and that is not what I said. I said that the definition of sex excludes sexual orientation and sexual preference, to which I took strong exception.

I wrote an email last Thursday to the *Newsday*, to the news editor, Mr. John Babb I think he is, but I have not seen anything. Sen. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh was a little more fortunate than I, because he wrote a letter saying that he was misreported on the same subject, but his letter was published, I think it was probably Friday of last week.

Mr. Vice-President, let me say that I am still awaiting a reply or a statement in the *Newsday* and if Mr. John Babb, or whoever it is, has not received my email, please call me at 629-2519 [*Laughter*] and I will respond, I will send a fax or whatever it is, but I am asking for a reply. I also told him how my name is spelt, because *Newsday* keeps spelling my name wrongly. It is a simple name, Basharat, but somehow they get it wrong.

Let us put that aside, Mr. Vice-President. I had to say it. As I said, I did not intend really to speak on the Motion before us, but before I came here, I had a little problem in that looking through the Motion, the schedule, for example, seemed to me to address primarily the information from individuals or small holdings. For example, in the regulations, the definition of “holder” says:

“‘holder’ means the person who has economic and technical responsibility for the operation of the agricultural holding which he may operate directly or through some other person to whom he has delegated the responsibility for the day-to-day management of the holding and in cases where a holding is under the control or administration of a Ministry or Statutory Authority includes the officer who is directly responsible for the day-to-day administration of the holding;”

I have looked at the questionnaire which was passed to us by the hon. Minister and I still am not clear in my mind of how any delegated person fills out this form, whether it be from a ministry or statutory authority or a large holding.

There are people, large holdings who may not be so readily identifiable. For example, a coconut estate which has some other agricultural product, or a cocoa estate under a particular holding which has citrus. I know not so long ago WITCO was involved in the production of orchids.

I am not sure how these kinds of entities are captured and how they report. Certainly, the delegated person does not have to report his sex or ethnicity, and so forth, but he might be reporting for a whole lot of people. Maybe I am not

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. ALI]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

completely au fait with the questionnaire, but I still have a matter to be clarified as to how that happens. So, hopefully the hon. Minister, in her wrap-up will address that point, because even energy companies have got holdings or they may have had.

I remember one energy company which had citrus estates on the way to Point Fortin. I think Madam Minister will probably be familiar with those estates. Citrus estates belonging to a petroleum company. Recently, I know that, for example, Caroni (1975) Limited that passed over some of its estates—I do not know the name of the company—had lots of citrus in fruit, but nobody could touch it because of some vesting problem. At the same time, Cooperative Citrus Growers Association was sitting there idle because the fruit could not go to them. I believe there finally was a solution to that kind of problem.

I am asking please, can we know how within the questionnaire, numerators or the supervisor would capture what is an important and less visible part of the agricultural system, large holdings, estates which are primarily, say coconut or cocoa, but which produce other products and that they will be able to give valuable data on a lot of matters including the number of persons involved, how they market products, and so forth.

So, with that very short intervention, I thank the hon. Minister and I hope I will have some questions answered at the end of the debate.

Thank you very much.

Sen. Mary King: Mr. Vice-President, I too would like to congratulate the Minister. I think the Order is very exciting to have such a census done. It is quite all encompassing, the information that is being collected. Just for completeness, I would like to see under 2.1, when we are looking at the types of organizations of the holding, that we also include under private company, whether it is private locally owned, whether it is private foreign owned, or if it is a joint venture and a percentage local and percentage foreign, and I think this would go a long way in letting us know exactly what resources we actually own in the sector.

The other suggestion I had for the questionnaire was perhaps somewhere, when we are looking further down in 2.4 or maybe at the end of the questionnaire, but I think it should be included, a forward looking question, because if we are using the census, which obviously we are, for future planning and for Vision 2020, I think we should examine what the people actually think out there. Do they have some plan of their own for diversifying their own holdings? So I would like to see a question in there. What is their future vision or plan for diversification?

The only other section that I want to question in this case is section 5, where we are looking at economic activity and we are saying and asking for all members of the household 10 years old and over. This may be something that the international lending agencies want to know, that we do have child labour. I think to even have this in the questionnaire may imply that it is quite all right to have a 10 year-old working, and I think that really violates the Convention on the Rights of the Child and I wanted the Minister to explain to us why we actually have that in the questionnaire. I think it has no place there and I have a concern.

Those are my three points. Thank you.

Sen. Wade Mark: Mr. Vice-President, this particular Motion which seeks our support today focuses on the agricultural sector. As the Minister indicated in her opening remarks, it is a census that we are going to be conducting between the period May 2004—September 2004. I have some questions I would like to raise, but I would like to put this particular agricultural census in some perspective, Mr. Vice-President.

The last one, as we were told, was conducted sometime in 1982 as a tool for planning purposes. We have to probably reflect on what useful nature was the last census put to, because when we look back and we look at the present period and we examine the state of agriculture in this land, it does leave a lot to be desired, and one wonders, Mr. Vice-President, whether the census, whilst it is very useful, to gather as the Minister said the necessary information and data, how is this information and data being used? How is it being applied in order to address agricultural development in our nation?

As you know, Mr. Vice-President, food is a basic necessity of life. Without food, we cannot live. And yet, with all the fertile lands and the well-endowed waters that surround our islands, we continue to wallow in a sea of poverty and almost an ocean of misery. The cost of living is way beyond the reach of ordinary people in this country, and if you look, Mr. Vice-President, at the last monetary report, monetary policy report issued by the Central Bank, which is dated March 2004, you would realize that the food alone constitutes the largest component in terms of increases in the last rate that was analyzed by the Central Bank. I am dealing with the rate of inflation.

When we look at the basket of goods, Mr. Vice-President, the food component comprised about 13.8 per cent of all the other items that were involved or incorporated in that basket. So it means that if we had a better approach to agricultural development in this country, we would have been in a better position today to feed our nation.

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. MARK]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

Therefore, we believe that Trinidad and Tobago has a responsibility to do something about the crisis that we do have today as it relates to food. Mr. Vice-President, Trinidad and Tobago has become a very large importer of food. In fact, my information is that we import close to \$2 billion and a little more every year in this country. It has been between \$1.7 billion to about \$2 billion worth of food, Mr. Vice-President—food and related food products and items—and it is becoming more and more large and huge in value terms.

Whilst Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean and Third World countries have been hoodwinked by the rich countries into dismantling all their protectionist barriers so that they can protect their infant industries, all on the basis of what is called liberalization, globalization and deregulation, religion, almost like a fashion, as Lloyd Best would call it, and we have just fallen for these things. We have fallen for these fashions and the consequential result is there for all to see, until today we have a Government that is lobbying for the FTAA headquarters. They cannot even supply products but looking for headquarters, but that is the kind of contradiction and paradox that we have in this land of ours.

The rich countries continue to protect their agriculture, whether it is the common agricultural policy undertaken by the European Union, whether it is Japan, whether it is the United States of America, they continue to protect their farmers. America is a net food exporter. They export food to the world and they feed themselves, but we are being told to dismantle our subsidies, remove our tariffs and our non-tariff barriers so that the rich nations can penetrate our market space. Whilst they protect their markets, we seek to open ours to their imports, Mr. Vice-President, but that is the contradiction that we have in these developing nations like ours, where the leaders, like what we have in place today, engage in charades, in parades essentially, and at the end of the process, it is the people who suffer.

Trinidad and Tobago, as we speak today, continues to be a primary producer of raw materials. We have not graduated from that particular stage of our development, Mr. Vice-President, and we have been in existence for some time now. Not only as an independent nation, although we are relatively young, but I am dealing with the period since we were brought here in different forms and in different manners.

We are still producing raw materials, and if you look, for instance, at the state of play in this country, we see where the Government, whilst it is seeking to promote, it is seeking to conduct an agricultural census, I would like the hon.

Minister to tell us when the results are expected. Would it be after they leave office in 2007? When are these results expected, Mr. Vice-President? They are talking about 2020. Would the results be ready before they submit a plan to this nation as to what is 2020, and where they intend to take this nation in the few years ahead, or the years ahead, Mr. Vice-President?

We would like to know whether in this, I have not seen it, because again, because of the contempt, disrespect and disregard that the PNM has towards the Parliament of this country, if it were not for the pleading of the hon. Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosaran, we would not have had a copy of this questionnaire belatedly supplied to this Parliament. This should have been brought as a matter of course long before this debate so that we could have studied it properly, but that is the style of the present administration that is now in existence in this country, Mr. Vice-President.

We would like to know, the Government is conducting an agricultural census, would that incorporate, as some of our earlier speakers alluded to, the question of land use? Would it? We do not know. But the question remains that in our country today, we know that the PNM slaughtered almost 10,000 ordinary workers at Caroni (1975) Limited. They are now without jobs, Mr. Vice-President. An entire community has been destroyed, but the PNM does not care about that. They have their political agenda. Their only policy is survival. It has nothing to do with national development in this country; PNM's only concern is about the PNM.

Even when Brian Lara was hijacked, the Prime Minister—it slipped his tongue and he said “This is how PNM does things.” He does not make a distinction between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the PNM as a party. He sees the Government and the PNM in one, as one. So, every objective is towards one objective, one end, rather: To perpetuate PNM rule. You think they care about development? You think they care about farmers? You think they care about Trinidad and Tobago? They care about the PNM. That is what they are about. So they have appropriated in the process, 75,000 acres of land out of Caroni to give to their friends and their families, their nephews and nieces.

Today, as we speak, 7,000 cane farmers do not know if they are going or coming. Sugar has collapsed under the PNM, because they felt it was a good policy to pursue in an effort to destabilize the United National Congress. It had nothing to do with economics, because if it was economics, WASA would have been closed down. It has nothing to do with economics. It has to do with politics, and a very vicious and vindictive approach by that regime, but they say you know, the Lord, He wears pajamas; He never sleeps. The time will come for them as it came for the workers of Caroni (1975) Limited.

Sen. Dr. Saith: [*Words expunged*]

Sen. W. Mark: [*Words expunged*]

Anyway, Mr. Vice-President, let me say, 75,000 acres of land, and up to now, in terms of agriculture, we are conducting a survey and we do not know what is the policy of the Government as it relates to agriculture, as it relates to those lands. We understand the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. Christine Sahadeo, boasting about how the Government was able to properly restructure Caroni, and how they were able to carry out their policy in a very effortless way and seamless transition sort of thing, and one wonders if that lady has a heart. People are crying blood. They do not know where their next meal is coming from, but she said it was a very smooth transition.

We would like the hon. Minister to tell us whether this census is going to take into account these lands and what use they are going to put to these lands. What is the policy of the Government as it relates to the 75,000 acres of land, Mr. Vice-President? To what extent are lands that are supposed to be for agricultural purposes—you would recall, during the second world war, Tobago was the food basket. Not only of Tobago, but of Trinidad, and we supplied food to the Caribbean as well. In Trinidad we were able to buckle down during the second world war and produce food in this land because Hitler blockaded the oceans so Britain could not send food to us in the Caribbean and we were forced to adjust.

The moment the PNM came into office, they destroyed agriculture. Mr. Vice-President, when we got the oil in 1973, the rapid increases in oil prices from \$4.00, as you would recall, in some cases US \$1.50 a barrel to US \$37 dollars a barrel, it was money flowing through the taps like water and they spent money as if it was going out of style and they heated up the economy, as how they are doing today. So the Prime Minister is predicting inflation at 7 per cent; not 2.3, not 4 per cent, but seven as an outer limit.

So here it is we are allocating lands that are supposed to be appropriated for agricultural purposes and we are using those lands for housing. So the best agricultural lands that you could think about was right there in St. Joseph; the St. Joseph farm. The evidence is there. The university has corroborated that information, that it is the best agricultural land, and the former Minister who is grumbling there, his conscience is hurting him because he was the person who was responsible for bulldozing those lands in that place there. That is why he is grumbling. His conscience is pricking him, hurting him.

People like him do not die young. They die old, because God keeps them because they are wicked. Wicked people! [*Laughter*] How can they destroy prime agricultural lands? To do what? To construct 300 apartments so that they could bring their supporters from Diego Martin, from Laventille, from Port of Spain, in order to occupy those houses so when the election is called in 2007, they would be able to close the gap and “tief” the election. That is all. It is house padding. Everybody knows what the PNM is after.

In Carlsen Field today they have appropriated 83 acres of land. It is related to agriculture, because that is prime agricultural lands that we are taking away Sir, from agricultural production into housing production. For what purpose? Because the PNM has one policy: To perpetuate its rule. That is the only policy. It does not care about the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It does not care about T&T at all. It is party first before country. That is how they operate.

Mr. Vice-President, you know what they have done? They have cleared 83 acres of land in Carlsen Field. To put up how many houses? It is 2,750 houses. In other words, they are house padding in Chaguanas, they are house padding in Caroni Central, and I understand from my reports that another 300 acres are being earmarked.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Where?

Sen. W. Mark: Same area. What has happened, Mr. Vice-President, in Barataria they have also appropriated prime agricultural lands in order to put up some houses, as you know, right near the Republic Bank compound. I understand west of La Horquetta, the Minister would be interested in that, again, prime agricultural lands. I understand they have earmarked a lot of houses for that particular area.

What I am dealing with is that they are dealing with agricultural census, and we are saying “Listen, if you are going to conduct a survey, with what purpose in mind?” Is it a charade? Is it a mamaguy? Is it because you have to do it? Because you have no interest in applying anything towards transformation, towards agricultural development.

There is no plan on the part of the Government. All this Government is doing, and Mr. Vice-President, I want to tell you, after they construct Train 4 and they get into Train 5 with the proven reserves that we have here, about 30 trillion cubic, after that, with \$2 billion being exported on a daily basis after Train 5, in less than 12 years we would have no gas unless we discover new gas.

All we are doing is mining our gas and oil and exporting them to the rich industrialized country. Nothing of substance is taking place here. You know we

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. MARK]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

have two economies here. We have the energy sector and the non-energy sector. One sector is holding up this economy, the energy sector. So in 2003, that grew by 11.7 per cent and the non-energy sector grew by 1.8 per cent. Under the PNM, in 2002 it was 0.8 per cent and it has grown just to 1 per cent, and in 2003 it was 1.8 per cent. When we were there, the average was about 5 per cent.

The heartbeat of this nation is not being taken care of by this regime. They do not care about agriculture. Agriculture has contracted, according to this last report issued by the Central Bank called the *Monetary Policy Report*, March 2004, by 15 per cent, and that came about as a result of the collapse, the closing down of Caroni (1975) Limited by this PNM regime, as well as the continued fall in production of citrus fruits. So the production of citrus has also fallen dramatically to the point that we have had a contraction in the agricultural sector by some 15 per cent.

What I am saying, what is really happening with the census? Is it a mamaguy, is it a “gambage” Because the Government is not serious about agriculture. They are not serious about agriculture. Since they came to power, all they have been doing is distributing largesse. They have not created anything. Since the PNM came to power they have not created anything. They have not produced anything. They have not constructed anything of value. All they are doing is using the resources of the State to give away our resources to their friends, families and relatives and their party hacks. Nothing is taking place in this country.

After 28 months they have not built a bridge. All they are doing is crushing poor people. That is all they are doing. Crushing them. They are crushing the squatters, settlers we call them, citizens of this Republic—Cashew Gardens. They are crushing them at Wallerfield. They are crushing them in Union Hall, and I understand there are 255 communities that they have earmarked to also crush ordinary people.

When we check it out, the PNM is not doing anything of substance here. This whole thing is a mamaguy. You think the PNM is serious about agricultural census? That is a joke. They have no interest. They are just going through the motion because they have to do it. As the Minister said, FAO says this, ILO says that, this one says the other, so the Minister is being driven by what they say. No idea of her own, and that is what the PNM is. They are intellectually fossilized people. That is what they are. They do not think. They are just operating as a result of remote. No idea of how to transform this economy and bring about some sanity in this society.

Mr. Vice-President, could you imagine in this country, in the last 48 hours or the last two or three days, about six or eight persons just got shot just so? Bullets! Every young man has a gun.

Sen. Joseph: How is that related to the census?

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith): Mr. Vice-President, in accordance with Standing Order 9(8), I beg to move that the Senate continue to sit until we complete the debate on this Motion and the debate on the Bill to provide for the establishment of the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago and for related matters.

Question put and agreed do.

AGRICULTURAL CENSUS ORDER

Sen. W. Mark: I do not support it, but I will reluctantly go along. Mr. Vice-President, when we look at this economy of ours, and agriculture being so important an element in this whole process, and given the fact that we have had so much revenues, particularly from oil and gas, one would have thought that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago would have channelled the excess surpluses, the excess revenues into meaningful, productive channels so that we could have the capacity creation, so that the economy can expand and grow and develop.

We do that not when we have crises, we do that when we have abundance, when we have plenty, and the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, my good friend, Sen. the Hon. Conrad Enill, at some stage, maybe next week, would tell us, for instance, how much surplus we have gained in revenues as a result of the price of oil moving from \$25 that we budgeted for, or \$26, and it is averaging around \$35. At times it is \$37 or \$38. My understanding is that we have collected close to \$1.8 billion in surplus revenues so far. I do not know. I am guessing these figures. I think the Minister would have to clarify whether I am right or wrong on that.

What I am saying, we should be channelling all those excess resources into productive activity. We need to get the agricultural sector really started and we are not seeing any signs of it. What we are seeing is that resources that are critical are being misspent, misallocated. That is what we are seeing. We are seeing, for instance, a CEPEP contractor going home with \$51,000 a month in this country, and an ordinary CEPEP worker going home with \$75 a day. How can one equate this, Mr. Vice-President? That is what is taking place under this so-called caring administration. They care about the big people in their party, not the small people.

Mr. Vice-President, I would like to ask the hon. Minister, would this agricultural census take into consideration the number of bridges and agricultural

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. MARK]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

access roads that farmers need in order to get to their lands to bring out their produce? Would this census record this? Would it take into account, would it take into consideration the need to repair all the landslips throughout the country—Trinidad—because I know the Tobago House of Assembly would take care of Tobago?

Would it take into account the number of farmers who have left the agricultural sector because of the prevalence of praedial larceny? Is this census going to take that into account? A lot of our farmers have given up farming in this country—agriculture—because of the consistent loss of crop as a result of praedial larceny. I would like the hon. Minister to let us know.

We would like to know if this particular agricultural census would take into account our fisher folk who are crying out for proper facilities for cold storage purposes so that they can actually house their catch. We also know that many of our fisher folk are being murdered on the high seas of this country by criminals and bandits coming from other countries. We want to know, for instance, Mr. Vice-President, how would this particular census deal with this matter.

Would it tell us, would it take into account the number of young people who are being trained under YAPA and, as a result of that training, how many of those young people are now actively involved in agricultural production and farming, as an example? Would the census reflect that?

What about all those persons who have gone to the University of the West Indies and have studied agriculture? Would this census take into account where they are? Are they in agriculture or are they working at the Atlantic LNG or working at Petrotrin? I would like to know if the Minister of Planning and Development would, in fact, explain to us whether, for instance, this is going to be taken on board? Because we either have a very solid—we have strangers in the gallery and they are disturbing me. They either pay attention or leave. They are distracting me.

I would like to ask the hon. Minister of Planning and Development as well, we understand that the PNM had promised before they closed down Caroni (1975) Limited, before they destroyed Caroni (1975) Limited, they had promised the farmers producing pineapple in Poole, Tableland, a crusher and a processing plant during the last local government election, so that, for instance, their pineapples would not go to waste. It would be processed.

I do not know, for instance, if the PNM has forgotten, as they have forgotten the people of Point Fortin, when the Prime Minister of this country went and

campaigned in Point Fortin, mamagued the people of Point Fortin, telling them he was going to introduce a sectoral minimum wage and when the crunch came, he crushed them and the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation was at the beck and call of Atlantic LNG in supplying police and army to beat the people of Point Fortin. That is his only claim to fame so far.

Sen. Joseph: Mr. Vice-President, on a point of order. I think the Senator is misleading this honourable House by imputing improper motives.

Sen. W. Mark: You said that. You are on public record.

Sen. Joseph: He said I wanted to crush and to brutalize workers. I want him to either withdraw it or strike it from the record.

Sen. W. Mark: ‘Nah, I ain’t withdrawing it or striking it out.’ Mr. Vice-President, he is on public record as saying that.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, whereas I have no proof of what you are saying, I would certainly like to ask you to return to the Motion at hand and that you desist from making any such references please.

Sen. W. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, I am always guided, but I wanted to find out, could the hon. Minister of Planning and Development tell us what has happened to that promise that was made to the farmers of Poole in Tableland where they were promised a crushing and processing plant. As I said, all that has happened in terms of crushing is the heavy hands of the PNM on poor people in this country. [*Desk thumping*] That is the only crushing taking place here. Squatters being crushed; poor people being crushed; workers being crushed; and workers being brutalized. That is what it is.

What we would like to advise the hon. Minister in this area of planning for agriculture, I know the hon. Minister is not the Minister of Agriculture, but I think in light of the fact that they have not answered me as yet, I would like to suggest to the hon. Minister of Planning and Development that the PNM should seek to establish a multipurpose processing plant for the farmers of Poole. Because you know, one of the problems that we have here is that in times of plenty, fruits go to waste, and what we need to do is to really process.

It seems like a disease, virtually. We just have a kind of sickness, we have almost like a kind of bias towards doing things that would bring about added value in the whole production chain. Whether it is fruits, whether it is oil, whether it is gas, we do not want to engage in processing and in transformation. I want to ask the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to take that on board.

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. MARK]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

Mr. Vice-President, this Motion on agriculture we would hope, and I want to ask the hon. Minister to let us know what has happened as it relates to recruitment. I would like the hon. Minister to tell us whether the persons who are supposed to conduct this agricultural census, have they been recruited? Have they been employed already? Have they been trained already?

We would like to know whether it was advertised, the jobs as enumerators, whether that was advertised, or whether it was jobs for the boys and girls and party hacks once again? I have not seen any advertisement in the newspapers. I would like the hon. Minister to tell us if these jobs were advertised and when and where. I would like to know, Mr. Vice-President, through you, how many workers are going to be employed to deal with this issue of this census. How many? Five hundred, a thousand, 15,000? Let us know.

Mr. Vice-President, in this period of high crime, people are going to be very wary of allowing strangers, not only to knock on their doors—they are going to be very wary about allowing persons to knock on their doors, far less to have them enter. Because this country lives in constant and continuous fear. That is all praise due to the PNM for bringing this country into this state where everybody lives in fear, Mr. Vice-President.

So I would like the hon. Minister to take that into account, and I hope that these workers who they have engaged are properly trained, because they are going to be asking some very sensitive questions. Mr. Vice-President, I do not know if you saw a copy. I thought it was a bit discourteous, but I want to thank her nevertheless. I thought that each Member of Parliament should have gotten a copy of this document. I had to borrow one from Sen. Montano, and I think the hon. Minister should never chink on the public documents.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Chink? You mean “chinks”.

Sen. W. Mark: “Chinks”. Do not “chinks”. In other words, make a copy available, hon. Minister, to every one of us, rather than I have to borrow one from my colleague. Not even the Prime Minister. Mr. Vice-President, I called you Prime Minister. I elevated you. I thought that at least you would have had a copy, so that for instance, in going through, you would have been able to follow me. It is unfortunate that the hon. Minister is “chinksin”. Is that a parliamentary word, Sir?

Mr. Vice-President, I want to ask you, in this period when sensitivities are high in this country, you know people are going to be very wary to answer a question like, “To which ethnic group do you belong?” In other words, the

persons who are going to be asking these questions, I hope that the Minister would have ensured that they would have been subjected to rigorous training, sensitive training in this period, because some of the questions are highly sensitive, and I just hope, for the sake of the whole exercise, that she would have taken this particular matter on board.

Unlike the PNM, we do not see ghosts behind every post, Mr. Vice-President. If it was the UNC introducing this in a period like what we are in, one would have heard the hue and the cry coming from the PNM, but you see, we have identified some of our concerns. We would hope that the hon. Minister would be able to provide this Parliament with a proper response to our concerns, because we know that the PNM, as a party, has its own ulterior objectives and motives for everything, and this is why we would like the Minister to provide us with some additional clarification on the areas that we have identified.

Mr. Vice-President, I just want to leave something with you, because it is an area that I am concerned about. Trinidad and Tobago, to me, is like a caterpillar. You know, it is eating more and more, it is getting fatter and fatter, but not transforming into the beautiful butterfly that it was meant to be.

I think that we have what is coming close to resembling a caterpillar economy. That is what is happening in this society, where nothing is taking place. We are eating and eating—that is the PNM. They are eating and eating and getting fatter and fatter and nothing is taking place to transform this society and this economy. I think the census that we are about to undertake is another charade, another hit parade. It has nothing; nothing will come out of it, as nothing came out of it in 1982. But as the alternative government, waiting in the wings, as this Government continues to make mistake after mistake, blunder after blunder, we, for purposes of this particular debate, will await clarification from the hon. Minister on some of the areas that we have raised during the contribution.

I want to thank you very much.

Sen. Dr. Saith: Mr. Vice-President, before the Senator concludes, I was hoping to get a copy of the *Hansard* but I have not been able to get it. I believe to the best of my recollection the hon. Senator made a remark that I am lucky not to be in jail. Words to that effect. Mr. Vice-President, under Standing Order 35(5), I would ask that the Senator withdraw the statement and have it expunged from the record, unless he can give cogent reasons why I should be in jail.

Sen. W. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, I do not want to engage in any debate here, but if you want, I can give him the cogent reasons.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, the Standing Order clearly states that no Senator shall impute improper motives and that was an improper motive and I am asking you to withdraw the statement.

Sen. W. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, I think you will give me the honour and privilege of supporting my argument. I do not think that if I have facts on a matter and I raise an issue, I do not think I will withdraw a matter that I have evidence on. I think it is in the public domain.

Sen. Dr. Saith: Mr. Vice-President, I do not wish the Senator to continue to abuse parliamentary privilege. If he has evidence which would suggest that I be locked up, give it to the police.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, Standing Order 35, and I am looking at (5), says “no Senator shall impute improper motives to any Member of either Chamber.” It says nothing about evidence and, as I said before, you did impute an improper motive. I advise that you withdraw the statement.

Sen. W. Mark: Again, Mr. Vice-President, I have raised a matter. The hon. Senator is well aware of the matter that I have raised.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, I am dealing with Standing Order 35(5).

Sen. W. Mark: Yes, I am following you.

Mr. Vice-President: This is the Standing Order that was breached.

Sen. W. Mark: I did not breach it, Sir. He alleged that.

Mr. Vice-President: In my view, you did.

Sen. W. Mark: What is the basis, Sir?

Mr. Vice-President: You did suggest that another Member of this Chamber should be in jail. It is an improper motive being imputed. I advise that you withdraw the statement.

Sen. W. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, if I may, I made a statement. If, for instance, the Minister felt or he believed that the statement is untrue, then he must say it is untrue. I want to say something. If I make a statement in this Parliament, I have a right to make a statement and I can provide the evidence of it.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, we are not talking about whether you have or could provide evidence. We are talking about a Standing Order that states clearly that no Senator shall impute an improper motive to another Member of this Chamber. That was done and I think that no argument is going to change that.

Sen. W. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, may I?

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, yes, go ahead.

Sen. W. Mark: I am saying, Mr. Vice-President, that if the hon. Senator interpreted it in the way that he has interpreted it, what I am saying to you Mr. Vice-President—

6.45 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, I agree with the Senator and as I said before there is no question of a suggestion here, you did, and again I advise you to withdraw the statement. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. W. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, I just want to say for the record that I can back up; I can provide you, Dr. Saith and the Senate with what I consider to be some of the reasons for advancing that statement. I believe in truth and I believe what I said. I made a statement, if Dr. Saith wants to interpret it in a negative way, it is up to him. [*Crosstalk*] I said, “If”, Sir. [*Crosstalk*] I did not say that Sen. The Hon. Dr. Saith should be in jail or could. I said, “If”. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Senators: Get the *Hansard*!

Mr. Vice-President: I should like to suspend any further discussion on this until I get the record from the *Hansard*. Madam Minister, please proceed.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Mr. Vice-President, I thank hon. Senators for participating in this debate. There are some issues that I will speak to, and I will start with Sen. Prof. Deosaran’s questions.

In relation to question 2.4 of the questionnaire, he suggested that under the heading of “The Purpose of the General Characteristics of the Holding”, the type of holding and so on, that one of the answers should include research. There are two points I would make in relation to this: one is that under the particular section the heading is:

“What is the main other economic activity of the enterprise?”

Usually research is not an economic activity; however, in these circumstances, if research is being used as an economic activity we do have the circle “Other”. Under that heading research can be stated as one of the activities carried out at the holding.

In that particular regard, I would make the point that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, as a member of UPOV, has found that in relation to

Agricultural Census Order
[HON. C. ROBINSON-REGIS]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

intellectual property there has been a dearth of information with regard to agricultural produce. As a consequence of that, our adherence to the UPOV Convention has indicated that we are certainly lagging behind a number of other countries, in terms of doing research into the generic plants that we have here and cross-fertilization of species. As a consequence of that, we are now making every effort, through the Ministry of Legal Affairs where the Intellectual Property Office is located, to ensure that we, at least, take a quantum leap in terms of research into agricultural cross-fertilization in breeding and so forth.

In my own constituency of Arouca South there is some research going on at present with regard to anthuriums. That is one of the main areas in which there is research going on. There is also some research with regard to cocoa and coffee. It is an issue that is now being looked at very, very closely, especially with regard to intellectual property in circumstances where the more developed countries have come to Trinidad and Tobago and taken away the intellectual property, for want of a better word, of plants and plant varieties; not only Trinidad and Tobago, but other Caribbean countries and, in particular, the equatorial forests of the Amazon. So that is an area for which we have very grave concerns in terms of research into agricultural production.

With regard to question 5.7, this section deals with gross income and income from activities other than agricultural production, farming, et cetera. Sen. Prof. Deosaran wanted us to be a little more specific in terms of that particular question. That can be examined, but because of the way the questionnaire is worded, because we are trying to find out about activity in relation to farming, that particular question does not focus specifically on farming; it focuses on the other income of holders. So there is a certain amount of nebulousness with regard to that particular question, and we will look at it, but the objective of the census, really, is to get information as it relates to agriculture.

With regard to item 21.5, which deals with fungicides, insecticides, et cetera, an attempt has been made by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to ensure through their extension officers that the proper use of pesticides and other chemicals is practised by farmers in Trinidad and Tobago. It has become very obvious from the information gleaned from these extension officers, that there has been a high level of improper use of these pesticides. As a consequence of that, extension officers have been making every effort to train farmers in the proper use of these chemicals, so that their effect is not deleterious.

We do have instances where improper use has occurred, but there is every effort being made, through the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine

Resources and, especially, through the deployment of extension officers in all the areas that we know have large farming communities, to ensure that this practice is minimized as much as possible. Apart from the extension officers going out, every effort is being made to give farmers, not only written information, but information through training programmes in the use of pesticides, weedicides and other chemicals. When this questionnaire is completed, it is also anticipated that we would get a sense and a clear indication of the types of pesticides that are used and how the farmers have been actually using them.

In that particular regard, I take this opportunity to also indicate that the census is not only an effort to determine who is farming and what is being farmed, but also it is an effort to determine what are the practices being used by the farming community. In many instances, the type of farming being done on particular parcels of land may not be the most effective type of farming; when I say that, tree crops, root crops, livestock farming. Sometimes the farmers do not know the best use to which their land should be put, and this census will attempt to get that kind of information and, therefore, to inform farmers how best they can benefit from the use of their land, not only the types of crops they should use, but also the kinds of livestock they could possibly put on the land, so there could be a combination of land use to produce the best for the farmers of Trinidad and Tobago.

The question was asked regarding the location of agricultural land. Some of you may know that at present there is what is called a GIS system that has been developed and is being improved all the time. This is a system of mapping all the land in Trinidad and Tobago, being able to locate each parcel of land, where the land is, what it is being used for. It is a system being developed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and by the Ministry of Legal Affairs, the Registrar General's Department. So every single parcel of land will be identified, mapped and given a specific unique parcel identifier number.

We recognize that land is extremely important, especially on an island where sustainable development is of extreme importance. As a consequence of that, there has been a programme of land identification, not only on the ground, but being able to identify the land by transactions, deeds and a combination of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and the Ministry of Legal Affairs working together to identify private property, and state lands. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Prof. Deosaran: Mr. Vice-President, I would like to ask, with the Member's permission, of course, will that GIS survey include the extent of squatting and the specific locations of these squatters?

Agricultural Census Order
[HON. C. ROBINSON-REGIS]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: The GIS survey would include that, but I am sure Senator that you would recall the Squatters Regularization Act which specifies that squatters should be identified by aerial photography and after a certain cut off date that there should be no squatting outside of those areas already identified; so part of the process would be to identify the squatters, but, of course, that cut off date, if I recall correctly, was 1998, and the aerial photography for that time would have been done already. Any new squatting that has been identified would have been identified on the ground. As I said, the GIS system identifies every parcel of land in Trinidad and Tobago, in an effort to ensure that we know what we are dealing with.

There was a question asked with regard to land use planning. The GIS project will also be able to assist with land use planning. Let me reiterate that we are living on an island and land is at a premium. In some instances over the years, unfortunately, agricultural land has been put into other uses, but there is an effort being made through the information that we will be obtaining from this census and through the information that we have already obtained through the House and Population Census to ensure that the plans that are now put in place for the use of land reflect what the land will be best used for. Land capability is being assessed, not only through this census, but also through other systems that have been put in place in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and the Ministry of Planning and Development. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Seetahal: Through you, Mr. Vice-President, I do not know if you said anything about it, but what is the enforcement that would make people reply to the questionnaire? Supposing I am a farmer and I just say, "No, do not bother me."

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: You are free to do that. Nobody is going to be forced to answer; we are hoping that people will answer. I am sure some of you may have seen it on television or heard on the radio; there are ads that have already started in order to sensitize the population that this census will be taking place. We are trusting that people will understand the importance of the census and will be willing to answer, but there is no enforcement; it is voluntary. We are hoping that people will, in fact, answer the questions.

Sen. Prof. Deosaran also talked about using agriculture for narrow political purposes, and there was an issue in relation to YAPA and so forth. The policy that informed the entire YAPA programme was really one to try to encourage young people to go back to agriculture. The Government recognizes that people have moved away from agriculture in droves, but the Government has also recognized

that diversification of the economy is paramount, that agriculture can be a growth area where employment can be generated in quite large numbers. There is also the recognition that if we do not encourage young people either through training programmes or otherwise to understand what agriculture is all about, there will not be that inclination to go back to agriculture. That was really the policy decision that informed the YAPA programme.

Another programme that has also been informed by that kind of thinking and that has been placed on top of it—the fact that some areas of the country just do not have enough land to allow for major agriculture production, is what is called the grow box industry. So in areas where land is at a premium, that particular industry has been encouraged. Women, in particular, have been encouraged to go into that industry, and what are called “bedroom communities” like those in Laventille, Maloney and La Horquetta where land is at a premium, have been encouraged to look at that grow box industry. That is part of the policy of the Government, and we are trusting with this census, when we get the information, we will be better able to encourage people to show exactly the areas that need the assistance of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Sen. Prof. Ramchand raised the issue of ethnicity, among other things. He was not the only Senator who raised it. I think what was said was that if the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Labour Organization (ILO), et cetera, want that kind of information, let them do their own survey. I was just a little taken aback at Sen. Prof. Ramchand making that kind of comment. As a professor I had just assumed that he would be one of the people who would understand that when a census of this nature is being done, even if the ILO and the FAO did not need it, the people of Trinidad and Tobago need this kind of information, because I do not think that issues of ethnicity and race should always be seen in a negative light. There is nothing to be feared by asking the question: To which ethnic group do you belong? We all belong to some ethnic group and I am sure that we all recognize that is the reality of Trinidad and Tobago. Our anthem says: “Here every creed and race find an equal place”.

I felt a little saddened when I heard Sen. Prof. Ramchand saying something like that, in circumstances where I am sure—I am not even sure if he really feels that way or if he is just saying it. I am a little concerned about that. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Prof. Ramchand: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I would like the Minister to know that a lot of social scientists, apparently not Sen. Prof. Deosaran, find it very difficult to define and apply the word “ethnicity”, that there are so many nations, ethnicities or group interests in the country that the old fashioned

Agricultural Census Order
[SEN. PROF. RAMCHAND]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

ones based on race like African, Indian and so on are quite unable to describe the complexity of the different kinds of interest groups in the country. So you would find that an interest group may include people of Indian, African and Chinese origin and that is an ethnicity. It may be regarded as an academic qualification, but I really do abide by it, and that is the difficulty I was referring to when I said that I was not happy with it. Also, I really do not see how having that information would assist the development of agriculture.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: It assists development generally. It is not only in an agricultural census that this information is requested. It is also requested in a housing and population census. As Sen. Prof. Deosaran said, one of the ethnic groups that is named here is Caucasian. At one time that particular ethnic group, our history shows, owned most of the land. Are they still on the land? Are they the ones who own the largest areas of land? Just for our own development purposes it may be important for us to know that. I do not think that we should link it to interest groups or anything; it is just a question.

I would also like to indicate that if you do not feel that you belong to any of those ethnic groups, including “mixed”, you could put “Other” and you do not even have to answer that question. You could say, “Not stated”. So if you are violently or vehemently opposed to answering the question, you do not have to.

Sen. Prof. Deosaran: Mr. Vice-President, since some reference was made to my own intervention, may I indicate to the Minister that the use of race in this limited context—this is not an anthropological study to get a million and one differences; this is a categorization of the respondents for convenient policy development purposes. The question asked here is very useful to see the extent to which the de-colonization process has taken place, as far as our memories go, and also to show the extent to which de-culturization has taken place with regard to traditional cultural practices which in our history includes agricultural participation.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you. Let me indicate that the objective of this census is to get information, because for far too long we have had a lot of planning taking place without actual statistical empirical data.

With these few words I, again, request the support of this Senate with regard to the Agricultural Census Order and Regulations.

Sen. King: I would like the Minister to address the question I posed on 10-year-olds being considered involved in economic activity.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: To be brutally frank, I really do not know why the age 10 was chosen. I recognize the issue you raised about child labour and so forth. If I may, can I ask that I be given an opportunity to inform you on the answer after you have voted. [*Laughter*] I am not being facetious.

Sen. King: Mr. Vice-President, that is not the way we do things in the Senate.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Really speaking, hon. Senator, I do not know the answer to that particular question, but I have noted the question and I give the undertaking that I will give you the information with regard to this. As I said earlier, this questionnaire can be reviewed; we do have enough time, and I will give you the answer before the questionnaire goes out.

Sen. King: Thank you very much.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Agricultural Census Order, 2004 be approved.

ACCREDITATION COUNCIL BILL

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move,

That a Bill to provide for the establishment of an Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago and for related matters be now read a second time.

The matter before us has been in formation for more than 30 years. I will give some history of this matter: On January 22, 1970, the then Cabinet agreed to the appointment of a committee to report on the recognition in Trinidad and Tobago of qualifications of degree and similar status obtained in foreign countries. The then government recognized that there was need to evaluate the qualifications offered by foreign universities, with respect to the particular development objectives of Trinidad and Tobago.

There was also, at that time, a particular interest of returning nationals. Remember the period in 1970 there were returning nationals and others possessing qualifications from Canada, the United States, Europe and India, and there was need to do something to recognize these degrees. This committee prepared a report, which led to a decision in 1971. In 1971, which was 33 years

Accreditation Council Bill
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

ago, the Attorney General was directed to proceed immediately with the preparation of legal instruments for the establishment of a National Commission on Accreditation. That is the genesis of the matter which we are about today. Some 33 years later, we are now establishing the Accreditation Council.

In 1979 a committee was established under the National Institute of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (Niherst) to assess university degrees, and this no longer spoke of foreign degrees, but also embraced local degrees. That committee later became known as the Committee on the Recognition of Degrees (CORD), which was formed in 1979. It has been somewhat difficult to find out from CORD what happened from 1979 to now; a period of 25 years. It appears that CORD did not have the staff and did not also have the legal authority to do its work. So over that 25-year period there has been a minimal—that is the best way I could describe it—accreditation of institution and degrees programme. In fact, we are talking about merely two or three maybe four assessments and accreditations being completed in that time. That is the informal information I have, because it has been difficult to get from CORD exactly what has transpired in the 25-year period.

There are also other issues. The Education Act of 1979 makes no provision for accreditation, but compels private schools to register with the Ministry of Education. The procedures and rules that apply to the registration of primary and secondary schools are also extended in some way to tertiary level institutions, although the Ministry of Education, certainly at the present time, does not have the legal authority to accredit or register tertiary level institutions, given the considerations in the Education Act.

We also have the National Training Agency (NTA), which was established as an umbrella body either in 1999 or 2000 for technical/vocational education and training (TVET) in Trinidad and Tobago. One of its functions is quality assurance of technical and vocational education programmes, but the NTA does not have the legal authority to accredit any programme, so that while it assesses it cannot register, recognize or accredit, especially tertiary level programmes.

Let me look at a few situations in the world: In the United States, every State is required by the Department of Education to register institutions as licensed—schools, colleges or universities—prior to seeking accreditation for their organizations. An example is the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Accrediting Commission; that is an accrediting authority for 11 of the States in the southern United States. In the United Kingdom, the Quality Assurance

Agency for Higher Education is one of several authorized accrediting bodies that establish quality standards for higher education institutions.

In South Africa, a country in the news recently, the Higher Education Council compels institutions to register as law, as higher education institutions and establishes quality standards for public and private institutions. In Jamaica, they are well ahead of us in this regard, in 1985, some 19 years ago, they established the University Council of Jamaica which, despite its name, registers private higher education institutions in Jamaica. It accredits programmes and confers degrees on students of institutions. I am advised that there are 50 registered institutions in Jamaica, at this time, and 17 accredited institutions with 48 accredited programmes.

In St. Kitts and Nevis, the Accreditation of Institutions Act of 1999 compels all private and offshore institutions to register with the Accreditation Board of the Ministry of Education, and only legally registered institutions can seek accreditation from the government of St. Kitts and Nevis. There are presently five accredited offshore tertiary level institutions operating in St. Kitts and Nevis. In fact, in my previous portfolio I had encountered one, which was an offshore medical school, actually doing some work in Trinidad and Tobago.

That is the regional and international framework in a nutshell. There are many other examples with the Asian countries and so on; they all follow similar lines. Let us go now to the specific matter before this House. In the recent past, I would say within the last five years, pending the establishment of an accreditation commission, the former administration established a committee in October 2001 to establish provisional accreditation criteria for the selection of institutions to develop mechanisms by which tertiary level institutions could submit information to identify and implement mechanisms for verifying the information on tertiary level institutions, to increase public awareness of quality concerns, to provide reliable and available information on accredited status of institutions, by the publication of a list of accredited institutions, and to develop linkages with existing programmes.

The committee reported to this administration in 2002. The report was submitted on May 09, 2002 and it made a number of recommendations. It recommended that accreditation be a two-stage process involving, firstly, registration and then accreditation after an in-depth evaluation of programmes offered. It went on to make a number of recommendations leading to the establishment of what they had called an Accreditation Commission; that was the

Accreditation Council Bill
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

Anna Mahase committee. That committee was chaired by Anna Mahase, and included Fazal Karim, Esme Charles, Althea Lawrence and so on.

The Cabinet decided that it would accept the recommendations of the committee and would cause legislation to be drafted to give effect to the recommendations. This led to a decision of Cabinet in October 2003, on the policy and draft legislation for the Accreditation Council. This was arising from the work of the Anna Mahase committee and also another committee appointed by this administration, the Dr. Ruby Alleyne committee, that took the work of Anna Mahase and completed it to the level of draft legislation.

This is, essentially, the history of the legislative process and the deliberations that took place leading to this legislation before the Senate. With the growing tendency to do things from a regional perspective, in 2000 Caricom agreed to prepare a draft bill for the establishment of national accreditation bodies in all Caricom member States. Dr. Ashton of Niherst was this country's representative in Caricom for the purposes of accreditation.

The Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education also engaged a consultant in 2003 who conducted an independent review and finalized the legislation flowing from the draft Caricom legislation, the legislation that is before us. So we have come to this stage today where this administration is seeking the support of the Senate to establish the Accreditation Council. There are time lines, and I ask the Senate to support the legislation, because one of the prerequisites for the grant of tuition support under our Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE) programme—GATE builds on the Dollar-for-Dollar programme by widening access to private institutions. The Dollar-for-Dollar programme was restricted to public institutions, and it had other limitations as well, but the GATE programme builds on that, improves it and widens the access to private institutions, but a prerequisite will be some sort of approval process, some sort of verification process to determine the quality of the offerings and the programmes in these private tertiary level institutions.

One of the primary functions of the Accreditation Council will be to register, to verify, to investigate and to accredit private tertiary level institutions and programmes; it is critical. This is why I am asking that we pass this legislation today, because I have received a number of suggestions, which are not—I do not want to use the words “earth shattering”, but I will—going to undermine the legislation, but improve it. I received many suggestions in terms of refinement of the definitions, even recently, within the last hour or so, I received some suggestions from Sen. King. I have had proposals made informally by other

Members of the Senate with regard to definitions and the functions of the council, and we will seek to incorporate as many of these as we can at the committee stage.

There are others that have been proposed to me, and I give this Senate the assurance that as soon as the Accreditation Council is established and functioning, one of its first mandates will be to look at all the various proposals, recommendations and suggestions for tightening and improving the legislation. I can come back, perhaps in a month or two, and make the necessary amendments to deal with some of the definitions, but what I would like to do this evening is take on board as many of the proposals that have been made by honourable Senators and as many that will be made in the course of this discussion.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to read from the Cabinet Note of 2003, which speaks to the report of the Accreditation Committee. The report recommended that this legislation should be confined to the tertiary level since it is the sector where there is a proliferation of private and offshore institutions. It is, therefore, the sector fraught with the most quality concerns in programme delivery. Another compelling reason for concentrating on the tertiary level at this time is that the secondary, primary and pre-primary levels are undergoing major developmental changes which will require some time to be completed.

The point that jumped out at me was the fact that you have this barrage of private schools, for want of a better word, offering degrees. You would see the advertisements in the newspapers; many claims are made that they are affiliated with overseas institutions and that they offer degrees from the University of London. They use prestigious names and so on. There is quite a bit of a free-for-all in this sector, at this time. It has become a growth industry and we do expect that it will continue to grow.

This is the policy framework into which this Accreditation Council fits, quite apart from the need now to regulate the sector and to put proper rules and systems in place, because there are no existing rules and regulations, is the Government's desire—and this has to be the country's desire as well—to significantly increase our participation rate in tertiary education.

When I was doing some research for this debate, I was looking at some of the things being done, particularly in the Asian countries. I was intrigued to find that quite a few of the countries in Southeast Asia are not as far advanced in this area as we would think. In Malaysia, in particular, I was surprised to see that their participation rate is only 11 per cent. In fact, I was reading a speech by the minister with responsibility for higher education in Malaysia, and he said that

Accreditation Council Bill
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

they have to catch up and he quoted the statistics for the United States, the United Kingdom and Singapore. Singapore is used as an example, but South Korea, believe it or not, is the country in Southeast Asia with the highest level of participation in tertiary education, not Singapore.

He was looking at all these countries and saying, “We in Malaysia need to catch up, because we are only at 11 per cent; Singapore is at 34 per cent and Korea is at 45 per cent,” and so on. I was also surprised to learn that New Zealand is only at 12 per cent as well. I would have thought that most developed countries would have had a participation rate in tertiary education exceeding 25 per cent. This is what my initial thoughts were. I was surprised to learn that some countries that we might consider developed, like New Zealand, do not have participation rates at that level.

There are some countries, for example, the United States, that claim to have a participation rate in excess of 50 per cent; so does the United Kingdom. Several European countries claim to have participation rates in excess of 50 per cent. Sweden claims to have a participation rate of 65 per cent. This got me in the direction of determining what is tertiary education and what is participation in tertiary education. What I discovered is that the definition of participation in tertiary education used by most countries of the world is derived from an examination of a particular group of students. I do not like clichés, but I understand the word is “cohort”; they look at a particular cohort.

The cohort is the 17—24 or 18—24 age group. They look at this group and determine the total number of persons in that age group enrolled in tertiary level institutions. This is the formula used in Singapore, for example, to get their 34 or 35 per cent. It is the formula used in Malaysia to get their 11 per cent and, believe it or not, it is the formula used in the United States and so on to get their rates. I picked up a research paper which said that the United Kingdom is fudging the figures and including people outside of this age group.

Having established that as the definition, and these are school leavers, so you look at the age at which people leave school, you pick an age, whether 17 or 18 years, and then you say, “Okay, for the next five or six years, we would expect that these people would be going into tertiary education,” and you then define your participation rate. Most countries do this. I did some very informal investigation in Trinidad and Tobago, because, unfortunately, there is no proper assessment of this situation in Trinidad and Tobago.

I got the current enrolment at the University of the West Indies to be about 10,000. I was not able to get the breakdown into diplomas, certificates, short

courses, degree programmes and so on, but I will use the 10,000 figure for the time being. The enrolment in the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT) is about 3,400, again, that would include some short courses, but let us use those figures. So I had 10,100 for UWI; 3,400 for COSTAATT; for the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology (TTIT) I got 1,600. So 10,100 plus 3,400 would take you to 14,500, and adding TTIT I got 16,100. So let us say the enrolment in what we would call public or quasi-public institutions is 16,000; those are the figures I have at this time. I hope my maths is right. [*Interruption*] Is my maths wrong?

Sen. Prof. Deosaran: Not the mathematics. Did you include the School of Continuing Studies in that arithmetic or would you consider that within the category you are speaking about?

Hon. C. Imbert: I got a gross figure out of UWI and I assume that they considered the School of Continuing Studies. I am told that my maths is wrong; 13,500 plus 1,600 is 15,100.

I then went on to private tertiary level institutions, and that, again, is very difficult to estimate because there is no register; there is no requirement for them to be registered so you have to depend on their good graces to tell you how many students they have enrolled. We used best estimates, in terms of degree programmes and diploma programmes, and came up with 1,000; it could be 2,000. I am told that it varies somewhere between 1,000 and 2,000, but not all of them offer degree or tertiary level programmes, so let us use 1,000 for now.

If you take 15,000 in the public sector; 2,000 in the private sector, you get 17,000 people enrolled in post-secondary tertiary level education. I am assuming, which is a false assumption, that the vast majority of these fall into the 17—24 cohort. It is a false assumption, because you would have post-graduate students. Using that, I then went to the Central Statistical Office (CSO) to determine the number of persons in the age group 17—24, which I found to be very difficult, because the CSO does not categorize in that cohort. They go from 15—19 and 20—24, but, again, using some mathematics I was able to come up with an average figure, a very rough estimate, of 170,000.

So you have 17,000 persons enrolled in a population of 170,000; so our participation rate is about 10 per cent, which is consistent with the informal information in the system; nobody really seems to know. Some people say 9 per cent; some people say 11 per cent; some people say 12 per cent, but I am using a figure of 10 per cent, using this informal approach, which I am sure hon. Senators opposite would agree is within a reasonable margin of error.

If Singapore, using this same methodology, the 17—24 cohort, has a participation rate of 34 per cent, and the US and the UK have a participation rate of 50 per cent, if we are to get to developed nation status we have to get into those numbers. Our target is, in fact, 25 per cent by the year 2015, which means that we have to more than double the enrolment in tertiary education over the next 10 to 12 years. That is why I said that I am certain it is a growth industry, because the public sector cannot provide an additional 17,000 or 20,000 places all on its own. We would need two or three more universities for that.

I do expect that the private sector will get into this more and more, and we would have many private tertiary level institutions springing up. Because we suspect this would happen and we are reasonably confident that it will, because of the lack of standards at this time and because of our need to double our participation rate, it makes it imperative that we establish some system of control; some yardstick, some mechanism to tell the population about the quality of tertiary level institutions in Trinidad and Tobago.

We are seeking to define what is secondary and tertiary education, because in order to register an institution as a tertiary level institution we must first be satisfied that it is offering courses at the tertiary level. An informal definition of secondary education is that it is a period of education—and I am using age groups now—for young people between the ages of 11 and 18, where the emphasis shifts from what they were taught at the primary level to the mastery of tools of learning, expression, understanding, the exploration of areas of thought, the acquisition of information, and the development of concepts, attitudes and appreciation. It is a development on primary education.

7.45 p.m

Mr. Vice-President, I would also venture to say that secondary education is arranged around subjects where you study physics, mathematics, history or algebra and as you move to the advanced level, you would specialize further in the subject areas, whereas tertiary education is planned learning beyond the secondary level that prepares students for successful living. So, secondary education gives you a grounding in subject areas and also teaches you initial concepts and so forth. Tertiary education is a programme of subjects and teachings that teach you to work, to do research and so forth. These are the definitions that we are developing.

I am satisfied that using that definition A'level is secondary education. There is quite a debate about that. In fact, many of our Caribbean neighbours forge the

figures by adding advanced level education into their participation rate for tertiary education. However, when one looks at European countries they make a clear distinction; they have secondary and upper secondary which, to me, is the equivalent of the advanced level system in the British model. So, I am satisfied that O'level and A'level standards are secondary education, but these definitions would need to be refined and so forth. These are just views that we are developing within the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education as we seek to define what is tertiary education. We need to also define what is a tertiary level institution and what is a tertiary level programme. That is the history and the background of the Bill.

The policy of the Bill is to regulate the sector; to establish standards to allow us to give tuition grants to students at private tertiary level institutions and also to allow us to generally expand the tertiary level education sector.

I would just go briefly to the Bill and look at some of the clauses in the Bill. The Bill is arranged into four sections. The first section of the Bill includes the definitions. We would treat with this area of the Bill in the committee stage where we would look very closely at these definitions; the second section deals with the structure of the council, its powers, its functions, its duties and so forth; the third section deals with administrative matters and it allows the council to raise funds and to borrow money and so forth; and the fourth section deals with prohibitions and places restrictions on the registration of institutions and so forth.

I have circulated some amendments and the most fundamental of these amendments flows from recommendations made by the Opposition in the other place, where they raised the matter of the concept of appeals. I thought it was a very good intervention from Members of the Opposition in the other place, so we have included a section to provide for an appeal committee. There was a view that this Accreditation Council would have a lot of power and, therefore, if people are aggrieved against decisions of the council, they should have some sort of appeal process. So, we have put in an appeal committee, which would include members of the public so it would not be a closed shop. There would be members of the council on this committee and also members of the public.

We have defined the areas where persons could appeal if they feel that the council has not complied with the legislation, or that the council acted on false information, or that it is arbitrary, one could appeal and there is a process. And, of course, as in all legislation of this type, after you have gone through this process, you could go for judicial review, or if you wish, you could probably go straight for judicial review. What we are trying to do is to limit the litigation by providing

Accreditation Council Bill
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

an appeal process. So, hopefully, this committee would deal with 90 per cent of the issues, and then just a few matters would go to the courts. We really do not want to get into that where every other day we are faced with a lawsuit where a person was denied registration.

We are also refining clause 26 to make it very clear that registration would be mandatory. The amendment says that no institutions shall carry on the business of post-secondary or tertiary education or use the various words that described tertiary level institutions unless it is registered under the Bill. So, we are making registration compulsory, as is the case of Jamaica, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and in most countries in the world.

This is the purpose and intent of the legislation before us. I hope that I have dealt conceptually with the issues related to the Bill. I would be very happy to take on board any proposals or suggestions from Senators. I think this is something that should not be politically motivated. We have a participation rate now of about 10 per cent, and if we want to become a developed country and increase our participation rate to 25 per cent, then we would have to get everyone involved in the business of tertiary education. Every single citizen of this country must want to improve himself/herself by going on to further and higher education and, therefore, this cannot be a political matter. It could only be for the long-term benefit of this country to develop our human resource base. I would even welcome proposals from Sen. R. Montano—that is a joke—and Sen. Wade Mark. I would be most happy to receive their proposals on how we could refine and improve the legislation.

Mr. Vice-President, with those few words, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, it is already 7.50 p.m. I am advised that dinner is being served. I think we should take the dinner break now and return at 8.25 p.m. We should take the dinner break now. The Senate is suspended for dinner.

Sen. Dr. Saith: Mr. Vice-President, before you suspend the sitting, we do have a copy of the *Hansard*, and I do not know whether you wish to deal with it or whether you want me to repeat what I said. May I read the *Hansard*? In Sen. Mark's contribution he talked about God never sleeps and the time will come and this was his remark: "It will come to you as well..." This was in response to something that I had said. "The \$30 million debt forgiver, you are a very lucky person not to be in jail". Mr. Vice-President, having read the *Hansard*, I would also suggest that you look at Standing Order 35(4), in addition to Standing Order 35(5).

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, you would have noted that I was provoked. I just want you to bear with me, because I see that you are getting upset, and I think as a Vice-President you should be calm. I have to put my case—I am a trade unionist. May I just indicate to you that when I was on my legs making my contribution—as you would see from the *Hansard*—Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith made a remark arising out of my statement. Mr. Vice-President, you would see that it was recorded “Inaudible”, so you did not hear it, Sir. I responded to Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith on the spot. As soon as I made that remark, I went back to my substantive matter, but it was like a provocation and I responded immediately.

In addition, normally when a matter like this arises, I would have expected my honourable colleague and friend to stand immediately and seek some redress, but as you would have noted, it was only when I took my seat that Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith arose, which I found was a bit unfortunate. I thought that if I had said something that was so damaging or hurtful to him, he would have objected at the time and you would have had a little clarification on the matter.

Mr. Vice-President, I felt that in light of the provocative statement that was made, which was very threatening to me, I had to respond and I responded. Although it was not recorded there, Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith would remember that he said: “That the time would come for you as well”. That is what I recall and I would ask him to withdraw that threatening remark that he made towards me, and I would equally withdraw my statement. He provoked me and it was because of the provocation that I responded. If Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith withdraws what he said then I would withdraw. I was on my legs when he made the statement. Mr. Vice-President, you did not hear but I have it recorded.

Sen. Dr. L. Saith: Mr. Vice-President, I withdraw the “Inaudible” remark, because that is what is here in the *Hansard*. [*Laughter*]

Sen. R. Montano: So, Wade, you would have to withdraw now. [*Laughter*]

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, you know that I am a man of peace. I really believe that we are getting a little thin-skinned in this Parliament. My colleague and I have been in this battle for a number of years so, if the Senator feels very offended, with your leave, I would withdraw.

Sen. Yuille-Williams: Amen.

Sen. Mark: I still believe what I said.

Sen. Prof. Ramchand: Mr. Vice-President, after that entertainment, do you feel that we were sufficiently refreshed to continue the debate?

Mr. Vice-President: No. Sen. Prof. Ramchand, we are going to take a break for dinner.

Sen. Dr. McKenzie: Mr. Vice-President, I remember you saying that the statement should be expunged from the record, and I would like that it be done. In other words, we have had the reconciliation, but you did say at the beginning that you would like Sen. Mark to withdraw the statement and that the *Hansard* record be adjusted. I am just reminding you because we may get carried away by that statement.

Mr. Vice-President: So that the statement would be expunged from the record. Senators, we took five minutes doing that, so we are going to return at 8.30 p.m.

7.57 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

8.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Question proposed.

Sen. Roy Augustus: Mr. Vice-President, thank you very much. I am not usually very longwinded and I would maintain that particular style this evening, not only because of the lateness of the hour, but I think the Minister has set the tone. It is sometimes difficult to give praise to the other side, but this evening the Minister did in fact set a tone, which I suspect we should all follow. In fact, we have come here prepared to support this Bill.

Indeed, the genesis of this Bill started a couple years ago, and I was happy that the Minister acknowledged that it began with Dr. Anna Mahase and continued with Dr. Ruby Alleyne and her committee. More than that, at this point in time, this is something that is absolutely necessary in education in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, it is long overdue. If we are to accept that the economic development of a country is integrally related to its human resources development, then it is only necessary that we put a number of things in place, one of which is the accreditation of tertiary programmes in registered institutions. So, with that, I want to say that the Government would support the Bill. *[Laughter]* The Opposition would support the Bill. Well, I am thinking futuristically, and you cannot blame me for that at all. *[Desk thumping]* *[Laughter]*

In fact, when we looked at clause 8(1) and the question of the promotion of the quality and standards of education and training in Trinidad and Tobago, I was glad to hear the Minister refer to primary and secondary education because it is

the bedrock on which this could be developed. There is still much work to be done in the system to ensure that we produce the kind of candidate that would be able to access these programmes which we are now going to accredit and also to develop the kind of citizen that we want in Trinidad and Tobago to carry us forward.

I heard the Minister mention that many developmental programmes are taking place in the primary school system and in the secondary school system. I want to point out that I would never stop talking about appointments. I am extremely worried about appointments and promotion in both the primary and secondary school systems.

There seems to be a problem existing among the Ministry of Education, the Teaching Service Commission and the denominational boards. I think we all have to get together to erase these problems. I am certain that we all know that in many of our schools—particularly in the denominational primary schools—there are too many posts occupied by persons in acting positions, and some of these persons have been acting for years. I think that kind of non-security of tenure affects performance. That is one of the matters that I think we would have to look at very closely to see how quickly we could eradicate that problem of the length of time it takes to promote teachers. I think this is so because there are different interpretations on a number of matters, especially between the boards and the Teaching Service Commission. So, while this does not affect this Bill, I think it is absolutely necessary that we look at what is happening there, so that we could ease the congestion that is taking place. That is one matter that we must look at.

Clause 8(2)(j) seeks to enhance the quality of tertiary education and training in Trinidad and Tobago, and this is a laudable objective. This is what we are looking at. First of all, we are looking at the question of the kind of quality student that we would be putting out. We are increasing the tertiary education cohort. The problem that we are experiencing is that we are losing many of our tertiary educated persons via migration. In fact, there are statistics to show that 47 per cent of the people migrating from this country are people with tertiary education. We must continue to expand our access and the quality of tertiary education by virtue of what we are doing here. Why are they leaving after we have educated them? If we have the answer to that question then we could deal with the causes, so that when we increase the number of persons who would be accessing tertiary education, we should not increase the brain drain—the number of persons who would be leaving our country after having being trained.

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. AUGUSTUS]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

Mr. Vice-President, one of the reasons that has been put forward by some people is the question of crime. It is being said that because of crime in the country, young people who have acquired their degrees and who want to work comfortably at their skill, do not feel comfortable in the atmosphere of crime that exists in the country today. And, therefore, while we are looking at increasing the tertiary education cohort and the number of persons who are leaving with properly accredited degrees from properly recognized tertiary institutions, we have to also look at keeping them here. It is a question therefore of simultaneous operations taking place among the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and also the Ministry of Community Development and Culture.

I would state that community work is essential in any battle against crime. So, there has to be that interlocking of approaches towards reducing the crime level in the country to the extent that we could feel comfortable that our developed human resource would remain with us to continue the process in the never-ending cycle, and we could get to our 25, 30 or 40 per cent tertiary education reservoir in 2019. [Laughter]

There is also the question of accreditation having a twofold purpose. It is inbuilt here, but I hope that steps would be taken to ensure that the necessary machinery is being put in place for the continuous review of those institutions that would be on the register and also for the continuous review of the programmes.

I think that the quality assurance team is one that must be carefully selected and one that must be allowed to do its job in the proper manner. The Government would be registering, accrediting and reviewing these institutions. On the basis of reviewing them, we are saying that when the time comes, if an institution is not performing, there is the possibility of closing down that institution. I have no problem with that because I think an educational institution must always be up to standard.

The Government must also be very careful before it closes an institution, because we do not want to reduce the number of available spaces. To prevent too hasty closures, or to prevent even the need for closure, one of the things that we would like to see is that the quality assurance group should have a capacity to assist the schools in the development of their programmes, wherever there are weaknesses. This group must be able to assist these institutions in taking care of those weaknesses. It is not just therefore a question of going in to see what they are doing and then coming out and reporting, but to go in and see what they are doing, and where there are weaknesses, the necessary assistance should be provided to these institutions so that we could take them the extra mile.

The Minister mentioned the question of the New Zealand concept, and it was very interesting. I did a bit of reading on the New Zealand aspect. In fact, I have truncated my contribution this evening, because I came on a different tenor, but I was charmed by the Minister and, therefore, I am going to another level. One of the things that I observed in the New Zealand arena is that they were talking about the universality of tertiary education and they were widening the scope. As far as they are concerned, the lines between many of the polytechnics and community colleges and so forth are blurred—so they are all encompassed into that post-secondary or tertiary education area.

The point I was looking at, based on the Minister's definition of tertiary education is that New Zealand is saying that it is fast moving to the stage where people of all ages have to be embraced. If we are moving toward universality of tertiary education, to not be exposed to tertiary education would leave you out of the loop. In fact, they are saying that more than 50 per cent of the people that they have in tertiary education are over 25 years. So it is not the 17—25 age group. We have to look at that in our vision down the road. We have to see what we are doing now so that we could expose more people to tertiary education, whatever the age levels. There are many persons who may want to change careers, and we must provide for them if at age 35, 40 or 45 they want to move from a particular career in which they were engaged all their working life. So, there must be an opportunity for them to go back to school, if that is possible. That is why I think that distance learning and online teaching and so forth would be extremely important. So, we have to look at that aspect of our tertiary education advances.

Mr. Vice-President, I worry, because the more I look at the concepts developed here is the more I see the magnitude of the job that faces us and the more I see the need for a lot of infrastructural development as far as schools are concerned—whether they are schools run by the State or whether they are private schools. I know that some of these private schools—and they had better start putting their house in order—at this point, may not come up to the physical standard that you would want in terms of classrooms and what you would want to have available like laboratories and so forth.

In spite of the fact that there is distance learning and also online teaching and so forth, the teacher or the lecturer is an integral part of the delivery of education. I hope that the Government is looking at the reservoir that exists at the moment, and how it would expand that reservoir—even if we have to try and get some of those who have left because of crime to come back in—so that we could offer quality teaching to persons for whom we are now making tertiary education very accessible.

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. AUGUSTUS]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

The final point I want to drive at—and I always have to talk about persons who are less fortunate than others—is that whatever we are doing, in terms of our registration, in terms of our accreditation and in terms of financial assistance to persons—both at the State level and at the private sector level—I would hope that every effort would be made for persons of lesser financial means to have almost an equal opportunity—“poor us” never had the equal opportunity, but we understand that. The Government must make every effort to ensure that those persons—already they are disadvantaged, because they come from homes where they do not have the kind of environment, which allows them to develop to the extent that they could develop. With all these processes that we are putting in place here, we must ensure that we do not disadvantage these persons any further.

Mr. Vice-President, with those few remarks, I want to thank the Minister for presenting this Bill in this manner, and I am certain that the Opposition would support the Bill.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand: Mr. Vice-President, I welcome this proposal to establish this Accreditation Council. I am very appreciative of the Minister’s historical account of the stages leading to this moment. I welcome the Accreditation Council for a number of obvious reasons which I think need to be stated just to see how bad things have been.

For too long, teachers were finding difficulties in being considered eligible to be appointed as teachers and graduates were finding it hard to be considered eligible because the system said that they had to go to Niherst which would assess them, and sometimes it took years. So, many foreign graduates could not find jobs in a profession where we needed people, as well as other kinds of employment. So, I think that situation would benefit a lot from the council.

There are also problems where if a person does a degree at a foreign university and wants to do graduate work at the University of the West Indies (UWI), sometimes the UWI does not even know how to place that person. For example, should that person be required to do one or two of our undergraduate courses or should that person take a preliminary year, et cetera. Again, I think the council would assist in that area. In the case of students who have done one or two years at a foreign university and want to complete an undergraduate with us, again the council would help.

Mr. Vice-President, most important, this council would help to clean up and rationalize the current confused situation, and it would allow for transitions and

transfers where you could move from one stream to another, and you could work your way back if you want to go to UWI. If we were to look at all the post-secondary provisions and assess them and grade them, a student would know if he wants to go to UWI, or if he wants to go to the University of Trinidad and Tobago, and it would be very clear that he has to get this or that to gain admission.

8.50 p.m.

He would also be able to shift from a College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT) type to a polytechnic type. There would be lateral and upward movements. I am sure it was the Minister's emphasis and that he was not unaware of one of the great problems in our system.

Let us look at the definition of post secondary. It means "all education and training programmes which are not at tertiary level but which are offered to secondary school leavers to meet their vocational or continuing education needs".

We have secondary, post secondary and tertiary. There are many people who have not completed their secondary or who have done their secondary very poorly and cannot proceed to tertiary. They have not successfully completed secondary but they start to think of them as post secondary. A large number of young people in this country are caught between and are the victims of unscrupulous organizers of courses and programmes.

At the University of the West Indies I have two friends who attended a course there using its facilities in A+. At the end of the course they were told that it was their job to sign up for the exam. Their money was taken and they were given a certificate of attendance. That happens to people who have not completed secondary but have some secondary and are fighting. Although I welcome the Minister's emphasis on expanding tertiary, we need to do a survey of the number of people in this confusing and confused void who are just thrashing about; getting nowhere; losing all their money and getting frustrated. Many of them go into COSTAATT.

The council is to be welcomed for another reason that has to do with the general sense people have—I call it a prejudice—that the only degree worth having is one from a conventional university. The way I see the council operating is that if the council evaluates all the offerings that are going around, the council might be able to be a degree awarding body. The council can award the equivalent of a university degree even though the student did not go to UWI or the University of Trinidad and Tobago. Because of the status of the council and its international affiliations that degree would have the respectability of a degree from a so-called conventional university.

I think we need that very much and it is something that would give impetus and motivation to those people who have fallen out of the conventional streams, but want to help themselves by shopping around for available courses. The council would enlarge educational possibilities by offering an alternative way of getting a degree or giving people a second chance to get back into the conventional stream. It also has the advantage of recognizing those private and commercial institutions that have now sprung up. You can now tell them that if they have the quality, we have nothing against their making money, but we would make them a quality place; they would make their money and public and private can work together. The students that reach the required standard would benefit from the Government Assistance for Tertiary Expenses (GATE) programme and in that way, the institution would benefit.

I have some problems and I am sure that the Minister thought about it. In part 1(2) of this Bill “accredit” means “to evaluate and determine...meet established standards” but established by whom and what means? Standards in relation to what? One question that has been going through my mind as I look at this is: What kind of relationship would exist between the council and the University of the West Indies? Would the council want to use the standards of UWI as a kind of norm, to say that they would ensure that you come up to UWI standards? No matter what people say about UWI it is an internationally recognized university. Some of its faculties are stronger than others, but this university has a very high reputation. If we work in conjunction with UWI, the council could work out the standards in collaboration with UWI and hopefully, the University of Trinidad and Tobago. We would not have a vague term like “established standards” because at the moment we do not know the standards and who would establish them. I would like to see the word “polytechnic” put in the definition. It is a very respectable term for a tertiary institution and I do not think it is here.

I am very interested in a technical university. Those of us who were arguing for a University of Trinidad and Tobago were very clear in our minds that we wanted a Technical University of Trinidad and Tobago, not just a University of Trinidad and Tobago. A technical university which would have all the status and research strength of the great polytechnics in the United States and Canada and which would be a university in its right; give a degree in science and technology and whose focus would be on relevant training. It is not a second grade thing that frees us from the responsibility of doing research, but the difference would be the kind of research you would do in the technical university.

For instance, you would ensure that that technical university would put us in the forefront in air conditioning techniques; the use of solar energy and so on. It

would be pure research, but relevant and which when completed would enhance the economy and lifestyle of the country. It is not just mechanical technical stuff. You have to do much research to work out our refrigeration and air conditioning.

It is a shame that in a tropical country like ours, we have to depend on other people's refrigeration and air condition and we do not use the sun, wind or sea. A technical university can devote research money to solving those technical problems. I am not happy with the definition of "technical university". I have a feeling it does not mean what I am suggesting. A technical university means such and such and also conducts research of an applied nature. I am not sure what the phrase means and maybe the Minister would explain what "research of an applied nature" means and whether it is the kind of thing I am talking about.

I come to the functions of the council. In clause 8(1) the Minister should leave a little for the Minister of Education. It states:

"Notwithstanding any law to the contrary, the Council shall be the principal body in Trinidad and Tobago for conducting and advising on the accreditation and recognition...programmes and awards, whether national or foreign, and for the promotion of the quality and standards of education and training in Trinidad and Tobago."

I would like to see there, "post secondary education and training".

In subclause (2), there is "Without prejudice to the generality". My general comment on this is that there are some specific functions that the council can manage and be clear about how to do it. Some are so general that one could feel that they are implicit in the specific tasks. I think that subclause 8(2)(c) should come first to register post secondary institutions. You cannot go anywhere unless you find out all the institutions. You maintain a constantly updated list of accredited institutions then accredit the institutions to recognize the programmes. I am suggesting a shift in the order. Subclause 8(2)(f):

"to determine the equivalency of programmes and awards",

followed by subclause 8(2)(g):

"to develop and advise on a unified credit based system for the post secondary and tertiary education sector".

I have a feeling that subclauses (f) and (g) go together and perhaps mean that you would examine and grade all the programmes and awards that are currently being offered and having done that, you might work towards the possibility of making a

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. PROF. RAMCHAND]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

coherent credit system. It is not the equivalency to determine the comparative strengths and weaknesses. You are not looking for them to be necessarily equal; you want to be able to say this one is stronger or that one is weaker and on the basis of that, you try to work out a coherent credit system, so that you would be able to decide that these 24 courses would constitute the equivalent of a university degree.

Sen. Dr. McKenzie: Mr. Vice-President, I thank the Senator for giving way. What I understood by “to determine the equivalency of programmes and awards” is that you may have an award or a diploma and it could be equivalent to what is probably a certificate course in another institution.

Hon. Imbert: You are right.

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: The Minister has a lot to think about.

Clause 8(2)(h) states:

“to establish relationships with regional and international accrediting and quality assurance bodies and to keep under review their systems of accreditation, procedures and practices;”.

I think that this is a crucial provision. The council cannot work in a void. If it has to establish standards it would need to look at other people's standards. I would stress the importance of the regional thing to ensure that all the English speaking islands such as St. Kitts/Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica can arrive at some kind of agreement about what we require, so that we would have a regional front. The regional thing would then be compared with other international bodies. I do not know if we would need to change the phrasing but I would like that meaning to be clearer.

In subclause 8(2)(i), I would like to see the word “polytechnic” in there. I come now to one of those provisions that I feel just adds to the list, but is implicit to seek to enhance the quality of tertiary education and training in Trinidad and Tobago. If you are doing all those things, it follows logically that is what you are doing. To spell it out as a function might make people ask: What do I do in addition to what I am doing? I do not know if “to disseminate good practices in the tertiary education and training sector by conducting research and training” could be a function of the council. The council may suggest that this has been done by the institutions, but I feel that it is asking too much of the Accreditation Council to undertake something which should be done by the administration of the institutions, that the council is relating to. To provide the public with

information would be a kind of secondary function. After my work is done it is available to you. I do not know if we need to spell that out as a function.

Subclause 8(2)(m):

“to provide for the advancement in Trinidad and Tobago of education and training”,

seems to me to be superfluous.

Subclause 8(2)(n):

“to ensure that the quality of all post secondary and tertiary education delivered in Trinidad and Tobago meets the standards set by the Council”

is implicit in all that has been said about what the council is doing.

Subclauses 8(2)(o) and (p) do the same thing. I suppose that the members of the council would know that these are by-products of their work. Do we need to specify them as functions in the legislation?

I applaud subclauses (p), (q), (r), (s) and (t) on the ground that they are very specific things appropriate to a council. I would have liked to link subclauses (t) and (u) so that you would know that we, who grant you that recognition, can withdraw it. The same clause that tells you that I am granting it to you is telling you I can take it away from you. That is just a minor point.

Subclause 8(2)(v):

“to facilitate the free movement of skills and knowledge within the Caribbean community”;

would be a by-product of my work. I do not have to set out to do that as a function.

In general, the functions are very appropriate, but the list is too long and can benefit from a bit of pruning where we give certain very specific functions to an accreditation council and leave the by-products to spin off. The Minister would be able to explain why we need some of those other by-products. I am giving my suggestions.

I come to membership. I am not happy about the way the membership is set out. I do not know whether it is envisaged that the council would collaborate with UWI, the University of Trinidad and Tobago, COSTAATT and the National Advisory Council of Education. I would like to see it specified that there are persons from the School of Education at UWI; the University of Trinidad and Tobago; COSTAATT and the National Advisory Committee on Education. It should be clear that these four institutions be represented on the council.

Part II subclause 4(1)(b) states:

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. PROF. RAMCHAND]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

“two persons with expertise in accreditation and quality assurance at the tertiary level;”

What are the experience and the expertise? Are you saying that you want a senior academic who has had experience in universities from all over the world, or one who has worked at UWI for 25 years? I do not understand how you would choose those two persons especially if we are already saying that we must have somebody from the School of Education, or somebody from the University of Trinidad and Tobago. If you are specifying the institutions, do we need to go with something vague as two persons with expertise? This seems to leave an opening for bad appointments.

Subclause 4(1)(c) states:

“two persons nominated by professional associations involved in the discipline of education;”

Are we saying that we want somebody from the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association (TTUTA)? What are the professional associations involved in the discipline of education? Could we specify those?

Subclause 4(1)(d) states:

“one person nominated by the Ministry;”

Which ministry? Ministry of Education or Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education? It is very puzzling because it seems to be too general.

Subclause 4(1)(e) states:

“two persons nominated by organizations most representative of employers;”

What kind of organizations are we thinking about there?

Subclause 4(1)(f) states,

“two representatives of the general public;”

I do not know how we would choose those two representatives. Is it a different pool from the pool of two persons with expertise in accreditation? What is the difference between those two pools? Then, we have the executive director.

The two representatives of the general public may have a populous sound about them and may make ordinary citizens feel that they could be on that. This is an extremely technical committee that requires knowledge, imagination, skill and experience. I do not like a blanket thing that says two members of the general public. I am afraid that the general public is not qualified in general to be on the council.

Finally, I find it alarming that institutions already scamming people in Trinidad and Tobago at the commencement of the Act shall for the period of two years thereafter be allowed to continue to do so. I do not see why these fly-by-night organizations should be given two years. For me, they would get six months but I am willing to compromise and give them one year. I really do not like that clause.

These are some of the things that I picked up on a quick reading of the Bill. I think it is a very important Bill and the council has a great role to play in the development of education and post secondary education in Trinidad and Tobago. I give it my blessings and hope that tonight the Minister would have his way and wish and come back in a month or two with adjustments and amendments.

Thank you.

Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosaran: Mr. Vice-President, I rise like the previous Senators, to extend my congratulations to the Government and in particular the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education for bringing this long awaited Bill to the Senate. I think it deserves the commendation of the entire Senate. [*Desk thumping*]

I wish to be brief given the late hour. I do not know whether it is part of a legal requirement for the GATE programme or a brilliant contrivance to manipulate the length of our delivery. Knowing him as I do, I remain very skeptical as to which one. [*Laughter*] We are grateful for the history and he has brought us up to date. It has a long and very interesting history and as extended by my colleague Sen. Prof. Ramchand, this attempts to come to grips with an educational system to meet a dynamic society as Trinidad and Tobago. It is no easy task.

In the White Paper on the National Institute of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology which is part of the history, dated October 1977, the first page recalled Cabinet's policy of the then PNM government and as enunciated by the then prime minister, the late Dr. Eric Williams. Ironically, I believe that in that era the PNM had consistently demonstrated its understanding of the educational needs of the country in terms of both diversification and having a judicious emphasis on the growing energy sector which led to Point Lisas. I am afraid that some of that, I would not say brilliance, but versatility, got lost in the history as enunciated by the distinguished Minister. We are beginning to pick up. This Bill gives us an opportunity to pick up the slack in a rather brisk manner because time is not on our side.

I would recall the words of the late Dr. Eric Williams. To make it brief, time restraint. He identified challenges; the need for knowledge in the modernized

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. PROF. DEOSARAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

technological sense; the availability of people, that is the human resource issue and the third one is more relevant to the issue at hand which is to construct an institutional framework and system to propel our social and economic development within the secondary and tertiary educational system. There is a quotation here from Dr. Williams that I would not read in its entirety but merely to underline the fact which I made in a recent debate, that the knowledge economy and provisions in this Bill should look at the objectives of the accreditation exercise. For what kind of programming? It should not be a free for all accreditation as if it should not have a particular direction to augment the purpose of Vision 2020. I find that gap is missing or relatively silent and the way the Bill is presented is purely legal in context and rightly so. I would have wished to see an extension such as what Dr. Williams enunciated in 1976. I know that you are quite different from Dr. Williams in many respects, but similar in some respects of course. I make that with some generosity. It is a good document. Perhaps, your technocrats could revisit it and expand the scope to make it relevant. That is a point that my colleague Sen. Prof. Ramchand was making.

I understand the question of 20 per cent tertiary enrolment coming out of secondary school is commendable. In Britain, the age group is specified. We have to deal with the realities of things. First of all, we have stuffed rather hastily, a couple more hundred people into the University of the West Indies. If you see what can only be called a nightmare in terms of classroom congestion; availability of space and parking, I do not have to enunciate the tremendous difficulties in trying to reach a goodly target, but in a way that does not take into account the fuller question of resources and proper accommodation. If you do not, we would end up with the same mistake we made in 1975, by expanding the secondary educational system quantitatively and structurally without taking into account the need for quality control and accommodating the students in a way that the objective of high quality education would be achieved.

I do not have to remind the Senate and the veteran Ministers and members of the PNM of the *Moses' Report* which enunciated the tremendously adverse consequences that flow from what we know as the shift system. We need to pay attention to not only the quantitative targets but also the qualitative aspects in terms of meeting the objectives to which I briefly alluded.

There was a plan which might have been mentioned in the Lower House—but I am quite sure that it is available to the Minister—where one of the projections of the University of the West Indies in the light of the growing number of community colleges and COSTAATT, more particularly the University of Trinidad

and Tobago is that UWI should take a shift from heavy undergraduate programming into the third year and graduate training, thereby becoming a centre of excellence with a better chance, shedding some of the load and divesting some of that undergraduate load onto the community colleges and the other tertiary educational institutions that would fall under this accreditation council. In my respectful view, that is a most productive vision for the University of the West Indies. You can have your associate degrees; go for the third year at university, but let the University of the West Indies gradually become a centre of research excellence and development which could then be used to feed the teaching programmes at the community colleges and the other institutions.

Teaching is not just teaching as we have been doing over the years. That is, having all these American and British textbooks especially in social sciences. We need a heavy dose of indigenous research output in all forms of life such as community and economic development. I believe that is what the issue of the agricultural census was all about. There is an indication of that in one of the relevant reports. It is called the Strategic Plan (No. 2), 2002—2007. This is more recent but there was one before that. I am making the point to impress upon the Minister that he is in the best position to provide some leadership in an instance where the university seems to have lost its way and has become redundant on the very point that they had previously treated so as to make a difference in direction. Mr. Minister, perhaps you might need to nudge them into what should be the long-term direction, otherwise they would end up duplicating much of what the other tertiary institutions could do and perhaps, could do better and let the university do what it could do and should do better at a relatively higher level.

I had one or two little concerns. I would not try to knock the Minister over the head, figuratively speaking of course, to accept my points. I think that he is of a liberal mind enough to open the gateways for new ideas especially with respect to the GATE programme. If you are going to include subsidies for private institutions, I want to put it in a proper way. You should not only consider what is good to do, but also whether we can afford to do it. Since you are sitting next to the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, the question of taxpayers' money should always be taken into account when you are extending your resources and financial allocation. It sounds very good to help everybody all the time and in all different ways, but we should become more endowed with fiscal responsibility. There are many other areas where I could make that same point.

The other issue with subsidizing private institutions, apart from if that is the way to go with taxpayers' money, you have to consider what kind of programmes

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. PROF. DEOSARAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

they have. You have the universities of the United Kingdom and America linking with local institutions. Students are taking foreign courses and you are subsidizing that, implicitly! Are you subsidizing foreign universities indirectly? It is good to do it because you want to raise your tertiary level enrolment ratio, but can we afford that and for how long? I do not know, but I think that it is a matter for consideration without sounding uncharitable. When you are managing taxpayers' money there has to be a line of fiscal responsibility.

Then, you have a plethora of foreign universities linking up. There are almost 100 of them across the Caribbean. I would not say it is a move for imperialism, not in this global economy and knowledge base and all these fancy words. We welcome them with open arms but not so much at the cost of our taxpayers. All kinds of exaggerated claims have been made. I must tell you that Oxford and Cambridge are not what they used to be. The market has opened. Distance learning courses have been changed from long-term to short-term. The whole quality aspects of these reputable universities, still reputable to some extent, but I do not think that the years Dr. Williams attended Oxford are the same. Institutions have changed. I am quite sure that the Minister would be aware of those changes. Not because it is a foreign university you will give accreditation willy-nilly. You must run the qualitative and accreditation checks and more than that, still keep a tight rein on the extent to which you want to fund students taking those foreign courses and the foreign linkages, except in cases where it is directly appropriate to the objective of your tertiary educational system. Perhaps, I would wait to see that being delivered at some other point.

The Minister is quite correct. Some countries have 11 per cent in terms of the tertiary level enrolment and New Zealand has 12 per cent. There are two serious issues. I would not go crazy over the percentage and say that we are worse or better than. My other colleague, Sen. Augustus alluded to the point of what was the use of having a 25 per cent enrolment ratio and two years after, 12 per cent of them depart which is one problem. There is a lack of patriotism in the country. I was waiting to hear my friend, Sen. Augustus, apart from saying that we should look after the causes, perhaps another time he would give us the specifics. What are the causes? Is going overseas for economic benefit; to join the family or due to crime? We have to explore that phenomenon. Why so many people who are trained at public expense—I made the point once to the Minister of Public Administration and Information that those who are trained as doctors at government/taxpayers' subsidy, do they have a contract to serve the country at some extent? We cannot use taxpayers' money willy-nilly even though we want a

high tertiary educational enrolment because we would not achieve the objective if they are not here. You must have a system without being too punitive and being as a communist, but they have to serve the country otherwise they must do it with their finances. You cannot take taxpayers' money to train people and when you are ready for their services they are not here to serve the people whose money was paid for them to go through the system. Maybe, some compromise ought to be found.

The other issue perhaps, and one that is less vague, is this question: Do you have a socio-economic system? If you want the quality that you are pursuing through the Accreditation Council, do you have an economic system that could absorb all these people you are training and subsidizing, without any connection between the tertiary educational system and the economic capacity to absorb them properly, without having a large number of unemployed professionals on your hands? You are asking for serious trouble because then you can justify Sen. Augustus' point that they have nowhere ahead to go after being trained. In addition to the accreditation Bill you need consideration of these particular factors.

I am yet to be convinced that we are very badly off at the current tertiary educational level enrolment. Take those specific factors into account and the current capacity that your system can absorb. You have an unemployment rate of 11 per cent. There are many educated graduates around the place. I know, because they come to our centre for jobs. I do not want to elaborate and try to humiliate them. If you do not have the connection, the fundamental purpose of this Bill of high quality graduates would not be satisfied in the existing circumstances. Perhaps, the answer is that while you are dealing with the Bill and its objectives the system would open. I am not hearing much about that except Trains 5 and 6 that are narrow gaps to absorb trained people. It is very capital intensive.

I believe that the Minister and his technocrats, perhaps when they return, would convince the public not only of the justification of the Bill, but also the far reaches of the Bill in terms of Vision 2020. My colleague, Sen. Prof. Ramchand is quite correct that you need to operationalize this thing about standards. What standards are you speaking about? A good start is to begin with the standards of the University of the West Indies that I know about. The Minister would know the kind of controls we have as he has been a lecturer at that institution. For example, the examination is marked by one examiner and a second examiner. In the case of graduate programmes they are sent abroad to external examiners. Those are quality controls. Even the courses we have just developed, MSc, Phd and MPhil in

criminology and criminal justice, I sent them to Oxford, Cambridge, University of Toronto and Florida State University just because of the quality aspects of the programme. You get it accredited not perhaps legally, but in a professional sense. I think that he is right. A good way to start is with the reference point produced by the University of the West Indies.

On pages 7 and 8, I think Sen. Prof. Ramchand alluded to that, but I am still not sure if he wanted to make the same point I want to make. When you define “post secondary education”, it means, “all education and training programmes which are not at tertiary level but which are offered to secondary school leavers...” “Tertiary education” means “...the process that occurs following successful completion of secondary schooling...” I do not know if there is a grey area and I am warring too much. Perhaps a sharper distinction could be made between those two definitions. I would not worry the Minister’s brain too much with that. It is just for clarity sake especially since this is an academic document which might be subjected to accreditation.

On page 9, the council must have not less than 10 and not more than 13. That is a common phrase we use in comprising boards. I ask the Minister to consider why not the number 13? If you add (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f) and (g), they would come up to 13. I know you want some flexibility but I suggest that you tidy it up. Put 13 since when you look at the Schedule, Item 3 you speak about a quorum. A quorum is a very problematic issue. It is always on my mind. It has given me many a sleepless night. I do not want to attribute blame on this particular occasion. I must tell you that I am very sensitive about the problem and a chairman having to call meetings time and time again, where three or four diligent members appear and the other recalcitrant delinquent members do not appear consistently! With that in mind, I suggest with respect that you put 13 and to tidy up the quorum make it seven out of 13. The other six or those who refuse to come for one reason or another after three meetings, you do something about them. Anybody who chairs boards or has committee meetings to deal with, much time could be wasted and decisions could be jeopardized by malicious absenteeism. They could manipulate the system. If you want efficiency and effectiveness, I am suggesting a concrete methodology to achieve it. Therefore, I would be very surprised if the Minister as gracious as he is otherwise should refuse this respectful proposition.

I come to page 10, clause 8. This is the heart of the Bill, Minister, once again we commend you for bringing this Bill. Subclause 8(e), is an issue that deserves to be dealt with “to advise on the recognition of foreign institutions...”. Before

that, with post secondary education, we have a university here too. You might register the University of Woodford Square too. Perhaps, you might want to consider that because it has done so much for decolonization.

I would tell you why I am keen on advising on the recognition of foreign institutions of education and training and their awards. Mr. Vice-President and my dear colleagues in the Senate, you have a lot of bogus PhDs parading in this country. You have a lot of bogus professionals or people who claim to be professionals with bogus credentials putting the national community at risk and more so in certain professions. I am tempted to call the professions. Some of them are on radio and talk shows. If it were not so late—I think you should enquire. You do not want something as crime stoppers, a whistle blower, but you should invite the public discreetly to tell you those who are suspicious of these bogus PhDs. I know some of them personally and unfortunately. It is not good if you look at the objectives of your Bill. You want to clean up the stables. We cannot have these PhDs parading. You have correspondents who are giving PhDs and just posting around a certificate for you. It is a corrupt mess. This Bill is the ground level and you ought to start from the bottom up as it were. Tidy up the system and make some pronouncement or give some warning in your own inimitable style about this bogus situation of parading with credentials which are not genuine or properly accredited.

Subclause 8(2)(p) is designed to protect the interests of students and subclause (q) to undertake audits, reviews and evaluations independently. You should not wait until someone asks you to enquire. You should initiate that enquiry where there is a justifiable suspicion to do it discreetly. This is a big problem and part of the objective of this Bill is to clean up that particular aspect of our professional life.

Briefly, Mr. Minister, you have my warmest congratulations for clause 11. It is a very litigious country. Everybody wants to go to court, the High Court, Appeal Court, Privy Council and if there were a fourth or tenth level, they would still be going to court. They are entitled but the entitlement has to be justified in this modern era. I would tell you that a time would come when not only whether it is Caribbean Court of Justice or the Privy Council, these layers of appeal would have to be retailored. You get the feeling as if the divine spirit put in a third level of appeal, if you had a fourth level the dynamics would have been the same. I think that the time would come when just an appeal court would have to satisfy the litigation propensities of our Caribbean people especially in this country. The point is pertinent. Let the decision be final except of course, in your spirit of

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. PROF. DEOSARAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

goodwill you have an amendment for an appeal coming. That is the way most of the legislation has to go now. You have the due process, but it should not be over extended in such a way that it jeopardizes the basic intention of the particular Bill.

With clause 14, you might think that I am giving you with the left hand and taking back with the right hand. I do not know why the council needs your approval to appoint a secretary. I do not know what you know about secretaries more than the council. And such other staff, would that mean messenger? Minister you have more important things to do, I am quite sure.

Having said that, subclause 14(2) is good. You should have some oversight about the allowances and remuneration.

The last point is linked to what the distinguished Senator on my right said. I noticed that clause 26 is in bold letters. I think that you are trying to say that it should speak for itself.

Hon. Imbert: Thank you, Senator, for giving way. This is in bold because it is an amendment which was made in the other place. That is the only reason it is so.

Sen. Prof. R. Deosaran: Thank you. Apart from that, it is good reason it is in bold. It speaks about fraud and misrepresentation. Without going through the details I could tell you clause 25(3)(c), “misrepresent to the public the recognition gained by it for its programmes or awards.” It is similar to the bogus PhDs I spoke about. This is fraud. What is the punishment? Removal from the register? You might as well hug them up and kiss them. If that is the penalty for such severe misrepresentation, I am left to wonder. Is this all considering the damage done?

Hon. Imbert: Once they have been removed and they continue to operate they have committed an offence and are subject to other penalties. It creates an offence.

Sen. Prof. R. Deosaran: When it comes to academic and intellectual work you have to be serious because the question of integrity is essential to intellectual work. That is why there are rules against plagiarism. Mr. Minister, in spite of your gracious explanation, I think that this consequence should be strengthened, but I leave it to your better judgment. There is too much “rachifie” and too many false certificates in the world of academia. Everybody is printing certificates. It undermines public interest. I do not mind somebody hanging 12 certificates in their bedroom to boast to their friends, but practising through that certificate, you

jeopardize the public's interest especially in some professions which I would not engineer my way into.

There are some other points. I know it is late and I am sorry to have been so long. I am very grateful for the opportunity and I commend the Minister and the Government for bringing forward a Bill which is long overdue.

Thank you.

Sen. Dr. Eastlyn McKenzie: Mr. Vice-President, I would be pretty brief. Let me join with Sen. Prof. Ramchand in welcoming our temporary Senators, Bonnie-Lou De Silva and Francis Pau. It is nice to see when we have appointments to make on a temporary basis that ladies are remembered. Today, I think we have the strongest number of ladies in the Senate. There are 12 of us today. I know that the number would keep increasing.

Let me congratulate the governments past and present for this process of bringing this Bill on accreditation and recognition of educational institutions and their degrees. I am extremely happy that this Bill has been brought to the Senate. In Tobago, we have had the experiences of fraudulent schools from Trinidad advertising their courses and what you would get. They collect their money up front. Just three weeks ago I had a mother calling me about her son who had enrolled in one of these courses. He paid the money; got very little tuition and when the time came for the examination, they saw no papers and examination supervisors. She is investigating and getting all the facts together and I am sure I would hand it over to you. This has not been the first time.

At one time I used to be the coordinator of exams in Tobago. We have had these problems from schools in Trinidad coming to Tobago to set up courses and collecting their money up front and we really had a fight. In many instances I had to inform the Ministry of Education and the supervisor of examinations of what was happening and they had to take the necessary action. Let me say thanks for bringing this and I am sure that if this is made public a number of people who are being robbed would actually complain.

I understand the Minister's age range but we have to go back to what happened formerly. Not all our students got a chance at free secondary education. Some paid and some could not afford to pay and the output from the secondary schools was smaller than it is now.

9.50 p.m.

What has resulted is that a number of our people now older than 25, before Dollar for Dollar and Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE),

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. DR. MCKENZIE]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

would have had to save their money to take advantage of tertiary education and therefore if you were to visit some of these—Roytec, Institute of Business (IOB), School of Continuing Studies, et cetera—you would find that there are people there who are actually working and studying, and they are not the people between 17 and 25. They are 30, 35 and over. Some of them are actually going to change their jobs. This is one of the areas you have to look at when you are thinking of the age range. You will see it when it comes to the GATE programme. Many who could not afford and who started to save their money to access education at this age, you would see are not in the 17 to 25 age group, whose parents are funding them.

There was a time, Mr. Vice-President, when the Ministry of Education had a list of recognized universities. I know that. I still have one from the days when I was a public servant. It would tell all the universities throughout the Commonwealth that were recognized, so many students actually came to the Ministry of Education to check whether a university they were applying to was on the list. I guess this would have to happen later on where you would have to have a published list that people could cut out and keep.

I welcome the Bill also because it lends itself to a transfer among Caribbean institutions, especially as you mentioned the role that the Caricom Secretariat was playing. You can actually start a course at the University of the West Indies—in Cave Hill or in Mona—and finish it in St. Augustine. I also think that you can have courses started in different islands within Caricom and transfer to Trinidad and Tobago or vice versa. Credits could be transferred and work recognized.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to agree with something I think Sen. Prof. Ramchand said and that was the sort of going onward from a lower level. In other words, in the United States you have a student going to Community College for two years, getting an Associate Degree and going on to a university to complete the Bachelor's. I think that this is something we could look at. It is not something probably that might happen overnight, but who says if we have a common curriculum and structure we could not start a course in COSTAATT or even IOB and move over into the university and be a full-fledged student doing your degree in probably two years, having done two years elsewhere.

I agree with Sen. Prof. Deosaran that we link education with the needs of the country, prioritizing where the GATE money goes. In fact, if you have a certain amount of money to spend—as I expect you would—on the GATE programme and you have to set priorities, I guess that needs of country would put you in a higher

bracket of acceptance than something else, especially for a foreign university. I want you to look at that. One thing I am concerned about is tertiary education and how action in one area breaks down action in another area and I will give you my experience of what happens now, especially in Tobago.

There are teachers in the primary schools, who are now accessing the Bachelor of Education degree on a part-time basis. They all know that the degree pitchforks them over people who do not have a degree but who may have 20 years service and courses in-between. Those primary school teachers are away from school for a day, so their children are without a teacher and the burden is on another teacher to take over that class. Apart from that, the course is so compact that even though they are at the school, they are in front the class in body and not in mind because they have to have their assignments done on time and they have to do their reading. Sometimes I think if I could find the person who made workbooks, I would assassinate him. The children have to do workbooks. They are just doing tests; they are not being taught. I am not blaming the teachers. I am saying to give them full scholarships and replace them in the classroom.

It happens with the Dip. Ed. course for the secondary school children. I belong to a PTA in a secondary school and many times parents complain that the teacher is not there. Some teachers make alternative arrangements and the children are looked after, but these are secondary school students who are left unsupervised and not taught because the teachers in Tobago have to come to Trinidad for their Dip. Ed. course on a Friday. So every Friday many of the secondary schools in Tobago are without three and four teachers because they are legitimately at a course in Trinidad. When they are there they do not go to the class because they have an assignment to hand in at a certain time; they have reading to do. I am not blaming the teachers. I am saying that those teachers should be given full-time scholarships. If you have to do that then you can probably prioritize and say, we can afford to give 15 scholarships. You assess and give 15 scholarships and let them take no-pay leave, sabbatical or something. But it is unfair. What you are going to do with GATE will break down what Mrs. Manning is doing in the primary and secondary schools.

Sen. Prof. Deosaran, you do not know that you got so many curses because you said the teachers are delinquent. It is not an untruth. It is quite true. This is something the Minister has to look at—that action in one area does not break down action in another, because the social cost attached could be disastrous.

Just to rush through the Bill. Already my colleagues talked about the post-secondary meaning. I want to add to what Sen. Prof. Deosaran said about the

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. DR. MCKENZIE]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

composition of the council. You said 10 to 13. I am saying if you have to have 10, from where will you take the three? When you count whom you have there, you have 13. If you are saying it must be 10, from where will you take the three? Will I take one from the three; one from which of the twos? You have to be specific as to what you want.

I go to page 11, (i) and there you talk about all these things—university, tertiary, college, et cetera, but you do not have “technical institute”. You have technical college, but on page 8, you have “technical college or technical institute”, so you need to say that also.

On page 12, (q), I would say you should also consider external evaluators out of the system. They do this in the United Kingdom and you would be surprised to know how they find what other people who are connected to the system do not look for. Sometimes it is good to have an external body to do the evaluation, the audit, the reviews and so on. I know you said independently, but I am just giving that idea from having read one of these evaluations.

I go to page 17, clause 24. I suggest that in the register you categorize the institutions, for example technical institutions. I go to page 18, clause 26(3) and I ask: And then what? If you remove the name of the institution from the register, then what? And I say that the public must know that this institution has been decertified. It is no use telling them that they are decertified and everybody is still going to the college. The public must know, after the evaluation or the monitoring, that this college or institute has been decertified; and it must be gazetted.

I agree with what Sen. Prof. Ramchand says about clause 29(1). I think that two years is a long time for these institutions to go like that.

Many of the points I had the other Senators raised them. It is no use just repeating them to pretend that I am bright.

Thank you very much. I support the Bill.

Sen. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I am pleased to make a short intervention on this particular Bill to provide for the establishment of an Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago.

I was pleased to hear the Minister say that this particular piece of legislation was informed by the work of two committees: one, the Anna Mahase Committee, and I do not recall the name of the second one—the Ruby Alleyne—and the recommendations that arose from those two committees. I probably would have

liked an opportunity to see the committees' reports because accreditation has been an issue for quite some time now and the whole evolution of accreditation itself—not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but globally.

In my contribution, I just want to put an economic value to what is being attempted by the Minister this evening. At the end of the day, we must look at what value this is bringing to Trinidad and Tobago. I know that everyone is saying that it is to stop the floodgates and the bogus institutions, but there is a bigger economic value to this whole process of accreditation.

Let me start, without boring the Senate too much, by going back a bit and putting this whole question of accreditation in a global context. Most developing countries have been establishing what we call local accreditation bodies for some time and the purpose was to demonstrate the commitment to quality education; to ensure that there is employability of their graduates; to provide this international mobility that we keep talking about and to permit the transportability of qualifications or even partial qualifications and, most importantly, to permit what we call the international credit accumulation.

I see one of the biggest advantages of accreditation, especially for a developing country like Trinidad and Tobago, as being able to attract students to our shores. If I put it in the regional context of Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean, we will see that there was a Caricom mandate—I think the Minister alluded to this—for all Caricom countries to establish national accreditation bodies because at the end of the day they wanted a regional network of accreditation bodies. Again, the importance was to allow for the free movement of trade with a view to the whole CSME and it was necessary for each country to assure the quality of its products so that they could move across the region more easily on the basis that there was mutual recognition of each other's qualifications.

There is an educational paradigm shift taking place where new models and linkages are challenging not only Trinidad and Tobago, but also the Caribbean region to move beyond the confines of our national perspective towards regional and international issues.

What dominates these international issues and by extension the regional issues, is quality assurance. The quality issues are dominating the higher education debate. There are some factors that explain this and that is because of the concern for public expenditure; the expansion of this higher education because of the opening up of borders; and again the international viability of students, teachers and researchers, together with the whole globalization of the market.

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. SEEPERSAD-BACHAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

Many governments decided that it was time to get rid of these traditional economic controls, which were found to be inadequate to face today's challenges. They feel that they need the quality assurances. I was not sure I heard the Minister speak on the issue of this accreditation body and how it fits into the regional and international networks. To become an accreditation body, they must have what we call mutual recognition within the international network for quality agencies for higher education. There is the whole big area in that they now run their conferences. The last conference, I think, was in Dublin.

In order for one to accredit, one's accreditation body must become a member of that international network. If I may say so, "speak" means that your accreditation body cannot be accredited therefore it will not get recognition. So any of the programmes you accredit will have no recognition unless this accreditation body belongs to the national network.

When we look at the Bill, I get the impression—the Minister can clarify this—that their work centred somewhere between the two committees because parts of it are in the Bill. When you look at the functions of the council, you are seeing that international linkage. It is talking about the regional linkages.

Hon. Imbert: This is something I had raised in the other place and it was just in deference to the later hour that I did not repeat it. The council will be a member of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education. That is one of international accrediting agencies. The point you have made is well recognized, that the council's accreditation would have no significance unless it is part of an international framework.

I spoke at length about that in the other place, but I decided to ease you all up in terms of time. I did not want to talk too long.

Sen. C. Seepersad-Bachan: I thought it would be because I saw it in the Bill. There were parts of it that alluded to the international network. I am making the point because if we look at the intentions of the network itself, in terms of promoting good practices and maintenance—Sen. Prof. Ramchand raised many issues and some of those issues will be covered under this international network of quality assurance because there are standards and practices you will have to abide by.

In addition, what is very important here is that it will facilitate the links with the other accreditation bodies. Once it facilitates the links with the other accreditation bodies, it means you do not have to reinvent the wheel. My concern with this accreditation body is that, from where I sit, I find that we have been taking so long to get it off the ground and this is why we have had all this

explosion of tertiary and post-secondary institutions that are just getting away. Some of them are not being recognized and may be offering very good programmes, which, if they had been given the recognition, may have attracted foreign students. This is why I put an economic value on it.

There is that opportunity that we do not want to lose because other Caribbean islands are looking now at the same issue. They are looking at the Caribbean becoming a centre to attract international students. Everybody wants to come to the Caribbean to study; to spend three years as a nice little holiday and get away from the terrorism and all that. Unfortunately, times are hard in other countries, but in the Caribbean you look for the economic opportunities that may exist.

I was trying to get clarification on how far along the process is in terms of becoming a member, adopting the best practices, codes, et cetera—the working relationships of the other accreditation bodies because that will be a kick-start if it has already started. As soon as we establish the council, we may not—as Sen. Prof. Ramchand stated—have to find ourselves reinventing the wheel to accredit programmes. You may be able to look for another accreditation body that has accredited that particular programme in a foreign institution and have it accredited because that is the agreement you have—the mutual recognition between the various bodies.

What is also important, in the Dublin Assembly 2002, for this international network, is that there are bi-annual conferences. It was agreed that the network should place much greater priority on the working of regional associations. So the network itself is probably no longer going to be looking just at the national body, but maybe also at the Caribbean Regional Network. It is important therefore to establish our accreditation council in the network. This already exists because Jamaica has a body and Guyana is establishing theirs and so on. I think there is one next year where they are actually drafting a statement—I think the conference for 2005 is in New Zealand.

I am making the point because I have had the experience of this changing paradigm in accreditation. Having served in the Department of Electrical Engineering for many years, we were accustomed to being accredited by the Institute of Electrical Engineers every three or four years as the case may be. It was a routine process for us. The Faculty of Engineering at UWI, as the Minister would be aware, goes through these exercises and in the case of civil engineers, it might be the Civil Engineering Society or the Society of Structural Engineers, Mechanical Engineers would be the Institute of Mechanical Engineers, but after going through this routine every three years—we know what we have to do:

submit all our exam papers; submit all our course material; all our examination papers for assessment; external examiners reports and so on, we thought that was the exercise. They then interview you; talk to your industry partner to hear how your students are performing out there and, end of the exercise. However, one year we failed accreditation and it was quite a blow to the Department of Electrical Engineering at UWI. We never thought we would lose the accreditation status, but we did; not because of teaching, not because of course material, but because we had no quality assurance procedures in the department. We failed every one of the tests for quality control and quality assurance.

We had not put in place the processes, the methodology, the administrative support required to support this particular process. I do not know if the other faculties like Social Sciences—Sen. Prof. Deosaran might be able to say—have had that experience. So all the engineering departments I know are now very wary of that and are very careful when it comes to quality assurance procedures and ensuring that we have that. That whole paradigm shift, as I said, was quality assurance and that is where accreditation has gone.

It has now been recognized that there are programmes and it is easy to determine the equivalency of a programme with another programme. That is no longer difficult because of the network of accreditation bodies. You can exchange information, but what happens is that the quality assurance process will be the determining factor. When that happens, when they are finished with the quality assurance—they do an audit every three years—you are able to determine right away your weaknesses and they are able to exchange with you where you need to improve because something is not reaching your students; or, this is not being implemented; why is there a lower success, or why are your students not being absorbed effectively in the industry.

This is why I base tonight's contribution on the quality assurance because that is where I think this Accreditation Council will find its biggest challenge, which it will have to face. If it is going to be accepted, it has to show right away—in the national network—that it can deliver in terms of quality assurance.

Sen. Prof. Ramchand asked the question, when we talked about the functions of quality, whether it was a special expertise. It is. The accreditation teams that now visit the Department of Electrical Engineering bring two persons who are quality assurance experts. There are people now trained in the field of determining quality assurance for tertiary education. It is now an emerging field, a very specialized and trained field. I thought that was what was meant in the Bill when they referred to looking at the quality in that particular function. In addition,

when they talked about the audit—I am just reading between the lines—the function was based on the audit procedures that will be carried out periodically because it is going to be an on-going process and it is not a stop-and-start, meaning “I get my accreditation today and I stop because when you come back in the next three years, you are using the data from the last three years. So it is a continuous evaluation process. That is why they look for an audit trail on all of the data. I wanted to make that point.

It has become so useful because it helps you to identify—because you mentioned why we need to help them. Why should we be telling them where they could improve? What happens is that when you do the quality assurance, when you go through the audit, the information gleaned can now be used as a feedback into how to improve the system because that is a part of accreditation. The accreditation team must be able to tell you where you need to improve. If they tell you where to improve and the next three years you come back and you have not improved, that is a serious case and you could lose your accreditation for that. You have to show genuine attempts at trying to improve performance.

There was also an issue of clarification. This issue about mutual recognition between bodies—and it depends on the nature of the accreditation body that you are setting up—for example, you can have mutual recognition among academic institutions or you can have it among accrediting agencies. I was not sure whether this was one of the recommendations coming out of the committee that it be done on both levels—that there be mutual recognition among existing universities and there be mutual recognition based on the accrediting agency because of the accrediting agency being able to credit the university programme in another country and because there is mutual recognition among the accreditation bodies, we have recognition of that university programme. Or, in fact, the modus operandi may well be that this international network being the supernatural body will become the body to say whether or not I recognize the particular accrediting body because of that agreement among other accrediting agencies. I was not too sure whether that was the modus operandi.

The other thing I wanted to find out was in terms of the Accreditation Council. Reading again into the Bill, I was not sure if there was going to be a combination or if you were just looking at the committee’s report recommending therefore that you accredit some minimum threshold standards, for example. You can do that. You can say: I accredit you based on an assessment of some minimum threshold you are supposed to meet. Or is it—which is what happens in the Department of Electrical Engineering—that they assess our objectives and

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. SEEPERSAD-BACHAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

missions as a department? Some centre on the processes, which is where we see we are going now in terms of the quality assurance issues. There will be some focus on the processes. I was not sure which one or if there is going to be a combination of the type of assessment methods that may be taking place.

Going quickly to the Bill, if you look at clause 2, the functions of the Bill, I know Sen. King has circulated some amendments, but I had a little problem when you were talking about accrediting the programme and accrediting the institution. I am not sure if you would be accrediting the institution or giving recognition to it.

Hon. Imbert: Certainly one would have to be specific to programmes. You cannot give a carte blanche accreditation to an institution.

Sen. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Then, Mr. Minister, you would accredit the programme, but you have to register the institution. When you are registering the institution, what are you looking for? Some minimum standard of operation in terms of some established standards that the council will come up with for such institutions? There is a difference between accredited programmes and registered institutions. You can have two institutions offering accredited programmes—the same programme—but one may not be registered because it has failed to comply with the minimum requirements.

I dealt with the equivalency of the programme. Sen. Prof. Ramchand also raised that. I saw it in terms of various institutions offering similar programmes, but equivalent. I served on a ministerial committee on science and technology some time in 1989 and you would be amazed that right here in Trinidad and Tobago when we tried to do an assessment of a number of research institutions offering training programmes how much duplicity was taking place right here in Trinidad and Tobago in the 1980s. For example, we found that the Institute of Marine Affairs offered a similar programme to Cariri. This is where I saw the equivalency that you were talking about. I may be wrong, but I assume that this is equivalency.

Again, you may be saying that a BSc in Computer Science at the University of the West Indies is equivalent to a BSc offered by the School of Business and Computer Studies. That is the sort of equivalency, which is different from the unified credit system. You want to say that you came from CAST, Jamaica, I have so many credits available to me. I have evaluated it and these are the credits. Therefore, I can be exempt from X credits in the electrical programme.

One of the things I am not sure about—and probably the Minister can indicate—is it that the regulations for this particular legislation would address the quality assurance framework that you would have to establish?

Hon. Imbert: Yes.

Sen. C. Seepersad-Bachan: I take the point that Sen. Prof. Ramchand is making that a lot of the functions identified you may find—and I do not know if this is the intention—when the regulations come into effect it will take up some of the functions outlined here because these will become procedures.

When I go to the appellate body, clause 11, you circulated an amendment, you are suggesting that two members of the council also participate on that appeals committee. I am not sure if you want it to be an appellate body. Coming before the appeals body are representatives of the council versus the agreed body. I think that would lend for quicker resolution of matters because immediately an agreed body has to come before this committee, which comprises members of the council who would already have been biased in such a decision, I am not sure what confidence there may be in terms of the appeals process.

On clause 13, I am of the firm view that as much as possible, wherever there can be total independence from the Minister, this legislation would do well in terms of the recognition. One of the things you are trying to do is to look at the economic value of it and to attract students to your shores by saying the institutions and programmes have been accredited by the National Accreditation Council and if we want that, as much as possible, if we can make this body independent of the political directorate, we would have better success.

I know there are many who feel that we should address the issue of the students we lose, how many people go abroad when we train them in tertiary education, but we are talking about diversifying our economy, moving away from the energy section; we have been talking about developing a knowledge base and technology driven economy and one of the best ways to do that is through education explosion.

We may find that we are exporting a lot, but nothing is wrong with that. These people are getting employment and at least they are being trained to pick up some high skilled employment. I will talk about how we can look at the issue of absorbing the skills into the system. I do not have long again, Mr. Vice-President.

Therefore based on making the body independent of the Minister, I suggest that in clause 13, it be the President who appoints the service commissions, et cetera, to appear to be insulated from the political directorate. I also suggest that the Minister does not have to approve because there is the Auditor General who will go in to look at the accounts for any impropriety. They would be subject to audits, but I believe, in terms of staffing and remuneration package and those

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. SEEPERSAD-BACHAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

things, it can be dealt with by the council because it would be operating like a board with accountability.

I was not too sure why in clause 20, they were exempt from motor vehicle taxes. These things have a way of extending and because the executive director may be entitled to a motor vehicle, he ends up with a motor vehicle that is tax free. Is that the intention?

Clause 22, we note that the Auditor General would be required to audit the accounts of the council, but I wondered if there should not have been an annual report to Parliament. If you would want the Accreditation Council, a body set up by an Act of Parliament, there should be some accountability to Parliament. I suggest that there be an annual report to Parliament.

There is a review in one of these clauses here—I think it was further down—which says that there is a review every three years in relation to the Caribbean body. The report with that information can be forwarded to Parliament.

With respect to clause 26, one of my colleagues on the Independent Bench—I think it was Sen. Prof. Deosaran—indicated that if there is a misrepresentation there should be some offence. You indicated that there was an offence, but I think you have to make it into an offence like clause 25 and there must be a penalty associated with that offence—a summary conviction or tort.

I was not sure, in clause 28(2), what was meant by “the accrediting bodies established by the Caribbean”—there was the review undertaken in collaboration with regional accrediting bodies. Is that a review by all the bodies or is it a review by this council with respect to its linkages with these other bodies? I am not sure what was meant by that. This was to do with the Bill.

There are two other points I wish to make. I know that this Bill will be passed and that there will be a council but that it would take a while to implement it because there are regulations. While that is going on, time is going. We have a situation outside there because there are many tertiary education providers and post-secondary education providers complaining day after day that they need the recognition and that they need accreditation because even in the public service they are not being accepted because of that. Some of them may be offering very good programmes.

What sort of interim plan will be in place to kick-start the whole recognition process? I heard someone say that almost immediately we should accredit schools of business studies, Roytec and so on, but there is danger in that as well.

Although these programmes may be aligned to “foreign”, that programme may be accredited there, but we have not checked to see if it is complying, which means that they have the required tutors, qualified teachers. Are they carrying out the number of hours for practical exercises? Who is policing that? When you give that sort of carte blanche approval, you open it up for people to slip and to say there is no need because there is no policing.

I think there is a danger if you take that broad-based approach and give interim approval even for programmes that I know may be aligned. We had that problem. At one time we were accepting students out of a school of accounting, which did this BSc degree in Electrical and Computer Science out of the University of London because there was an alignment. When the students came in—we accepted them into the post-graduate programme—we noticed that there were several weaknesses. When we went back, it was not that the programme was weak, but that is something that needs to be looked at if you are going to give interim approval.

I know that there will be the attempt to expedite this process, but you must look at dangers in this case. There is the other extreme. There are institutes that are conforming and complying. I was interested the other day in looking at an institute of medical technology, which is aligned to a premium Canadian Institute of Medical Technology and they were offering several programmes and could not get accreditation nor the recognition. Their graduates are not being absorbed into Mount Hope. If you look at the amount of money that this Government has just spent in medical technology in this country—almost \$21 million and we have known situations where people have been misdiagnosed because of medical technologists not being competent in terms of their job—in terms of how they read and analyse. Some of them miss a cancer growth or tumour.

I know of a case where a very good friend of mine died after doing a CT scan. Because of a misreading, which should have been detected at the time the scan was taken, that person died. It was not read properly. I suggest that, especially in this area of medical technology because it seems to be an area that is mushrooming in this country, it may very well be an area that we can start training people because there is a need for them throughout the region.

What is interesting is that in this particular case of this Institute of Medical Technology, operating here in Trinidad, Guyana, some of the other Caribbean countries and the US are now looking at giving them recognition so that persons graduating from the programmes would be able to go to the US just like the nurses.

The other thing we need to look at is that there is a tremendous opportunity to further expand the technology-based institutions in this country

10.35 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, again, in medical technology there is the example of computer tomography, CT scans. The capital cost of this equipment is so high, most of the private institutions would not be able to put out that capital cost. Could there be some arrangement between the Government, the public institutions, the RHAs and these private institutions? They could say: “Based on a nominal fee for the operation and maintenance of this piece of equipment, I will pay you a nominal fee and you would allow my students to come into the institutions and use it for practical purposes.” When the students graduate, you would now have professionals on your hands. You do not have to go looking outside, beyond the shores of Trinidad and Tobago for such professionals.

Mr. Vice-President, I think that is an area, having come out of the information technology field. There are many institutions. They have just mushroomed all over the country. Another area that is going to mushroom and should be pushed is medical technology.

I want to end on one issue. Two Senators on the Independent Bench raised the issue of our graduates leaving Trinidad and Tobago. Sometime ago, I had spoken to the Minister in the Ministry of Finance. I mentioned to him what was happening in developing countries all over the world, in terms of tax incentives. We could produce as many graduates, but we want to continue to provide the incentives for people to continue to train themselves. We must have the industry to absorb them. The only way to get that industry to absorb them is by giving tax incentives. I do not mean cut of the mill. It is not just the manufacturing; it is really the technology base, pharmaceuticals, et cetera. We should get them to come here with the knowledge-based skills, software engineering and the Internet type. We should get them to come to Trinidad and Tobago. This is what the science and technology park was all about. They will absorb all these post secondary and tertiary education graduates, because that is what is required. I feel it was always short-sighted on the part of the Government, when they shelved the idea of the science and technology park. The science and technology park would have provided that incentive and stimulus for a knowledge-based economy.

I thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

Sen. Mary King: Mr. Vice-President, it is late in the night, so I promise I will stick to the Bill. I am very happy to see this Bill before us tonight. I know it has

been in the making for 33 years, but it came to the fore when we were debating the Medical Board (Amdt.) Bill some months ago. Actually, it was the same Minister who brought it to the fore, very clearly. There is the lack of an efficient and professional accreditation body in Trinidad and Tobago. This Bill goes a very long way in alleviating that problem.

However, I have some points of, for me, confusion. There is the lack of clarity in some of the definitions. If we do not get them properly clarified, they may cause both confusion and conflict in the future. The Bill indicates that:

“‘accredit’ means to evaluate and determine whether a registered institution, its programmes or awards meet established standards and ‘accreditation’ shall be construed accordingly;”

My next concern is with the word “recognize”. I will tell you in a minute why I have these concerns. In your definition:

“‘recognize’ means to evaluate and approve the quality of foreign awards;”

The third one for me is the word “register”. The Bill states:

“‘register’ means to confer legal authority to operate a post secondary or tertiary level institution in accordance with established standards and criteria;”

This implies that there will be certain general standards and criteria established for registration. It also implies that institutions cannot operate legally in the post secondary or tertiary area, if they are not registered. I am taking that from the interpretation in the Bill.

However, I want to give you an example. If a school is operated by the foreign private sector, the private investor must be registered so as to offer programmes in Trinidad and Tobago. According to the World Trade Organization and the Free Trade Area of the Americas regulations, which we are all working on, we may be erecting standards which could prevent the operation of the foreign investor in education in our country. In fact, the World Trade Organization, in the development of the definition of “services”, constrains government regulation of such private sector services. I want to know from the Minister if he put this into the pot when he was framing the Bill. As you know, 2005 will soon be here. I doubt that, but we still have to be concerned about our definitions and what we are doing to that kind of situation.

I will get to the overall concerns I have with the Bill. The first main concern is what does it mean to accredit an institution. I would think that what we really intend to do is to accredit the programmes of an institution on a one-by-one basis.

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. KING]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

I agree that the institution should first be registered. By registering, we mean it must meet some general standard and criteria. I would like to see an amendment to that effect. Maybe I could explain the reason for wanting an amendment. Let us say UWI is registered to award certain kinds of degrees, but not all of its programmes may be at the standard to be accredited. We have to look at what exactly we are saying.

Clause 8(2)(a) of the Bill talks about maintaining a list of accredited institutions and programmes in Trinidad and Tobago. I think we should want this to read: “maintaining a list of accredited programmes with their associated registered institutions in Trinidad and Tobago.” Again, if we look at 8(2)(b), I think that should read: “to accredit the programmes of registered institutions operating in Trinidad and Tobago.” Again, if we look at 8(2)(d), I am suggesting that it should read: “to recognize”—we said “recognize” meant to evaluate and approve the quality—“accredited programme awards of foreign institutions operating in Trinidad and Tobago.” I am wondering if it is not also important to have these foreign institutions also registered in Trinidad and Tobago, just like the local institutions.

Hon. Imbert: I thank the Senator for giving way. You have quite a detailed list of amendments, which we are studying very closely. The point you just made about awards, in addition to programmes, is covered in our circulated amendment. We are seeking to amend clause 8(2)(d) by adding the word “awards”.

Sen. M. King: That point has been taken. Thank you. I was asking if it is not also important to have the foreign institutions registered in Trinidad and Tobago, just like the local institutions, before their programmes are evaluated. Here too, if we are doing that, what is the World Trade Organization impact for us as a country?

Clause 8(2)(e) spoke of the recognition of the awards, which is the same point we referred to earlier. Clause 8(2)(h) states:

“to establish relationships with regional and international accrediting and quality assurance bodies...”

I think it is important that we go a little further than this. Trinidad and Tobago is, as we all know, a very proud nation about its education standards. We are also in the globalized world. We want our professional engineers, doctors, architects, et cetera, accredited as highly as possible. To be accredited by a local organization does not always stand in good stead in some international companies and

countries. That is why I mentioned earlier that the Faculty of Engineering at the University of the West Indies has sought for many years accreditation from the United Kingdom Professional Society of Engineers and Engineering Institutions.

In this clause, I would like to see that we have a joint accreditation process. We are looking at 8(2)(h) and I am suggesting that we establish relationships, including joint accreditation exercises, with the regional and international accrediting bodies.

With respect to clause 8(2)(l), I am suggesting that we provide the public with information about the quality of programmes and recognition of the awards of institutions, in order to protect the public's interest. This should not only be to provide the public with information about the quality and recognition of programmes and institutions. It should be more specific, with information about the quality of the programmes and recognition of the awards of institutions.

I am concerned about clause 8(2)(m). I am wondering how will the council be able to go about ensuring that the quality of all post secondary and tertiary education delivered meets the standards set by the council. This may be a hard thing to ensure. I am suggesting that we modify the clause to seek to raise the quality of all post secondary and tertiary education delivered in Trinidad and Tobago, to the standards set by the council.

I am also reading into the Bill that we will allow institutions that have been refused registration to continue to operate. I want to know if that is the intention of the Bill? That is my reading of some of the clauses. I think the Minister would have to answer that for me.

I would like clause 8(2)(o) to read: "to ensure that the appropriate standards set by the council are being maintained in approved accredited programmes," just to be more specific.

Clause 8(3) suggests that post secondary institutions that are not registered will not qualify for accreditation of its programmes. That also implies that they can operate unregistered and unaccredited. I want that to be clarified for me please. I have suggested a rewrite of the clause which should read as follows: "Subject to subsection (2), in order to qualify for programmes of accreditation, all post secondary institutions must be registered." It is ambiguous.

Hon. Imbert: I thank the Senator for giving way. That is the intent of the penultimate amendment that I have proposed. No institution shall carry on the business of post secondary or tertiary education unless registered under this Act. That issue has been captured in this amendment.

Sen. M. King: So the law school would register.

Hon. Imbert: We would deal with that. We have an amendment to deal with that. "Ah' fraid all yuh lawyers."

Sen. M. King: Thank you. I am glad you have also seen what I saw. We are all on the same wavelength.

Clause 28(1) and (2) make sense, but subclause (3), to me, does not really follow. If an institution that is registered has many accredited programmes, but for some reason or the other it changes one of these programmes, perhaps, it is just being avant garde or it is way ahead of the council in thinking and action. Why should the institute be deregistered? Perhaps, all the other accredited programmes are in line with the council. I would like to suggest that it should read: "If the institution fails to comply within the stipulated time, the Minister may remove that programme from the accredited list of programmes," and not that you close down the institution for one programme.

Clause 29(1) seems to suggest that a presumed registered institution cannot offer a new course or a new programme, which is unaccredited. It is saying that a registered institution must get the permission of the council to offer a new course. I think this is a little rigid. Obviously, there has to be a time frame for proper assessment and accreditation. I do not see why the course cannot be offered. I think we could look at this.

Clause 29(2), again, states that if an institution, which was registered in the transition period, did not get itself properly registered within two years, it shall cease to perform its functions. This two years' violation would deregister and automatically discredit all of the courses. I do not think we can actually force that on a private business. I do not think we can force a business to close its doors. We have to look at the phrasing of that. I have suggested that it read: "An institution deemed to be authorized under subsection (1), to continue to perform its functions within the period specified, shall cease to be considered thereafter as registered, unless it is registered in accordance with the Act." We can give it a time frame to be able to get its house in order.

Mr. Vice-President, those are my main comments on the Bill. I agree that the Bill needs to be passed tonight.

Sen. Prof. Ramchand: Mr. Vice-President, I wonder if the Senator would consider or give us her opinion on clause 29(1) and (2). We may not be able to close them down, but they are registered. We can say: "Your courses are not

accredited.” It should be known to the public that the courses are not accredited. We would not have to close them down. They may close themselves down. Would that get us around the problem?

Sen. M. King: It is very rigid the way it is written. We have to give the people time to comply. I think the rewriting of it may help to ensure that they get the time to reregister, so that they are registered in accordance with the Act.

In closing, Mr. Vice-President, I agree with all my colleagues who have stated that there must be a nexus between our education system, our education programmes and our economic activities. Is Vision 2020 keeping up with the new legislation? Is Vision 2020 ensuring that, with this new Accreditation Council Bill in place, we can be assured through their tertiary education and the financial plan, which we heard of a few weeks ago, will really address the restructure of our economy? I think it is time that we try to get Vision 2020 working, to realize that they have to break out of the current system of commodity production and let us get on the platform from which we will be able to actually absorb the graduates from our new tertiary institutions.

I thank you very much.

Sen. Dana Seetahal: I just have one point to make, which is in reference to the proposed amendments for the establishment of the appeals committee under clause 11. My comment is threefold. Firstly, the proposal is that the appeals Committee, a higher body than the council, should be appointed by the Minister. Here it is the council is to be appointed by the President. It really does not gel with the fact that the council is a lesser body than the appeals committee.

The second point is that if the appeals committee has to deal with appeals from the council, it would be contrary to due process that two members of the appeals committee would have to be two members of the council. I have communicated that view already. We would have to look at a different composition. It may well be that we may want three or five members of the appeals committee. It is not a good idea to have an even number in appeals.

Thirdly, the appeals committee has to function in accordance with rules to be prescribed. There is no provision in the Bill or the amendment indicating who is to prescribe those rules. If it is an appellant body, these are not regulations, but specifically rules. It cannot be regulations made by the council. This is an appeals tribunal.

The question of the decision of the appeals committee being final, I am sure the Attorney General would indicate that that means nothing in this modern day

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. SEETAHAL]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

because it is always subject to judicial review. I do not know why that is there. I know people continue to put it in hoping for some effect.

The last comment I want to make is on the proposal by Sen. King with respect to the amendment to clause 29. Clause 29(1) which was referred to by Sen. Prof. Ramchand, is really a provision which is not allowing the institutions that already exist to be registered. It is merely allowing them to function. They are authorized to continue to perform. If we say, as Sen. King is suggesting, that the institution deemed to be authorized shall cease to be considered thereafter as “registered”, it would suggest that they would have been “registered” when they would not have been. The purpose of clause 29(2) is to say if they do not bring themselves within two years under the Act, that is if they do not register, they can no longer perform the functions. That is what clause 29(2) is about; to compel them to put their house in order for two years. They have two years to do so. To my mind, if they do not do it in two years, that should be the end of them. I do not think that the proposed clause 29(2), Sen. King is suggesting—an institution deemed to be authorized shall cease to be considered to be registered—is a true reflection of what they would have been because they would not have been registered. That is the point. Thank you very much.

Sen. Wade Mark: Mr. Vice-President, I know the night is young. My colleagues have been here for a while. I want to give them the assurance that I will try my best not to be that long.

Mr. Vice-President, may I take this opportunity to warmly welcome, as my colleague Sen. Dr. Eastlyn McKenzie did earlier, our two colleagues from the other side: Sen. Francis Pau and Sen. Bonnie-Lou De Silva. May I also take this opportunity to welcome our colleague again, this time in a new incarnation. The last time he was here, he was in an old incarnation. He was the Minister of Health at that time. Today he is the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. He is the third Minister within 28 months. My information is that by October he may be promoted to Minister of Housing, given his demeanour. Certainly, he would be of better comfort to the squatter, I understand. I think he may be promoted.

There are a few areas that I will like to share with you and ask my colleague to consider, in the context of what my colleagues on this side have already advanced. I believe that the Minister would like to look at clause 4. I believe that justice, balance and the whole principle of tripartism should encourage and support the inclusion of two persons nominated by organizations most

representative of labour. I think labour is a major stakeholder in the education process. There is a recognized trade union that represents teachers in particular, TTUTA. I suggest, for his consideration, to ensure that there is balance in this whole process, that we consider adding subclause (h), in which we would like to propose two persons nominated by organizations most representative of labour. I think that is a very important area which, I am sure, he would like to consider.

I find clause 6 to be untidy. The council shall pay to the members of the council such remuneration and allowances as the Minister may approve. I believe, the Minister of Finance can tell me if I am wrong, there is a Cabinet Note that deals with class of members of various boards. There is class A, B or C. The Cabinet has already decided on levels of remuneration from members of boards and agencies. Rather than have the Minister arrogate unto himself that authority—I am not saying that the hon. Minister may not have some background. He is a very successful businessman in the construction sector. I believe in this particular area we do not have to reinvent the wheel. I think there is a system already in existence within the Cabinet, where we can appoint directors to boards and they are divided into classes. Instead of the Minister giving himself that authority, it could be given to the Cabinet. This is in relation to clause 6 of the Bill. The Minister is given the authority to approve these allowances for members of the council. I think that should reside in the Cabinet. Already there is a precedent for that. Hon. Attorney General, do you agree with me?

I want to deal with clause 10. The Minister is the person who is ultimately accountable to the Parliament, but I like to have checks and balances in legislation. Clause 10(1) states:

“The Minister may, after consultation with the Chairman of the Council, give to the Council, in writing, such directions of a general nature as appear to the Minister to be necessary in the public interest.”

Mr. Vice-President, we are dealing with accreditation. As you know, that is a very sensitive area. It requires, to my mind, a lot of trust and confidence. I believe the Minister has to tread very warily in this area. What would you interpret the public interest to be? The Minister can define the public interest as he sees fit. There is no system of accountability to ensure that when the Minister issues a directive to the particular council, it is not couched in any one-sided manner or biased as the case may be. There are no systems in place to ensure that there are checks and balances in the public interest. We simply have to rely on the Minister's word. We have to trust the Minister, but we cannot. We cannot trust him. We cannot trust the PNM. We have seen the abuse of power by the PNM. I am not saying that the

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. MARK]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

Minister would be part of it, but he is under a Prime Minister who has demonstrated abuse of power in the Marlene Coudray matter, as an example. I want to be very cautious in terms of clause 10. [*Interruption*] That is a fact. Do not argue. Do you want me to pull out my affidavit? I have it in my bag.

Mr. Vice-President, I want you to protect me from these people because it is provocation. That is what caused me to react and explode. I do not want them to provoke me tonight.

May I continue? Clause 4(1) states:

“The Council shall comprise not less than ten nor more than thirteen members appointed by the President...”

The President, in this instance, does not mean the President of the Republic, it means the Cabinet. I have a difficulty with that. I would like my friend and Minister to consider this question. It is really to safeguard and protect him. This is a situation where an incestuous relationship can develop. We saw it recently in the case of the NWRHA and Dr. Colin Furlonge. We saw it in the case of the SWRHA and Dr. Colin Furlonge. A board was appointed by the President in both instances. The board took a decision not to appoint Dr. Furlonge as the Medical Chief of Staff. He had to take his matter to the High Court. The High Court determined that he should be appointed as Medical Chief of Staff. I cannot trust this.

This is why I would like to suggest to the hon. Minister, rather than have the Cabinet appoint all these people, and given the sensitivity of accreditation—we are talking about confidence and trust—I believe that requires some degree of independence, as far as practically possible. I would like to suggest to the hon. Minister, instead of the President appointing these persons, the President of the Republic, after consultation with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition, should appoint these people, so that there will be some equity and balance, particularly in an area as sensitive as this. This is accreditation! You cannot put that kind of power into the hands of a Minister and a Cabinet that has shown its ability to abuse power. I would like the Minister, at 11.12 p.m., to consider that amendment. Instead of giving it to the President, which is the Cabinet, I am suggesting that you give to the President of the Republic, after consultation with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition. I hope my dear friend, who is going to be shortly promoted again in October, would consider this one very seriously.

Clause 13(1) speaks of the President. I am trying to stretch my imagination and faculty of reasoning to understand the rationale for this particular clause.

Clause 13(1) speaks of “the President”, which is the Cabinet of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago,

“shall appoint on such terms and conditions as the Minister may approve a suitably qualified person as Executive Director.”

Could you believe this? Does the Cabinet have nothing to do? The Cabinet is appointing an executive director? What madness is this? That is a function for the council. The council will do that and then get the Minister’s approval. What is this thing about the Cabinet appointing these people? It does not make sense.

Hon. Senators: Why are you making so much noise?

Sen. W. Mark: I have to keep you awake. Joe, you have a tendency to drift. I just want to keep your focus. As the Minister of National Security you must protect us here, not sleep. That is reserved only for Howard Chin Lee, not you. Mr. Vice-President, let me come back to you. Sorry, Sir. I have to keep at a certain temperature so my colleagues could be alive. Mr. Vice-President, you would bear with me.

Clause 13(3) states:

“The Executive Director shall be paid such remuneration, including allowances, as the Council may with the approval of the Minister determine.”

Again, I see the Minister is having a lot of power in this matter.

Sen. Seetahal also referred to the Appeals Committee in the amendment that has been circulated. Again, the Minister would be appointing the Appeals Committee. This is a mockery. It is himself talking to himself. It is Caesar to Caesar! That is what it is! The Minister, through the Cabinet, appoints PNM hacks and party affiliates to be members of the council. The Minister comes back and appoints the Appeals Committee. How can that be right? If you look at the section you would see “two representatives of the public”. What does that mean? Is it that two PNM party members are members of the public? This has to deal with accreditation and appeal? We are making joke. This is a Mickey Mouse arrangement. This is not serious work that we are engaging in. I would like the hon. Minister to rethink this. Who are these two representatives of the public on an appeal panel? There must be a reason for those two representatives. We would like the hon. Minister to reconsider this. We should put a labour representative and an employer representative there, so that we would have some balance. I propose that the Minister revisit this particular amendment that he has put forward.

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. MARK]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

This particular council, as you would read in clause 16, gets money from us in the Parliament. They can borrow money with the approval of the Minister. They are exempted from taxes and duties. Do you know what? There is no accountability. Sen. Seepersad-Bachan made reference to the fact that there is no accountability. I know the Minister is a man of worth. He is an honourable gentleman. I believe, since he was demoted, he has changed somewhat. He has gotten better. I think demotion is good for him. All his arrogance has gone. That is good. I would like my colleague and friend, the Minister who is here, to consider this particular matter. We must have a system of accountability. This is too secretly organized. Under the Regional Health Authorities Act, the Auditor General—look at clauses 21 and 22. Firstly, the council, by resolution, may make their own rules for proper control of the system of accounting. I would not be hard and fast on that.

“The accounts of the Council shall be audited annually by the Auditor General or by an auditor authorized by the Auditor General.”

It stops there. We the taxpayers are giving them money. Their books are being audited but there is nothing dealing with the Parliament. I want to encourage the hon. Minister to look at section 25(3) and (4) of the Regional Health Authorities Act. I believe the Minister can fit this in neatly into this present legislation.

In the case of the RHAS, I want to substitute the word “Council” for “Board”. I would like to suggest the amendment “that the council shall within six months of the end of each financial year, submit to the Minister an annual report dealing with the activities of the council during the financial year and containing financial statements and such information relating to the operations and policies of the council as the Minister may require”. The Minister may incorporate it in terms of accountability.

The other section I would like to see incorporated is that the Minister shall cause a copy of the audited accounts, prepared in accordance with the relevant section I have just mentioned, to be laid before Parliament within 28 day of its receipt by him. If Parliament is not in session, within 28 days after the commencement of its next sitting. There could be a system of accountability.

11.20 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, there could be some system of accountability. We need to have an annual report on the activities of this body. I would ask my dear colleague and friend, when we get to the committee stage, I will advise him. I am not a lawyer, but I have been able to extract, because I believe that accountability is

very, very important in terms of public funds and public moneys. I want the hon. Minister to give us some consideration in this matter.

I do not know if in terms of the functions of the council, online degrees would be incorporated or considered by the particular Accreditation Council. Because as Sen. Prof. Deosaran said, there are many bogus institutions. In fact, someone wrote me a very interesting letter and told me about an incident that took place at the Chaguaramas Development Authority involving an individual whose name escapes me at this time, but parades as a doctor, and the man is a bogus person. I will bring the certificate. "Hear nuh, big certificate and ting, yuh know! Doctor so, so. And de man ain' no doctor!"

Sen. R. Montano: Who is that, Cudjoe?

Sen. W. Mark: No. The name escapes me. I will bring it. Mr. Vice-President, next Tuesday, if you are still in that Chair, I am going to bring a copy of that for you and I will circulate it to all my colleagues. I got it in my mailbox.

Let me continue. I want to ask my colleague, the hon. Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education to tell us what is going to happen with persons who access knowledge online. Somebody can obtain a degree online. I want to know what is the role of the Accreditation Council in that regard. What about distance education? Would that be considered as well? I would like my colleague to indicate to us what is the position on this matter, because not everything, you know, probably could be covered, but at least we would want to make sure that these matters do not escape his attention. And certainly, we would like to know about the University of Trinidad and Tobago, because one of the greatest milestones of our administration was the revolution we had in education.

That is something that we stand proudly in support of, and we feel great about it. Because this accreditation exercise that we are engaged in, really, the foundation stones were laid by the United National Congress. We called it an accreditation agency. All my colleague did, he just called it a council instead of an agency. Just as how they take away Dollar for Dollar, he called it GATE. He is the gatekeeper. Whatever we have, they just change. They are so wicked, vicious and vindictive, they do not want to be associated with anything of the UNC.

Mr. Vice-President, anyway, it is late in the night. I will leave that for next Tuesday. I will reserve some more venom and fire for them. I would like the hon. Minister to tell us what is the position, because the hon. Prime Minister told the entire country in his budget speech of 2002 that a university called the University

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. MARK]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

of Trinidad and Tobago would be established and we were told in the last budget that it will be opened, launched and on the road in September of 2004.

We would like to know where is the infrastructure for that university or is it a university without walls? Is it a university without walls? Because I have been to Wallerfield and I have seen nothing to indicate to me that something is going to happen there. I would like the hon. Minister to tell us if it is a university without walls, or maybe, Mr. Vice-President, I know that you have a university called the university on air, so I do not know if this University of Trinidad and Tobago is just in the air. I do not know. It is just a fancy word, a fancy thought. Let the Minister tell us where we are with that particular matter.

Mr. Vice-President, we on this side are very proud of our history. You know, I remember the hon. Minister parading all over the country saying that we closed down the John S. Donaldson Technical Institute. We stopped funding John D, we caused John D to decline. The evidence is clear that we saved NIHERST, because the PNM tried to destroy NIHERST, and the evidence is there in terms of allocation.

During the period that we were there, we transformed NIHERST into a real viable institution. From there, we established a community college. From there, we went to COSTAATT. Remember, we did that. We established the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology. We established the National Training Agency. *[Interruption]* No, the evidence does not support that. That is what you call PNM propaganda. The evidence does not support that. I do not have the facts before me now, but I shall dispute that at the next sitting in writing. Because, you know, I do not want to say things and the next thing she calls for a withdrawal. They are thin-skinned now. PNM gone through! Fire coming from the UNC; they cannot take fire at all. But anyway, the fire now start.

Mr. Vice-President, we are concerned about one area and I would like the hon. Minister to really try to understand what I am saying. We are concerned about the possibility of political interference. That is what we are concerned about, and we are trying to see to what extent the Minister can bring some kind of checks and balances to ensure that this particular new body or council is not contaminated or polluted, because we saw what happened at the SASC. We saw what happened at the Unit Trust. We saw what happened, therefore, we want to ensure at this time that there is some degree of protection for the people.

The final area I would like to raise with my colleague here—I still have a half hour, Sir, so I do not want people to breathe too lightly. Maybe the hon. Minister can tell us what degree of consultation took place with the stakeholders involved

in this industry before this Bill was brought to this Parliament. My understanding is that the level of consultation was nil or minimal. We would like the Minister to indicate to this honourable House in terms of the stakeholders in this particular industry, the private sector, the public sector, what kind of consultation took place? Who did he consult with on this matter? We understand that it was very limited, if not non-existent, but I will leave it up to the Minister to give his remarks when he is winding up in this particular matter.

Mr. Vice-President, I thought it was necessary to allow the hon. Minister to look at these points that I have raised and see to what extent, in his wisdom, he would be able to make some adjustment so that in the interest of accountability, transparency, good governance, and in an effort to promote confidence, integrity and trust, we would hope that the hon. Minister would take all my points and our points into consideration, and in his winding up he will be able to give consideration to them.

I thank you very much.

Sen. Brother Noble Khan: Mr. Vice-President, one gets the impression that as the night grows older, things get better. [*Laughter*] I shall try to make it short and sweet. One would think in terms of what is before us as being a highly evolutionary process. We know that pre-independence there was a great thrust forward in the realm of education and speaking from my own personal experience as a young man at that time, we could think in terms of at that time tertiary education was purely at Mona and, to some extent, at UWI here in St. Augustine.

At the secondary level in the Port of Spain area in which I lived, there were only two schools that catered for the boys at secondary level. That was at Queen's Royal College (QRC) and at St. Mary's. For people of my background, which was a very humble background, there was a question of being referred to as a college exhibition, and at that time I think it was about 50. It moved up incrementally.

What came to the rescue for many people like myself, and even in the Port of Spain area and outside, was the opening up of what has been referred to as private secondary schools. These organizations are schools run by very dedicated people, many of them have gone to the great beyond, and they were succeeded by the mushrooming with the coming of 1956, of the government thrust in education. Here you had at that level, the secondary school level, doors being opened up and education became one of the choice programmes, as far as the Government of the day was concerned.

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. BRO. KHAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

For me, apart from our tradition, education is one that so much is rested upon. Some of our sayings are “Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave”, and “The duty of every person—both male or female—is the pursuit of knowledge.” So, we could see at that time, a background of that mushrooming. Also, those of us who have come from what has been referred to as the slave indentureship milieu always looked upon education as the great gateway for mobility upwards, both at a social level and at an economic level. It is against this background that we could see the system changing. We were very heartened with the explanation given by our very affable hon. Minister here today, and I think at all times we always look forward to that type of contribution that he usually gives.

Sen. R. Montano: He made a good contribution today.

Sen. Bro. N. Khan: Towards 1970, or thereabout, one knows what 1970 symbolized, not only in our country, but the Caribbean and the world at large. An explosion of real power, and knowledge power at that, and today we can see the product of some of that action at that time. The Minister did make mention of NIHERST too, and this too brings memories to mind of doghouses of some of the architects of NIHERST. Some have gone to the great beyond, and some of our very cherished persons who more or less built the concept of further education in this area are still around. Parallel to that, we had the university expanding. We have seen two very beautiful products of the university making contributions here tonight.

So, this is what we are at the stage. We could also think in terms of those early thrusts. A name that comes readily to mind is a goodly gentleman who occupied your seat as President of the Senate many years ago. That is Mr. Hamilton Maurice, a very great educator, provider of education, and these are some of the things that come to my mind. Even as has been said that the progress at the point that we are at today had followed a rather choppy or staccatoed movement to what we are, we see what we have before us.

Within recent times, I know the last administration had stressed the whole question of tertiary education and had put plans into place. Of course, that in itself may have been an echo of what the old administration was before, and the one before which continued to be, but as I said before, the world and all of us recognize the position of education and the pursuit of knowledge in the area of development. So today, we are at this point.

I would think that I have heard with great concern and attention to the contributions being made, and what we are seeing here is the creation of an

instrument to move us forward into a next area of stabilizing the mushrooming of education which has gone into the private sector. This is a feature not only that is now emerging in our country, but I would dare say in other parts of the world, and it is part of the developmental process, particularly in the area of materialism.

Then again, I know our present Minister of Education, while on this sort of path of elevating the society, it seems to me that her responsibilities overarch up to the point of secondary education, the point of value education and bringing these elements into the curriculum is one of high priority that the present Ministry of Education is pursuing.

Nevertheless, we are in the area of private education and, at the moment, as has been said, there appears to be need for some element of control reached before us. The point that I would like to stress upon is the question of the implementation process, because I am sure that when we are through with this, I am satisfied that we are agreed on the question of the control through the council or the committee or what have you, which this Bill seeks to bring into effect.

The question of the implementation, to my mind, brings to bear two particular points. The law, how does it fit in, and the administration and the funding, the question of staffing. Two points. Money in this area and, also, people. This is a feature which, as far as civil society is concerned, and even in governance, we have had some experience in. I am sure that if we were to look at some of the institutions which have preceded this one and have been around for quite some time, great, great questions of grave consequences will arise in our minds of how well they operate.

I would suspect that some of even our own constitutional bodies, how they operate, even while an element of independence is enshrined in the Constitution, is still a big question mark. Even within the Judiciary we have had complaints from the Judiciary, I would not apostrophize complaints, but concerns by such noble institutions as the Auditor General's Department where the question of staffing and facilities in order to advance their work has been raised.

To some extent, we have on the one hand institutions which seek an element of independence of pursuing a path, and on the other hand, a control mechanism which seemed to be acting in a rather incongruous way. There is not that fluidity, and this is within the system. This is systemic. So, that, to my mind, when it comes to the implementation of this new body that we are seeking to create will continue to haunt us, because if we were to take it, if there is any creditability in what I am saying that there are inherent problems in that system, we could see

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. BRO. KHAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

that we are starting out a system that is fraught with an inheritance from the others that will just transfer into it.

The other part of that is the question of the appeal committee within the structure. I have listened with some concern, and even in my own way, that point of having an appeal body being totally controlled by one body, so to speak, I do not think that is something that as far as civil society is concerned, and good governance is concerned, is desirable. What I would suggest is that we look at this again and consider even the appointment of this appeal committee, as referred to, which will have judicial functions. It will have mediative functions that will give it that veneer of independence that the President, in his own right, seeks to appoint these people.

We would not have being created something which I think academia and other parts of administration look upon as not being on the right path if we are really going to give some element of independence or a creation of independence. That in itself will tell us, even if we were to do that, within the wider society, that itself is questionable. Because very often, if we were to see that the resource personnel that usually find themselves into positions such as these might be very divorced from the total society, so there are even class differences that may arise in the creation of even this type of system, but at least we can pursue a path which has been established in the past insofar as the appointment of the appeal committee.

The point of consideration for the dispossessed is real, and I listened closely to the contribution of our colleague, Sen. Roy Augustus, and I think it was very enlightening. He is a gentleman for whom I have high admiration and respect for his contribution, not only in the field of education, but in so many other aspects of our society, in his own right that is.

I would think in terms that the consideration for the dispossessed, those who are at the other end of the economic ladder, I know for a fact we could say all of us have come from that, but it is a part of our society which still continues to persist with us and there should be consideration for how we would deal with this group, because if we are going into private institutions, because I think this is what this law will be interacting with mostly, there will be need to give some kind of support for those who will be able to access, and even to help those who are partway, because even with the system that operates now at the secondary level, we see many gaps in it. So, while I know there are systems in place to try to help out, there will also be need to put the thrust into assistance in this area.

With respect to the issue of being trained and leaving the country, I think this has occupied to a great extent some of the colleagues on the Independent Bench, and I guess everyone else, because to put out money, put out effort with the hope of building a country, and when you see our products, the fruits of our nation blossoming, here we see that it is gone. They have left for other places.

I know I myself had that experience. Not that I left. I was in another part of the Caribbean when a young gentleman who had recently graduated at the Mona University as a doctor had come to me to say that he was leaving and he was going to Canada to do his internship. I felt very desolate at that time. I wished him well, but it still was within my mind, I did not tell him about this, that “Boy, you get training here. We spend our money and you should give some service.”

He was going and he had his right so to do. There was no law against it. The system was like that, but I know a few years afterwards, I felt a bit elated when he returned to our shores and gave service—and good service at that. Some good students, great academicians—I know of one, particularly in the area of medicine, who was a very brilliant person, and won many scholarships, but he himself, after a period of time, left the profession, so to speak, and had gone into other areas.

We have that sort of movement taking place within the society. Trained in one area, gone into another area. In the other area, he did excellent too, because he was an excellent person. But I know it could be a very complex thing, and then we are thinking in terms of global, we are thinking in terms of all forms of export.

I recall on a little hillside there were many, many post office boxes. They had about 40 or 50 of these little post office boxes in a place where we might call a shantytown. It was in Jamaica too. The reason they had this thing, families from overseas would send their little remittances to the family and they had that common respect among them that what goes into the box would still feed into the society. It is alleged that in some of these societies, that little thing that comes from overseas makes a big contribution into the economy. So we could think in terms of that export.

One could think in terms, too, of even before when someone graduates, hold back the paper, the practising paper or what have you, but I would not like to go that way. We are dealing with a human, we are thinking of one world, one people, and if we have to share and we cannot devise a society that will cause our people to stay and give service, possibly we are not definitely on the right track up to that time. Still, it is an expanding world and there is need to be accommodative of that.

Another point that occupied my mind is the question of this committee. What role it would play. I am not speaking about what is written here. What is written

Accreditation Council Bill
[SEN. BRO. KHAN]

Tuesday, May 04, 2004

on this document here, one wonders in the real world, how much of this would really take place. As we all know, people of the practical world, the real situation, how much of that would we really meet up, and it does provide a framework in which we would operate.

The question of that academic freedom or knowledge-based freedom, or what have you, of interacting, where the explosion within the mind is being guided towards certain goals. Inherent in the human spirit is that explosion, pursuit of knowledge to build a society within a framework, of course.

That question of these types of organizations, how could it become inquisitorial? Could it become a wet blanket? We know with each moment that we find new bureaucracy taking place, it does detract from that freedom that I speak of, but this is something that has occupied my mind. Could this become just another mechanism to misguide or direct in a way that might be totally anti or counterproductive to a proper society? These are some of the points, as I listened closely to what has been taking place here. I know it is pretty late and I know that some of these changes are before us and I think at the end of the day we will definitely come up with something good that will move us, because in this evolutionary process that we are going through, and I think we as a people are really on the right track, insofar as advances and advancing the education system.

Before I close, Mr. Vice-President, I too would like to add my little congratulatory bit to our two temporary Senators whom I have the good fortune of knowing, even before today, but I think their being inside of here is truly an enrichment of our Senate and the people who are here too. So, congratulations and may God continue to guide you and bless you too.

Thank you again, Mr. Vice-President, for allowing me these few words.

The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Vice-President, let me quote if the hon. Senator will allow me. Taking into account the number of amendments and the late hour, there is a suggestion that we do the committee stage next week. I am afraid that despite the many praises that I have received today, I doubt my own capability to respond appropriately to all the very useful suggestions and proposals that have been made here today.

What I wish to do is to go through the *Hansard* in detail and get my staff to pull out all the suggestions for amendments, because they were so many and so varied. So, what I would like to do, Mr. Vice-President, I am not going to

complete my winding up at this stage. I would do so at another point. I will still be in the process of winding up.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith): Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move that the Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday, May 11, 2004 at 1.30 p.m., at which time the hon. Minister will complete his contribution on the Bill.

At the completion of this Bill we will go into the Telecommunications Authority (Amdt.) Bill, and following that, the Insurance (Amdt.) Bill. In the light of the way the debate is going, I wish to signal to the Senate that if we do not complete our work on Tuesday, we may want to meet on Wednesday so that they should make the appropriate arrangements.

Sen. R. Montano: Mr. Vice-President, if I might just ask the Senators, if that is the case, rather than meet at 1.30 on Tuesday, can we not meet at 10 o'clock on Tuesday morning?

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, there was to be a matter on the adjournment today.

Sen. Dr. Saith: Mr. Vice-President, by mutual arrangement, the mover of the Motion has deferred it to next week Tuesday.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 11.54 p.m.