

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 18, 2026

The House met at 10.30 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]



LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from Mrs. Shivanna Sam, MP, Cumuto/Manzanilla, who has requested leave of absence for the period June 18 to 28, 2026. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

VISITORS

(Woodland Hindu Primary School)

Madam Deputy Speaker: I would also take the opportunity to welcome the students of Woodland Hindu Primary School

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS (HERITAGE PETROLEUM, PARIA FUEL TRADING AND GUARACARA REFINING VESTING) (AMDT.) BILL, 2026

Bill to amend the Miscellaneous Provisions (Heritage Petroleum, Paria Fuel Trading and Guaracara Refining Vesting) Act, 2018 (Act No. 17 of 2018), brought from the Senate [*Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings.
[*Hon. L. Baptiste*]

Question put and agreed to.

PAPER LAID

Audited Financial Statements of Caroni (1975) Limited for the year ended June 30, 2024. [*The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of*

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the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath)]

To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

**MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS (HERITAGE PETROLEUM, PARIA
FUEL TRADING AND GUARACARA REFINING VESTING) (AMDT.)
BILL, 2026**

Madam Deputy President: The Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Sen. The Hon. Leroy Baptiste): Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I beg to move:

That a Bill to amend the Miscellaneous Provisions (Heritage Petroleum, Paria Fuel Trading and Guaracara Refining Vesting) Act, 2018 (Act No. 17 of 2018), be now read a second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today to pilot the Miscellaneous Provisions (Heritage Petroleum, Paria Fuel Trading and Guaracara Refining Vesting) (Amdt.) Bill, 2026. I am grateful for the opportunity to be before this honourable House just the day after the successful passage of the said Bill in the Senate—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste:—and the day before we commemorate Labour Day, 2026.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Permit me the opportunity to extend greetings to the Members of this House, my comrades in the labour movement, all the workers of Trinidad and Tobago and the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as we celebrate the pioneering work of great labour leaders who fought tirelessly over the years for decent work and the dignity of our workers in Trinidad and Tobago.

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Madam Deputy Speaker, the debate on this Bill today is not a ploy in any way to pacify the labour movement on the eve of Labour Day, or to give them something to gally about tomorrow, as one of the Members in the Senate from the other side alluded to yesterday. Let me make it abundantly clear, this debate is not some token gesture on the eve of Labour Day. That is the kind of empty symbolism the PNM has perfected, handing workers hollow promises and cosmetic gestures, while stripping them of their rights. Their policy has always been one of mere handouts and gallery—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste:—designed to pacify rather than protect. However, this Government, led by the hon. Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, MP, is not here to play politics with workers' dignity. We are here to legislate justice, continuity and real protection.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Madam Deputy Speaker, this Bill is simply meant to correct a grave injustice that has been unattended to since 2018. This omission was no accident. It was a calculated move by the PNM, a party that has consistently treated workers as expendable, collateral damage in their reckless experiments with our national assets.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: At first glance, this Bill may appear modest in its drafting. It contains no sweeping institutional reforms. It does not establish a new regulatory regime. It does not create an entire new system of rights and obligations. Yet, notwithstanding its concise form, it is a measure of considerable legal, industrial and social significance.

This Bill concerns a question that lies at the very heart of industrial democracy in Trinidad and Tobago, whether workers, who have lawfully secured

collective bargaining rights, can be deprived of those rights merely because their employer has undergone a corporate restructuring exercise. It asks whether a change in corporate form should be permitted to extinguish decades of collective bargaining relationships. It also asks whether a recognized majority union can simply disappear from the industrial relations landscape because a state enterprise has been divided into successor entities. It asks whether workers, who have invested years of effort through collective action, negotiations and lawful industrial engagement, should suddenly find themselves stripped of representation because of a legislative omission. Madam Deputy Speaker, this Government's answer to each of those questions is an unequivocal and emphatic, no.

This Bill is fundamentally about fairness, continuity, legal certainty and industrial stability. It is about preserving the integrity of collective bargaining, and most importantly, it is about ensuring that workers are not disadvantaged by decisions over which they had no control. The measure before this honourable House seeks to correct an omission that has persisted since the restructuring of the Petroleum Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (Petrotrin) in 2018. It seeks to clarify what, in our view, should always have been clear, that collectively negotiated rights and obligations do not simply vanish because assets, operations and employees are transferred from one legal entity to another, or others, as in this case.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the legislation before us is not revolutionary. It is restorative. It does not seek to confer benefits that workers never possess. It does not seek to create bargaining rights where none previously existed. It does not seek to rewrite history. Rather, it seeks to ensure that rights that existed before the restructuring, continue after the restructuring. It also seeks to ensure that obligations that existed before the restructuring, continue after the restructuring, and that justice is done. In short, it seeks to affirm a principle that has long been

recognized throughout the Commonwealth and across modern labour jurisprudence, that workers should not become collateral damage in corporate restructuring exercises.

Madam Deputy Speaker, for the purpose of this honourable House, allow me to turn to the principle of social justice. The International Labour Organization has long affirmed that social justice is the bedrock of peace, prosperity and human dignity in the world of work. Its Constitution, adopted in 1919, begins with a timeless declaration:

“...universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice;”

The United Nations has likewise recognized social justice as the guiding principle for peace and prosperous coexistence within and among nations. In essence, it envisions societies built on equality and solidarity, where human rights are respected and the dignity of every person is upheld.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when we speak of social justice in these Chambers, we at the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development speak to more than rhetoric. We speak to the deliberate alignment of our laws and policies within the fundamental rights at work, there being freedom of association and the effective recognition of collective bargaining; the elimination of forced and compulsory labour; the abolition of child labour; the eradication of discrimination in employment and occupation; and the guarantee of a safe and healthy work environment. These are not abstract ideals, Madam Deputy Speaker. They are the standards by which this Government measures its commitment to fairness, dignity and justice in the workplace.

10.45a.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, before addressing the substance of the Bill, I wish to place on record my sincere gratitude to those whose commitment and diligence

have made this legislative initiative possible. First, I express my profound appreciation to our Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, MP—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste:—whose unwavering commitment to social justice, worker protection, and equitable development continues to shape the legislative and policy agenda of this administration. The Prime Minister would have caused this Bill to be drafted, and for this, we are indeed grateful. I also acknowledge my Cabinet colleagues, whose collective commitment to strengthening our democratic institutions, advancing decent work, and promoting industrial harmony has provided the foundation upon which this legislation rests.

I further extend sincere thanks to the hon. Attorney General and the technical officers of his Ministry for their invaluable legal guidance in the preparation of this Bill. Their expertise has assisted in ensuring that the proposed amendments are both legally sound and fully aligned with the broader objectives of our industrial relations framework. I also wish to acknowledge the technical officers of the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, and the Ministry of Energy & Energy Industries, whose dedication, professionalism, and technical competence contributed significantly to the development of this measure.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Madam Deputy Speaker, it would be remiss of me if I did not also acknowledge the important role played by the labour movement in bringing continued attention to the issues that this Bill seeks to address. In particular, I recognize the advocacy of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union, which has consistently championed the rights of workers affected by the restructuring of Petrotrin and has remained steadfast in its pursuit of industrial justice for those workers. Whether one agrees with every position advanced by OWTU or not,

there can be little dispute that the union has played a historic role in the development of labour relations in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker, the history of the OWTU is, in many respects, inseparable from the history of the modern labour movement in this country. The struggles of the oilfield workers helped shape the labour consciousness of our nation. The events from 1937 fundamentally transformed the relationship between labour, capital, and the State. The courage displayed by workers during that period helped lay the foundation of many of the rights and protections that working people now enjoy. The labour movement has, therefore, never been merely an institutional participant in industrial relations. It has been one of the principal architects of social justice and social progress in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when we debate labour legislation, we must always remember that the rights we discuss in this Chamber were not created in abstract. They were secured through decades of sacrifice, organization, negotiation, and collective action. And they were secured through the determination of ordinary working men and women who believed that dignity at work was worth defending. That principle remains as relevant today as it was nearly 90 years ago.

This Government firmly believes that economic development and worker protection are not competing objectives. We reject the false notion that industrial progress requires the erosion of labour rights. We reject the idea that workers must surrender representation and collective bargaining protections in order for enterprises to remain viable. Our position is clear: Sustainable economic development must be built upon respect for workers, respect for the rule of law, and respect for the institutions that underpin industrial peace.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Government's workers' agenda is founded

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upon these very principles. It recognizes that workers are not merely factors of production, but are the driving force of our national economy. Accordingly, the role of government is not simply to facilitate economic activity; it is also to ensure that economic activity takes place within a framework that respects human dignity, promotes social justice, and preserves industrial harmony. Madam Deputy Speaker, this Bill represents an important step in fulfilling that commitment. For those reasons, I now turn to the purpose and objectives of the legislation before this hon. House.

Purpose of the Bill. Madam Deputy Speaker, the purpose of this Bill is straightforward. It seeks to amend Miscellaneous Provisions (Heritage Petroleum, Paria Fuel Trading and Guaracara Refining Vesting) Act, 2018 by inserting a new clause 7A to expressly provide for continuation of collective agreements to which Petrotrin was a party, prior to its restructuring, and to deem Heritage Petroleum Company Limited and Paria Fuel Trading Company Limited to be the successors of Petrotrin for the purposes of those collective agreements and the Industrial Relations Act chap. 18:01, and to expressly note that the OWTU shall continue to be the recognized majority union subject to the Industrial Relations Act.

This amendment safeguards the collective bargaining rights of the impacted workers, as well as ensures that recognition and obligations survive the vesting and continue in full force against the successor companies of Heritage Petroleum Company Limited and Paria Fuel Trading Company Limited, similar to what was accomplished in the Petrotrin Vesting Act 1993. The Bill further provides that the amendments shall be deemed to have come into force on December 1st, 2018, thereby ensuring continuity from the commencement of the vesting arrangements.

Madam Deputy Speaker, why is this being done now? The answer is simple: The last administration, and by that I mean the PNM administration, sought to disenfranchise the workers by omitting a very simple section, which

would have served to preserve workers' existing rights. Had the last Government done what should have been done in the first place, I would not have had to stand before you today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Madam Deputy Speaker, this legislation merely confirms that the collective bargaining rights negotiated before the restructuring of Petrotrin remain protected after the restructuring, and ensures that the collective agreements continue to have legal effect, notwithstanding the transfer of operations from Petrotrin to successor entities, and that OWTU maintains RMU status.

The historical context. Madam Deputy Speaker, the closure of Petrotrin on November 30th, 2018, under the PNM Government, was one of the largest workforce displacements in our Republic. Thousands of workers and communities were devastated, facing uncertainty over jobs, benefits, and future prospects. This was not economic prudence, but social vandalism.

The restructuring created Heritage Petroleum, Paria Fuel Trading, and Guaracara Refining under Act No. 17 of 2018. While the Act transferred assets and contracts, it deliberately omitted provisions for union recognition, denying the OWTU statutory successorship. This was legislative sabotage, an attempt to silence workers' representation. It was union busting.

Notably, in 1993, when Petrotrin was formed, the Vesting Act included the clause ensuring union successorship from TRINTOC and TRINTOPEC. The omission in 2018 exposes PNM hypocrisy. Workers' rights were protected when convenient, but discarded when inconvenient. Similar deeming provisions exist in other laws, such as the Regional Health Authority Act and the Civil Aviation Act.

Madam Deputy Speaker, collective bargaining is central to industrial relations in Trinidad and Tobago. Once a union is recognized under the IRA, it enjoys exclusive bargaining rights. Agreements negotiated over the years provide

stability and fairness, and it would offend social justice if these rights disappeared due to corporate restructuring. Successor rights ensure workers do not lose representation or collective agreements when employers restructure. The ILO has long recognized this principle embedded in Convention No. 87: Freedom of Association, and Convention No. 98: Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining, both ratified by Trinidad and Tobago. Convention No. 87 guarantees workers' rights to maintain union representation despite ownership changes. Convention No. 98 reinforces that collective bargaining obligations must continue under successor employers.

Madam Deputy Speaker, what the Government advances today is not novel. Statutory: Statutory and judicial precedent firmly establish successorship in state enterprises. Labour jurisprudence across the Commonwealth recognizes that collective bargaining rights are fundamental industrial rights that attach to the workforce, not privileges that vanish with corporate restructuring. The recent Privy Council judgment in the *PSA v Civil Aviation Authority*, September 11th, 2025, illustrates this. When civil servants transferred to the Civil Aviation Authority, they lost PSA representation.

11.00 a.m.

The Civil Aviation (Amdt.) Act No. 17 of 2003 remedied this by deeming the PSA the certified union for CAA employees. The Privy Council confirmed this position, preserved successorship, ensuring workers retain union protection. This judgment shows that with a simple amendment to the Vesting Act, the OWTU can be accorded recognition in Heritage Petroleum and Paria Fuel Trading.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Further precedents exist. On October 04, 2017, the Industrial Court ruled that Caribbean Airlines was the successor to BWIA, as we

call it. The Court of Appeal upheld this ruling on April 22, 2024. One of the questions the Court of Appeal dealt with was whether certification and recognition are necessary consequences of successorship. The Court of Appeal noted that in the case of the *Banking, Insurance and General Workers Union v Eastern Commercial Lands Limited*, the Industrial Court declared that Eastern Commercial Lands Limited was the successor employer to True Value Supermarket Limited under the provisions of section 48 of the IRA.

The Industrial Court ordered further that Eastern Commercial Lands must: One, recognize the union as the recognized majority union for the relevant bargaining units. And two, in good faith, enter into negotiations with the union for the purpose of collective bargaining, including but not limited to negotiations for new collective agreements. The Court of Appeal stated that the Industrial Court in *Eastern Commercial*, in effect, held that a consequence of successorship was recognition and agreed with this position.

In that same case, the Court of Appeal quoted with approval His Honour Mr. Rambathaly, in the case of *Transport and Industrial Workers Union v Trinidad Electrical Manufacturing Corporations Limited/Electrical Industries Limited*, that the purpose of successorship has to do with the continuation of a collective bargaining relationship. And the statement of Khan P. in *Oilfield Workers Trade Union v the Petroleum Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited*, that successorship in industrial relations is not confined merely to honouring the contract of employment, or the workers and the previous collective agreements.

Under the industrial relations principle of successorship, the new employer not only inherits the workers in the bargaining units and, consequently, must apply the terms and conditions of employment to them, but he also inherits the recognized majority union and must treat and negotiate with the recognized majority union for all the purposes of collective bargaining. The recognized

majority union is—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Minister, would you require your additional 15 minutes?

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Yes, thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The recognized majority union is inseparable from the bargaining unit in respect of which it obtained and holds its certificate of recognition as such from the board so long as its certification continues to subsist. Its bargaining status and authority as the recognized union for the bargaining unit are not interrupted because the workers in the bargaining unit become the workers of the new employer. Otherwise, there would be no smooth transition from the previous to the new employer. The union status does not terminate or is affected, or diminished by the fact that its certification of recognition has not been altered to reflect the name of the new employer.

Madam Deputy Speaker, across the Commonwealth, labour tribunals and courts have increasingly recognized that the substance of an employment relationship must prevail over mere changes in legal form. The underlying principle is that industrial justice requires examination of the reality of the enterprise rather than the technicalities of the new corporate structure. Canadian labour law has been particularly influential in the development of the successor rights doctrine. In Canada, labour relations boards have long recognized that where a business remains the same after a transfer, collective bargaining rights should follow the business rather than remain attached solely to the previous corporate entity.

Similarly, Australian labour jurisprudence has similarly developed protections for transferring employees during business transfers and restructurings.

Recognizing collective bargaining rights and workplace protections should survive changes in ownership. These same policy considerations have increasingly influenced labour jurisprudence throughout the Caribbean. Madam Deputy Speaker, this approach reflects the recognition that labour law jurisprudence exists to correct the inherent imbalance of bargaining power between employers and individual workers. And as a Minister with the responsibility for labour, I state unequivocally that my Ministry and this Government are committed to ensuring industrial stability, fostering industrial peace, and promoting decent work.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Government believes that economic restructuring and workers' protection are not mutually exclusive concepts. A modern economy requires efficient enterprises. However, efficiency must never come at the expense of fairness to workers. This Government believes that workers should not be asked to bear uncertainty regarding rights that have already been negotiated and secured through lawful collective bargaining. The role of the Government is to ensure that economic change occurs within an appropriate framework. This Bill therefore advances three important public policy objectives.

One, it protects collective bargaining rights as it will bring clarity, stability, and fairness to collective bargaining within Heritage Petroleum and Paria Fuel Trading. As well as ensuring that there is effective countervailing protection of workers' rights in the workplace. Two, it strengthens institutional stability by establishing a clear, lawful and orderly framework for collective bargaining, thereby reducing the risk of ad hoc disputes and service disruptions. It would ensure orderly collective bargaining, consistent representation and industrial relations stability. And three, it reinforces confidence in the legal framework governing labour relationships.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I now take a clause-by-clause analysis. Clause 1. Madam Deputy Speaker, clause 1 provides the short title of the legislation. It

states that:

“...may be cited as the Miscellaneous Provisions (Heritage Petroleum, Paria Fuel Trading and Guaracara Refining Vesting) (Amendment) Act, 2026.”

Clause 2 provides that the Act shall be:

“...deemed to have come into force on the 1st...of December, 2018.”

This is an important provision as the restructuring arrangements themselves took effect on that date. The purpose of the retrospective commencement is to ensure continuity from the very beginning of the restructuring process. And it avoids any notion that there may have been a period during which collective agreements were inoperative or uncertain. The retrospective provision therefore preserves legal continuity and protects both workers and employers from unnecessary disputes regarding rights and obligations arising since 2018.

Madam Deputy Speaker, clause 3 is the substantive provision of the Bill. It inserts a new section 7A into the principal Act. The proposed section provides that:

7A. All collective agreements...”—existing—“...before the appointed day...”—and—“...to which PETROTRIN was a party shall...”—continue to—“...have effect as if Heritage Petroleum Company Limited and Paria Fuel Trading Company Limited were parties...”—to—“...those agreements...”

The section further provides that for the purpose of those agreements, and for the purposes of the Industrial Relations Act:

“...Heritage Petroleum Company Limited and Paria Fuel Trading Company Limited shall be deemed to be the successors to PETROTRIN.’.”

Additionally, the amendments go further and insert a new subsection to clause 7A, which states that, subject to the Industrial Relations Act, the OWTU, which immediately prior to the appointed day was the recognized majority union

representing the workers who were employed in Petrotrin, shall continue to be the recognized majority union representing workers in Heritage Company Limited, and Paria Fuel Trading Limited, for the purposes of collective agreements referred to in (1) and for the purpose of collective bargaining. Finally, (3) notes that OWTU means the Oilfield Workers Trade Union.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as I conclude, let us be reminded that the closure of the Petrotrin Refinery and the restructuring of our petroleum sector stand among the most consequential industrial upheavals in our nation's history. The shockwaves of those decisions continue to reverberate across our workforce, our families and our communities, scars that remain visible to this day.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Madam Deputy Speaker, this Bill does not seek to reopen the debate on the refinery closure or the restructuring of the petroleum sector. What it does is address the critical legal consequences that flowed from those decisions. It ensures that collective agreements and collective bargaining rights endure beyond restructuring, preserving continuity, safeguarding hard-won protections and promoting industrial stability. Above all, it affirms this Government's unwavering commitment to the workers' agenda—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste:—to fairness, to justice and to dignity in the workplace. Madam Deputy Speaker, this legislation merely confirms that collective bargaining rights negotiated before the restructuring of Petrotrin remain protected after the restructuring. While the PNM abandoned workers in 2018, this Government stands firmly on the side of justice, continuity and respect. We do not treat workers as pawns in political games.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: We treat them as the backbone of our economy and the soul of our Republic. Accordingly, Madam Deputy Speaker, I respectfully commend the Miscellaneous Provisions (Heritage Petroleum, Paria Fuel Trading and Guaracara Refining Vesting) (Amdt.) Bill, 2026 to this honourable House, and I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

11.15a.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Point Fortin.

The Minister in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Ernesto Kesar): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I rise this morning to enter this debate, and I know that this debate, most of it, some of the people on the other side would like that we do not have this debate at all, because they knew what they did in 2018.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: And, Madam Deputy Speaker, I make no apologies when I say that Satan cannot correct sin. Yes?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: And I also make no apologies when I say that, in the words of Buju Banton:

“It’s not an easy road
...and who feels it knows”.

And believe me, Madam Deputy Speaker, I myself, as a former Petrotrin/Trinmar worker, we felt it. Because we knew what this was.

But that is why, Madam Deputy Speaker, the great Tubal Uriah “Buzz” Butler, father of the modern trade union movement in Trinidad and Tobago, his favourite hymn was hymn 33 from the Spiritual Baptist Sacred Order:

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“O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, thank God that Almighty God saw in His wisdom to grant us victory on April 28, 2025.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: And it is on that basis, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I would like to state, I agree with everything that the hon. Minister of Labour, the hon. Leroy Baptiste, and as I call him, the hon. “Comrade” Minister Leroy Baptiste, has laid here this morning. So I will not go over what he has said. But I will bring to this House just some memory, historical memory, as to the battle that has always been fought between the OWTU and the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Madam Deputy Speaker, in 2018, the PNM shut down the refinery and restructured what was the Petroleum Company of Trinidad and Tobago into five parts: TPHL, Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Limited; Heritage Petroleum; Paria; Guaracara Refining; and Petrotrin legacy, the legacy company being the company that they indicated will hold all of the legacy matters, including the trade disputes.

The idea behind restructuring, Madam Deputy Speaker, was for the set purpose that the union, the OWTU, would have had to go and reapply for recognition and would have had to reapply for successorship. And indeed, the union did that. But inconsistent with the Act in 1993, the Petrotrin Vesting Act, where that was already catered for, it indicated from the get-go that that previous administration wanted to destroy the OWTU at the heart by taking out some 5,000 members of the union, Madam Deputy Speaker.

But let me continue. What that did—because we have some fellas here, the Member for San Fernando East, “Mr. Maka”—sorry, Mr. Manning, who always like to talk about figures and figures. So I would like to quote, Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the immediate effects of that removal of these workers and sending them home. *Guardian* article, 15 December, 2018, in that article, it indicated, NIB cutting monthly contributions, \$51 million. The article stated that some 26,000 workers dropped out of contributing to the NIB. It even goes on to state, June 30, 2017, you had 479,036 persons in the workforce, and June 30, 2018, 452,234 persons in the workforce. But let me drill a little deeper and to show you, according to my line Minister, the hon. Dr. Moonilal, the “wickedity” of the PNM, what they did to workers in this country.

With the sending home of the Petrotrin workers, immediately the National Insurance Board lost \$8 million a month in contributions. Let us remember as well, that same year, earlier on, they sent home 554 workers in TSTT, losing a further \$1.5 million a month in contribution. Do the math. Multiply eight plus one, multiply that by 12, and it will tell you an estimate. Because NIB has a different—there are some little calculations, some cumulative factors and so on, that may shift the contribution. But on average, about \$112 million a year was taken away immediately from the National Insurance Board.

And let us remind Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the first time they spoke about interfering or moving the age of retirement, it is the PNM that spoke about it. Those are the first people that spoke. But indeed, they criticized the hon. Minister of Finance for taking a decision to save the NIB and to save the National Insurance System, because they extracted and extricated \$112 million a year from 2018. Now, really and truly, brothers and sisters, I know there is nothing that those on that side could say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that will justify what they did. My only advice to them, before I continue, is to repent.

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Repent for the evils that you did against Petrotrin workers and against this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]**Hon. E. Kesar:** You shut down the refinery, Madam Deputy Speaker, and up to now, the refinery is down. Oil prices reached an all-time low. That might be a bad thing. But that if the refinery was running, low oil prices would have meant excellent margins; excellent margins at that time. But let us not forget, Madam Deputy Speaker, the removal of the recognized majority union, the OWTU, came with the removal of work standards, collective agreement standards, systems of work, safety standards.

Let us now turn to what was the effect of that. Four divers died in a pipe, Madam Deputy Speaker. They want the public to forget that, but we cannot forget that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Had the union been in Petrotrin, “dat woulda never happen,” Madam Deputy Speaker. “It woulda never happen.”

In addition to that, let us not forget, in 2024, December 22, to be precise, an entire oil rig collapsed in the Soldado fields, formerly where I used to work in Trinmar. Again, Madam Deputy Speaker, there is no way that would have happened had the OWTU still been there, because we were the ones that policed the system. We were the ones that ensured that they had safety standards. Madam Deputy Speaker, there is nothing that anyone on that side could say that will justify what they did.

And more than that, Madam Deputy Speaker, let me continue the “wickedity”. The trade union movement—because I know, you know, Madam. I know them. I have been dealing with that side for quite a while; quite a while. And the trade union movement, from as far back, Madam Deputy Speaker, as the 1920s, have had a duality. There was always an issue in terms of what side of the trade union movement was supporting here and what side of the trade union movement was supporting there.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me refer you to the history and to the records of Trinidad and Tobago, in case we have forgotten. In the early 1920s, Arthur Andrew Cipriani, 1926 to be precise—1925, sorry, he was elected to the Legislative Council. During 1956, around 1955/'56, Tubal Uriah “Buzz” Butler came, he rose, and he was elected in the Legislative Council as well. But let me “back back”. Tubal Uriah “Buzz” Butler was part of Arthur Andrew Cipriani’s party and he was expelled from Cipriani’s party. You know why, Madam Deputy Speaker? Because he took a position against the colonial masters and he stood up, as we all know how Butler is, in the interests of the workers. So that, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is very, very disingenuous to hear those that purport to support workers speak from one side of their mouth, knowing the atrocities that that party’s history has with workers.

And let me continue. Madam Deputy Speaker, it is the PNM, in 1965, with the ISA, went to war with Comrade General George Weekes, and it is the PNM, Madam Deputy Speaker, that took issue and infiltrated the Oilfields Workers’ Trade Union and the National Trade Union Centre, leading to some of the trade unionists at that time supporting the PNM. And may I read, with your permission, directly from the autobiography of Comrade George Weekes, written by Mr. Khafra Kambon, and I read from page 109, second paragraph:

The PNM hierarchy was working hard, mobilizing members and making it very clear at this time the battle lines were drawn. In effect, two things were being extracted from trade unionists: The support for the Industrial Stabilisation Act, which amounted to the support for the Government’s aim to substantially paralyze the trade union movement, and the support for the destruction of the President of the National Trade Union Centre, President General of the OWTU, Comrade George Weekes.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the OWTU has been in a perpetual battle with the

People's National Movement from as far back as 1937—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar:—and that Tubal Uriah “Buzz” Butler himself, Madam Deputy Speaker, became a Member of this House, 1956. He was a parliamentarian, but that the people on that side “does try” to have the public believe that trade unionists have no place being in the Parliament, trade unionists have no place being in politics. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, I stand proud, as a trade unionist of 25 years, now being a part of the politics in this House, led by the Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: And let me talk about that a little bit, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I remind Trinidad and Tobago, it is 1976, the ULF became the first official Opposition, and for the record, the United Labour Front became the first official Opposition, and it was led by trade unionists fighting against the PNM again.

11.30 a.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me continue. This Petrotrin Vesting Bill—in 1993, there was no issue. Because in 1993, when the Petrotrin Vesting Bill came to Parliament to amalgamate all of the different arms—Trintoc, Texaco, and so on—into Petrotrin, in that Petrotrin Vesting Act, it captured the rights of the workers to be represented by a trade union. It also captured the preservation of the collective agreement.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, one might ask, “What changed from then to 2018?” What changed, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that from 1993, we had a whole lot of political experiences that came to a head in 2010. That further went, Madam Deputy Speaker, to the issue of the whole thing of production and who are the ones that drive production. Madam Deputy Speaker, let me remind Trinidad and Tobago that it is the workers of Petrotrin—the workers—who were the ones

that were saying to the then administration in 2018, “Go ahead and do your restructuring.” There was even a proposal to send home 1200 workers who were over the age of 50—and I dare anyone on that side to refute what I am saying—and that was agreed to during the talks led by the company’s chairman, Mr. Wilfred Espinet, and the union’s President General, comrade Ancel George Roget. All those things were agreed upon. There were three successive studies as to what was the best way to deal with Petrotrin. None of the studies indicated to close down the refinery and send home everybody. None indicated. None of them indicated.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Correct.

Hon. E. Kesar: And Madam Deputy Speaker—

Hon. Member: Wicked.**Hon. E. Kesar:**—I am still asking, and I hope soon that I can get it, because I am not saying that it does not exist, but I am yet to see the Cabinet Note that made the decision to send home all the workers and close down the refinery. I am yet to see it. It probably exists; I do not know. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, we continue to believe—we in the labour movement—and I still say “we”, because “you cyah take” trade union from in my belly. It is in my DNA. Representing workers is in my DNA.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Representing trade is in my DNA, and nobody on that side would dictate to us what we should and should not do.

Hon. Member: Correct.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Madam Deputy Speaker, the people on that side, led by the Members of Parliament on that side, had many chances. They would have infiltrated every known trade union, up to today. They perpetrate that agenda. And let me tell you why I am talking about that; because in 2018, Madam Deputy

Speaker—you see, I am talking from experience, you know—the most the Members on that other side could say is that they disagree, but these are my experiences, Madam Deputy Speaker. Good? I have been on the frontline, and I have been in the trenches. When people talk about protest and so on, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have faced the police. “Ah get licks from police”, Madam Deputy Speaker. And I say it proudly, “ah take meh licks”. I know what it is for a snake—for what you call it? The—

Hon. Members: Cat o’ nine?

Hon. E. Kesar: Not the cat o’ nine. “The long, black whip that does hit yuh that—well, some of you all might not know anything about that, eh.”

Hon. Member: A “bullpistle”.

Hon. E. Kesar: No, not the “bullpistle”. It is a metal thing. “When it hit yuh, it does wrap round yuh back.”

Hon. Member: The blackjack.

Hon. E. Kesar: “Or hor, yuh know it? Nice, good man.” Good. Careful, be careful, careful. Madam Deputy Speaker, I know what that feels like. I know what it feels like when you lock arms to defend workers, and the State forces have to do what they have to do. We always say in the trade union movement, “Leave de police alone. Do not interfere with de police.” If you are not prepared to get locked up, do not interfere with the police. Madam Deputy Speaker, at the end of the day, at that time, we did what we had to do—we defended what we had to do. Madam Deputy Speaker, but we have never faced the type of oppression and repression that was meted out in 2018 that was done by the People’s National Movement.

Hon. Member: Correct.

Hon. E. Kesar: Madam Deputy Speaker, again, October 2018—another *Guardian* article—and again, I mean, these things are matters of public records. It stated

1,000 casual temporary workers went home with nothing—nothing.

And you know why they went home with nothing, Madam Deputy Speaker? It is because the management, led by the board and led by the People's National Movement-influenced Government, totally ignored the collective agreements at that time, so that a thousand casual workers, up to this day, went home with nothing. But it gets worse, you know, Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker, when the union would have agreed with the company on the issue of land—land for workers—as a form of compensation, additional to whatever the agreement, thinking that, “Okay, every worker”.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is only now that we are to learn that, in doing their loan arrangements, they mortgage every single thing that Petrotrin have. Every window, every property, everything—they mortgage it. Every piece of land, Madam Deputy Speaker. And that was now used to say, to take a loan to pay workers, when the people who benefited the most from that arrangement were the hundreds of managers. Some were good managers, but some were part of the issue that we had. They were part of the problem. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, when they told workers, in some lottery system, that they would get land, I say here, and I say it without apology, that the land that the 238 persons would have gotten, or the commitment—first of all, none of them ever received a document to this date. That is the Rowley's lottery.

Hon. Member: That is not true.

Hon. E. Kesar: What they got is a document giving them a commitment. “So yuh right, they eh get a document”—yeah, that is not true. None of them received a lease, a deed of comfort, or a title indicating that the land is theirs, up to this day, Madam Deputy Speaker. And I dare them to bring documents. I dare them to bring—bring “ah” lease. Show me where one of the 238 would have received a lease for their land. Madam Deputy Speaker, you know why? Because those

lands—

That is right. Those lands, Madam Deputy Speaker, upon checking, those lands belonged—those were state lands, and some of those lands were Caroni lands. “Piece ah them”—one or two parcels belong a PSAEL. Up to now, Madam Deputy Speaker, the workers of Petrotrin are still waiting on their land. And that it is difficult now—just for now, just a little bit—because we now, in this Government, are going through the paces to do some restructuring of the loan to free up the loan, and to bring some more movements so that former Petrotrin workers would be able to get their land, Madam Deputy Speaker. This Government will make sure that that happens.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, the restructuring of Petrotrin caused some 13 major trade disputes to be filed. Those trade disputes, Madam Deputy Speaker, range from pension to medical to non-payment of severance. Madam Deputy Speaker, imagine trade dispute 112 to 117—and I know it by heart—of 2018, the PNM owed the workers moneys from their savings plan that had accrued interest, and we had to take them to court, Madam Deputy Speaker, to pay the workers moneys from their savings plan. As I continue to say, the “wickedity” of the PNM—these workers were sent home unceremoniously on the 30th of November, and at 10.00 p.m., that very same night, strange contractors came into the Fields. Where was the procurement process for these contractors, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Hon. Member: Exactly.

Hon. E. Kesar: How were these contractors given contracts, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. E. Kesar: I mean, the depth of the legislation did not come into fray at that

time, but there was still a procurement policy in the company that required bidding. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am reliably informed that a particular south-based contractor who got the lion's share of the labour supply contracts is still there today, has been given or was given at that time, the company's collective agreement rates, Madam Deputy Speaker—yes—but was paying the workers at the time between 25 and 30 per cent of the rates that they got. Madam Deputy Speaker, when we are debating the next Bill, the retrenchment that has been laid in the Senate, I will pull out—I will save those things.

But Madam Deputy Speaker, that is because they knew what they were doing. No collective agreement, no policeman—you see, they are always talking about crime but they “doh” like police because they removed the police—OWTU. We were the ones who ensured that all the standards were maintained. So because that was not there, they could have done what they wanted. And up to this day, Madam Deputy Speaker, that particular south contractor is still in the company, and no one can account what the process was that that contract just keeps renewing, and renewing, and renewing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to say as well that the—in 1965 with the ISA, it was the OWTU, led by George Weekes, that had to push back against the PNM, led by Dr. Eric Williams at the time, to ensure that this oppressive law called the ISA was repealed. That was part of the fuel that led to the 1970s Black Power Revolution. That in 1972, Madam Deputy Speaker, what we now know as the Industrial Relations Act came into being, but not without workers having to sacrifice. Some workers even died. Every repressive public action that a government led, it was led by the People's National Movement, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: In 1965, ISA; 1970, Black Power Revolution; Bloody Tuesday—

and let me come to something that is more memorable—2022, the proposed furloughing of workers who did not want to take the jab. “Allyuh remember dat” No legislation came to the Parliament for that. Nothing came, but the threat was, “No jab, no job”. And you know why, Madam Deputy Speaker? It is because they know what they did. They went to cripple the OWTU. They went to damage the trade union movement.

I mean, I make no apology, again, Madam Deputy Speaker, comrade Ancel Roget and his team would have led the trade union movement for the last 20 years, carrying the entire trade union movement. “And whether yuh like trade unions, Madam Deputy Speaker, or you doh like trade unions, whether you say, ‘Well boy, I save Ancel wuk de other day. I save he wuk’—whatever yuh want to say”, Madam Deputy Speaker, the point I am making is that the trade union movement, the OWTU, has been a critical institution in Trinidad and Tobago for the last 89 years. So when people boast that they are 70 years old, the OWTU is 89 years old. And we have been here before you, and we will continue to be here long after you go, 70-year—old PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Long after. So that, Madam Deputy Speaker, before—I have about three more points to make.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

11.45 a.m.

Hon. E. Kesar: “Yes, I eh done yet, I eh done, I eh done, I eh done”. Madam Deputy Speaker, before I make my—I have some other points to make—I just want to salute—they do not like this, “eh” because it hurts them, because they want a set of false narrative outside there. The trade union movement does not know

anything about race, Madam Deputy Speaker. The trade union movement does not know anything about class, Madam Deputy Speaker. The OWTU—the first President General at the OWTU was a man named Adrian Cola Rienzi. He was an East Indian. Yes? Then Rojas, Right? Then Weeks, then McLeod, then Roget. You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, the only time we hear about race in an excessive way is when the PNM is out of power, Madam Deputy Speaker, when they are out of power.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Good. Madam Deputy Speaker, as Black Stalin say: Sufferers doh care about race—you know.

Sufferers doh care where “yuh” come from

Sufferers only want to know is where the next food coming from.

Madam Deputy Speaker, at the end of the day, I could telegraph what they are going to say, you know, I could telegraph it. But you see, your action speaks louder than your words. You abstained from supporting this Bill in the Senate. You abstained, and I imagine you might do the same thing again today. Yes.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]**Hon. E. Kesar:** Yeah, or they might say no, right. And you know why? Because, Madam Deputy Speaker, they know what they did. Their attempt was to wound the most successful trade union in Trinidad and Tobago, the OWTU. And they wounded, you know. Madam Deputy Speaker, sometimes we do not believe that old adage called “all unfair games must play over”. And indeed, November the 30th, 2018 was an unfair game, and as a good former Chief Labour Relations Officer, the great Bennett Berkley does say, It was an “unfairment” that took place on the 30th, November 2018. But you know what?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Would you require your additional 15 minutes, Member?

Hon. E. Kesar: Of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, of course.

UNREVISED

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: As I said, it was an “unfairment”, as quoted by the great Bennett Berkley on the 30th of November 2018, but the unfair game played over on the 28th of April 2025, yes, and that the PNM was dealt the blow that they deserve, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Now, I know tomorrow is Labour Day, and this is the eve of Labour Day, and indeed I will see some of our colleagues on that side in Fyzabad. Yes.

Hon. Member: “Nah”.

Hon. E. Kesar: They will be there, they will be there, they will be there, they will be there. I mean, I am reasonably fair and respectful, you know, once they show respect. The hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Arima, is always in Fyzabad, always. I have seen her many, many times. Yes.

I am saying, Madam Deputy Speaker, the People’s National Movement has been an enemy to labour for the longest time that I can remember.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: No matter, no amount of things that they are pretending now, well with this and this one, and that one, and that one, when it means really elevating and supporting workers to be sustainable, they come out with their long teeth and their fangs, right, to destroy workers, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have just quoted. Let me quote again, because you know, they say you are making a lot of sweeping statements. The MBanefo Commission came after 1965 where the colonial masters, supported by the leader of the PNM at that time—to look at the issue of subterfuge and— “Wey yuh call it, oh God, ah having”—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. E. Kesar: “No, ah lil senior moment, yes.” Mutiny. Yes. And the issue of the trade union movement plotting against the State. Then you had the Mostofi Commission also, employed by the State, supported by the then Prime Minister, the late Dr. Eric Williams. I can go on and on in terms of the different measures that they implemented to prevent workers from having their rights, and that were directed against OWTU, in particular.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as I said, I know, I can almost telegraph what they are going to say when I take my seat. You know what, Madam Deputy Speaker, it does not matter, you know, it does not matter, it does not matter. The history will have it. It is the PNM that destroyed Petrotrin. It is the PNM that sent home 5,000-plus workers—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar:—“and up to today dey cyah ketch dey self”. It is the PNM that continues to have the refinery down, and it is the UNC that is going to put the refinery back up and back to work.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: It is the PNM, Madam Deputy Speaker, that in spite of all of the things that they have said, it is the PNM that went at the heart to destroy the working class, the working class of Trinidad and Tobago. Those persons who had sustainable jobs, they went at them, and indeed they took it away.

Madam Deputy Speaker, do you know, when those particular contractors—and I will call their names, “because ah know we doh have much speakers today”, so I will save some for later. They were instructed, Madam Deputy Speaker, not to hire former Trinmar and Petrotrin workers. They were instructed. Right. They were instructed. I do not expect some of my colleagues on the other side to know these things, because again, they only talk from a philosophical, existential perspective. I talk from a real perspective. I was there, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: So, that if you want to challenge me, let us go back in time. Madam Deputy Speaker, they were instructed not to hire Trinmar and Petrotrin workers. It is only when they realized that in Petrotrin and Trinmar the operations are still fairly analogue. If you do not know it, you will end up dead. Good. “Dat dey had to now put dey tail between dey leg and hire back these workers”. That up to today, they are still struggling, because some of the major workers with all the institutional knowledge, they are not coming back because of the money and the compensation that they were offering.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Bear in mind, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the very said contractors are to this day being paid the rates of the collective agreement that the OWTU and the company would have dealt with at that time—up to this day, and they are still paying workers less than.

In closing, as I wrap up, Madam Deputy Speaker, this vesting Bill will begin to—not immediately— restore standards of work, will begin to restore quality terms and conditions back to this industry. But more than that, Madam Deputy Speaker, it will begin to restore standards, standards that can be evaluated, policed if it needs to, and corrected.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as well, this Vesting Order, what it will also do, it will allow the union and the company to sit and work things out. You see, as I say to my former colleagues, this is not something an open door—well, all right, “rah” and we just go and it is craziness. No, Madam Deputy Speaker, what it allows is order for the union now to sit with the management and work things out properly in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago and production.

“Madam Deputy Speaker, is we alone does talk about production”. So, when people on that side talk about, they know this, and they know—Madam

Deputy Speaker, if I were to bring a 300-pound fisher valve here with an actuator, they would not even know what that is. I remember a particular person did not know what is a bull plug, yeah.

Hon. Member: Imagine that?

Hon. E. Kesar: Good.

Hon. Member: Thought was something else.

Hon. E. Kesar: Madam Deputy Speaker, “ah saying dis to say”, I respect everybody for their profession and what they can do. But Madam Deputy Speaker, at the end of the day, it was the Oil Field Workers Trade Union, it was the union that the oil field was built upon. It was the workers that worked in the oil field from as far back as 1898 to present, who are the ones that build this economy. And it is the PNM, Madam Deputy Speaker, at different junctures in the lives of these workers who would have instituted repressive policies and taken repressive actions to attack and destroy and to break down these workers’ terms and conditions. Maybe because they found that it was getting too close to the big boys and them. Madam Deputy Speaker, I would just like to thank the hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, MP.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: I would like to thank the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, this UNC Cabinet.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: I would like to salute—I want to end on a not so good note, Madam Deputy Speaker. How much I have, Madam Deputy Speaker, how much time I have?

Madam Deputy Speaker: You have three more minutes. **Hon. E. Kesar:** Good, Madam Deputy Speaker, again, this is for the Members on that side who like figures, and we are getting figures out of the air, and what manufacturing

[*Laughter*] “ah” like him too bad, you know, but “Maka”. “Wah ah say to him is Maka, Maka, love, love, love, love, love all the time.” Right.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. E. Kesar: “Aye, yuh answer.” I was not talking about you, but alright. Madam Deputy Speaker, this is taken from the Petrotrin Employees Pension Plan (PEPP). These are stats taken from the plan itself. This is the reported deaths of regular pensioners from 2019 January 1st to May 31st, 2026. The total number of regular pensioners who would have died during that period. Males: 1,557; females: 80. A total of 1,637 pensioners who would have passed away from 2019 to May 31st, 2026. Deferred pensioners, same period, 24 males, five females, a total of 29.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, during that period of 2019, January 1st to May 31st, 2026, when I stood up here a couple months ago, and I said that over 1,000 pensioners died, those on that side said, “You are inflating and you are conflating the figures.” You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will soon come—to go to cause a death, and so on, and because they lost a valuable benefit called their medical plan that was taken away, stripped away, emasculated, and removed from them, and they replaced it with some paltry insurance. Something, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we may not be able to even replicate because of how it was structured. Some of these pensioners perished because they had illnesses that only the medical plan could have sustained. Madam Deputy Speaker, that is another “wickedity” that the PNM perpetrated on Petrotrin workers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Madam Deputy Speaker, there is much more, I could stand here and talk for about three hours, giving the whole reasoning or non-reasoning, or unreasonable notions that would have allowed that previous administration, to take God out of their thoughts and did what they did, but you know what, Madam

Deputy Speaker, better days are here. Yes. And that indeed we are quickly as fast as we could to work on restoring the benefits and to assist all former Petrotrin workers, and this legislation is to deal with the present and the future. Because there are workers right now who deserve protection, they deserve.

So that indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker, with these few words, I want to thank again, this Government for seeing the wisdom in amending this Act. Thank you, Attorney General. Thank you, Prime Minister, again for doing—thank you, Prime Minister and I want to say, not in the English way but [*Foreign language spoken*]. The struggle continues. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

12.00 noon

VISITORS

(Woodland Hindu Primary School)

Madam Deputy Speaker: Before I call on the next Member, I would once again like to recognize the Woodland Hindu Primary School—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker:—classes of First Year, Second Year, Standard 1 and Standard 2, and the teacher, Nalini Jairam-Boodram. Thank you for joining us today.

MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS (HERITAGE PETROLEUM, PARIA FUEL TRADING AND GUARACARA REFINING VESTING) (AMDT.) BILL, 2026

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for La Brea.

UNREVISED

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Ministry of Public Utilities (Hon. Clyde Elder): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for recognizing me, and for allowing me, my voice, to add to this debate. Madam Deputy Speaker, before I contribute to this debate, allow me just a moment to recognize the efforts of my Government in assisting the family of Mercedes Layne, who tragically lost her life at the hands of a devil, and who we laid to rest a couple of days ago, and who was my constituent. I want to thank the hon. Vandana Mohit and indeed, the Prime Minister—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder:—for ensuring that the support was given to that family in a time the need, and I need to put that on the *Hansard*, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: Madam Deputy Speaker, at the risk of violating 55(1)(b) of the Standing Orders, why are we here? Why are we here on June 18, 2026, to debate this vesting order that should have really been in this Parliament since 2018? We are here because of the evil that had been perpetuated upon, not just the workers of Petrotrin, but upon our country by the closure of Petrotrin.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: I want to start by saying thank you to the hon. Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, Comrade Minister Leroy Baptiste, for piloting this Bill here this morning. As I say that, I quickly add my special gratitude to our hon. Prime Minister and the Cabinet for ensuring that this Bill came here on the eve of Labour Day.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: I want to also recognize, Madam Deputy Speaker, the presence of the President General and the Education Officer of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union, Comrade Ancel Roget and Comrade Ozzi Warwick.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: Madam Deputy Speaker, for those listening to us on the radio and television, wherever you are, and you ask yourself, “What is this vesting Bill about? It is a vesting Bill that they are debating in Parliament. What is that about?” Let me give you a little context of what this Bill is about.

This Bill is about ensuring that the justice that workers deserve, albeit belatedly, that justice, albeit delayed, is not denied. I say that because when a company wants to close up shop, they simply close up shop and they go their way, and in the law there is nothing to worry about, “because the shop close up.” Under the law you say, “Once the company dissolves, that is it, there are no moneys owing to workers,” you go your way. That happened with ArcelorMittal. But when a Government is hell-bent on attacking a union, and they are so determined to destroy, not just a union, but an individual, then what you see happening in Petrotrin is the results of why we are here today.

I will go further, Madam Deputy Speaker, to say this, you could close down a company, reshape it, reform it and restart it, sometimes with the same tools and equipment, the same location, the same job, doing substantially the same thing, and when you do that, even though you open a next company, the new company becomes the successor of the old one. We are replete with different pieces of examples, and even legislation, that speaks about successorship. In fact, it is clearly defined within the Industrial Relations Act at section 48, I believe.

Minister Baptiste would have given us some examples of *Public Services Association of Trinidad and Tobago v Trinidad and Tobago Civil Aviation Authority* to speak about that successorship. But what happened with Petrotrin was more diabolical. It was more evil. It was more deliberate in the way they went about, in their words, “restructuring Petrotrin”; in their words. It was so diabolical and so evil, and so ill-intended that even the former, former Prime Minister lied to this

country, and then the former Prime Minister lied to this country and said, “We not closing down Petrotrin. We did not close down Petrotrin. So if you were closing your fridge door and you did not hear what I said, we not shutting down Petrotrin.” So in the event that you are opening your fridge door or you are closing it today, I am saying that, today, we are vesting into Guaracara, Paria and Heritage, the transfer, the successorship of Petrotrin into these companies.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: That is why we are here today. What they did was what they thought was a “smart man move”, because they felt—“dem on dat side feel dat dey have ah monopoly on education, eh.” If any one of us on this side pronounces a word bad, if you see their faces on that side. You understand? If it is they feel that they heard something off-key, because they are more educated than us, “dey screw up dey face.” They watch us like, “Buh how you could be a parliamentarian? Wa yuh doing here? You cannot even say”—I remember how they treated, how they attacked my fellow parliamentarian, Minister Alexander, because they do that because they tell themselves that they have this monopoly on knowledge. “Dey feel dey better than anybody.”

So when it is they shut down Petrotrin, they told themselves, “Ah boy, if we open a new company, it will be the same thing as Eastern Commercial and BIGWU, successorship, the same thing like BWIA and CAL, so hear wa we go do, we go shut down Petrotrin and we go break it up fine. Mash it up into different pieces. We have one that is dealing with fuel, one dealing with the lands, one dealing with trading, one dealing with debt. Mash it up, and just break it up and put things in different companies.” What that will do is that you cannot now say that one company is the successor of the initial company because they are not doing the same thing. That is the “smart man move” behind it, you know.

But when you look at it, whatever was being done in Petrotrin, when it

comes to fuelling, that is what Paria is doing. Whatever was being done in Petrotrin when it comes to land, that is what maybe Petrotrin legacy is doing. But the point is, the exact same functions is now taking place and persists and continues in these smaller companies. So they told themselves, “Ah boy, we ketch dem. We get dem,” and I want the country to take note of this. You see, my comrade, colleague, friend, fellow parliamentarian, Minister Kesar, Member for Point Fortin, told us about the attack on OWTU and the historical deliberate attack on OWTU. But when you marry that now, that hatred they had for the OWTU, with a more acute and poignant hatred for the President General of the OWTU, you get what happened in Petrotrin. That is what you get. Because Petrotrin was not just about—“mashing up Petrotrin” was not just about destroying the union, you know, it was an attempt to destroy the integrity and the character of Ancel Roget. That is what it was.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: They had people talking all kinds of things about Roget and about Petrotrin workers. Remember when they also put out, in the public domain, how much a maid was making in Petrotrin, and how much this one was making, and that one? Remember when they did that? They did not do that by guess or by “vaps”, you know. They did it to get the public on their side, so that the public will hate Petrotrin workers so much, that the public will not stand up in defence of the closure of Petrotrin.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: That is what they did.

When they closed down Petrotrin, that had consequences. The former speaker, the speaker before me, Member for Point Fortin, told us about one of the consequences, which is affecting the National Insurance Board contributions. That was something that the union had spoken about and prophesied about that will

happen. The union said it. Before it happened, the union said it, “If this happens, the result is going to be affecting the contributions to NIB.” Because why?

Because the OWTU, over the years, has done so good and so well at engaging in collective bargaining that they were able to move workers’ salary from pittance to something that was a little more livable and manageable.

People said, “Oh, Petrotrin workers were overpaid.” Well, it was not that Petrotrin workers were overpaid, the rest of the country was so grossly underpaid that they felt Petrotrin workers were overpaid.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: So what then happened was that the NIB contributions were affected, but that is not what I want to talk about, because my colleague and comrade Minister dealt with that. I want to talk about how that closure affected the foreign exchange earnings of our country, because after the closure of Petrotrin, and of the refinery especially, we could no longer take crude oil, import it as well, refine it, and if we bought it for \$1, we sold the refined product for \$5, and therefore we would have a gross earning on foreign exchange.

12.15p.m.

Now what we have to do is sell the oil, hope to get a good price for it, and

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then buy fuel. So, the foreign exchange that we used to make, we are now spending to buy fuel. That is what we were doing. Then, when it affected the foreign exchange—I remember the former, former Prime Minister talking about, “Why we have to use horny goat weed.” Remember that? He started to talk about horny goat weed.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. C. Elder: Eh. “Why we have to use the foreign exchange to buy horny goat weed?” I suspect, maybe at that point in time—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. C. Elder: —I suspect—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. C. Elder: —that because he did not and could not engage in ultra-deep drilling like—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Kesar: Oh, my. Oh, my. Oh, my. Oh, my. Oh, my. Oh, my.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: —the Member for Oropouche. Yeah.

Mr. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, 48(1). Are you comfortable with that kind of rhetoric in the Parliament?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Alexander: What did he say?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I will allow the Member to continue his contribution.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: Yes. Or maybe, some special branch of some worker over what was taking place on some well, that he was not sure what was happening, that he was concerned about horny goat weed and how the money was being spent. But he was not concerned about the workers of this country. I said of this country—I

could have said OWTU—because, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want us to remember, as well, that November 30th, 2018, they shut down Petrotrin. December 31st, 2018, they sent home 500 TSTT workers, myself included.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Kesar: That is right.

Hon. C. Elder: They were not isolated events, eh. They may be different companies, but they were isolated events. It was a deliberate attempt to destroy the trade union movement. I was leading the CW at the time. Comrade Roget was leading the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union at the time. I also recall there were talks about going on the Port, to restructure the Port, and they wanted to restructure WASA. So, they were going to attack the Seamen and Waterfront Workers Trade Union and then go and attack the PSA. It was part of their plan. The difference is that the other companies did not close down like Petrotrin, and that is what brought us here today. That is the difference.

So, when the Members opposite—I am speculating—when they rise to speak, they may want to suggest that, one, “This Bill is only because tomorrow is Labour Day and dey trying to appease de OWTU and trying to give the OWTU something because dey supported de UNC to get into government.” Well, thanks for the support, OWTU. We are here, and we will represent you very well.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: They may say that. They may also say that, “So, what happen to other companies that ha’ the same fate with different unions? Why yuh not treating with dem?” But, you see, what they will not tell you, Trinidad and Tobago is this: What we are doing here today is nothing that is unprecedented or new.

When they closed Trintoc and Trintopec and formed Petrotrin, they ensured that what we do here today, it was done then. So, the union, OWTU that is, in the Vesting Order, was protected, and OWTU transitioned into Petrotrin without

having to go and fight up with organizing the workers' 50 per cent plus one, go to RICB, go through all of the different rigors of getting recognition. No. It was simply passing it on to say, "Aye. Alyuh, here. We taking in de company. We merging it. We forming it into one. Alyuh will continue. No need to go back and go through the whole process. Yuh continuing." So, this is not a favour we are doing to OWTU. What this is, is ensuring that that violent, wicked, evil, vindictive piece of action is now corrected in 2026.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: That is why I started by saying, Madam Deputy Speaker, that this discussion should have been happening in 2018, not 2026. That is why I started by saying that.

Mr. Lee: It should never have happened.

Hon. C. Elder: It should never have happened. That is correct. It should never have happened. Right? But we are not here to, as Minister Baptiste said, reopen the debate of whether or not the refinery should have closed or should have remained open. "It close. Dey shut it down." We are here now. We are dealing with what is before us now. That is why we are here, to deal with what is before us now.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, I firmly believe that strong unions and successful organizations are mutually exclusive. In fact, the strongest organizations are often those where workers are respected, where dialogue is encouraged, and where disputes can be resolved through established industrial relations mechanisms. Strong unions contribute to stability, accountability, and productivity. We heard some of that before, about the accountability, ensuring safe working systems are there, and accountability to ensure if something happens, there is accountability for what has taken place.

As I say that, let me say this, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Point

Fortin spoke about the Paria divers. Some time ago, in a debate in this House—and I am speaking now about accountability and how this Vesting Order will encourage that, and had it been there, this would have not have happened. So, he spoke about the Paria divers. I remember when one of my colleagues commented and said, “The Paria divers.” The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West said, “Alyuh pay dem yet?” He quipped that under his breath. “Alyuh pay dem yet?” Accountability.

So, you would have been accountable to the families of these divers, had there been a collective agreement and a union in place where the families of these divers now could have said, “Aye. If de company playing de fool, de workers were protected under a collective agreement. This is what would have happened or should have happened.” We are here today, where the families of these divers have to feel “as if dey begging de former Government—not this Government because dey eh begging us”—that is what a union does. That is what a union presence does.

Mr. Kesar: NiQuan.

Hon. C. Elder: Let us not forget NiQuan. All those are consequences of Petrotrin being shut down and about having workers work in precarious working conditions, where there is no union representing them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: This legislation, Madam Deputy Speaker, therefore, restores coherence to the industrial relations landscape. It acknowledges continuity, where continuity clearly exists. Let me pause there. This legislation is retroactive to December 2018. Some may ask, “Well, wah yuh going all de way back there for? We in 2026. What is the need for that retroactive aspect of the law?” Well, I will tell you something. Between December 2018, and now, that time did not just evaporate, the issues did not just disappear.

As a matter of fact, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am aware that in October of 2022, the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union made an application to Industrial Court for successorship in Heritage Petroleum, Paria Fuel Trading, Guaracara Refining, and I think, even TPHL at the time. They made an application for successorship, 2022, and to date, the court has not said, "Yes you are the successor union." So we have—basically the union—different options, how they could become the successor in these companies. But they should not have had to exercise those options, had this same vesting Bill been brought to a parliament earlier and said "Go ahead. You are continuing to be the union in the successor companies. So, since 2022, they are waiting for a court hearing to determine whether or not they are the successors in these companies.

Now, the law does provide, Madam Deputy Speaker, at section 48—let me just get the exact paragraph because the law does provide for successorship. But hear what it says. Section 48 (3):

"(3) For the purposes of this section any question whether a person is a successor or assignee of another shall be determined by the Court from all the circumstances in accordance with good conscience and the principles of good industrial relations...and shall be binding on the persons referred to in subsection (1) and is conclusive for all the purposes connected therewith."

So, the union could have gone to court and they did that and they are waiting four years.

Another option to the union is that they could have gone by every one of those newly created companies, get an organizing officer, and go to organize 50 per cent plus one. But the problem with that, Madam Deputy Speaker, is this: number one, there was no way for the union to know what the exact headcount is in each of those companies, to start with. Number one. Number two, every one of those new workers in those companies, and if not every one, most of them, because some of

them came to me and said to me that they were told that “Dey get ah work now. Dey cannot go and join de union.”

So, even if the union went to organize them, the union would have been unsuccessful in the main because they were already threatened when they came on board to say, “Doh join de union eh and doh tell nobody ah tell yuh dat neither.” Because you know why? Because they saying that to the workers is in fact illegal. But the workers were threatened, “If yuh want ah wok, come to work, but stay quiet and doh go and join no union.” So, then that option that the union had to organize all of the workers in all of the companies and get back recognition, that would have been dead before it started. Then, the other option is what we are doing here today.

Now, you may ask, and I think I have answered it already, “Well, why was it not done?” It is not unprecedented. It is not unheard of. It is not a favour. It is something that is already contained in legislation, in the law, and in the parliamentary procedures. Why was it not done?” It was not done because it would not have served the agenda and interest of the People’s National Movement. That is why it was not done. So, we are here today because an injustice to a union has been committed. I am delighted that we are doing this debate on June 18th.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: It is not for talking points tomorrow, you know, but it is to show the workers, when we go to Fyzabad tomorrow—as I will go—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: —that this Government has a genuine workers’ agenda that we are furthering every single session of Parliament.

12.30 p.m.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: That workers' agenda started when we ensured that we saved the work of WASA workers. That workers' agenda ensured that the workers in T&TEC who were not getting COLA for 10 years; we fixed the COLA. That workers' agenda was further demonstrated when we ensured that we signed off 10 per cent for public servants, and today that workers' agenda is being furthered by ensuring that the OWTU gets recognition in Paria, Guaracara.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. C. Elder: And Heritage.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Lee: Promise made, promise kept.

Hon. C. Elder: Promise made, promise kept.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, would you like your additional 15 minutes?

Hon. C. Elder: I did not realise it went so fast. Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Sure.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: Time surely flies when you are having fun. Madam Deputy Speaker, this amendment recognizes a simple but important principle. If Heritage Petroleum and Paria Fuel Trading are successors to Petrotrin for the purpose of assets, operations and responsibilities, then they must also recognize the continuity of workers' rights and representation. One cannot inherit the assets and reject the obligations. One cannot inherit the operations and reject the industrial relations framework that accompany those operations. One cannot inherit the workforce and ignore the representative relationship that the workers enjoyed for decades.

My colleague from Point Fortin told us about the historical successes of

OWTU. The return of the OWTU to the oilfields is not simply about correcting a wrong of the past; it is about strengthening the future. It is about ensuring that workers once again have effective representation from an organization that understands the industry, understands the workforce and understands the communities that depend upon the energy sector. It is about preserving institutional knowledge, promoting industrial stability and reaffirming the importance of collective bargaining and social dialogue. My colleague, the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, spoke to us about not just social dialogue but social justice; that is what this is doing.

Before that 15 minutes expires and I do not realize “where it gone”, I want for a few minutes, Madam Deputy Speaker, while we are debating this vesting Bill that is going to ensure OWTU’s continuity into these three companies, it would remiss of me if, as the Member of Parliament for La Brea, I do not alert this country on how the action of the former administration affected my constituency. Because in saying that, it also tells you what the OWTU’s representation meant, and represented for the lives of the people in La Brea. Because La Brea is not one of what they call the fence line communities of the oil field. So you have La Brea, Santa Flora, Palo Seco—

Mr. Lee: Marabella.

Hon. C. Elder:—Marabella, Point Fortin, Penal, Barrackpore, Siparia, Fyzabad.

Hon. Member: Cedros.

Hon. C. Elder: Cedros. All of these areas because of the decision to shut down Petrotrin.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. C. Elder: I “cyah” call all—impacted in a negative way on the lives of the people, especially in the south-western peninsula. Madam Deputy Speaker, many of my family members, relatives I should say, worked in Petrotrin, either directly

or indirectly with a contractor. When they shut down Petrotrin, all of them, all, all, all went home because the contractor no longer had employment with Petrotrin, the employees no longer had employment with Petrotrin, and therefore that then created high levels of unemployment within these fence line communities.

Mr. Lee: They “ain” care about that.

Hon. C. Elder: They never cared about that. These were men and women who had devoted years and in many cases decades to the industry. They were workers who relied upon the protection, advocacy and representation provided through the OWTU. They understood the value of having a recognized majority union that knew their concerns, understood the realities of the oil fields and could effectively represent them. The removal of the OWTU from the oil fields created a sense of uncertainty and dislocation of among many workers. For generations, workers had viewed the union as an integral part of the workplace.

In fact, the union was an integral part of their everyday life, not just the workplace. Because the OWTU was able to have many different programmes as a union. And even the company, that was Petrotrin, had many other programmes. Social programmes, sporting programmes, programmes to deal with the creative arts. And as I speak about sporting programmes, I remember we used to have the Petrotrin Velodrome, there was the Petrotrin Velodrome. After they closed down Petrotrin—

Hon. Members: Guaracara Park.

Hon. C. Elder: Guaracara Park. When they closed down Petrotrin, the Velodrome stayed in abeyance. They put out a contract to fix it, \$24 million spent, not even a roof over the stadium.

Mr. Lee: Not a bleacher in place.

Hon. C. Elder: Not a bleacher in place, \$24 million after, eh. There were nice social clubs. Forest Reserve is one of the nicest ones you will ever find, pool and

“ting.” I took a walk in there three months ago, Madam Deputy Speaker. The pool is still there, but I had to use a cutlass to cut down trees and grass to get to the pool. The water is green. The water is green and there is a tree growing in the pool right now. It is just there and that is just one example of the many different assets that they left to rot away and to waste. When the union was there, the union members used to volunteer their services to take care of some of those clubs. Some of them ran the clubs to keep it to a certain standard, to encourage social activities, and camaraderie.

Hon. Member: The public had access.

Hon. C. Elder: You could have written and used those things and enjoyed it. So when we feel, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we are here only to debate a vesting order to transfer successorship to OWTU in three companies, this is more than that, Madam Deputy Speaker. This goes to the very heart of the people of the fence line communities; it goes to the very heart of their existence.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: I could never have any respect for the People’s National Movement after the way they treated workers of this country, never.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: And they will say all “kind ah ting” about our Government; they say all “kind ah ting” about the Prime Minister, say all “kind ah ting” about the UNC.

You could say “wa yuh want” to say, the UNC’s history has never been to repress workers, the UNC’s history has never been—

Hon. Lee: To shut down the whole company.

Hon. C. Elder: To shut down a company and destroy a country and an industry. The UNC’s history has never been to have any concerted attack on any union or any individual union leader in this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: So they could jump up high, they could jump low. They could—

Hon. Member: They could say this.

Hon. C. Elder: They could say this, they could say that, they could back up with dog.

Mr. Hosein: “Doh say de rest.” Doh say de rest.”

Hon. C. Elder: Who say that? Who say that? Who does say that?

Hon. Members: “Doh say. Doh say.”

Hon. C. Elder: I do not care what they say. I want to join my comrade from Point Fortin, and say that I am a proud Member of this Government and of the United National Congress.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: “Yuh cud say wa yuh want.” Before I close, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I say that, I remember there was one—not was, is—Faris Al-Rawi, Senator, had indicated, he said, “Ah giving them six months and the first one to leave will be the labour movement.” We are here and we intend to stay right here.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: Despite all of the rancour that they tried to perpetuate between the leaders in the labour movement, the labour movement will deal with that. But comrade Kesar and I, we stand here. I want to say to the workers, we stand here—

Hon. Members: And comrade Leroy.

Hon. C. Elder:—and comrade Leroy, of course, yes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Yes, “doh forget,” comrade Leroy.

Hon. C. Elder: Comrade Leroy, I have forgotten for a minute, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we have the Senator from the—

Hon. Member: The other place.

Hon. C. Elder: The other place visiting here with us today. So comrade Leroy, well, yes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: I want, before I take my seat, Madam Deputy Speaker, to say that I wholeheartedly support this legislation and I dare, just as Sen. Allahar did yesterday, I want to dare the other side to demonstrate that you have any love and care for workers and support this Bill here today. I dare “yuh” to demonstrate that here today. I dare “yuh tuh” vote in favour of this Bill here today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Elder: “Ah dare yuh.” “Yuh” want to posit as if you care about workers and love workers, only because you are in Opposition. “Doh” forget it is only because you are in Opposition they could love workers now, eh.

Mr. Lee: The “small man.”

Hon. C. Elder: Yeah. But you “cyah” even talk about small man properly because when the former Prime Minister started to talk about “small man” he could not even say “small man” with any sense of genuineness and understanding, because he “doh” understand what being a “small man” is, you understand. Yeah, short man is different, not small man, right. So I want to say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I support this legislation wholeheartedly. I commend once again the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development; I commend my hon. Prime Minister; I commend the Cabinet for bringing this legislation here today. And just before I sit, I want to take this opportunity to say happy Labour Day to the trade union movement. I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Port North/St. Ann’s West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Stuart Young SC (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West*): Thank you very

much, Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker, we have just witnessed the three former speakers put down the types of performances that I certainly would have expected from them as former members of the labour movement on the eve of Labour Day. So none of the rhetoric, none of the power and the passion with which they delivered their contributions is the least bit surprising. I must say that for me personally, in reflecting and contemplating how to contribute here today, I was faced with some level of introspection. Because you see, I think I can say here safely, I am the only Member outside of those three Members who have contributed before me who has actively represented both unions. The Member for La Brea was once a member and the Member for Point Fortin and the executive of the OWTU who are present here today.

12.45p.m.

I have represented both unions. And in looking at the legislation and studying it from a critical point of view, and deciding what was my responsibility and my duty here today, despite any personal philosophical thoughts I may have, I was reminded of the following, which is the oath that I have taken on three occasions as the elected Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, which is found in our Constitution.

“...having been elected/appointed”—in this case, elected—“a member of Parliament do swear...”—and for me it is by the Bible—“...that I will bear true faith and allegiance to Trinidad and Tobago, will uphold the Constitution and the law, and will conscientiously and impartially discharge the responsibilities to the people of Trinidad and Tobago upon which I am about to enter.”

Because you see, taking that oath as an elected Member of Parliament, it is clear to me that my responsibility, and the responsibility of 12 other Members on this side, with whom I am proud to serve, our responsibility is to the people of Trinidad and

Tobago—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC:—and that is a collective responsibility. Very often in that responsibility, and very often in representing the majority and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, you find yourself in the position of conflict with certain interest groups.

Having listened very carefully, in particular to the Member for Point Fortin, who, as he told us, came from Petrotrin—and my understanding is that he worked in the salvage department at Petrotrin. He opened up the debate, as did the Member for La Brea, in a manner that it is absolutely necessary for us on this side now to put it into the context that it should be; the decision that was taken, the build-up to that decision in 2018, that the PNM Government then faced, and the context within which and why we find ourselves here today.

Because I can say, as a Member who served in the PNM Cabinet at the time, along with others here on this side and those who were part of the decision-making process, and it has been said repeatedly, both here and outside, it was not an easy decision to make. However, it was a decision that was necessary to protect the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and in particular, the future generations of Trinidad and Tobago. And I immediately put on record, certainly, the People's National Movement of which I am a lifetime Member, and during that period of time when we were called upon to make certain decisions to protect the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and the future generations of Trinidad and Tobago, who are going to carry the fiscal debt of this country.

And quite interestingly, I saw an economist publishing, just today or yesterday—and this is an economist that certain people on our side have said is anti-PNM. But what she stated was a fact, that right now Trinidad and Tobago is in a very, very dangerous and precarious financial fiscal position, our debt-to-GDP

ratio being the highest it has ever been, and in particular, the foreign indebtedness, meaning the forex, the US dollar debt is at a dangerous level where our reserves are less than the debt and the interest together.

That is the perfect context to put this Bill in, as we come here today, because it is not a simple Bill. The previous speakers touched on successorship, which is something that the Industrial Court alone has the jurisdiction to deal with. So immediately, at the outset, this legislation is incurring and it is encroaching on the jurisdiction of the Industrial Court, which, under section 48 of the Industrial Relations Act, is the body that has the responsibility. But one can say, “Okay, well, constitutionally, the Parliament and we as legislators have the right within the boundaries of the Constitution to provide legislation.”

I want to take us now to the context in which this decision was made in 2018. Because you see, a lot of rhetoric was being spewed by those on the other side, and importantly, for the record, to put into context why the decision was made. And I refer to the op-ed that I wrote at the time in May 2024, which was published in all of our daily newspapers. I will refer to certain parts of it because it is important, especially in this debate, that country knows exactly what the Parliament, and in particular, those on the other side—they have said it, executing a promise that was made to one particular trade union in Trinidad and Tobago, what it can potentially do to the future generations.

So, taking us back to the period just prior to the decision to restructure Petrotrin. I have heard it—because, of course, it suits them—even just a few moments ago, Petrotrin was shut down. It was never shut down, it still exists in law, and it still has legacy assets. It was restructured. So if I may, I start exactly there:

“...Petrotrin was restructured. Petrotrin still exists as a legal entity, its main business is holding various legacy assets; however, its original

operations were restructured. Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Ltd (TPHL) was incorporated as a holding company with Petrotrin, itself, as one of its subsidiaries. The exploration and production operations were restructured into the successful company Heritage Petroleum Company Ltd.”

—which forms a part of the legislation before us here today.

“The provision of refined fuel products was taken on by Paria Fuel Trading Company Ltd (Paria) which has successfully imported refined products (eg, gasoline, diesel, aviation fuel, etc) for the domestic market and for sale throughout the region.”

Paria is also part of the legislation today.

Because what the legislation today is proposing to do, and will do—because there is a majority and a special majority—is it is now imposing on both Paria and Heritage and Guaracara, which was set up as a holding company to hold the refinery assets, it is imposing them, OWTU, as the recognized majority union, but also, importantly, the collective agreements in a retroactive manner to 2018. What that means for the population is the terms and conditions that existed in 2018, as per the collective agreements with Petrotrin at the time, including the figures and liabilities, are now being imposed upon these two companies that have been in operation now for eight years.

So, I will get to the pragmatic side of how this exactly is supposed to operate. Because it sounds good. It is excellent politics being played, to come here on the eve of Labour Day and to rush this legislation. But it is the far-reaching consequences of the legislation, especially on the fiscal side, that one must pause and reflect on.

“The refinery was placed into Guaracara Refining Company Ltd, a subsidiary formed to preserve the refinery and to provide utility services to Paria.

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This restructuring was actually conducted in 2018 by the then-chairman of Petrotrin, Mr Wilfred Espinet, and his board in conjunction with the decision making of the Cabinet. The board was fully involved at every step of the way in the restructuring of Petrotrin and advising the Cabinet. The decision of shutting down the refinery was a Cabinet decision. It is also an irrefutable fact that the shutting-down of the refinery and the restructuring of Petrotrin's operations averted a major economic crisis for the Treasury and the country at large.

Upon coming into office in 2015 the government was confronted with a major unsustainable financial model and operations at Petrotrin. In 2014, Petrotrin registered a loss of \$361.3 million and in 2015 its loss was \$1.2 billion.

The country had seen a decline in its total domestic oil production from approximately 144,000 barrels of oil per day (bopd) in 2005 to 98,000 bopd in 2010 to 78,600 bopd in 2015. Of this, Petrotrin's own production of oil declined from approximately 64,000 bopd in 2006 to 42,000 bopd in 2016.”

As of May 2024, it stood at only 35,000 barrels of oil per day.

“Our mature fields were clearly on a decline and this crude oil was the input into the Petrotrin refinery which was constructed to refine 175,000 bopd. This meant that Petrotrin was required to import approximately 120,000 bopd to maximise output at the refinery. This component of imported crude oil was sourced on the international open market at prices set by the global oil markets. It should be appreciated that the purchase of all imported crude was required to be done in US dollars. The declining oil production in Trinidad and Tobago had led to the increasing costs of importing crude for refining at Petrotrin. All analyses show that more often

than not, this resulted in losses of US\$5-\$7 a barrel...”—of oil.

These are the facts.

So, despite the nice-sounding rhetoric and the continued narrative that was just given by my friend from La Brea, the fact is that Petrotrin and the refinery were losing, after refining a barrel of oil, US \$5 to \$7 a barrel of refined products. So there was no net profit in US dollars and foreign exchange.

I go on:

“...the inefficient costs of lifting barrels of oil at Petrotrin had made the company very uncompetitive.”

This is another point that potentially could come back to haunt us now, when this Bill is passed. Because what had been found in the analysis that had been done at this point in time, as a result of some of the provisions in the existing collective agreements, it had become very inefficient, unprofitable, and quite frankly, leading to these losses of US \$5 to \$7 a barrel of oil of refined product. That is what was being faced at the time.

“In 2016, Petrotrin registered a loss of \$4.3 billion which meant it had incurred cumulative losses of approximately \$5.9 billion in a three-year period. By the end of 2016 the Government had done a preliminary assessment of Petrotrin. It was concerned about its trajectory and in particular the effects that it was threatening to have on the Treasury and the country’s sovereign rating. A decline of our sovereign rating would affect the Government’s ability to borrow and the interest rates that its borrowings would be subjected to.

In February 2017, the Cabinet appointed a team to conduct a review of the operations of Petrotrin...”

The Cabinet did not just take this decision lightly.

“...February 2017, the Cabinet appointed a team to conduct a review

of the operations of Petrotrin and to make recommendations for its restructuring. The team comprised Mr Selwyn Lashley as chairman...”

—who was then the most knowledgeable Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries in Trinidad and Tobago, with years of institutional knowledge.

“...Ms Helen Drayton, Prof Chanrabhand Sharma (who subsequently recused himself due to a potential conflict), Mr Robert Riley, Mr Wilfred Espinet, Mr Gregory Marchan (representative of the OWTU) and Mr David Abdullah (representative of the OWTU).”

1.00p.m.

So in the composition of the committee that the Cabinet asked, go in there and take a look, because this is going to sink Trinidad and Tobago, and our Treasury and our sovereign rating. That is the composition. Two of the comrades, two of the people who represented OWTU were part of that.

“The Lashley committee, as it came to be known, submitted its report dated June 1, 2017, to the Cabinet and this report was subsequently laid in Parliament.”

They talk about accountability and transparency. When the Cabinet received the Lashley report it was laid here in Parliament, unlike what we are seeing on the other side.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Frighteningly, Madam Deputy Speaker, the report concluded:

“This report concluded that all was far from well at Petrotrin and highlighted its financial difficulties, the inefficiencies that it was facing in its refinery operations which were losing hundreds of millions of dollars, the concerns of asset integrity, the looming bullet payment of US\$850 million which had to be paid in August 2019.”

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You see, you could sit there and you could go wherever you want and you could say whatever you want but this is the reality the country was facing, US \$850 million had to be found.

“There were further difficulties associated with servicing another US\$750 million debt...”—at Petrotrin—“...the increasing burden of short-term debt (the majority of which was being used to purchase crude oil for input into the refinery) and its declining oil production.”

You had US \$850 million to be paid, US \$750 million, US \$850 million, a billion and a half US dollars to be paid. That is the reality we were facing where the company was bleeding and making billions of dollars in annual losses. In addition to that, at the time, by buying and importing crude because we do not have enough for the refinery domestically, Petrotrin was now carrying US \$400 million in short-term debt to buy crude. Those are the realities, those are the facts and there was no union busting, whatsoever.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: It was according to the oath that we take very seriously, what do you do to protect the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

“The terms of reference and work done by this Lashley team was limited in nature and was always meant to provide an initial independent high-level analysis of the state of Petrotrin. Their conclusion was very worrying and required immediate action which included a deeper dive into Petrotrin’s operations to ascertain more details and to come up with options to avoid Petrotrin’s poor state having a contagion effect on the country’s economy. Based on this situation, the Government, and in particular, the standing energy sub-cabinet committee recognised that an urgent intervention into Petrotrin was necessary. The Government appointed a new board of directors...”

“...The new board...”—of directors—“...was mandated to assess Petrotrin and to come back to the Cabinet with its recommendations including, importantly, a proposal to deal with the US\$850 million...bullet payment due in August 2019.”

That is TT \$5.8 billion that had to be paid. Today the Government cannot even pay the trade union members their back pay. They cannot pay the teachers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: We heard a promise from the Minister of Finance, “I will pay that in the next fiscal”. We came here a few days ago for an additional \$3 billion. That would not even cover this bullet payment. The bullet payment was just under TT \$6 billion and they were told:

“...and to do so without recourse to the Minister of Finance having to liquidate same...without the provision of a government guarantee.

Because if the Minister of Finance took that debt onto the country’s books, it would change our sovereign rating, cost of borrowing would go up. We simply could not afford this anchor that was on our legs.

“In 2017/2018, to add to the operational woes, Petrotrin’s auditors insisted that cumulative losses that were being carried forward for tax purposes to the tune of approximately \$5 billion had to be written off, this would have had detrimental effects on Petrotrin’s financial standing and affected its solvency, threatening to result in triggers on payment of its debts, including the US \$850 million and US \$750 million debts.”

This is the reality of what the Government was facing at the time.

“The continued need to import crude oil was being supported by short-term US dollar loans which required government support. By the time the decision was taken to shut down the refinery these short-term US dollar loans totalled approximately US\$450 million. These US dollar short-term

loans continue to be carried...”

So then:

“The Cabinet was advised...”—you have to change the course.

“...without any changes and...to continue operating the refinery in the manner it was being operated with the high costs of production and negative projections would lead to Petrotrin continuing to incur losses at an average of over \$2 billion per annum. In 2017 Petrotrin declared another loss of \$2.4 billion in addition to defaulting on its statutory payments of royalties and taxes.

So in 2017, you had another loss of \$2.4 billion, plus you had the auditors saying, “aye, you have to write off \$5 billion”, plus you have the looming bullet payment of US \$850 million and now Petrotrin was in a position it could not even pay royalties or tax.

So to sit here and listen to the Member for Point Fortin, utilize figures of how much was being lost to NIB, et cetera, it would have crashed the whole economy of Trinidad because they could not pay taxes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: “Eventually the board submitted to Cabinet that the only way that it was possible to refinance the US\$850 million loan without a government guarantee was to go to the market with a restructured company that separated exploration and production into a separate company freeing it of the financial burdens of the refinery.”

And that is what was done. And for the last eight years that is what has made Heritage and Paria profitable.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: “It was also submitted that it was prudent to shut the refinery down and import fuels as the refinery was sinking Petrotrin for the reasons

stated above. After much analysis, and deliberation, the Cabinet gave the board the green light to proceed and Petrotrin was restructured with the workers being paid off approximately \$2.7 billion in cash...”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: And it is a sin of the former workers—the former speakers who represented workers at one point in time to stand here and say nothing about \$2.7 billion to the former workers of Petrotrin, but, they are part of a government that fired over 40,000 workers—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC:—in CEPEP, in URP, reforestation, continuing on a weekly basis to fire workers in HDC, in WASA, and other areas throughout the State agency and not provide them with a cent in compensation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: So to all of the CEPEP workers out there who I will now represent, and we have them going on the way to court, as well as the URP workers that they terminated, who did not receive any severance payment, not a cent, compared that to \$2.7 billion in cash.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: And my friend, my friend from La Brea, is on record when he was confronted about the termination of CEPEP workers and being asked, well how do you feel as being a part of the trade union movement about the termination of thousands of CEPEP workers who are the most vulnerable?

Mr. Hosein: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on Standing—please, on Standing Order 48(1), relevance. We are dealing with a particular matter here, with collective agreements—

Mr. S. Young SC: You said 48(1), sit down.

Mr. Hosein:—for the oil companies. I do not know how CEPEP and URP is

playing a role here.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, I think you have made your point regarding that, so I ask you to move on and stay relevant to the Bill.

Mr. S. Young SC: And the point is—thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker—the Member for La Brea said the workers are collateral damage.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: So these companies that we have come here today to talk about and to talk about their future, thinking only about the Junction in Fyzabad tomorrow, I want the future generations of Trinidad and Tobago to mark today, the 18th of June 2026, and to understand the burden potentially that is being put on you to carry where you have economists looking at our economy and saying, it is on the cracking point, we are at the highest debt to GDP level we have ever been in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: And I go on to say, Madam Deputy Speaker:

“The newly formed companies of Heritage and Paria have also been successful...

For the period...”—financial year—“...2019 through March 2024, Heritage has made \$40.3 billion in revenue...”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: “...paid \$12.6 billion in taxes and royalties...”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: “...and made a profit of \$6.5 billion...”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: And that is what is at risk now of being dissipated and putting us back in the position that we were in as a country when the difficult decision had to be made in 2018.

“Heritage has also paid TPHL \$1 billion in dividends...”

You see, what the population needs to know is the restructured debt is paid by the revenue from Heritage. We heard about promises about the refinery, we heard it again today, we are no closer today than we were then.

But to the OWTU, it is also a sin to come here and say that anybody was targeted there and that you were attacked by the Government, because it was the exact opposite. The OWTU, through Patriotic, was given exclusivity rights to negotiate to reopen the refinery. They were warned. They were warned over and over. I personally warned them on one occasion and at the time it was Trafigura trying to get hold of the tank farms, something we warned about this week.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: No, no, no, that is a lie.

Mr. Tancoo: You come back with that? You come back with that allegation.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Totally untrue.

Mr. S. Young SC: So that is what this country is facing. So you were given exclusivity and now here we are today and we have no problem with that union whatsoever.

Mr. Padarath: Madam Deputy Speaker, may I ask you to turn your attention to Standing Order 48(1), please.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Man all over the world.

Mr. Tancoo: And misleading—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes. So once again Member, please stay relevant to the clauses of the Bill and would you require your additional 15 minutes?

Mr. S. Young SC: Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you. I have heard you and I abide by your ruling.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Would you require your additional 15 minutes?

Mr. S. Young SC: Yes I do.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. S. Young SC: You see, we sat here in complete silence and listen when the previous speakers opened up the debate and talked about what the PNM did and how the PNM hate the union—and listen, furthermore, and I was ashamed for the Member for Point Fortin, he made a statement and I am responding to his statement. He said “since 1937 de PNM attacking the OWTU. The PNM was born in 1956.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: So desperate is he, so desperate are they to score political points that they always resort to lies.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: “For the same period of 2019 to 2024, Paria made \$52.6 billion in revenue, paid \$0.9 billion in taxes, and made a profit of \$1.3 billion. These results are indicative of the benefits of the restructuring exercise that this Government undertook.”

And that, Madam Deputy Speaker, and population of Trinidad and Tobago, is why that very difficult decision was taken and implemented in late 2018.

1.15p.m.

We took absolutely no pleasure in it. It was extremely—we debated amongst ourselves as a Cabinet for weeks. We explored every single option not to sink Trinidad and Tobago, which was the singular reason why the decision was taken, the singular reason. But in doing what we had to do, which was a restructuring, companies were created that are profitable, that will now be put at

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risk. Madam Deputy Speaker, \$2.7 billion, it is a fact that they do not like to hear, \$2.7 billion in cash paid. Cash, to the former workers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: CEPEP workers got nothing, URP workers got nothing. That is their legacy.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Another point that was made that irked me by the Member for Point Fortin and the Member for La Brea is the continued conversation, on one part, about the divers at Paria, who unfortunately met their demise, and in particular the Member for Point Fortin saying that if the OWTU was there, this would have never happened, and he goes on to talk about the oil rig that then unfortunately collapsed.

Well, I will have the population know that the OWTU is the majority union at Well Services, whose rig it was, and they represent the workers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: They then talked as well about making applications for successorship to date and casting aspersions on court action that was filed in 2022, failing, of course, to tell the population that the reason there has been no decision by the court is that the OWTU and the respondent have been adjourning the matter, and that is why it did not proceed. And I dare say adjourning it for what we have before us here today.

So do not come here, as you normally do, and attempt to mislead the population, playing on emotions with your emotive language and your mischief.

Hon. Member: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. S. Young SC: I hear the Member for Fyzabad mumbling, mumbling, mumbling and throwing words. He is the one now charged with the responsibility

to ensure—the Member for Fyzabad is the Minister of Finance—that this country does not go over that financial brink that he has put us on, that they have put us on.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. S. Young SC: So, let us go now to what they put before us. For respect of the rule of law, the Minister of Labour, in his lucid presentation, talked about this Bill as part of the respect for law. These are the concerns now, from a legal perspective, with what is before us, and a further amendment has come here today. After an amendment was made in the Senate yesterday, another one has come here today. I smiled when I saw it because one thing that I know is that the union is getting proper legal advice from a proper Senior Counsel because I recognized the fingerprints.

I will come to that in a short while. The Member for Siparia has been throwing words and barbs, but I will remind—maybe now is a convenient time—because, you see, I listened to the political rhetoric and all of the comments thrown, and how great the UNC is now, and the labour movement and the UNC.

I want to remind the President General of the OWTU, comrade Roget, of 2014, when the then Prime Minister, the same Member for Siparia, went to take his wicket and came into the Parliament and attacked him. And I will refer to that now because it is convenient that people forget.

“December 4th 2014, Kamla steals Roget’s thunder: PM tells of 1999 incident involving trade union leader.”

And, you see, I could speak about this because I recall it vividly. I recall when comrade Roget and an entourage of comrades came to us, and to me in particular, to deal with this matter for him against the Member for Siparia. And this is what the Member for Siparia said, according to this *Express* article:

“When Oilfields Workers' Trade Union (OWTU) president general Ancel Roget was a former Trinmar Ltd, there was an incident where, , he

“exhibited gross carelessness and negligence in the execution of his duties”
and almost killed a colleague.

Roget also—”

And this is the quote—

Mr. Sobers: Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(1). I do not see the relevance in this particular line being raised by the Member.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Gonzales: He is responding.

Mr. Sobers: Who said that? Who is he responding to?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member please, move on.

Mr. S. Young SC: Thank you very much. Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am responding directly, I am responding directly to the relationship—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC:—to the relationship that was raised with the present Government. It is directly in relation to that, and at the time, the Prime Minister in 2014 gave instructions to have Ancel Roget terminated from Trinmar—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Padarath: Madam Deputy Speaker, you asked the hon. Member to move on, Standing Order 48(1).

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, twice I asked you to move on, so I will say it for a third time, move on and stay relevant.

Mr. S. Young SC: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you very much. Responding directly to the comment, or one of the comments, of the

hon. Senator who piloted this Bill, talking about the Petrotrin restructuring exercise, he said, and I quote, that this was one of the largest displacements of workers ever.” He went on to say it was social vandalism. No one wanted to displace 5,000 workers in the restructuring exercise, some of whom went on to get employment, but all of whom shared in \$2.7 billion.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: And the irony and hypocrisy, the irony and hypocrisy of what was done to the most vulnerable workers in our society, who were terminated within a matter of days of coming into office by those on the other side.

Back to the legislation, because what this legislation is doing for the population has not been told to them. What it is going to do is it is now imposing on Heritage and Paria. The first part, it will come into force as though it was the 1st of December, 2018. It is doing two things. It is imposing all collective agreements which existed at that stage onto these companies that have now been operating for six years. It is going to have financial consequences. The pragmatic application and implementation of this, Trinidad and Tobago, it is going to affect Heritage and Paria in devastating ways, but so be it? So be it.

The next thing it does, and this is unconstitutional and it breaches the Constitution, in the section that was put in via amendment yesterday in the Senate, that is now before us, which is the new section 7A(2), is subject to the Industrial Relations Act, the OWTU, nice language. Subject to the Industrial Relations Act, when they are superseding the exclusive jurisdiction of the Industrial Court by imposing this successorship, because they are the ones with the sole discretion and jurisdiction.

They go on to say the OWTU—there is no piece of legislation where a singular union has ever been imposed—and these types of matters of successorship are currently, not in this matter, but in another one, before the Privy Council for

argument in October. So, the population needs to know, as is typical, what they are trying to do is affect due process and the legal arguments the Privy Council is meant to decide from October. But we are putting OWTU into this, okay, no problem, because OWTU was the recognized majority trade union for some of the bargaining units there.

What about the EPA, the Estate Police Association? What about the NPSA, the National Petroleum Staff Association? So those two associations and representative bodies do not deserve the same? Because they were there operating at the same time. Why? Because they did not go there and cut “no” deal with the UNC?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: How is this in breach of the Constitution, because what this section is now doing is, on all workers who are there at Heritage and Paria, when this is passed today, whether you like it or not, the union representing you is the OWTU, by imposition. That infringes section 4(j) of your entrenched constitutional rights.

Section 4(j) says every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago—and I could say this—is only respected under PNM Governments and the Constitution is respected under a PNM administration. Now, when this is passed, your right of freedom of association is being taken away. It has vanished into thin air.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Without asking you, who you want to represent you, or what should happen.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. S. Young SC: I do not expect you to understand. You never argued a case in court.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: I also reject, Madam Deputy Speaker, a comment that was made by one of the previous speakers that they instructed not to hire former Trinmar and Petrotrin workers. We reject that outright.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: “We will shut down Petrotrin and break it up to avoid successorship.” That too is completely false. We have taken the time here today. Those on the other side will never listen, even if they listen, not all, some. They will not understand. They will not understand why the restructuring had to take place, but at least today Trinidad and Tobago, and those who want to understand and those who want to know, and it has for the first time been put in this manner on the *Hansard*, understand why that difficult decision had to be made.

So, this piece of legislation here, that is the fulfilment of a campaign promise and a deal that was cut is going to have serious implications as we go forward in the future. Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, Member for Siparia.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Hon. Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you colleagues.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Madam Deputy Speaker, before I deal with my colleague politically here, let me just take a moment to commend the hon. Minister of Labour, Sen. Baptiste—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—my hon. colleagues, the Member for Point Fortin, Member for La Brea.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to commend the OWTU, its President—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—Mr. Ozzi Warwick, always there. They are in the Chamber, and I think we should take a moment to recognize them for their service to Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And I will say more on that in a moment.

So, I listened, and we listened, to 45 minutes of pure—

Hon. Member: Garbage.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Shouting and kicking and screaming across the Floor. And I am reminded of the famous Lord Nelson; you remember his calypso? “King Liar, King Liar.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

1.30p.m.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Because the Member engaged in many, many untruths, and a few of them I can deal with today, and will deal with them in other places, we have that reach. But all of this—they crashed the economy. They crashed the economy.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: They crashed the economy, you know. Then they ran out of government. When you listened to him now, you understand why they called the election a snap election, because they could not govern. The Member of Port of Spain North Ann’s/West—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: They put their hands up in the air. They gave up. They gave up, especially that Member who was responsible for the energy sector. They put their hands up. They gave up and they said, “Boy, we cyah run dis country, yuh know. Let us get de hell out of here and call de election.” They could not govern. And that is all the doom and gloom, all the debt—he is talking about the debt-to-GDP ratio, all the stories of why they could not keep it—

Hon. Member: Chicken Licken.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Chicken Licken, you said it before.

First of all, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member said, debt to GDP, talking about debt, and we could not keep Petrotrin running because of the debt. Let me give you the numbers, Madam Deputy Speaker, because the Member would not give them to you, again, just talking in general statements. They doubled our country’s debt; doubled it, Madam Deputy Speaker. When we left government in 2015, the debt was \$75.4 billion. In 2015, when we demitted office, \$75.4billion when we demitted. When they demitted office, the debt doubled, \$144.8billion.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And you want to come to talk to us about the debt-to-GDP ratio? They are worried about debt. Debt to GDP, the Minister mentioned, the highest ever. Why? Because of you, because of your Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Here are the numbers. Debt to GDP moved from 42.9 per cent in March 2025—

Hon. Member: 2015.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—sorry, in 2015, when we demitted; 42.9 when we demitted office. That moved to 82.8 per cent when they demitted office.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So do not talk to me—do not talk to me about debt. All that debt on the neck—it is a burden on the necks of the citizens, and it came from your Government, and not just debt. Again, I say, “King Liar”. You want to tell us that Petrotrin was running—“doh run away, yuh know.”

Mr. Young SC: “Ah, going for water.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping and laughter and crosstalk*]**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Madam Deputy Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yeah. They want to be in the kitchen, but they cannot take the heat. They cannot take the heat—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—the same way they ran out last year April and called a snap election. We will talk to you again. Again, “King Liar”. The Member quoted himself to himself. He said, “I am going to read from an op-ed I did for myself.” You know what that means? It is himself to himself, and he is using that now to tell us about why they shut down Petrotrin, why they had to do it, and says—listen to what he tells us—again, “King Liar”. He quotes himself—

Mr. Young SC: Madam Deputy Speaker, 48(4). To set the record straight, it shall be out of order to use offensive and insulting language. I just want to know if it is okay now to say, “King Liar” because I will have a lot to say about the Member for Siparia in similar language. Standing Order 48(4).

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: In my ruling, I do not think this is in accordance with 48(4). It is not offensive or insulting language.

Mr. Young SC: Good.

Madam Deputy Speaker: And if you wish, you may do whatever you please with that. Hon. Prime Minister, please, continue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: “Do so eh like so. Do so eh like so.” You stood there—the Member stood there and talked about the lies. Sat right there and is now coming to play “Mr. Innocent.” Look, let us move, eh. Let us get the numbers down. You were quoting yourself to say why you closed down Petrotrin, all the doom and the gloom, and debt, and debt, and debt, and debt, but these are the facts.

In its last year of operation, as at September 2018—listen to this, you know, not what the Member is telling us from his own op-ed, quoting himself to himself. These are the numbers coming from the annual report to investors from Trinidad Petroleum Holdings, 2019, and the financial reports of 2018 of Trinidad Petroleum Holdings, and I am not quoting myself. I am quoting these reports. And in the last year of its operations, as at September 2018, Petrotrin made profits of \$1.697 billion; \$1.697 billion.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is the rhetoric that you fed the country on why you shut it down. You know, one day—we always said, God does not sleep, he wears pajamas sometimes. One day we will find out why it is, after the former, former Prime Minister said, “Petrotrin is not closing down,” why did they really shut down Petrotrin? Why? The truth will come to light. That truth will come. Not closing it down, and then, thereafter, proceeded to shut it down.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member also spoke about, “Petrotrin still exists as a legal entity.” You gutted the entire company, and you want us to come here—you took out all the workers. You fired thousands of workers. And you come to say, Petrotrin still exists? For what purpose? Can you tell us that? It exists as a piece of paper because you gutted it out, the entire Petrotrin. You yourself, you admitted, you put them into Paria, you put them into Guaracara, all the assets and landholdings, and so on, gone elsewhere, but guess what? What did you do with

the workers? And when you spend all this time explaining today, in this debate, on a 2026 vesting Bill, crying and complaining you had to shut down Petrotrin, well, tell me why? Even if you had to—and I am not agreeing—we do not agree you had to do that—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Even if you went ahead to restructure in that manner, why did you not take care of the workers? Why did you not put in the clauses? We have done it before. You have legal precedent. You have judicial precedent. We have constitutional law. In every arena—my colleague from—Sen. Baptiste spoke about social justice. But in every arena of the law, you have what you should have done, because you have done it before.

When you took Trintoc and TRINTOPEC and vested them in Petrotrin, what did you do? That is not all you did. You had the provision, expressly, for the successorship rights of the workers to be carried over. Why did you not do it? You did it with the RHA law. When you converted RHAs, you had the successorship rights going on, and there are numerous legal examples. I know my colleague gave some. You did not do it. And today, you come to justify why you closed it down, but not once did you tell us why you did not consider successorship rights for the workers, as has been done in the past. You have the precedent. Not a single word about why it is. So, I no longer want to know why the Member on the other side thought it fit to shut down Petrotrin, because I say, the truth will come to light one day. We want to know why did you “buss de union?” That is what you are doing, you are “bussin union.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: That was “union bussin.” That is what you did then to shut them up.

So, as we come here today on the eve of one of our national holidays, a very

significant national holiday, Labour Day, we talk about the rights of working men and women of Trinidad and Tobago. That is at the very heart of our democracy. So at the core of the Bill is whether a government can erase rights of the workers for decades to secure, because that is what they did in 2018. They did not merely shut down the refinery—others have spoken, and I commend them for reminding us—you know something? Those of us who live in the south, when you are going down that highway, or when you are going down the Southern Main Road to go down South, you know what? You know you are almost home when you see the flare. Never ever forget who put out that flame, that flare, at Petrotrin when they shut it down.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Never ever forget. Never forget.

So they devastated livelihoods. They disrupted communities. They plunged thousands of hard-working families into uncertainty, and those effects are still being felt in our country today. But whilst at that time the country was focusing more on the closure itself, there was another grave injustice that was taking place, the voices of the workers were being removed. The continuity of collective bargaining was broken and the rights of organized labour were being extinguished. This Bill here today, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are here to correct that wrong. We are here to restore what should never have been taken away from the workers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: My colleagues have explained, and the Minister of Labour, exactly what the Bill seeks to do. It is a very short Bill, you know, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think just about three clauses. It is a very short Bill, but it is a very exceedingly powerful Bill that is here before this Parliament today. It seeks to correct this issue from the deliberate actions of the PNM, when, as I said before, they were engaged in clear union busting that took place in 2018.

The anti-worker action left workers of Heritage Petroleum and Paria Fuel Trading without the protection of a union, because there was no express clause identifying a successor recognized union. That is what we are discussing here today. And you know, today is a better day than any to have this discussion, as I have said, on the eve of Labour Day, a day that commemorates the actions of people united in a common cause to speak out against injustice, support one another and to fight for what we believe in. Today, we on this side, stand in solidarity with the labour movement to correct a past injustice.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am a child of the oilfield workers, you know. You may not know that. I think Mr. Roget knows it very well, being from the south himself. Many others know it. I grew up in Siparia. My father was an employee of Texaco, when what was Petrotrin—he was an employee of Texaco. And do you know the very first job I got in Trinidad, when I came home for summertime from university, the first job I got was at Texaco as an intern at Forest Reserve. My mother ran a roti shop in Siparia and the oilfield workers would patronize, and we had a lot of, you know, engagements with them. So, I am a child of the south, and I always say most of the wealth in the black hole, that is the energy sector, has come from where? The south of Trinidad.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, I am very proud and very happy to be engaged in this debate, to be engaged with my Cabinet and our Members, to have brought this Bill—have it drafted, and have it brought here today.

I want to thank, again, Sen. Baptiste for the hard work he has done, together with his staff at the Ministry of Labour.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The hon. Attorney General and Members of

Cabinet, we thank you for your service and for helping us to get this Bill drafted, researched and be here for today. I also take the opportunity to commend the labour leaders of the past and present. I say, we stand here on your shoulders and enjoy the fruits of your labour, the labour movement. And that is why I left nothing—left no stone unturned to make sure that I was here today to contribute to this debate.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, what we are seeing in this Bill—yes, I have thanked our Members, Ministers, whatever, but we must also commend the advocacy and the dedicated work of the OWTU.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Minister Baptiste grounded his presentation in social justice, and I will expand a bit on that, endorsing, in the meanwhile, all his comments that were made. Let us start with where we start. Let us start with the supreme law of Trinidad and Tobago. The supreme law of Trinidad and Tobago is none other than the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

1.45 p.m.

And that Constitution, Madam Deputy Speaker, at the outset, this Constitution in the Preamble, it starts by making that declaration. It talks about social justice, and I quote—the Preamble provides that we as a people, and I quote:

“(b) respect the principles of social justice and therefore believe that the operation of the economic system should result in the material resources of the community being so distributed as to subserve the common good, that there should be adequate means of livelihood for all that labour should not be exploited or forced by economic necessity to operate in inhumane conditions but that there should be

opportunity for advancement...”—based on—“...recognition of merit, ability and integrity...”

It is our very Constitution. The supreme law of our country talks about social justice and looking out for everyone, each and every one, in equality and for economic benefits.

Now, I hold this very near and dear to my heart, Madam Deputy Speaker. I mention it here because the Bill before us seeks to protect workers, it seeks to protect collective bargaining rights, and to preserve hard-earned rights negotiated on workers’ behalf. My Government’s workers’ agenda was mentioned by the Member for La Brea before, the Member for Point Fortin and others, of a workers’ agenda. Because of that, it is our responsibility to uphold social justice by creating and enforcing equitable laws and safety nets to ensure all citizens can thrive regardless of background, regardless of creed, regardless of race.

And so, that is why our official policy framework includes a workers’ agenda as an integral component to address the modernization of all labour legislation. That is something we are well on our way to achieving. So this is part of our Government’s focus on decent work promotion and sustainable development.

Now, the issue is fundamentally about whether workers’ rights survive when employers reorganize enterprises. So, we know. Nothing remains the same. The only thing that remains the same is that things change. Things are always changing. And so, we understand that there will be rights to restructure, reorganize, change things and do whatever. However, the issue is whether, when you change the structure, there are some rights that must always be honoured. And these are the successorship rights that I am talking about. So, notwithstanding a transfer of assets, notwithstanding if there is a vesting order, and notwithstanding if there is a merger, notwithstanding if there is a restructuring or the creation of a

successor company, rights of workers and their representative trade unions should continue to be recognized.

That principle exists to prevent a simple but very dangerous proposition. That an employer can achieve through corporate restructuring, what could never lawfully be achieved through collective bargaining. So what will you do? You just shut down your company, change things here, shift things here, there and there, and everybody just goes to waste. Without successor rights, decades of collective bargaining could be extinguished overnight to nothing more than a change in the corporate form of a business. Such an approach would undermine the very foundation of industrial relations and would render the freedom of association fragile and collective bargaining ill-used. And the Member had the temerity, Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, to talk about freedom of association, when you have breached the constitutional provisions for freedom of association, to stand here now to justify the "wickedity". I learned that word today. The "wickedity".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The "wickedity" of your actions back in 2018. And you know what? It was 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, '22, 2023, 2024, and 2025. All these years, never one day did it dawn on you that what you were doing was not only morally wrong, but also illegal in depriving the workers of their successor rights. Not once in all those years. Coming here to cry crocodile tears. Coming here to cry crocodile tears.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Listen, you not only breached everything when it comes to respecting workers rightly, but you breached the very law, the Industrial Relations Act. That Act has provided, I think it is 39 to 40-something, those sections, that this, if not in exact form, successor rights were recognized and would

be carried on. It was just that the regime for that to be transferred over was not expressly stated. You have breached, as well, all industrial—you mentioned Industrial Court. The Member said that we are trespassing on the Industrial Court. What kind of lawyer is that?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We are trespassing on the Industrial Court?

Sen. Jeremie SC: Self-professed.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: A self-professed Senior Counsel. How can you say that? And then threatening to go to court for CEPEP workers. Well, listen CEPEP workers, that will only incur you a set of cuss and no win. No win in the courts of Trinidad, being a lawyer.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Trespassing—

Sen. Jeremie SC: Personal liability.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Personal liability, of course, the AG is reminding me. Talking about, you know—just remind the start? Start at 1.28. Okay. Yes, so saying, you know, trespassing on the jurisdiction of the Industrial Court. How can we be doing that? This very Industrial Court has upheld successor rights. Our own—Minister of Labour will bear me out, I am sure you gave some of the examples. Our own Industrial Court has upheld successor rights. And then you come to even the High Court, the supreme court in our own jurisdiction, has upheld successor rights. And when you go to look at the international community, upholding successor rights, then you look at the ILO, you are breaching the ILO as well. I think it is Convention, remind me Minister, 86 and 98, if I am not mistaken, 86 and 98, upholding successor rights. So, all these 45 minutes—

Sen. Jeremie SC: [*Interruption*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Alright, okay. Okay.

Sen. Jeremie SC: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Okay. Okay, Attorney General [*Laughter*], I know you want to get up and deal with him, so you will get your turn [*Laughter*]. So I am saying, we had all these—what is the time? So, 1.58, 2.30, alright, okay. Yes, so in every regard, you have breached all these fundamental principles.

Sen. Jeremie SC: [*Interruption*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: [*Laughter*] So, for us, there is a very binding legal and policy basis for recognizing successor rights within our industrial relations framework. That foundation rests upon, I would say, three mutually reinforcing pillars. One, the first pillar, the recognition regime established under the Industrial Relations Act. Second pillar, the Industrial Court's commitment to good industrial relations. And thirdly—three pillars—the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. This is the legal basis, or bases, on which we are firmly in support of successorship rights for workers. Let us take the IRA.

First pillar, recognizing the regime established under the IRA. That Act Chap. 88:01 was enacted to promote orderly industrial relations and to encourage collective bargaining as the preferred mechanism for resolving workplace issues. The Act establishes, as I said a bit earlier, a comprehensive statutory framework which allows workers to organize, obtain recognition and bargain collectively through a majority represented trade union. That recognition process is administered by the Registration, Recognition and Certification Board, designed to create stability, certainty, and continuity in labour management relations.

That recognition is not intended to be temporary, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is not a fragile arrangement. It is a statutory right obtained through a rigorous process to reflect the democratic choices of workers within an appropriate bargaining unit. It is recognized a recognized bargaining relationship cannot be

extinguished merely because an employer, as I said before, restructures operations and assets and so on. Such an outcome would be inconsistent with the objectives of the IRA. Accordingly, where business continues substantially unchanged following restructuring, there is a strong of it being that the bargaining relationship should also continue.

The second pillar: The Industrial Court's commitment to good industrial relations practice. This pillar is found within the unique jurisprudence of the Industrial Court, and my colleague on the other side mentioned about trespassing on the Industrial Court. But this is to be found within the jurisprudence of the Industrial Court. For decades, the court has emphasized that industrial relations must be guided by fairness, consultation, mutual respect and industrial justice. The court has consistently demonstrated a willingness to assess substance over form in determining whether conduct accords with good industrial relations practice. The court examines the realities of the relationship rather than merely the legal structure through which that relationship is organized.

So the court has repeatedly acknowledged the relevance of international labour standards in determining what constitutes good industrial relations. In doing so, the Industrial Court has recognized that domestic labour laws do not exist in isolation. That forms part of a broader international framework dedicated to protecting workers' rights. That jurisprudential approach provides an important bridge between domestic law and international labour standards.

The third pillar. I mentioned the Constitution. I had quoted from the Preamble, but there are substantive provisions within our Constitution, in the Bill of Rights, which is commonly called by some, the Bill of Rights, in section 4. The matter must also be examined through the lens of the Constitution of our Republic, our supreme law. Any analysis of workers' collective rights, during restructuring, must begin with recognition that labour rights do not exist in a constitutional

vacuum. Do not exist in a constitutional vacuum. Section 4(j) expressly recognizes and declares:

“(j) freedom of association and assembly...”—as fundamental rights in Trinidad and Tobago.

Trade unions are amongst the most important manifestations of the constitutional rights association. Workers exercise that freedom by joining together, selecting representatives, forming bargaining units and pursuing collective bargaining. So, any restructuring that effectively destroys an established bargaining relationship raises questions that extend beyond honorary contractual rights, and directly implicates the constitutionally protected freedoms of association and assembling against the successor rights, protecting the practical effectiveness of these strong provisions within our Constitution.

Section 4(b) of the Constitution also gives us equality before the law and protection of the law. These protections require that workers affected by restructuring exercises must get their fair benefit of legal processes, rationale and consistent with the established principles of natural justice. So, when an enterprise continues to unchanged substantially, workers are deprived of representation solely because of a change in legal form when looking at issues of constitutional breaches. I move on, Madam Deputy Speaker, 4(a):

“...enjoyment of property...”—and so on.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, you require your additional 15 minutes, I assume?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So we can go through the Constitution and look at all these Bill of Rights provisions, and these are directly impacted and were

directly impacted when that wicked government on the other side, in 2018, shut down, brought a vesting Bill—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—changed it and restructured it, and deprived workers of their just due. Madam Deputy Speaker, I move on. Much more could be said, but I want to make a very important point. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, and by the way, why is nobody else speaking on this Bill from that side? **Hon. Members:** [*Interruption*]

Mr. Padarath: Because they have always been anti-workers.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You know? We debate one-on-one, one-on-one. They asked the Chief Whip, “Can we put on two of ours or three of ours and then they put on one?” But if you break that agreement, and you put on a next one, we will bring five more for you from this side.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: And we have five more.

Mr. Padarath: He is ready to enter.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Are you ready to enter the debate? Welcome. We will have Members on this—

Mr. Padarath: And stress you for the night.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And stress you through the night.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You want to go home? [*Laughter*] Okay.

2.00p.m.

Sometimes I do not believe what I am hearing from the other side. I really

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do not believe. Did I hear someone say he is going Down D Islands so it is a public holiday?

Mr. Padarath: The Member is taking his yacht Down D Islands.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Madam Deputy Speaker, as I close. I say tomorrow when workers across T&T celebrate Labour Day, they remind us that progress is earned through sacrifice, perseverance and struggle. The UNC was born from the struggles of working people. The UNC came out of the rice fields, the cane fields and the oilfields and from the belief that those who labour deserve dignity, fairness and justice.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: That belief guides my Government today. From 2018 until last year, thousands of Petrotrin workers and their families endured hardship and uncertainty. I will say one thing, the OWTU and their workers never gave up. They never gave up.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: There is a reason one of the great hymns of the labour movement declares: “We shall overcome. We shall overcome.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: For years they endured and persevered and today in a very real sense, they have overcome that 2018 “wickedity”. They have overcome that “wickedity”. Last Labour Day, I committed to working for the working people of our country. One year later, my Government stands in Parliament delivering our word and that commitment has become—this is one piece of legislation, there will be others.

On the eve of Labour Day, I say it is only fitting that this House returns to workers something, as I said before, that should never have been taken away. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us and I quote, Madam Deputy Speaker:

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“All labour that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.

Mr. Tancoo: Amen.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: May future generations always inherit a Trinidad and Tobago where the dignity of labour is respected and the voice of workers is protected and justice is never beyond reach.

So tomorrow, when workers across T&T celebrate Labour Day, they will remind us that progress is earned through, as I said before, sacrifice, perseverance, and struggle. We were born out of those struggles and yet the OWTU never gave up. Last Labour Day we committed, and so on the eve of this one, I want to say with my comrades, forward ever, forward ever, backward never. Happy Labour Day. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development.

The Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Sen. The

Hon. Leroy Baptiste): Madam Deputy Speaker, my job here is completed.

Following after the Prime Minister, I think she has done it all. She has dealt with what I would call the most obscene 1 per cent argument I have ever heard coming out—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste:—from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. Because that is how I could call it. It had to be a 1 per cent argument. That had nothing to do with what is before us. You would have sworn somebody came here debating

whether or not to shut down Petrotrin, again.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste:—But I think, Madam Prime Minister, you would have dealt with that. But it must never be lost to the population. We are here in a debate about people. And that Member for Port of Spain North, St. Ann's West could not take one minute of his contribution to deal with people. He hid between some stale-dated arguments, that if it was a debate on that, we here could treat with that. But it was not about that, it was about workers. We are here treating with workers who have been disenfranchised by the PNM in 2018.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Sen. L. Baptiste: That is what we are here treating with. And you expected that you would have heard some part of the contribution about that. But instead, he went down a road that I call it, it sound like some part of Rowley's speech, he found, and an exercise of deceit and dishonesty.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Because they come quite here again to say that they did not shut down Petrotrin because it still exists. Do you understand the level of hypocrisy, deceit?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]**Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste:** Because why? Yeah, it exists on paper. No, and you know, that is just, the other day, Rowley started to peddle that. And they decide, ooh, that is a good answer. They did not shut it down because it exists on paper. Listen, if you are not honest, and if you want to understand what is a manifestation of deceit and dishonesty, look at the PNM way.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Look at the PNM way. You know, the Prime Minister saved them. Because I, when I "hear him talking dey about, what is the

state of affairs with Petrotrin and this and that, I wondered who was in government, you know?" When they were talking about, "like all thing was going wrong, who was in government?" We need to put it on record, not only for the last 10 years, you know, but 53 out of the 70 years that this country has engaged in self-governance, the PNM has been in charge.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: And everything wrong. It is all about the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: And let me put it on record, because I see one, this, URP, CEPEP, these set of fraudulent contract issues that are dealing with, they are still in court. It is in the court. Let me just be clear and put on the record, "eh", because like Madam Prime Minister, I like stats. I looked at the CSO. It is the CSO, "eh", the CSO. Not what the UNC say, and surely not what the Minister of Labour said. This is the CSO, the Central Statistical Office. Hear what its data is about overall employment.

The UNC, in 2010 to 2015, employment increased from 582,100 to 623,300, a net increase of 41,200 jobs.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Under the PNM, the PNM from 2015 to 2025, the first quarter, this is CSO people, employment declined from 623,300, which they got from us, to 558,900, a drop of 64,400 jobs. This is not UNC figures. You could Google it. It is in the Central Statistical Office. It is facts. It goes on further to the stats. I want the *Hansard* to have the stats. Under the UNC from 2010 to 2015, because, again, I say, people, you want to know if you are betting on the right horse. You have to see how the horses run. If you want to know where you are going to line up your bets, you better go and look at the history. Look at the history and look at the history of performance.

So, in the public sector employment, according to CSO, under the UNC in 2015, in the public sector, we employed 166,700. The PNM, when they left office, the public sector was 129,900, a decline of 36,800 public sector jobs, “dey buss throat.” And I am saying this is a—“all yuh Google, oh know” because this is—all are talking about unemployment. These are the facts.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: “Hear nah”, the CSO went on to talk about youth employment, even youth employment. Youth employment in 2015, when the UNC left office, was 79,600. The PNM, by the time it left office, it was 51,700, a reduction of 27,900 youths.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: The labour participation rate—“all yuh what is dat term? All the economists love it?” The labour participation rate, this is the CSO. Again, this is the CSO. The labour participation rate under the UNC was 61.5 per cent. And then PNM comes, and it fell to 54.3 per cent. Even that could not hold. Listen, the population of this country knew what they were doing. Somehow, like they read that before us. Because April 28, they knew if there was to be a change, we had to get rid of the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: And let me put it, for those who are trying to throw all kind of idea about one union versus the next and why OWTU and that “kinda ting. Leh meh tell yuh”, we here, the working class owes the oilfield workers. It started there, “it did not start nowhere else”. It is oilfield workers.

Tubal Uriah “Buzz” Butler, when we talk Labour Day, you know who he was organizing? He organized oilfield workers. The terms and conditions that people enjoy today, that your children, you are glad to know that they could get an eight hour work day. They could get a lunch hour. They could get sick leave. It is

because of oil workers. Hear what, one of the happiest moment, when you have to start doing restorative justice and you have to start somewhere, we come in defence of oilfield workers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Because the PNM set about to destroy oilfield workers by destroying their union, and everything he said, he agreed. He sought to justify whatever problems they have “is why” we must get rid of Petrotrin and though the debate was never about that.

2.15 p.m.

The only question we ask is, if Petrotrin shut down and it disaggregated its function into other companies, what prevented you from ensuring that those workers enjoyed decent work—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste:—including the right to be represented? That is what this debate is about.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: That is what the debate is about. “Madam Deputy Speaker, leh meh wind up quickly. Leh meh be clear.”

Hon. Member: “Yuh going good. Yuh going good.”

Hon. Member: “Gih dem man, gih dem.”

Hon. Member: “Put licks, put licks.”

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Thank God for the United National Congress.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: “Leh meh look up” and say, also, thank God for the representation, on behalf of oilfield workers, who helped this country through the OWTU.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: They represent, and continue to relentlessly represent these workers so that today, we can fix it, and we shall fix it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: We shall fix it. Because of this Government—and let me put on record—

Mr. Alexander: Put it on.

Hon. Member: Preach, man.

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste:—the refinery shall rise again.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: OWTU shall be the RMU again.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Workers shall have a safe and healthy working environment again.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Workers shall have good-paying jobs again.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Workers shall have decent, sustainable jobs again.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: We shall rebuild the fence-line communities again.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Alexander: Put more.

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Madam Deputy Speaker, brighter days are ahead.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Gone are the days when every time you turn, it is an attack on workers. That is what it was. I see my comrades mentioned some. You turned around, Petrotrin. They started with sugar and destroyed Caroni workers, until it came in 2026, and we are now giving the people their land.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Oilfield workers, you shall—those who have left will get their land now. We are dealing with that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: When you turned around—when they moved from Petrotrin, it was TSTT; “yuh lick up” workers in TSTT. You turned around, and you had your eyes set on destroying the lives of WASA workers. You then swing there, they were going to destroy the Customs and Excise workers. Everywhere you twisted and turned—

Hon. Members: Somebody—[*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste:—somebody had to be fearful. They could not plan their lives. And you have a 1 per cent argument that suggests that workers are fine being sent home because they spent \$2.7 billion. “Allyuh” understand what a 1 per cent mentality is? A 1 per cent mentality suggests that these workers are glad to be sent home because they shared \$2.7 billion. That is the life of the 1 per cent. That is how they see things. They do not understand that people lost their lives, that people took their lives because they were out of a job. People lost their families and communities were destroyed because of their decisions. But colleagues, Madam Deputy Prime Minister—

Hon. Member: Deputy Speaker.

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste:—Deputy Speaker—that could be—

Hon. Members: Prophecy, prophecy.

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste:—“ahh” prophecy. Prophecy there, man. Prophecy, prophecy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am just happy that we have an opportunity to help workers. I know that, just as happened in the past, brighter days are coming for workers in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: The record speaks for itself. All workers, rest assured, we will have decent, sustainable jobs. Gone are the days of the reliance on make-work programmes and handouts that PNM politicians used to corral people to put on red jerseys to hop in maxis. Those days are over.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: And every time I say, “Madam Deputy Speaker”, you believe I was just about to end. But every time I think about them—but, Madam Deputy Speaker, with these few words—let me just say one last thing—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: One last thing, one last thing. I want to say it because I despise it.

Mr. Alexander: Say it, say it.

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: And I want the national community to know that this is something to be despised.

Mr. Alexander: Say it

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: One of the tools of the PNM is that they peddle envy and covetousness. They look at anywhere that there is a good-paying job, and they try to show their supporters, who they have suffered and depressed, that somehow they must hate where they have good-paying jobs. Hence, why they started taking out a salary in TSTT and tried to say, “Aye, allyuh look what money dey getting,” or “Look at WASA workers getting,” or “Look at what Petrotrin workers getting,” and that gives them the licence to destroy these people’s work lives. Rather than build, they rather break down workers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: The peddling of covetousness and envy must come to an end. And hear “meh”, the population of this country, trust me, they have

understanding. They would think they would get away, from time to time, with “dey little bobolizing dey one or two persons around dem with race and all these foolish attempts to get people to corral around dem. Dat eh go work because we have the facts supporting us here.” Madam Deputy Speaker, I look forward to us delivering on behalf of the OWTU and the oilfield workers. Madam Deputy Speaker, with those few words, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Clauses 1 to 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3.

Question proposed: That clause 3 stand part of the Bill.

A. In the newly inserted Clause 7A, insert after 7A the words “(1)”.

B. Insert after the newly inserted 7A as amended, the following new subsections:

“(2) Subject to the Industrial Relations Act, the OWTU which, immediately prior to the appointed day, was the recognised majority union representing the workers who were employed in PETRORIN, shall continue to be the recognised majority union representing workers in Heritage Petroleum Company Limited and Paria Fuel Trading Company Limited for the purposes of the collective agreements referred to in subsection (1).

(3) In this section, “OWTU” means the Oilfield Workers Trade Union.”.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Attorney General.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Chair, the Minister has circulated an amendment to the Bill,

which was amended in the Senate. So the Senate amendment is further amended in terms of the written amendment, which has been circulated.

Mr. Gonzales: Attorney General, can you give a reason for the further amendment?

Sen. Jeremie SC: It gives the union the right to engage in collective bargaining. You can say that the right is implied in the previous draft.

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. Jeremie SC: Correct. So this just makes it abundantly clear that that is, in fact, the position.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The AG's famous words were, *ex abundante cautela*, out of an abundance of caution, for clarity.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 3, as amended, ordered stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill be reported to the House.

House resumed.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Baptiste: Mr. President, I wish to report that the Miscellaneous Provisions (Heritage Petroleum, Paria Fuel Trading and Guaracara Refining Vesting) (Amdt.) Bill, 2026, was considered in committee of the whole and approved with amendments. I now beg to move that the House agree with the committee's report.

Bill reported, with amendment.

Question put: That the Bill be now read a third time.

2.30 p.m.

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Mr. Padarath: Division.

Madam Deputy Speaker: A division has been called.

The House voted: Ayes 26

AYES

Padarath, Hon. B.

Persad-Bissessar SC, Hon. K.

Tancoo, Hon. D.

John, Hon. J.

Moonilal, Hon. Dr. R.

Lee, Hon. D.

Hosein, Hon. S.

Ameen, Hon. K.

Alexander, Hon. R.

Maharaj, Hon. D.

Mohit, Hon. V.

Sturge, Hon. W.

Bodoe, Hon. Dr. L.

Dowlath, Hon. Dr. M.

Morris, Hon. W.

Benjamin, Hon. M.

Sobers, Hon. S.

Watts, Hon. P.

Seecheran, Hon. Dr. R.

Kesar, Hon. E.

Elder, Hon. C.

Narinesingh, H.

Roopnarine, Dr. N.

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Gosine, Dr. C.

Thomas, D.

Sampson, J.

The following Members abstained: Mr. Gonzales.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Gonzales: Madam Deputy Speaker, why is the Government shouting at Opposition for exercising our constitutional rights? Please protect us, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Division continued.

The following Members abstained: Mrs. Beckles-Robinson, Mr. Imbert, Dr. Gadsby-Dolly, Mr. Young SC, Mr. Scotland SC, Mrs. Robinson-Regis, Mr. de Nobriga, Mr. Manning, and Mr. Marcelle.

Hon. Members: [Interruption]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I am advised that the division should be taken in silence. So, let us hear the response from the Opposition.

Division continued.

The following Members abstained: Mr. Des Vignes, Mr. Birchwood and Mr. Romain.

Hon. Members: [Continuous crosstalk]

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Leader of the House. **The Minister of Public Utilities and the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath):** Thank you most kindly, Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

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Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, before putting the question on the Motion for adjournment, I will now invite Members to bring greetings on the occasion of Labour Day to be observed tomorrow, Friday, June 19th, 2026. Hon. Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

GREETINGS

(Labour Day)

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. On a very historic day today and on the eve of Labour Day tomorrow, I want to say as Trinidad and Tobago commemorates this special day, we honour the generations of working men and women, whose toil, sacrifice and determination build the nation we proudly call home. Every road, Madam Deputy Speaker, every school, every hospital, every industry, stands as a testament to their contributions.

Labour Day reminds us of the rights, protections, and opportunities enjoyed by workers today were not freely granted. They were earned through struggle, sacrifice and perseverance by ordinary people who refused to accept injustice as their lot. In the harsh and discriminatory society that was colonial Trinidad and Tobago, workers possess little wealth, possess little power or influence, yet through courage, resilience and determination they changed the course of our history and left an enduring lesson. No nation can claim to be truly free when the men and women whose labour sustains us are denied dignity, fairness and respect.

The modern labour movement was born out of hardship, inequality and injustice. By the 1930s the hardships of the great depression have culminated in the sugar workers struggles of 1934, labour protests in 1935 and historic labour disturbances of 1937. Those events strengthened organized labour, advanced political reform and helped lay a foundation for the democratic institutions we

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enjoy today. We honour Tubal Uriah Butler, Captain Arthur Andrew Ciprani, Adrian Cola Rienzi, Elmer Francois, George Weekes, CLR James and many other labour pioneers who helped transform our nation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We honour, as well, the thousands of unnamed workers whose courage and sacrifice helped secure a better future for generations to come.

Madam Deputy, one of the most enduring lessons of our labour history is that progress was achieved when ordinary people stood together. The descendants of emancipation and indentureship came to recognize that despite different experiences they shared the same aspirations, dignity, fairness, opportunity and a better future. That unity challenged injustice, that unity weakened division and that unity helped build a stronger and a more democratic T&T.

As we honour labour throughout T&T, we must also recognize Tobago's proud tradition of worker struggle, resilience and self-determination.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The Belmanna Riots of 1876 remain a powerful reminder of Tobago's contribution to the wider struggle for dignity, justice and opportunity and so today as well, we honour the generations of Tobagonians whose labour helped build their island and strengthen our nation. The UNC, and the labour movement. UNC emerged from traditions deeply connected to organized labour, the sugar belt, and the struggle of new citizens to have voices heard. Our founder, the late Basdeo Panday, was first and foremost a labour leader who stood with workers in defence of their rights—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—and he championed the cause of those who often felt excluded from the centres of power. Mr. Panday understood that prosperity

must be shared and that working people must never be left behind. Those principles became part of the foundation of the UNC and they continue to guide our approach to national development.

The relationship between the UNC and the labour movement is built on a record of action and achievement. Under the Panday UNC Government of '95 to 2000 amongst many other things *inter alia*, we passed the Minimum Wages Act, that was passed by UNC Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We put forward legislative measures to protect workers' pension rights and collective bargaining arrangements, during the restructuring of the regional health authorities. The commitment to the labour movement continued during my first tenure as Prime Minister between 2010 and 2015. In 2013, Petrotrin and the OWTU concluded six collective agreements that delivered salary increases, improved allowances, a vacation travel grant and enhanced leave provisions for workers. These gains coincided with a strong energy sector.

In 2011, Petrotrin recorded a profit of approximately \$2.5 billion demonstrated that economic success and respect for workers can go hand in hand. Indeed though out our history, the UNC has remained guided by a simple principle, "workers are partners **endeavour**".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: On April 28th, 2025 workers once again helped shape the destiny of Trinidad and Tobago. They voted for a UNC coalition Government that understood that workers must once again be placed at the centre of national development. This is why our workers agenda, mentioned before, has become a central pillar of our Government's programme. That agenda is built around about 20 commitments to improve lives of working people. So in just one

year, we have concluded wage negotiations affecting almost 40,000 public sector workers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We have delivered salary settlements and 10 per cent—we did 10 per cent, we have paid 3.8 billion to PSA members—is that correct Dave the 3.8 billion to PSA members?

Mr. Tancoo: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Okay, just check the figure for me, but we settled at the 10 per cent salary, but we did pay millions of dollars to workers in the PSA and in NUGFW and we also did some for T&TEC, reached agreements for the NIB employees, we concluded a landmark settlement at T&TEC. We removed taxation on private pensions and we repealed the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: My colleague, Minister of Labour, has talked to us about the statistics, the numbers of employments and so on, jobs created, placement and employment programmes. The national recruitment drive, expanded youth opportunities through UTEP, YTEPP, ITC and others. We have established the Refinery Reactivation Committee with OWTU local and international enterprise—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—and our work continues. Reopening that Petrotrin Refinery, protecting energy sector jobs, strengthening protections and benefits for domestic and vulnerable workers, strengthening agricultural agencies, rural employment and job creation. Honouring outstanding settlements and providing further relief through budget 2027, as the Minister of Finance has indicated and Madam Deputy Speaker, let me say if today I could pay every single

cent that is due and owed, we will do it, but we inherited an economy in shambles, we are attempting to fix it and as we say, better days will come.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

2.45 p.m.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Every advance the nation has made has rested upon the shoulders of working people. Investing in workers and expanding opportunity remains the surest path to national progress. As I close, Madam Deputy Speaker, I say, the history of labour teaches us that progress is earned, as I said before, through sacrifice, solidarity and perseverance. The workers who marched in the sugar cane fields, stood in the oilfields, who organized in workplaces across our nation, struggled for generations yet to come. Today, we inherit the rights, the institutions and freedoms their sacrifices made possible. On this Labour Day tomorrow, we pay tribute to the pioneers of the labour movement, the trade unions that continue to defend workers, and the generations of working people whose labour built our nation.

As Prime Minister, I reaffirm that my Government will continue to stand with workers to protect their rights and expand opportunities. For the lesson of our history is clear, every great advance in our nation has been built on the strength, resilience and determination of the working people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So united in that same spirit, there is no challenge we cannot overcome, and there is no future that we cannot build together. Happy Labour Day to everyone. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Malabar/Mausica.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Dominic Romain (*Malabar/Mausica*): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is indeed a privilege for me to bring Labour Day greetings on behalf of the Opposition. Today, as we prepare to commemorate Labour Day in Trinidad and Tobago, we pause to recognize and celebrate the men and women whose hard work, resilience and dedication form the backbone of our nation. Across every industry and community, workers make invaluable contributions that sustain our economy, strengthen our institutions, and improve the lives of countless citizens. On this important occasion, we extend sincere gratitude and deep appreciation to all who labour each day in service of our country's progress and development.

We also spare a thought for all those thousands of ordinary citizens who have been without work for the past year as a result of this Government's policies—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain:—who struggle each day to provide even the most basic of life's necessities, and who have been relegated to the position of collateral damage. Labour Day is more than a public observance. It is a tribute to the struggles, achievements and enduring contributions of workers across every sector of our society. It is an opportunity to honour those who labour in our schools, hospitals, factories, farms, public services and communities, often under challenging circumstances, yet with unwavering commitment.

The history of Trinidad and Tobago's labour movement is deeply intertwined with the story of our nation's development. We remember the courage and determination of pioneering labour leaders who stood against exploitation and injustice and fought for the rights and dignity of working people. Today, we pay tribute to the great sons and daughters of our nation, whose leadership transformed the labour landscape, including Tubal Uriah "Buzz" Butler, whose efforts helped ignite the labour uprising of 1937; Adrian Cola Rienzi, who championed the rights of the sugar and oil workers; George Weekes, whose leadership of the oil workers strengthened the labour movement; Basdeo Panday, who emerged from the trade union movement to become a national leader; and C.L.R. James, whose intellectual contributions inspired workers' struggles throughout the Caribbean and beyond.

Their sacrifices and achievements laid the foundation for many of the workplace protections, rights and freedoms that workers enjoy today. The People's National Movement has long recognized the vital role of labour in national development. Since its founding by Dr. Eric Williams, the PNM has championed policies aimed at improving the quality of life of working people. Let us be reminded that the PNM, under the visionary leadership of Dr. Eric Williams, has played a defining role in shaping the rights and recognition of workers in Trinidad and Tobago.

On March 18, 1965, Dr. Williams introduced landmark legislation that provided for the compulsory recognition of trade unions, mechanisms for the resolution of trade disputes, price regulations, and the establishment of the Industrial Court. This legislation laid the foundation for modern labour relations and industrial justice in our country. The PNM's engagement with the labour movement has been historic and continuous. Trade unionists such as John Rojas, who was part of the 1962 delegation to London for Trinidad and Tobago's independence, exemplified the deep integration of labour into the national fabric.

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From the party's inception in 1956, prominent union figures like Donald Granado (UCIW), Ulric Lee, John Hackshaw and Olie Mohammed proudly contested elections on a PNM ticket.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: Many went on to serve in Parliament, on state boards, in diplomatic posts, and in the upper chambers of governance.

In the decades that followed, union leaders such as Claude Drayton, Sam Worrell, Clyde Payne and Elton Peters served on the PNM's general council, while others like Carl Tull, Vas Stanford, Simeon Alexander and WW Sutton took up critical national responsibilities.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: Even Sir Isaac Hyatali, the first President of the Industrial Court, though not a PNM member, was appointed during a time when the party sought to institutionalize fairness and justice in labour matters.

Further, under the leadership of the Prime Minister George Chambers, the country honoured the legacy of Uriah "Buzz" Butler through the renaming of the Princess Margaret Highway in his honour. In San Fernando, a newly constructed highway was named after Cola Rienzi, another towering figure in the labour history. Given this rich and undeniable history, it is deeply unfortunate that current trade union leaders now find it fashionable to launch broad and often unfounded attacks against the People's National Movement.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: The PNM has also supported the strengthening of labour legislation, industrial relations frameworks, and institutions that encourage constructive dialogue among workers, employers and the State. We recognize the national progress, or that national progress is best achieved when economic growth is accompanied by social justice and respect for workers' rights.

As we celebrate Labour Day, we must also look to the future. The world of work is changing rapidly through technology, innovation and globalization. We must continue to equip our workforce with the skills, knowledge and opportunities necessary to thrive in a modern economy, while ensuring that no worker is left behind. Today, we salute the pioneers of the labour movement. We honour the trade unions that continue to advocate for workers and celebrate every citizen whose labour contributes to the prosperity and development of Trinidad and Tobago.

On behalf of the Opposition, and on behalf of the People's National Movement, I thank all workers for your invaluable contribution to our nation. Your resilience, dedication and commitment remain the driving force behind our country's progress. Happy Labour Day. May God continue to bless the workers of Trinidad and Tobago, and may God continue to bless our beloved nation, Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, it is my privilege to join with those who have spoken before me in bringing greetings to the national community on this national public holiday, Labour Day. Labour Day is not merely just a public holiday, it commemorates the intense sacrifices, struggles and hard-won achievements of our predecessors. Pioneers like Adrian Cola Rienzi, Tubal Uriah "Buzz" Butler, George Weekes, Elma Francois, C.L.R. James, Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani, Albert Maria Gomes, Daisy Crick and Theresa Ojoe, just to name a few, who fought to ensure that we have better working conditions, fair wages and rights, which so many of us often take for granted. Its genesis can be found in the labour riots of 1937, a period marked by immense hardship, low wages and poor working conditions, which culminated in several protests and strikes.

Such action was met with brute force, resulting in many injured and several dead. This event was a catalyst for the birth of the labour movement of Trinidad and Tobago. Today, we have the collective bargaining structures, union representation, social and economic empowerment, improved living standards and legal protections. We are also very privileged to have such an illustrious institution in the form of the Industrial Court, established through the Industrial Stabilisation Act, through which we can seek redress for unresolved disputes and other labour-related matters.

I, therefore, take this opportunity to urge citizens to take time to reflect on the history of the labour movement in Trinidad and Tobago, what it took for us to get to this point to be able to enjoy the benefits we are afforded in the workplace. I also submit that while we have indeed come a long way, there is always room for improvement, change, flexibility and dynamism to continue to meet the evolving times and needs of our citizens. As a Parliament, we are keenly aware of our role and function in strengthening and shaping labour protections through the enactment of laws, upholding labour rights, promoting social dialogue, strengthening enforcement and compliance, and addressing social and economic outcomes.

I am confident that as we work together, hon. Members, we can ensure that our citizens continue to enjoy fair, safe and dignified working conditions. On behalf of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, my family and myself, I take this opportunity to wish all a safe, peaceful and happy Labour Day. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 2.56 p.m.