

**No. 8**

**WEDNESDAY**

**First Session**

**31<sup>st</sup> October, 2001**

**Seventh Parliament**

**SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

**THE**

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**ADVANCE COPY**

**OFFICIAL REPORT**

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**THE**

**THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

**OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE EIGHT MEETING, FIRST SESSION OF THE SEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES CONSTITUTED AS SET OUT IN SCHEDULE 2 TO THE SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES ORDER, 1979.**

**FOURTEENTH SITTING**

**31<sup>st</sup> October, 2001**

**HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

The Honourable House of Assembly met at 10.20 a.m. in the Assembly Chamber, Court House, Kingstown.

**PRAYERS**

**MR. SPEAKER IN THE CHAIR**

Honourable Hendrick Alexander

**Present**

**MEMBERS OF CABINET**

Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Planning,  
Economic Development, Labour, Information,  
Grenadines and Legal Affairs.

Dr. The Honourable Ralph Gonsalves

Member for North Central Windward

Attorney General  
Honourable Judith Jones-Morgan

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign  
Affairs, Commerce and Trade.

Honourable Louis Straker

Member for Central Leeward

Minister of Social Development, Co-operatives, The Family, Gender and Ecclesiastical Affairs Honourable Girlyn Miguel	Member for Marriaqua
Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries Honourable Selmon Walters	Member for South Central Windward
Minister of Health and the Environment Honourable Dr. Douglas Slater	Member for South Leeward
Minister of Tourism and Culture Honourable Rene Baptist	Member for West Kingstown
Minister of State in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports Honourable Clayton Burgin	Member for East St. George
Minister of State in the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries Honourable Montgomery Daniel	Member for North Windward
Minister of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Trade Honourable Conrad Sayers	Member for Central Kingstown
Minister of Transport, Works and Housing Honourable Julian Francis	Government Senator
Honourable Edwin Snagg	Government Senator, Parliamentary Prime Minister's Office, Special Responsibility for Labour and Grenadines Affairs

#### **OTHER MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE**

Honourable Terrance Ollivierre	Member for Southern Grenadines
Honourable Juliet George	Government Senator
Honourable Andrea Young	Government Senator/Deputy Speaker

Honourable Gerard Shallow

Opposition Senator

Honourable Major St. Claire Leacock

Opposition Senator

**ABSENT**

Minister of National Security, the Public Service  
and Airport Development

Honourable Vincent Beache

Member for South Windward

Minister of Education, Youth and Sports

Honourable Michael Browne

Member for West St. George

Minister of Telecommunications, Science  
Technology and Industry

Honourable Dr. Jerrol Thompson

Member for North Leeward

Honourable Arnhim Eustace

Member for East Kingstown/  
Leader of the Opposition

Dr. the Honourable Godwin Friday

Member for Northern Grenadines

# **SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

## **HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**WEDNESDAY 31<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER, 2001**

### **PRAYERS**

Mr. Speaker, read the Prayers of the House.

### **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the sitting held on the Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2001 copies of which had been circulated previously, were taken as read and were confirmed.

### ***Question put and agreed to.***

**DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES:** Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members I crave your indulgence, Mr. Speaker to make a formal announcement in this Honourable House. It concerns the State visit of the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, His Excellency President Hugo Chavez, who has kindly agreed to pay a visit to St. Vincent and the Grenadines on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of November. Mr. Speaker, I had informed the Leader of the Opposition a few weeks ago when the visit had been agreed upon but I had indicated to him that the information publicly on the visit was embargoed until both countries had agreed to make the announcement, and yesterday it was agreed with His Excellency the Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela here in Kingstown that the announcement would be made today in Parliament. This is the first visit that President Chavez is making to a Commonwealth Caribbean country and we consider it a signal honour that he has chosen St. Vincent and the Grenadines to be the location of his first State visit to a Commonwealth Caribbean country.

Currently Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, a framework agreement is being discussed, nearing completion between our two countries and very specifically within that framework agreement, an agreement on oil. We are hopeful that those agreements would be signed when President Chavez visits St. Vincent and the Grenadines. This will not be the first visit of a President of Venezuela to St. Vincent and the Grenadines; many years ago President Luchienski made a State visit; but it is a tremendous honour for our country to have someone of the international distinction of President Chavez to visit St. Vincent and the Grenadines as the first country for the Commonwealth Caribbean. As you know, he has visited many countries throughout the world. Recently he just returned from a visit to Europe, including the United Kingdom and he had been to the Middle East, the Far East and several other

geographical areas, and for him to come to us and to be working out this agreement with us, is both a tribute to President Chavez's commitment to strength relations in the Caribbean and also this Government's commitment to building links with Latin America and in particular this case with Venezuela. And it is a further manifestation of the evolving foreign policy of the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines which I think that even our most fervent detractors would concede has been an excellent foreign policy. And the manner in which we have been moving and in such swift time which we have, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, we would be having the second visit within an eight month period, second major visit, the first one being the visit by the Premier of the Republic of China and then of course, this Government has chalked up tremendous achievements in the area of foreign policy in our short period. We have had an activist foreign policy which has brought many, many benefits to the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and I think the Foreign Minister and the entire Government should be commended on their excellent work in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, if I may just make one additional announcement and it is important for it to be made here in Parliament though it had been done at a press conference yesterday. As you know, Mr. Speaker, for the last four weeks or so, the discussion in banana circles among the banana farmers and the professional is that St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the Windward Islands would be facing a price cut of ten cents per pound. In my own role as the spokesperson for banana within the OECS and CARICOM I could not sit by and allow that to happen, and that was the WIBDECO proposal and after consultation with the other leaders in the OECS in the Windward Islands and with WIBDECO Chief Executive and upon the advice of Prime Minister Anthony with whom I discuss this matter extensively I hosted a meeting here yesterday for the Windward Islands governments, attended by civil society, all the banana interest groups, the officials and also WIBDECO and I am pleased to announce that there would be no cut in prices for bananas. None. That the meeting further agreed that St. Lucia and Dominica would follow St. Vincent and the Grenadines in speeding up the signing of the guarantee for the release of £1million from the Crown Agents held therefore WIBDECO, St. Vincent and the Grenadines had already some weeks ago, as regards prior agreement, had given that guarantee and that further that WIBDECO is being permitted to restructure the remain of the £20 million loan from the Allied Investment Bank of Ireland. Just over £2 million remaining and that we will give also a guarantee to that restructuring and to the restructuring in relation to the provision of £1million working capital. But these are contingent upon WIBDECO accelerating its restructuring proposals and business plans which were to be presented by December the 31<sup>st</sup> by prior agreement from meetings which were held here since June. St. Vincent and the Grenadines as everyone in this country knows, and in the entire Windwards, we have met all our deadlines and we have done all that we are supposed to do in respect of our restructuring. The banana industry bill which we passed at the last sitting of Parliament was one element of that restructuring, there has been others

including WIBDECO's take over of the purchasing, reception and loading arrangements here in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

The farmers have been reporting and the officials have been reporting a renewed confidence among banana farmers, in St. Vincent and the Grenadines because of the public policy decisions which this Government has taken and I want to repeat that. That confidence is rising among banana farmers, as a direct consequence of the public policy actions of this government and at this time we are not going to countenance WIBDECO cutting the price to farmers. It has nothing to do with profit and loss in respect of WIBDECO, it has to do with their cash flow problems, because what happens, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, is that when WIBDECO sells to the supermarkets they have to wait five to six weeks before actually get paid, but they yet within that period of time, they have to pay the farmers on an on-going basis and when volumes are increasing, when production is increasing, it means that they have to pay for increased quantities when in fact what they would have been remunerated for, for the previous five six weeks would be smaller quantities. So they face a cash flow problem and the governments have decided to assist with guarantees, no outlay of monies for the cash flow problems and we are satisfied that this is the proper way to go.

So I repeat, the Unity Labour Party Government has saved the day for the banana farmers by organizing the meeting of the Heads of Government here in St. Vincent and WIBDECO and all the stakeholders are putting up all the requisite guarantees to ease the cash flow problems so that the banana farmers in this country can enjoy their current prices into the foreseeable future, and certainly would have a much more welcomed Christmas than appeared to be the case when the banana producers were informed on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September of WIBDECO's proposal. I think this is a matter which the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines ought to be commended for because we acted swiftly, in a timely fashion to avert problems in the banana industry.

So Mr. Speaker, I had two good pieces of news to report today, to the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and I think when they see the details of the energy pact between Venezuela and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the oil agreement, that they would even be more pleased, but that would be for another day Mr. Speaker, I am obliged.

**DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES:** Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members the item on today's agenda it's the continuation of the debate on the Motion on Constitutional Reform, we may not go beyond 6:00 p.m. but out of an abundance of caution I beg to move Mr. Speaker under standing Order 12 (5) that the proceedings today be exempted from the provisions of Standing Order Hours' of sitting.

**HONOURABLE SELMON WALTERS:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

***Question put and agreed to.***

**MOTION: CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM – CONTINUATION**

**HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members when we last discussed this motion at the end of the day's sitting the Honourable Julian Francis, no, you were not discussing this one?

**DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES:** He was on the motion which the Opposition had brought at the third sitting, and he had not spoken at all on this one.

**HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER:** Okay then. Thank you, for that.

**DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES:** The persons who had spoken, Mr. Speaker, ...

**HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER:** I have a list of the persons who did. The Honourable Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, Honourables Arnhim Eustace, Mike Browne, Dr. the Honourable Godwin Friday, Honourables Vincent Beache, Joseph Bonadie, Rene Baptiste and Selmon Walters would have spoken on that motion. I think in order for those persons who are listening to understand what is taking place in this House, it is necessary for us to read the resolution on this Motion and then after that of course members would begin the debate.

**BE IT RESOLVED** that this Honourable House establish a Select Committee of Parliament to set up promptly a broad-based and competent Constitutional Review Commission to begin the exercise formally of fashioning a new, more democratic constitution as befitting a free people at the dawn of the twenty-first century and that the report of the Commission be submitted to this Honourable House.

Any further debate on this motion?

**HONOURABLE ANDREA YOUNG:** Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, you will recall that it was over six months ago when the motion for Constitutional Reform was first introduced to this Honourable House by the Honourable Prime Minister. This was at the first sitting, the first working session of this Honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, during the last election campaign the Unity Labour Party had advocated the need for Constitutional Reform and to this end the setting up of a Constitutional Review Commission. The electorate would have realized Mr. Speaker, that this was not a mere threat or even idle talk for long before the elections, the Unity Labour Party

had presented to the general public a discussion paper on Constitutional reform; to be precise, Mr. Speaker, this was in July of 2000 and that document has been tabled in this House.

Just four days ago we celebrated our 22<sup>nd</sup> year of Independence, I am sure Mr. Speaker, that we will all agree that the constitution at present has served us well but equally that there is a need to revisit it so that it can serve us better. And my confidence, Mr. Speaker, springs from the fact that support for this measure has been given on both sides of the House and even outside.

Like any other society Mr. Speaker, our society is evolving, our political system is evolving; it has met many challenges, one which springs to mind is the elections of 1989 and so Constitutional Reform Mr. Speaker, becomes critical in this evolution. The Constitution, Mr. Speaker, must correspond with the changing times. It must correspond with the changing ideas, and it must be amended so as to deal the new demands placed on our political system.

In the recent past, Mr. Speaker, one of the lessons that we learnt in April of 2000 is that our political system must cultivate a democracy which ensures the participation of all sectors of society. The Constitution, Mr. Speaker, performs many important functions, it provides a fundamental law, it establishes organs of the State, it allocates functions to the State, it provides for the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms and generally it declares the ideology of the State.

Mr. Speaker, the provisions which have been enshrined in the Constitution for the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms must be paid special attention in the process of reforming the current Constitution since these provisions, Mr. Speaker, are designed to regulate state conduct. While they provide, Mr. Speaker, a good measure of protection we must ensure that the provisions which limit the enjoyment of these rights and freedoms do not operate so as to chip away at the very protection which is sought to be guaranteed. Further Mr. Speaker, the enforcement of these rights is often hindered by the broad and imprecise language in which they are couched and accordingly we have to endeavor to bolster these provisions so that they would provide the civil and political rights afforded by the Constitution. It is interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that the right to vote is not stated as an expressed fundamental right in the current constitution, although section 27 (2) states and provides that a person who is registered to vote unless he is disqualified he shall be entitled to vote." This Mr. Speaker, is not peculiar to the Constitution of St. Vincent and Grenadines, it is the position in many Caribbean constitutions, but the point is Mr. Speaker, if the right to vote is stated as an expressed fundamental right, it imposes a legal obligation on the State to accord the individual elector that right.

Mr. Speaker, the separation of powers must be further enhanced so that the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary can function independently. The independence of the judiciary is very critical, Mr. Speaker, and we must maintain the independence of the judiciary, so that Mr. Speaker, at all times the judiciary will be the pillar that stands between citizen and citizen and the State, in the resolution of conflict. I need not state Mr. Speaker, the ramifications for any society if there is even the slightest lack of confidence in the judiciary. At present we are all well aware Mr. Speaker that there is no provision in the current constitution for ensuring that elected representatives are held accountable to the people who elected them to serve. And in a reformed constitution, Mr. Speaker, provisions must be made for this, given our political history.

The Honourable Prime Minister when he debated this Motion, he himself Mr. Speaker, spoke of the excessive powers of the Prime Minister which the constitution contains. These powers include, Mr. Speaker, advising the Governor General on the appointment of a number of persons. Advising the Governor General on the appointment of the Chairman of the Public Service Commission and at least two members; advising the Governor General on the dissolution of Parliament among other things. It is now patently clear Mr. Speaker, that these powers must be curtailed.

This brings me Mr. Speaker, to the Services Commissions. The Public Service Commissions and the Police Service Commission, Mr. Speaker, must be autonomous, if they are to effectively carry out their functions of recruiting, training, promoting and transferring and so forth, members within the Public Service. These commissions, Mr. Speaker, must remain and they must be insulated from the tentacles of political influence, and the time has come Mr. Speaker, for the teachers to have their own Service Commission.

In the document to which I referred earlier, the discussion paper on constitutional reform consideration has been given, Mr. Speaker to establishing the Office of the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman, Mr. Speaker, first appeared in Sweden in 1806 and was first established in the Caribbean in Guyana in 1966. The purpose and main functions of the Ombudsman is to receive complaints, Mr. Speaker, of mal-administration and to investigate these complaints. We would have to decide, Mr. Speaker, if we are going ahead to establish the Office of the Ombudsman what would be the mode of his appointment, his tenure and what would be the permitted fields of investigation, for example Mr. Speaker, whether we he would be permitted to investigate allegations of corruption. I believe Mr. Speaker, that the Office of the Ombudsman would add greater transparency in Government and we will have the opportunity, the Government would have the opportunity to improve general administration.

In debate that had preceded, Mr. Speaker, over six months ago, many other concerns were raised concerning the current constitution among these, Mr. Speaker, was the

question of whether there should be fixed term limits for a Prime Minister. Whether we should have a fixed date for general elections. Whether we would continue with the First-Past-the-Post System as opposed to proportional representation or whether we would have a hybrid. There is also the issue Mr. Speaker, of a unicameral legislature, versus a bicameral legislature, and its composition. And then Mr. Speaker, there are the options for executive authority, whether we would continue to have a monarchical system or a ceremonial president who is elected by an electoral college or an executive president elected directly by the electorate, or an executive president who is elected by the House of Assembly. But all these matter, Mr. Speaker, are matters that the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines would have to decide on when this issue is brought before them.

Mr. Speaker, in the new international system of globalization it behooves us to have good governance in our country. It behooves us to have Mr. Speaker, transparency in Government, accountability and integrity. These are some of the essential ingredients of good governance. Gone are the days, Mr. Speaker, of a state where the political system may be aptly described as “kleptocracy.” We must eliminate, Mr. Speaker, corruption in public office and we must involve our people more in shaping their own future.

Mr. Speaker, those persons who feel that the business of running the country is the exclusive task and domain of a selected few are sadly mistaken and are headed for self-destruction. So Mr. Speaker, when the review commission is established, it must meet with the people, seek out their views so that their recommendation, Mr. Speaker, can be based on the representations made to them by the people. Above all else Mr. Speaker, I believe that a reformed constitution must be a document with which every citizen is thoroughly familiar. It's language, Mr. Speaker, must be clear and simple so that every citizen can understand it fully and will be in a position to appreciate the social, political and economic changes which constitutional reform will certainly bring. On that note Mr. Speaker, I wish this motion a safe passage through this Honourable House.

**HONOURABLE GERARD SHALLOW:** Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I rise to make my contribution to this motion on Constitutional Reform. Mr. Speaker, the Constitution of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is the sole instrument that governs the lives of all its citizens, hence indicating how important it is and to embark on a constitutional reform, would therefore require Mr. Speaker, the total involvement of all and sundry. In other words from the onset, Mr. Speaker, we should target our population and ensure that they are properly educated on the issue of constitutional reform. They must be fed with an education that is free of political interference and that is very unbiased. They must be fed with an education that would give them the opportunity to reveal all their concerns and in so doing Mr. Speaker, we may arrive at what could be considered a people's constitution.

Mr. Speaker, the constitution that we are using now, has served us extremely well since it has been brought into effect after we have gained independence, but as you know Mr. Speaker, like everything else, time changes and so should our rules and our regulations, and as we promote a society that must be adaptable to change, we must ensure that the changes we ensue, that the changes we embarked upon must be for the better and not for the worst.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as we are today, we are functioning in a global market place. St. Vincent and the Grenadines could be considered a mustard seed in a very large ocean. And for us to withstand the battering of this global economic force, it becomes more and more difficult for us Mr. Speaker. It is with that view in mind that I thought constitutional reform would have been done in the wider Caribbean context. It is fair to say that we have to change our constitution, because time changes so should everything else. But the context in which this Constitutional reform should take must be, and I want to repeat Mr. Speaker, in the wider Caribbean context if we are supposed to achieve any meaningful measure of success. Because we have witnessed the globalization that is taking place, we have witnessed larger and stronger economies marrying, whether it be marriage of convenience or not, as in the case of the European countries, into the European union, and we have witnessed everyone else coming together. We should be no exception to this rule, Mr. Speaker. And I want to emphasize. Within recent times we have been moving in that direction and if we are to achieve any meaningful measure of success, Mr. Speaker, it must be taken in view of the wider Caribbean, because we are not going to be able to withstand the batterings of this global economic force as a single unit and funds that could be used in restructuring this constitution could we used to do one constitutional framework that would embrace the entire Caribbean. So like the old people say, you don't wait until it rains to take your clothes up, you take them up when you see the clouds. And we know it is going to be imperative upon us, Mr. Speaker, to come together if we have to achieve any meaningful measure of economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, this constitution as it is, is the Westminster model and like all other constitution, it has its strengths but it also have its weaknesses and it should be the weaknesses that must be targeted, because there are areas of the constitution, Mr. Speaker, that are admirable and has been functioning extremely well over the years. Now, as it is Mr. Speaker, it does not function exactly as it has been anticipated in the Commonwealth Caribbean. There are flaws in the system which limit democracy and popular control under elite in practice, therefore Mr. Speaker, you are supposed to spend sometime examining this constitution carefully, clause by clause with an aim to having it remedied and making it capable of dealing with situations as they arise. Now in this case the political system tends towards "clientism" and a concentration of power: that is, Parliament does not control the Cabinet. The Prime Minister controls the Cabinet and that means that there is hardly any check on executive power, I would

wish that these would be taken on board when we are in the process of restructuring or reforming our constitution.

This constitution also allows the Government to carry out excessive easily and this is particularly dangerous in numerically small society like ours. You see what happens, Mr. Speaker, in a democratic system that we have practicing here in St. Vincent and the Grenadines the winner takes it all. And there is hardly any opportunity for the minority in the country who is not represented in the Government to have their demands met. There is hardly any room for the minority to have their problems addressed. That is simply because of the way the system has been structured. The minority is equally ignored and that is so because they are not needed to form a stable government. And after all, if you are not responsible for me being in Government who are you for me to consider, so we should restructure our constitution to address these problems.

Another very serious weakness of this constitution Mr. Speaker, is that it is very easily abused, very easily abused. And I want to air one example of gross abuse of this constitution Mr. Speaker, after the 1972 elections when there was an alliance between the then James Mitchell and Ebenezer Theodore Joshua the government fell in 1974 and an alliance was formed between the then St. Vincent Labour Party and the People's Political Party of Ebenezer Theodore Joshua, this was done to ensure that the James Mitchell fraction would be pushed totally out of power. It so ended up that the alliance won, but the constitution was conveniently amended so that a Minister who would have won their seat under alliance ticket was given Leader of the Opposition just to ensure that James Mitchell did not hold that position. Gross abuse Mr. Speaker, and these are things that we can never forget, because history will always keep good record of the truth. We cannot allow things of this nature to repeat itself, Mr. Speaker.

I therefore want to make some proposals, Mr. Speaker, and that is first of all we should retain the Westminster model. I think it is appropriate with the necessary adjustments and restructuring. We should provide as would have been said before an office for an Ombudsman so that we would have executive wrong doings investigated and penalties imposed, for after all, we are all obliged to serve and we should face consequences for our wrong doings.

I would like to see an introduction of a proportional representation in the Upper House, Mr. Speaker, to even out the swings, and distortions. Very often a whole heap of noise is made on one side, because they are the majority, something must be done about that Mr. Speaker, because after all the Government functions in the interest of the people.

We must appoint an independent counsel with full powers to investigate the executive wrong doings and we must establish structures to monitor the award of Government

contracts to both local and foreign agencies. I want to repeat that Mr. Speaker, we must establish structures to monitor the award of Government contracts to both foreign and local investors or agencies.

Mr. Speaker, I want to suggest also we must limit the number of Parliamentarians who must be appointed to the executive to 40 or 50% of the membership of Parliament in order to strengthen the role of the back benchers and by extension the powers of the Parliamentary oversight committees in relation to the executive. Mr. Speaker, we must also ensure the enshrined in our new look constitution of an element of integrity legislation. This is to curb the tendency of politicians who would want to use public funds to enrich themselves.

Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate that the State owned media where they exist must be made privatized and must be made to compete so that we could have fair and unbiased commentary throughout St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The head of State should be a president who should have greater say in the affairs of Parliament. Directors of State owned enterprises should not be called upon to resign or offer to resign as a matter of course, following the coming into power of a new regime, They should be allowed to serve out their term of Office and then replace them if necessary as their terms expire, and why did I say this Mr. Speaker, the limited nature of our professional resource base in these islands is too limited to sustain the indiscriminate hemorrhaging of talents which this policy encourages.

We must establish a Teacher's Service Commission to deal with the hiring, the conduct and other matters relating to the teaching service, and most importantly Mr. Speaker, we need to enshrine in our new look constitution the power to recall. Very often people are elected into office based on any else but their ability to do what the portfolio requires and when this happens Mr. Speaker, ultimately the people are the ones who suffer. The people should be able to recall representatives when they can't function. Plain and straight, if you can't do the work leave Office and give the responsibility to somebody who is more capable. I would very much appreciate, Mr. Speaker, if I can see things of this nature enshrined in our constitution. With that Mr. Speaker, I think it is a good gesture, I hope that all I would have said here today, would be given some consideration and that the new look constitution that we are aiming for, would serve as we ensue the changing times and that we would be in a much better position later on when we have completed this task. Let me therefore wish this motion a safe journey through this Honourable House. Much obliged, Mr. Speaker.

**HONOURABLE JULIET GEORGE:** Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members I rise in support of constitutional reform. I also at this particular point to make my contribution to this debate.

Mr. Speaker, as is customary and will be customary in the future I normally like to give a background to my understanding of what is to be debated or what is being debated. And Mr. Speaker, I see a constitution as a body of fundamental principles according to which a state is governed. In fact, it is a set of rules so defined in fundamental laws which regulates the relationship between State and citizen, citizen and citizen and also regulates the behaviour of that State to other states. Mr. Speaker, behind any constitution lies a philosophy of the way society ought to be organized. It must not be mistaken, however, Mr. Speaker, that the document must be treated with the sanctity or divine respect as the Tablets of Mount Sinai. It is therefore important Mr. Speaker, that this new document must emerge from the people themselves. It must also be in tune with the principles of international regulations. This new constitution, Mr. Speaker, must contain our aspirations for our future. The people's aspirations based on the analysis of our possibilities and the limitations of the present. A new constitution, Mr. Speaker, must reflect a progressive deepening, democratic side of our people. It must also strengthen, consolidate, extend and defend the existing rights and freedoms of the people's of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have heard since the commencement of debates and this morning that there are many reasons why this constitution must change, and it is pleasing to know that many of us agree that our constitution has served us thus far. However due to the changing circumstances of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the region, the international arena including the technological, the political and economic changes, these demands that we must develop a more appropriate framework.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Senator Young said earlier that our country has recently celebrated 22 years of independence that means, Mr. Speaker, according to our constitution which was drafted in 1979 our constitution is now 22 years old. When one reaches such an age Mr. Speaker, his perception of life changes it must change, people's conception, their perception of that person must also change. They must develop a different approach to life. So it is with our constitution Mr. Speaker, it must reflect the changing trends. The changing thinking. The changing approaches to democracy. The ULP Government won this election, elections that was held on March 28<sup>th</sup> with a promise of constitutional reform. The government has been mandated to bring about constitutional reform. It is also very pleasant and pleasing to know, Mr. Speaker, that it is also the thoughts and the wishes of the Opposition as they have so clearly stated in this debate, so it is good to know Mr. Speaker, that we are all on common ground. The voice of the people have spoken, people as you would realize and recognized are becoming increasingly aware of their increased fundamental rights and freedom. Society Mr. Speaker, is already expecting greater accountability, honesty and effectiveness from Government.

Mr. Speaker, I have given you some reasons why I feel this constitution must be reformed, must be changed. At this particular point, Mr. Speaker, I like to give you

some special points for consideration and discussion when this debate goes to a wider forum. We know, Mr. Speaker, that the constitution of St. Vincent is a monarchical one. Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Senator Shallow alluded to the fact that the West Minister model should continue. Mr. Speaker, I am not sure that I am in agreement with the Honourable Senator Shallow, because I feel that at this particular juncture we should be asking ourselves whether constitution of the Monarchy is a necessary one. Is it in this 21<sup>st</sup> century a relevant and necessary one? Mr. Speaker should parliamentarians be paying allegiance to Her Majesty, her Heirs and Successors or should parliamentarians, Mr. Speaker, be paying allegiance to the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines who elected them. Mr. Speaker, these are not my thoughts they are thoughts that are thoughts expressed on the street through many people who have discussed this particular aspect with me. Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, people would find this thought very controversial, but every controversy needs to be explored, we are Mr. Speaker living in controversial times. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, with this in mind should the new reformed constitution reflect perhaps a preference for a republican form of government. Surely, Mr. Speaker, a republican form of government can offer a more meaningful and positive elaterium symbolism than a monarchy does. Perhaps, again, Mr. Speaker, in discussion and considerations and for recommendations, maybe we need to think of whether the people should select from among themselves a Head of State to perform the duties of symbolic, Head of State functions, ceremonial leadership, inspirational, educational, or integrative. Mr. Speaker, I do not profess to know the answer these are thoughts I wish to be taken on board to be discussed.

Mr. Speaker, if we turn to page 25 of our Constitution section 26 (1) particularly (1) (b) we read: “

**No person shall be qualify to be elected or appointed as a representative or senator if this person is a Minister of Religion.”**

Mr. Speaker, in my humble thinking I feel this surely is an unreasonable act of discrimination against persons because of their work. It may also Mr. Speaker, amount to a restraint on the exercise of a person’s religious freedom. Surely, Mr. Speaker, if such person of the holy orders and others whose principal occupation is to preach and teach to any congregation of religious worship should not the disqualification from membership of this House of Assembly appear to be bias? Mr. Speaker, I feel that our new constitution should reflect and strength the fundamental rights of everyone including the religious freedom.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish you to turn to page 24 section 25 (1) (a) where stipulates that in order for you to qualify for representing or senator in this House that the person must be a Commonwealth citizen and at age 21 years or up wards.” Mr. Speaker, I see no valid reason why someone must attain the age of 21 years to become a member of this Honourable House. Mr. Speaker, that same person at age 18 is eligible for

representation in this House, if he is quite capable of making such a decision I feel Mr. Speaker, then perhaps the time has come we need to review that particular section.

Mr. Speaker, we know that one's maturity is not measured merely by a chronological number but by the development of the mind and once adaptability and adjustability to suits one's encounter. So Mr. Speaker, I hope that this will also be taken on board.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to turn again page 45 section 63 (2) which states the office of the Attorney General shall either be a public office or the office of a Minister. Mr. Speaker, I think that the ULP Government needs to be applauded for taking the bold step of appointing a public servant as the Attorney General. This is in keeping with our thinking that the Attorney General's position must not be a Ministerial one. Also Mr. Speaker, page 40, section 71 it gives you the conditions for the Ministers of Government to be appointed. It excludes, the appointment of naming of a Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, I feel this should be included in the Constitution to prevent, as we have seen in the last administration, the level of insecurity that persisted when the Prime Minister was out of State and the ad hoc manner in which the Deputy or Acting was given to any particular person. I also feel Mr. Speaker, that the Constitution should reflect that once a person has been rejected at the poles they should not become a member of this Honourable House and certainly not hold a ministerial position.

Mr. Speaker, in this new document an elected Parliamentarian must be required to make periodically quarterly reports to his constituents of his or her performance of his or her parliamentary duties. Failure to make this report, Mr. Speaker, possibly on three successive occasions will probably have to result in some form of disciplinary measure. I think within the constitution, Mr. Speaker, there can be enshrined some ideas with regards to whether a petition or petitions can be made of course, there will have to be limits on the number of petitions that can be brought over a five year period, because you would not want to cause any frivolity by the repeated appearance of petitions. Mr. Speaker, I can go on and on because I have got several points. Many of my colleagues have alluded to many aspects of reform. There has been mention of the Executive, of the Parliament, the Unicameral and Bi-cameral Houses, have been suggested, there are questions that need to be asked Mr. Speaker, such as what should be the role of the lower House, or the role of the Senate, these are questions to be discussed Mr. Speaker, these are questions to be thrown wider. Mr. Speaker, the process of consultation will soon begin. The process must incorporate full consideration and consultation across political parties and the community as a whole. The adoption of any change that has been discussed, those changes must command wide support locally, and it must be appropriate realistic, and compatible with international obligations and consistent with good government. It should also contain Mr. Speaker, an explicit and well-defined process for future constitutional changes.

Mr. Speaker, at this particular point, you know my voice is particularly for the women of this country, and I am appealing for the women, that I expect all women's organisation throughout St. Vincent and the Grenadines to be consulted as a body and I am expecting that our women's organisations to get ready to participate in this particular important exercise. Mr. Speaker, I wish this motion, this resolution, a safe passage through this Honourable House. Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

**HONOURABLE GIRLYN MIGUEL:** Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I rise to give my wholehearted support to the motion before us. Mr. Speaker, I am privileged to remember the days previous to 1979. I remember the late Honourable Hudson Kemuel Tannis coming out to Marriaqua and inviting many of the young people there that we should come for consultation at the Marriaqua Community Centre. And Mr. Speaker, I want here and now to say to this Honourable House that in the beginning much consultation was done, it was new to us we were on the threshold of becoming a new nation, we were about to let go of England's apron string and we need to have a constitution that was suited for us in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Mr. Speaker, at the present moment the government of the day promised in its manifesto, good governance. The Government of the day, promised to build a modern democratic productive, just, peaceful and caring society to be enjoyed by its entire people. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members profound promises. The government of the day, promised to focus on ten policies and one of these is, deepening political democracy, strengthening individual rights and freedoms and upholding the law and the constitution. Mr. Speaker, the Government also promised to reform the existing constitution through extensive and intensive public debate between and among the people of our nation at home and abroad. Mr. Speaker, we cannot ask for better vision. Mr. Speaker, I want at this time to feel very proud to be a part of this team. Importantly so Mr. Speaker, because there are people like me and others sitting in this Honourable House who would know that our country though it is 22 years old that we do not know enough about our constitution. In my time in the senior section of the school we did from time to time try our very best to bring the constitution to the knowledge to our senior students, but as we know within the senior sections of our schools our seniors are not able to read so very well. Enough consultations were not held in our local communities and so I think we did let go of something that was very, very important.

And for those listening today, you might asked well we are hearing of constitutional reform. What really is a constitution? I dare say Mr. Speaker, it is a system of fundamental principles or rules according to which a country is governed. Our present constitution as I have said before, it came into effect in the year 1979 when we became an independent nation. Mr. Speaker, we know that there is an old adage which runs if there is anything that is constant is change and so from time to time we need to change. We change as we grow older. We change as we get bigger, fatter or thinner whatever it is we need to change. We change in many different ways. We are 22

years old and today our citizens need to be educated, Mr. Speaker, we cannot over emphasize the fact that we must educate to eradicate. And we must eradicate ignorance. If we are a people who are well informed, if we are people who know our rights we would not be getting into so much trouble. Mr. Speaker, it is well for us to believe that the Government must be accountable to its citizens. It is well for us to know that the Prime Minister of this country has enormous powers, it is like saying if we can give the Prime Minister the chance when I talk no dogs bark. The powers are enormous Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I personally believe is that Parliamentarians must show forth integrity at all times. It is not only when we think it is important to do so, but even under the cover of darkness, that we must be persons of integrity. But today can we say we have seen this, all of this must be enforced, it must be enshrined in our constitution.

Mr. Speaker, there must in a reformed constitution be greater efficiency and commitment by all sectors of our community in the building of our nation. And in so saying Mr. Speaker, I must remember all the hard work that was put in to this constitution and I want to add that we need to be very, very careful as to what changes we will make in the process of reforming this constitution.

Mr. Speaker, I want at this time to refer to the constitution and I want to refer to page 7. And it is under number 3 (h); I am speaking now as the Minister in the Social Development Ministry. And in (h) it says, in the case of a person who is or is reasonably suspected to be of unsound mind, addicted to drugs or alcohol or a vagrant for the purpose of his care or his treatment or the protection of the community.” Mr. Speaker, in our Government’s vision for improving methods to help these persons who are so unfortunate we are trying our very best to find a suitable place to have a “half-way- house” or crisis centre, Mr. Speaker, we see here that this is not so, enshrined in our present day constitution. It is very, very important as we see so many of these persons roaming the streets at an alarming rate, some are half naked some of them we can keep them in these centres whereby they can receive constant training, we can change their occupation, we can counsel them and we can help to rehabilitate them so that they can return to normal life. If these things are to be done Mr. Speaker, I am of the opinion that all of this must be enshrined in such an important document as our constitution. I note as I went through the document Mr. Speaker, that on page 40 under the executive, I note Mr. Speaker, under section 51 which says Ministers of the Government there shall be a Prime Minister of St. Vincent who shall be appointed by the Governor General. Whenever the Governor General has occasion to appoint a Prime Minister he shall appoint a representative who appears to him likely to command the support of the majority of the representatives. Mr. Speaker, in looking at this something came to my mind, such an important position needs to be under guided with someone whose post is regularize and that person is the Deputy Prime Minister, if we look at it, we would not see this being there, but I think it is very, very important that in our deliberations that we try our best to regularized the post of the Deputy Prime

Minister it should not be anybody whom I love but it should be a person who is able, it must be a person who must be able to make decisions in the event that something comes up critically, that there is an emergency that you have the right person for that.

Mr. Speaker, I went on a little further as it has always been in my mind even while I was a worker in the education system. I want us to turn to page 51 under the public service and I see here, it says, there shall be a public service commission for St. Vincent (a) a chairman appointed by the Governor General acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, one member appointed by the Governor General acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister and not less than one or more than three other members appointed by the Governor General acting in the accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister. Mr. Speaker, we in this Honourable House have always been speaking of the importance of education. There is no provision for a voice here for a Teacher's commission or even from a teacher's association, Mr. Speaker, I think it is high time; it is time that we think more highly of our teachers. Mr. Speaker, after a child would have left the home, you take the child to be inoculated in the health centre but the child only goes to the doctor when that child becomes sick, but from the home the child is sent to the school, Mr. Speaker, I think it is high time, and I would love to see this, really enshrined in our constitution.

Mr. Speaker, something which is very piecing. Mr. Speaker, we say that we respect our citizens and we see from time to time that persons who would have been rejected at the poles and soundly beaten that these persons come into the House of Representatives, Mr. Speaker, I dare say, it is a slap in the face of our people and I would love to see it, enshrined here in this Constitution. A constitution is no document to toy with. Though our present constitution has much strength, it has its weaknesses, but I dare say, it has served us in very, very good stead, and Mr. Speaker, I cannot over emphasis the fact that we as a nation need to take time out; we need to be extremely careful as we go about reforming this constitution. I would like as well Mr. Speaker, to add that we begin to sensitize the general public that in all our ministries that we organize, go into the communities because we know that if our people do not understand, it does not make any sense that we try to put plans for them, we are a government of inclusion. I feel that at this time, a very important time in our history, that we need to take a different approach, we are global village, we have to try to do our work in connection with work that is being done in the wider community.

Mr. Speaker, it is only just recently that from our Ministry persons went to discussions with forming of legislation for children and families in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. And Mr. Speaker, it was joint initiative with UNISEF and NCH action for children. Within our present constitution, there is not very that tells about our children, and if there is a time that we need to focus on this is now. Mr. Speaker, we cannot over emphasize the importance of our children when the older ones would have passed on we need to have an informed society and we must begin to do some more informing. We must

begin even to have adult education, because many of our adults who through no fault of their own, Mr. Speaker, would have dropped out of school, that age group between 14 and 29 they are hungry Mr. Speaker, and I want here and now Mr. Speaker, to recommend that we in the education system as we try our very best to organize for them at their level and to have their input in all of these discussions so that at the end of the day they would feel very proud to know that they too would have made an input in the reform of the constitution of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Mr. Speaker, there are many more areas that we can touch on, but Mr. Speaker, looking at the size of our side here and looking at the time I know that there are others who would like to make inputs and so I want to wish this motion safe passage through this Honorable House.

**HONOURABLE DR DOUGLAS SLATER:** Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I rise also to give my support to this motion, it would be difficult not to repeat most of what has been said by the previous debaters but, it is also important that all of us show our support for this important motion to reform what is our constitution. I want to place on record my congratulations to this Government for its work, in fact, even before we were a Government it was our party that really led the way in proposing constitutional reform, even though we didn't have the executive power to do so, and I think that that should be recognized. Why constitutional reform, well constitutional reform as many speakers have said before is now recognized because the previous constitution has served us and generally it has served us well but there is now need for change, we must recognize that there is quite often objections or resistance to change, I am however encouraged by so far the contribution from the other side which seem obvious they would have listened to the party that is now in Government and obvious that they have studied the document that was mentioned by Senator Young, and many of our speakers on this side, 'The Constitutional Reform the Discussion', which was put out by the Unity Labour Party while in Opposition in July of the year 2000. So it is indeed a pleasure that we hear coming from the other side, support for most if not all of what we have proposed, and it is really a discussion of "together now," and we welcome now.

The Constitution is an important document, it is one that has been defined as a series of principles that guides the governance of our country and the rights and privileges of our people, and to the extent that we are recognizing that there has been some shortcomings, we need to move forward in improving on it, and that is the reason why we are debating this today, because I think that if we do not, we run the risk of running into certain problems that occasioned, probably in our favour, occasioned the change of government because if the power of the people were more enshrined in our constitution, maybe what happened in April 2000 where a Government that did not listen to the voices of the people, suffered the consequences of not doing so, might not happen, but be it may we must encourage the participation of the people in Government and that is one of the reasons for constitution reform.

How to reform? Well we really need to do at first what we are doing now, Mr. Speaker, having the members of the legislature, Members of Parliament, debate and educate the listeners, the constituents, the citizens of this country, but we know that we have to do more than that, some speakers, the Honourable Minister of Social Development and others have said we have to improve on our educational system, adult education and certainly we need to produce a constitution even though we may not be able to achieve that task, Mr. Speaker, in educating our people enough to properly understand the language of our constitution as it is now and for that reason we need to respond to the proposal by Senator Young and Senator George that it must be in simple language, language that is clear, language that is easily understood. Many of us are not too familiarized with the legal jargon and quite often these documents are written in sophisticated language and we must be aware of that, it is for this reason why we propose as in this constitutional document that extensive discussion and debate be done Mr. Speaker, throughout the nation, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

I would wish to pick a few points which I would want to enhance the support that must be addressed, the question of Constituency Boundaries Commission and its role, for example Mr. Speaker, I think we need a commission that would look very carefully at the distribution of the numbers in constituencies, because I happened to represent the most populated constituency, a constituency with well over 6,000 registered voters and we also know that there are constituencies with probably only 25% of that number, I speak of the Northern and Southern Grenadines. I know that one may argue that that is a special case because of the plural nature of our country, but we know also that quite often if this division is allowed by the executive, the government of the day, it may well be used to enhance their chances of winning an election, and even though we are now in that position we want to put on record that this Government believes in justice and equity and therefore a constitutional reform addressing that issue is one we believe in.

There is the issue of representation of our citizens in diaspora, I do not have a clear position on it but I think since we are encouraging the participation of our citizens in the Diaspora, we may have to consider what may be their role in electing representatives. I know it is not an easy position to take, there are some who may say that because of the numbers that are overseas, some believe there are more Vincentians overseas than in homeland, and it might not be fair that number overseas be given an opportunity to decide what happens on the ground when they do not really live the day to day realities of the life of citizens of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, but I think there is some room for some compromise or some way we can decide on having them participating and that is one issue I imagine would be debated.

The question of our existing First Past-the-Post System, our West Minister System versus proportional representation this too is involved debate, Mr. Speaker, and it is for this reason why we really need to have the wide debate and education, because many

of us really do not understand quite clearly the concept of proportional representation and we have the example of New Zealand where that is probably one of the most successful ones but they have a lot of problems, and we do not want to make as suggested by previous speakers, we do not want to change what is working well, we do not want to go and change to a system that we do not clearly understand, so therefore I am proposing that in our debate we need to have persons who understand these systems, Mr. Speaker, who will educate us, all of us as to the pros and cons before we make a decision.

Fixed date of elections; we have proposed that we should give serious consideration; but certainly there would be a move to minimize the power of the Prime Minister, and I don't think that our Prime Minister would have any problems, reduce, reduce the powers. (Laughter) Well, it is all proposed by us, you know, so we don't have any problems with discussing this at all. It is there in black and white. [Interjection] Exactly, that is the interesting thing. You know, I find it very interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the previous administration has been there for 17 years and the whole question of constitutional reform has been proposed over and over and over again and was never supported by that administration; but it is better late than never we are encouraged that you are now supporting what we are proposing.

Mr. Speaker, the whole question of integrity legislation, and the Hansard has the records of the several attempts made by this side of the House when we were over there to try and get the whole question of integrity legislation being discussed and debated when the former administration was in the Executive, to no avail, I am saying that this must be considered and this Government must look seriously, in fact we are on the way already in making moves towards this debate of integrity legislation.

The question of what type of leadership in terms whether it is Executive President or Ceremonial President, this is also one we must really, -- we need proper education Mr. Speaker, because before we make this decision I think our citizens must fully understand, or as much as possible understand what does each of this system or style represents, and I think that we are all not too clear yet as to the pros and cons of it and I think the discussions and education on these issues are very important before we make a change. I personally may have a preference for a republic type government, where we have an executive president but then again, as this Government has always said we respect the wishes of the majority and that is why we are proposing that this be debated, and we will go along with the wishes of the people.

I support the idea of an Ombudsman, and I think it is long overdue, certainly we would have to have clear the terms of reference of this person and certainly we will have to try our utmost to de-politicize the selection of such person. We cannot be too naive that is not going to be an easy task, because everyone would have their right to political preference and so selecting a citizen who would be an Ombudsman in a small society

that person would also have their political preference but we hope in selecting such a person, it would be somebody of impeccable integrity.

Senator Shallow's proposal to change in a Caribbean context is well taken, but it is nothing on this side, we are on record as proposing that we wish to develop a Caribbean Civilization and certainly if we are thinking of a change in constitution we inherently will support that. It is of note that our current Prime Minister is heading the move towards OECS unity and certainly to strengthen our move towards Caribbean Unity and therefore where the reform in our constitution may enhance the Caribbean unity I am certain that it would be given favourable response by this side and certainly on the other side.

The Teachers Service Commission too, is one issue that is a hundred percent supported on this side and I want to personally lend my support to that.

I also want to also support the proposal by Senator George, and I always found it strange there must have been some good reason why it was decided that a Senator must be 21 years and over even though in order to be an elector you must be 18. I do not know the reason but certainly I think it is contradictory, and I will support a change where to be a Senator it should coincide with the age of 18 which is the age of being an elector. I will support that position.

In order to change our constitution Section 38 outlines what is required and just to revise that we require a two-thirds majority in the House of Representatives and also a two-third majority in a referendum. This is very important. It is important because even though we may have that two-thirds majority in the House of Representatives it is important that our citizens, our people are convinced of the need, the necessity to have such a reform. It is therefore incumbent on the other side, the Opposition to support this reform, enough to have their supporters throwing their weight behind this because it is in the interest of all Vincentians. I will say that this debate is a non-partisan debate. I will say so because it is demonstrated by the support of the other members of the other side. But when we look at it we are all interested in the improvement of Governance and +therefore we cannot be to partisan and oppose just for opposing sake, and so I wish to encourage the members on the other side that they too have a responsibility to educate their supporters and other Vincentians; to take the task along with Government to promote the need for and the process of Constitutional reform.

So, Mr. Speaker I am convinced that that will be so. I am convinced that our people will be ready for this change and with that in mind, at this point Mr. Speaker, I wish to give my full support to and wish this motion a safe passage forward. Thank you.

**HONOURABLE ST. CLAIRE LEACOCK:** Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I rise to make my contribution to this very important motion. I am in agreement with my

colleagues on the other side, Mr. Speaker that this is a motion that requires a non-partisan approach and so much of what I have to say today Mr. Speaker, reflects this thought, this acceptance. But I start Mr. Speaker, by reminding the Honourable Members of this House that while we choose rightfully to debate this very important subject today, that in our Blessed St. Vincent and the Grenadines perhaps two-thirds of the country do not know what we are talking about and what all the fuss is about, because perhaps close to two-thirds of the country are under the age of 22 and Mr. Speaker, besides yourself and the Honourable Prime Minister and I believe the Deputy, there are not very many in the House who have spent more of their lives on the other side of the Constitution, the old colonial form, than ourselves of course. Senator Young just a few years past the 22 and of course making a sterling contribution here today, and I am not so sure of my Honourable friend the Minister of Healthy, Douglas Slater, but Mr. Speaker notwithstanding the demographic changes and the relatively young population, constitutional reform does in fact deserve our attention.

I would however submit to you and to this House Mr. Speaker that we need to just stop for a little while and take some stock as to where we are today and perhaps where we were in 1979 when this constitution came into being so that we get a greater appreciation of the urgency of the situation and perhaps more importantly what we are trying to achieve by addressing constitutional reform in this House.

In 1979, Mr. Speaker, the world was a vastly different world, the founding fathers, the Late R. Milton Cato whom I had very great respect, and who made such a sterling contribution to this country and I say that with the same vain that I hope the other side would identify Sir James Mitchell, not as a founding father but as the one who has moulded the nation, the baton passed, you know, if you want to give him the credit of the post founding fathers I would live with that too, the post independence period, I would live with that too. I make the point however, that in as much as we recognized the sterling contribution of the Late R. Cato, so too the records and posterity speak kindly of Sir James. And maybe after your five year term Honourable Prime Minister history will address that.

Mr. Speaker, I make the point that we live in a vastly different world and the point is that in 1979 we were really coming out of the Colonial epoch, the period of colonialism where much of what was done in St. Vincent and the Grenadines was guided and directed by those from outside. Today it is not so, Mr. Speaker, we have as a people proudly taken command of virtually all of our national institutions, and we must there say with very many respects, we have done, or attempting to do a pretty good job. But I say that to make the point that as a nation State the challenges that confront our country today cannot be addressed in the same form and fashion and in that regard the provisions in our constitution may be of major importance in making our country more adaptable to hostile international environment in which we would find a place.

In this regard then Mr. Speaker, the question of Constitutional reform ought not to be an exercise of change for change sake, but it ought to be an exercise in which fundamentally we attempt to make ourselves more amendable, flexible, innovative and capable of being proactive in this hostile world, by providing the kind of regulatory framework that best helps to integrate us as a part of the world community. As you know, very well, Mr. Speaker, today even more so than we did 22 years ago we live in a rules driven world. Whether we speak about World Trade Organisation, whether it is the United Nations or our own CARICOM or the OECS, it is a rules driven world. And we have to be assured in this country that the fundamental laws that guides the way we as a people operate does not inhibit our progress, but as far as is possible facilitate our coming to grips with these new challenges.

In a sense therefore Mr. Speaker, the question of constitutional reform begs another question: what kind of St. Vincent and the Grenadines do we want, for ourselves and for generations yet unborn? In this regard I fully understand, Mr. Speaker, the important interrogations brought by Honourable Members in this House as to questions the right for example to appoint the Prime Minister, whether the people should have that direct right or whether it should be left to the elected members of the House. Whether we should become a republic and I think we should be careful, we should tread carefully there because these two have very serious implications, whether we continue with a Presidential system, whether it be ceremonial or executive. All these are important questions and we must indeed ask and answer those questions, Mr. Speaker, but our answer to those questions, I submit, Mr. Speaker, must not be for the aggrandizement of those of us who have the privilege of being in the Parliament but for the betterment of our Vincentian populace at large.

I therefore appreciate Mr. Speaker, that a reformed constitution ought to take cognizance of an increasing role of what is to be called civic society, and as far as is possible allow them a voice, if not in the Parliament, certainly in the political theater of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. I must confess, Mr. Speaker, in this regard I would much prefer to see a Parliament with a broader Senate which allows for multi interest representation from the Chamber of Commerce, Employers Federation, the Farmers Community, our women, the trade unions, perhaps sports and culture, the various interest groups, and I know, there must be a cut off point, people who perhaps can be nominated in their own independent right to give a balance to political appointments that must of necessity constitute our Parliament.

I recognized too, Mr. Speaker, the value of the clarion call of the potential role of an Ombudsman, an independent voice, a fair voice, a voice for equity, a voice for compassion in our Caribbean societies. But sometimes Mr. Speaker, we have to be mindful that what's in a name; because there are very many Caribbean countries where an Ombudsman is already a part of the constitutional provisions, but yet there is

no hard core evidence that it has made any meaningful change to the quality of life through equity, freedom, fairness, in that particular Caribbean society. So that if, when, Mr. Speaker, we make decisions on the role of the Ombudsman let it be one that really brings integrity and has some key. And I understand the challenges that that proposed in a small country where everyone knows the other, and they almost always have some political shade of one form or the other I do feel however, to go back to my original point of Senatorial broadening in the Parliament, that we as a country also have to examine very carefully, how well, and how best as a country we can tap in to the wider expertise that resides in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. It is a mistake to believe that because some of us, temporarily, myself included, have the privilege, I say it is indeed a privilege Mr. Speaker, to be in this Parliament, that as politicians we have all the answers we know it all. I believe there is some value as we may see in the United States, their system, where upon the appointment of a President, that individual has the benefit, the privilege to be able to look around him, in his society and choose from the best brains, best talents, best demonstration of volunteerism to serve in the Congress, or in the Senate, and to make United States of America a powerful country. [Interjection] Correction noted Mr. Speaker, the point I want to make is that we must be allowed to draw on the widest pool of expertise available to us at all times to serve our St. Vincent and the Grenadines. So the that the question of a bi-cameral and a unicameral Parliament I understand would get full ventilation and you can be assured Mr. Speaker, and Honourable Members on the other side that we on this side of the House would approach that question in the most objective of manners.

In deed, Mr. Speaker, there will be no end of issues to be raised in the discussions I believe that would abound as we advance discussions for a new constitution for St. Vincent and the Grenadines but I am sure Mr. Speaker, that the Honourable Members on that side of the House are as mindful as we are on this side of the House, that political democracy important as it is does not represent an end in itself. It may well be Mr. Speaker, that political democracy maybe a precondition for the economic franchisement of our people. But when I go back to the fundamental question that I asked earlier in my presentation, of what kind of St. Vincent and the Grenadines do we want today, in the year 2001 some things immediately come to mind, people want jobs, they want opportunities for education, they want good health care provisions, they want justice, they want equity, they want a good and improved quality of life for themselves and for their children and much of these, Mr. Speaker, while supported by a political democracy are better generated by the economic and franchisement of our people and by the economic conditions that prevail in our society.

I say that to make this point, therefore, Mr. Speaker, that the fundamental tenet of our constitution must be to drive economic reform and to ensure that St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a place that we all wish to live in and to enjoy ourselves, because while Mr. Speaker, the Parliament may be a rule making body we also must be reminded that rules by themselves do not always run things, sometimes the rules can be the very

constraining influence, some of us are familiar with the statement 'the law is a fool' I know the word fool is used but the meaning is gotten across. This Parliament for instance today, Mr. Speaker, is constituted to some extent by the derogation of the constitution with pressures that are brought to bear in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and rather than approaching the resolution to the constitution, provisions we on this have fallen into, a higher order of a free spirit of the people, and we cut short the term of office that the constitution would have provided for us. I say that in support of the fact that it is not always the rules but sometimes the spirit of the rules that is important. The support offered me on the other side, by my long-standing friend and colleague, the Honourable Minister of Transport and Housing is appreciated and I know he regretted he has spoken before me and so cannot speak in further support. I have every confidence in the Honourable Minister of Transport and Works that the things he must do for the constituency in which I live will be done and you can have no fear about that. [Interjection] The Minister of Transport is a good man. Leave him alone.

Mr. Speaker, I suspect that while we in this House are attempting to address constitutional reform the Prime Minister would be ever mindful of the fact, that we are doing so at a time that we are talking about the whole question of OECS unity et cetera, and it would not be lost in this House that to the extent that there be some harmonization in the way the various constitution in the OECS community are synchronized, and enhanced the deepening of the OECS region. And so I say to this House at this time that even while we take our own steps and initiatives, and even mindful of the fact that we are all people in other bowl at any given time there may be a need to keep the others abreast of what we are thinking of doing here in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, so that we are running at the same pace, perhaps in the same direction and that our revised constitutions do not become hindrances for further integration of the Caribbean region to which we are all committed. In other words, Mr. Speaker, let us not believe that by virtue of the fact that we can reform our own constitution that we are islands unto ourselves, we must think in an integrated and in a regional manner as we approach this piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I was very much encouraged by the presentation of my Senatorial colleague, Honourable Senator George, which I thought was a very useful presentation, and I take on board the point that we have to be careful with the things we sanctify and she made mention of the constitution in that regard. I say to her while I would agree generally with her presentation while we may not want to speak in terms of sanctifying the constitution, we must be equally resolved not to violate the constitution. For me it is pretty close to being sacred once we have agreed upon it in this House that the way we would conduct our affairs in this blessed land of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Mr. Speaker, I take note too, of the observation of the Honourable Minister of Health of how best do we capture or reflect the contributions of our brothers and sisters who live

abroad, in the other Diaspora. I am thankful to him for not recommending the Burnham style politics of proxies and I have every confidence it is not one of the cards that he has up his sleeve when he make his worthwhile contribution towards this Bill. We on this side would like to have their voices represented but we urge caution at this time if the notion of proxy votes is being contemplated. The experience in our Caribbean region has not been very instructive or demonstrative and even in the first world, the great United States of America we recently had great lessons of the pains caused in Miami community with the counting of votes of its military abroad et cetera. Nonetheless it is a matter that must be addressed by this House.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard talk of integrity legislation bandied about, we are happy on this side of the House that the Honourable members on the other side have taken note of the long standing commitment of the New Democratic Party administration towards integrity in Government. And we are sure Mr. Speaker, in the passage of time that they will go back and read, and read very carefully the reports and our own position that a greater result can be achieved if in this particular piece of legislation we also go the route of a regional approach, so what is done in St. Vincent is also done in St. Lucia, in Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts, et cetera. But I say too, Mr. Speaker, that it would also be to our shame and perhaps our disgrace if we members of this Honourable House, have to await our appointments, election or nomination to consider the importance of integrity. Integrity for us, Mr. Speaker, must be a way of life, it must not be imposed by laws, it must be reflective on our values, in our customs, in our culture and in our more not by legal dictates. And when, Mr. Speaker, as the Honourable Prime Minister has agreed, that the better way to go, is to have it, to be fundamental part of our value system, we could reinforce it with the legal framework, we in this House find ourselves at one on the direction ahead.

Mr. Speaker, in giving support to this important discussion of constitutional reform I made the point earlier that political sovereignty, political democracy, important as it is by itself, is not a, be it and end all for our Vincentian community. I end my contribution on constitutional reform by submitting to this Honourable House Mr. Speaker, that one of the things that we are charged to do, through every piece of legislation passed through this House, is to see how best, as honourable men and women, we can improve and have become a part of the culture of our people all that is now best captured in the existing constitution, not just of a free spirit but of a country where fairness, justice, and equity prevail and that whatever we do, in reforming this constitution, we will continue for a long, long time, Mr. Speaker to be a leading light and to be a liberal democracy upon which our children will sing for us, very many praises. I therefore, have very great pleasure Mr. Speaker, to supporting the notion of constitutional reform and given every assurance that the substantial research and interest that this side of House has always held for constitutional reform will be brought to bear and the growing 45% of the populace that supports this side of the House will stand behind us, as we edge closer and closer to that important 50 plus one percent

that I am told that is just around the corner. Mr. Speaker, I am much obliged, to have made this contribution and to have won the support once more of my Honourable colleagues and friends of the other side, that the pace that we have blaze and the trail that we have left will continue to be cleared efficiently, I hope by the Honourable fellows, colleagues on the other side. I am much obliged, Mr. Speaker, I wish this motion successful debate, successful passage and to become a reality, not for the ennoblement of the civilization, Mr. Speaker, but for the ennoblement of our people towards a better life. I thank you.

**HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER:** Any further debate?

**HONOURABLE JULIAN FRANCIS:** Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I rise to give some support to this motion that is before us, I had indicated to the Leader of the House the Honourable Prime Minister that I would not speak, on the matter but having listened to the debate, I thought it wise I make a little contribution to the debate.

Mr. Speaker, I think maybe we should review the Standing Orders of this House, because if you realize Mr. Speaker, the Opposition got another bite at the cherry, on this debate, Senator Leacock spoke again today after Senator Burns Bonadie whom he replaced had already spoken on this motion, so the Opposition having five members of the House were able to speak, six of them were able to speak, but that is democracy. And we are heading in the right direction and I suppose it is part of the constitutional reform.

Mr. Speaker, this matter of constitutional reform has been with us for a long time, I think there are certain deficiencies that were picked up in the constitution shortly after our Independence in 1979, but shortly thereafter, the father of our nation at the time, the late Right Honourable Milton Cato his government fell in 1984 and thereafter the NDP was in power for 17 years and we spoke of the deficiencies over the 17 years Mr. Speaker, that exist within the constitution but I am convinced Mr. Speaker that over the past 15 or 17 years, the NDP has made political football out of constitutional reform. I recall very early after 1994 election constitutional reform again rose in the discussion, at that time, the constitution of Parliament was similar to what it is today, just that it is reversed, Mr. Speaker, then we had three elected members on the other side and two senators and on this side the then Government NDP had 12 and 4 and we raised in this House, the matter of integrity legislation as a preview or part of the approach of constitutional reform and heard Senator Leacock referring to this earlier on.

The fact of the matter is Mr. Speaker, is that integrity legislation brought before this Honourable House was rejected by the NDP administration, totally rejected, there was vote on it and the motion that was passed fell. The NDP administration hid behind regionalism, again repeated today by Senator Leacock. We cannot continue to hide these matters Mr. Speaker, you know it reminds me of the modus operandi of the NDP

over the years; the airport construction and development was used as political football. The North Leeward highway was used as political football by the NDP. In fact the NDP campaigned for three elections on the North Leeward highway. And on airport, whenever you hear airport talk start you know elections around the corner, that has been the norm of the NDP administration, and basically Mr. Speaker, constitutional reform under the NDP fell into the trap and it was only used at election time.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall quite vividly that just before the 1998 elections between the 1994 and 1998 elections we in this Honourable House then Opposition and it reminded me significantly about the story in the Bible about David and Goliath, three members elected on the Opposition side and 12 on this Honourable side, the then NDP government, we were able to remove from Office the then Attorney General, then Honourable Parnel Campbell, David and Goliath, three against twelve. But Mr. Speaker, it is only after the Honourable Parnel Campbell left office that he thought the political system should be changed. Only after he left, he spent many years there and thought it very useful. I say this Mr. Speaker, because I hear coming from the Opposition benches this morning, very glowing speech about what should be done, and what changes should be done and contracts giving out and all this sort of talk. Mr. Speaker, they had 17 years. In fact Mr. Speaker, between 1989 and 1994 the NDP had 15 seats in this Parliament, and 67 percent of the electorate, you don't need any other qualifications, Mr. Speaker, to amend or change a constitution. In fact, they violated the constitution by not appointing an Opposition Senator, you remember those days Mr. Speaker, so to listen this morning the very glowing speeches from the Opposition I can only say, Mr. Speaker they speak from both sides of their mouth, while the ULP speaks on one side of its mouth only. We have been consistent in our call for constitutional reform, Mr. Speaker, the matter has been so bad under the NDP administration that the then Prime Minister even forgot that he had set up a commission to review constitution when asked about it, when it came between the 1998, just after the 1998 he said to the press, he can't remember setting up the commission on this matter, that is to show you how deep it was, or how superficial it was with the NDP, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Unity Labour is committed, has been committed will always be committed to constant change for the development of this country. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of July, 2000, the Unity Labour Party presented two documents in this country for discussions, that's while we were in Opposition, we did a lot of things while we were in Opposition, Mr. Speaker, in fact we did more in Opposition that the NDP government did in government between 1998 and the year 2001. "The Discussion Papers on Constitutional Reform" Mr. Speaker is one of those documents and "A Social Contract with Civil Society, a Discussion". Mr. Speaker, this document on page 6, I think encapsulates some of the matters that we need to consider for this constitutional reform. Some have been mentioned already this morning, but it says

**“in addition to committing itself to this wide ranging constitutional review the ULP particularized certain pledges in its manifesto on the issues of constitutional reform and good governance, including the appointment of an Ombudsman, establishment of an electoral boundaries commission, the reduction of the enormous powers of the Prime Minister, the reform of Parliament to make it more effective, responsive and more responsible to the people.”**

Mr. Speaker we have done that; today this nation is hearing us debate this in Parliament, the only time you ever heard Parliament debated before is during budget, every single Parliamentary meeting now Mr. Speaker, is broadcast live on radio. The Prime Minister is the humble Prime Minister I have known since I have been alive for the last 51 years.

[Interjection] The Honourable Senator Leacock sometimes likes to hear me speak a little more than I should. I was just about to wrap up but on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April in the year 2000, Mr. Speaker, a bill was brought to this Parliament to increase the salaries and pensions of the then NDP government and members of Parliament, our political leader, then Leader of the Opposition cautioned the then Government about that bill, they didn't listen Mr. Speaker, that was April 19<sup>th</sup> the year 2000, I heard this morning the Honourable Senator talking that they cut short their term and it was unconstitutional, well, Mr. Speaker, we are speaking here this morning, about the people's involvement in constitutional reform, it started April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2000, that is why we are here today talking constitutional reform, only six months after the ULP has been in Government. So to ask me if we have reduced the powers of the Honourable Prime Minister, I used that analogy to tell you this, and that is why you are now in the House of Parliament because had Senator Burns Bonadie been taken under the wings of the Prime Minister and then the Prime Minister listening to the people, the most humble Prime Minister, I have met in this country, you were allowed to come and sit in this Honourable House, as a Senator; Senator Leacock, so I can only say therefore that the people's power in this issue has been greater than that of the Prime Minister and I would say therefore the Prime Ministers had been reduced, considerable since the Unity Labour Party had taken office.

In fact, we know Mr. Speaker, that the constitution gives the Prime Minister executive powers. There are certain decisions that the Prime Minister can make that he does not have to refer to anybody but ever since we have been in office, Mr. Speaker, I have known our Prime Minister to consult even on executive matters. He does not take executive decisions without consulting with senior members or all members of his Cabinet. So, Mr. Speaker, we have started constitutional reform but you see the Opposition is so still dazed by the blows of March 28<sup>th</sup> that they cannot realize that constitutional reform has begun in this country.

Mr. Speaker, we were saying that the reform of Parliament to make it more effective, responsive and responsible to the people, the modernization of central government, the introduction of integrity legislation for Parliamentarians and the restoration of democratic local government within 12 months of taking office. Mr. Speaker, this Government intends to live up to these commitments and promises to the people. As Senator Young says in her presentation the first working day of Parliament, Mr. Speaker, the Unity Labour Party government presented this motion in Parliament for debate; it so happened it got delayed, we are now six, seven months afterwards, but the sole reason being is that we are still trying to do repair work for the mess that was left by the NDP administration, that is why this matter has been delayed in the debate, no other reason, it has been on the Order Paper ever since the 17<sup>th</sup> of April, or the first working day of Parliament, the 17<sup>th</sup> of April was the opening. But the only reason was because the Attorney General's Chambers and other Ministries have to be working overtime to clean up the mess that was left by the former administration.

But Mr. Speaker, I just want to say a little bit more on modernization of Central Government. Mr. Speaker, we live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and I have some accounting background, I spent considerable time in this field, and I am appalled at the way the government finances are managed. The system that we have inherited in this country Mr. Speaker, has to be reviewed. I understand just before, not too long ago, a new system called the smart stream system has been introduced in the Government accounting system. I do not have the initials behind my name, with the accounting symbols and the accounting recognition but to tell me in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Mr. Speaker, that you have to close off an accounting system to prepare a report in the days of computerization, Mr. Speaker, I cannot accept that. Cannot accept it. In the quarterly allocations of my Ministry, Mr. Speaker, and this is one of the hindrances to operating problems in the Ministry of Transport, Works and Housing. Because anything over a hundred dollars, Mr. Speaker, that has to be paid out of the Treasury has to be done by way of a contract. So if you go to the Grenadines to do a job and you go at the Restaurant, and five of you went down, a team went down, and you buy lunch and it comes up to more than \$100.00 you have to get a contract signed with the restaurant owner for him to collect his money. Mr. Speaker, we live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where plastic is the way we go. I am not saying that we put credit cards into the Treasury, but we have to review our accounting system within the Government.

Within the quarter, Mr. Speaker, the quarter just begun in October, the system in the Treasury closes on 19<sup>th</sup> October, 19<sup>th</sup> April, and 14<sup>th</sup> of December, how could we possibly Mr. Speaker function, we have to review this sort of thing, we have to modernize it. Honourable Senator Leacock is steeped in these accounting matters and he understands what I am speaking about that is why he is so quiet. But for the 17 years that the NDP has been in power, Mr. Speaker, we have heard of computerization and improvement in the Government accounting system, but this is the best they could

come up with. I spoke to some Barbadians who were here a couple weeks ago who were introducing some computer systems and they said to me, their understanding of the Smart Stream system, is that it is about 15 years old, Mr. Speaker, so I don't know if the smart is still in the Smart Stream. But I really would wish the powers, the authorities, the Ministry of Finance to look seriously into this aspect of it and it is poor people who suffers in this whole process, Mr. Speaker, we have to improve the way that we pay people for their services and goods, in this country, we have to do it.

A man will get a ten-day contract to clean a road, or he carries out a gang to clean a drain, ten days, it takes the public servant, two three weeks to write up the contract and get it pass through the different systems and then proper payment vouchers and go Treasury, but it cannot reach there before the 19<sup>th</sup> when the system at Treasury close off, so you don't get money again until another three, four weeks, so you get ten days work and you have to three months, six weeks, eight weeks to collect your money, by the time you collect the money the people done credit that out in the shop. So they are back to zero, so I am saying Mr. Speaker, the system is not a modern day system, it is not people friendly, and we have to spend some money and put some experts in this matter to correct the situation. I think I wanted to make that signal contribution in my debate, this morning, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I will end the way I begun that this Unity Labour Party Government Mr. Speaker, lives up to his word, we made a commitment on constitutional reform within six months we are in Parliament debating the commission to be set up to bring about constitutional reform and to recap Mr. Speaker, for 17 years, the NDP government has used constitutional reform as a political football.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when I listened this morning to Senator Shallow and spoke of awarding contracts I remember during 1989 to 1994 this Honourable House agreeing to pass sole power to then Leader of the NDP the Honourable Sir James Mitchell to do whatever he wants with Ottley Hall. I recall that quite vividly, Mr. Speaker, because after 1992. Today Mr. Speaker, do you know what is the result of that act, Mr. Speaker, the largest corrupt act that ever took place in this country. I think it would break world record, I think it would go down in the Guinness Book of Records for any small island state. Because of that single act in Parliament it costs this country over \$300 million and what do we have for it an asset that is valued only \$18 million US dollars, but during that time Mr. Speaker, we could have been amending our constitution, we could have been bringing constitutional reform to the people, so that the people could have participation and a more significant say in projects like Ottley Hall. It might have eliminated and avoided the Dr. Rolla's and the Bencasome Adames had you utilized the 67% vote that you got in 1989 and the 15 seats without appointing any Opposition to do the constitutional reform.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be part of a government that within six months could bring this motion to Parliament. I will give it my full support through this House.

**HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER:** Further debate on the Bill?

**HONOURABLE MONTGOMERY DANIEL:** Mr. Speaker, I rise before this Honourable House to give support to a motion that would have been moved by our Prime Minister, Dr. the Honourable Ralph Gonsalves on the motional Constitutional Reform. Mr. Speaker, today the world over, we are faced with a paradox, while some countries celebrate spread of democracy others lament the decline in good governance. And what has happened in our beautiful country within the last 17 years, is cause for the ULP administration to come before this Honourable House, to bring this motion before the House because we have seen the decline in good governance of this country. Mr. Speaker, in St. Vincent and the Grenadines we have harvested a colonial system, a system by no means that is outdated. A constitution that has been given to us over 22 years and it is time that we review the constitution. Times have changed and because what is happening world over we have to keep in tune of what is happening. But the ULP administration even before we got into office have recognized there are serious problem and would have placed in our manifesto for the 2000 election, we would have offered two profound promises, one of good governance and the other a modern democratic society and Mr. Speaker, in our manifesto there is a 10 point policy where it reflects our position on good governance. I therefore Mr. Speaker, would want to thank a ULP Government and personally as being part of this administration to bring to this Parliament a motion on constitutional reform.

Mr. Speaker, in my humble opinion this country needs the setting up of the commission immediately to look into good governance of this country. But as I sat here this morning, and I would have heard members on the opposite side making references to constitutional reform I was taken aback and Minister Francis in his presentation alluded to many of the areas where members opposite should have been thinking since 17 years ago what should they be thinking, what should be their actions but I want to say Mr. Speaker that the question of good governance was raised back in 1992 by the West Indian commission, among other things, Mr. Speaker, the commission expressed tremendous concern of type of governance that was happening within the Caribbean at that time, as a response Mr. Speaker the commission was very much dissatisfied and adopted a charter of civil society to which principles be elevated and enshrined, among these principles Mr. Speaker, are 1. freedom of press and association; 2. free and fair elections; 3. open Parliamentary competition; 4. elimination of corruption in public life; 5. respect for the rights of women children; 6. freedom from political victimization; 7. respect for religious and cultural diversity; 8. greater accountability and transparency; and 9. greater public access to information.

Mr. Speaker, under these principles, principles that were put forward by the commission since 1992 and that is why I say I am appalled of what was said by the members on the Opposite side that the NDP was in administration since then, did they offer freedom of press to this country, I said no, it is since the ULP administration that has come to power that this country has Parliament debate live so that each and everyone can hear what is happening in this Parliament. In the area of fair and free elections it was Prime Minister Mitchell then who indicated at one time a rigged election is better than no election. Mr. Speaker, Minister Francis alluded to the situation of 1989, when there were 15 seats in this House, all being taken up by the NDP administration and yet that administration refused to elect even Opposition Senators, they refused to appoint Opposition Senators, Mr. Speaker, elimination of corruption in public life again Minister Francis to such facts. Respect for rights of women and children, it was quite shameful that it was under the NDP that AG had a Court Order for respecting the rights of women and children.

Mr. Speaker, freedom from political victimization, one of the principles that was brought forward by the commission, and I am appalled Mr. Speaker, that a motion has come from the opposite side to this Honourable House, talking about political victimization. Mr. Speaker, I know of one Mr. Da Silva who has been working at the airport who would have been fired 16 years ago since the NDP administration had taken office and it was vouched Mr. Speaker, that the former Prime Minister said that Mr. Da Silva would never, ever see a job in this country again under his government and that has happened since then.

Mr. Speaker, I know of a policeman one Dougan who has been in a position for over 16 years, persons he had taught at the training school but would have climbed above him because his political affiliation, these are principles that would have indicated since 1992 of that commission, yet the NDP administration has refused these principles. We have seen for greater accountability and transparency, we know what happened with the situation of Dr. Rolla, we know the situation of Bencasome Adames yet, the then Prime Minister indicated that if anyone would give information out of the National Commercial Bank they would be fired. We are saying Mr. Speaker, that accountability and transparency are very important in good governance and the ULP is working towards such principle.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to say that adoption of the charter did not depend really on economical development, the economic position of the country, it depends really on national vetoes, therefore the NDP at that time, if they were really thinking humanely would have at least adhered to these principles but they honestly did not concern of a constitution because they were riding high.

The question of good governance Mr. Speaker, was also addressed in a symposium in Jamaica in 1994, this was done under the auspices of the UNDP, United Nations

Development Programme, and the participants there shared tremendous concern, the participants expressed their concern of political civility, the participants, blame leaders then and institutions for decrease in participatory democracy. The participants agreed that political failure in good governance related to poor performance of the economies and persistent poverty. Mr. Speaker, that was since then whatever is the matter, whatever it would cost us the problem of good governance must be addressed, and it must be addressed now. The size of the country does not have anything to do with good governance, Mr. Speaker, we know we are a small country but it was alluded earlier what is good governance. Mr. Speaker, one would say good governance is law and order maintained, one can say it is stability within a country but Mr. Speaker, the ULP wants to see good, political, financial, and administrative management, the ULP wants to see high levels of transparency and morality in public affairs. Therefore even within our small society we want to have these principles enshrined.

Mr. Speaker, we do not want to compare basically small societies, and what is happening in small societies versus large societies in respect to good governance. Although we know that some persons have been looking at demographics, the geographical space, the viability of the economy and things of that nature, we realize that as a country we need to put our house in order and the ULP administration Mr. Speaker is working through constitutional reform to have these matters addressed.

Mr. Speaker, I would have heard earlier on from members of the opposite particularly from Senator Shallow alluded to the fact that when a new administration takes place that persons should not be fired even though they are incompetent. Of course we know, Mr. Speaker, there is something that we called spoiled system and that we know for a fact Mr. Speaker when the NDP administration took office in 1984 what they did but until today, the supporters of the ULP are asking what are you doing because it constantly being said that the ULP has taken office but the NDP is ruling. I say that to say, Mr. Speaker, that Senator Shallow his statement this morning is not grounded, we cannot afford Mr. Speaker, to have persons who are incompetent in doing work, we want to establish good, professionalism. Persons within the profession that can show strong independence, strong will, knowledge of work, we do not want to have wastage of social capital, we want to utilize the best professionals ever so that our governance can be viewed in a positive way. Mr. Speaker, I want to say, that in the area of structural adjustments an area that was touched somewhat by Minister Francis this morning that good governance is established under structural adjustments within any country. Mr. Speaker, there is a situation whereby that while executive ascendancy has been the norm in the West Minister pattern states, new developments have served to increase such ascendancy, many of these states Mr. Speaker, are under the tutelage of multilateral lending agencies, they have their staff members inserted into local bureaucracies. Mr. Speaker, these parallel agencies not only dedicate macro economic policies as a condition of debt restructuring, they formulate detail policies and budget proposals and they monitor even in micro detail form the implementation of

such of these proposals to ensure that Government fulfils their terms and conditions of loans. Mr. Speaker, because of many of these proposals that are so unpopular and are likely to upset popular interest Government often withhold information critical information Mr. Speaker, from Parliament from Cabinet or even members of their own party for fear of disclosure and we have seen in the Ottley Hall situation, Mr. Speaker, what has happened where one person really took control of such a project.

Mr. Speaker, we have to be careful in terms of our structural adjustments in our governance. We have seen privatization of state enterprises, the St. Vincent Distillers Ltd, one of the few companies in this country that has been making profits we have seen such a company being given away under the NDP administration, Mr. Speaker, these are areas of concern.

Mr. Speaker, there are few more areas that I can go into but in the interest of time, I want to say that this administration, Mr. Speaker, ...

**HONOURABLE GERARD SHALLOW:** Would the Honourable Member give way? I just want to clarify a statement you made a while ago where you indicated that I said in my presentation that the Government must keep people who are incapable, I just want to repeat exactly what I said. I said that directors of State owned enterprises should not be called upon to resign or offer to resign as a matter of course following the coming into power of a new regime they should be allowed to serve out their term of Office and then replace them if necessary as their terms expire and this is because of the limited nature of our professional resource base in these islands is too limited to sustained the indiscriminate hemorrhaging of talents which this policy encourages.

**HONOURABLE MONTGOMERY DANIEL:** Thank you, very much. But you see, Mr. Speaker, I have points that I would debate, Mr. Speaker.

**HONOURABLE MR SPEAKER:** Yes, but could you continue on the motion.

**HONOURABLE MONTGOMERY DANIEL:** Thank you, very much. Mr. Speaker, integrity legislation is of concern to the ULP administration, we are concerned in terms of the corruption of Parliamentarians, corruption of civil servants, Mr. Speaker, I have before me, a document with some information and which I would reveal time after time. Those of us who know the Fancy playing field under the NDP administration, a sum of \$105,000.00 was spent on the Fancy playing field, Mr. Speaker, that is why we are interested in Integrity legislation, one wonders in the sum of \$105,000.00 really has that monies being spent? If you go to Fancy Mr. Speaker, and you see what is Fancy playing field then you know what I am talking about. Equally, the Pamenos Ballantyne Playing Field, similar sums were spent on that playing field but one month after, almost half of the wall that is enclosing the compound has gone. This is what we are talking about Mr. Speaker. So that corruption is what we are against and I would have heard

from the Opposite side this morning, that under the NDP administration and as was alluded by Senator Leacock that the NDP administration is concerned about corruption. Mr. Speaker, we have as I have indicated to you the facts, of what would have transpired under the NDP administration. Senator Francis alluded to \$300 million dollars on the Ottley Hall project of which values \$18 million US dollars, these are what we are talking about Mr. Speaker, so that we can bring to bear legislation to deal with Parliamentarians, civil servants, when they enrich themselves over a period.

Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have left Sir?

**HONOURABLE MR SPEAKER:** Sixteen minutes remaining.

**HONOURABLE MONTGOMERY DANIEL:** I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that poverty and good governance are of concern to this administration. While there is no necessary relationship between poverty and good governance there are number of factors we have to take into consideration. Of course, the Marcel Theory tells us that the basic things are food, clothing and shelter are required. And as any administration you would have to provide these necessities. But there are data showing in the Caribbean that in the OECS 25% of persons are living in poverty but particularly here in St. Vincent it is said that 4 out of every 10 are poor, these are very important factors, I am sure that the Minister is aware but it is something that we would have harvested by the NDP administration. You fail to realize that your economic policies have not borne fruit, that would have failed to provide work for persons in this country that is why the poverty levels have risen over the years, but Mr. Speaker, increasing poverty levels together with a process of economic mobilization are challenges to us, we must address them, failure to do so sir, will result in further marginalisation within the global, economic system, we need to enhance our constitution to take care of poverty in our country. Mr. Speaker, there is need for change. Mr. Speaker, there is need to change the constitution that is before us today. Mr. Speaker, indeed there must be a paradigm shift we need to change the way we do things. I want to say that we can do, Mr. Speaker, through strengthening the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals, we can change Mr. Speaker, through strengthening political democracy, we can change Mr. Speaker, through making Government more accountable and we can change Mr. Speaker, through consolidating independence of judiciary.

Mr. Speaker, more than ever I am saying that the constitutional commission should be set up now to take care of our immediate constitutional problems that we have in this country, in so doing Mr. Speaker, I want to give this motion my support through this Honourable House, thank you very much.

**DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES:** Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I beg to move the adjournment for the luncheon interval until 3:00 p.m. There are some members of the Opposition who would normally require two hours or more for lunch

but I think that perhaps today is a special day we can have a less than two hours, I would wish to move the motion for the luncheon adjournment and resumed at 3:00 p.m.

**HONOURABLE LOUIS STRAKER:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Suspension at 1:15 p.m. (Lunch)  
Resumption 3: 08 p.m.**

**HONOURABLE LOUIS STRAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Member let me first of all apologize for my tardiness, my unpunctuality, my lateness this morning, I was a little taken my surprise and I got the message that there was supposed to be a Cabinet meeting so while I was preparing to go upstairs for the Cabinet meeting one of my colleagues dropped by and say no its meeting of Parliament, and that put me in consternation because I was out and I was not aware that there was going to be a meeting of Parliament, I tried my best to retrieve my notes for I was prepared to speak on this motion of Constitutional Reform when it was first introduced, tried as I may, probable in my desperation, and you know when you are in a hurry looking for something, sometimes it is right before your eyes and you just can't find it. I just couldn't find my notes that I had made to speak on this important motion. So I must apologize for the lateness this morning.

Secondly, I notice in my absence somebody sneaked into the House here, glad to see the Senator Leacock. It is unfortunate Mr. Speaker, that he was not considered in the first line up, after the polls in March when the NDP assembled their best team he was not really considered then, but better late than never. I want to welcome the Senator to, -- well if my friend Hamlett was alive, he would say you are speaking foreign language to me.

Mr. Speaker, I looked on with some measure of admiration this morning as the members on the Opposite side spoke on this important motion of constitutional reform, it does my heart good to see them speak with such enthusiasm, because I realize that for 17 long years the question of constitutional reform has been bandied about by the NDP. As a matter of fact, even before they came into office in 1984, I happen to have a copy of their 1984 manifesto, and under the heading electoral reform and constitutional progress, they promised here that they would have constitutional commission setup to study the problem and to make recommendations. But like everything else for 17 long years they were incapable of executing, implementing their promise to the people. It is like the paralytic at the pool at Bethesda waiting for the water to be troubled and for somebody to throw them in and they could not get themselves to implementing their own manifesto promise having constitutional reform, until the Unity Labour Party came

with its energy, its vigour, full of initiative, with good leadership and has now presented this powerful resolution that they are able to take strength when we say to them rise take up your bid and walk. So we were able Mr. Speaker, to liberate their minds so that they can think in terms of constitutional reform, we were able to unshackle their legs so they were able to stand and talk in their seats, were able to unloosen their tongues so they can get up and wax eloquently about the virtues of constitutional reform and they must be saying in their hearts of hearts thank God the Unity Labour Party is in Government because they never would have realized this day. Or had it been that the NDP had returned to power all they would have had is just the words on a piece of paper, but I am very happy Mr. Speaker, that I am a part of a party that shows initiative, shows leadership and able to execute its promise to the people of this country within six months. As a matter of fact, the very first meeting we presented this resolution here and we were able to follow through and give the Opposition a chance so that they can speak as eloquently as possible in the virtues of having this timely resolution come to a vote in this House. That is leadership. And I am happy that I am part of a party that produces this leadership, and not sitting where I just have to say I support what the other side is doing.

Mr. Speaker, the constitution as it were our skeleton. It is the framework on which is clothed the flesh, the sinews, the veins and everything else. It is an important document, it is the basic document of this country and we cannot tingle with it in a careless way. But we realize the time has come that we must have some reform on this basic document. Mr. Speaker, when we look at the evolution of our political history, we can thank God not only for those who are responsible for our constitution here but even going beyond that, those who have laid the ground work to enlighten our people and I speak of Ebenezer Theodore Joshua a man who has done much to open up our eyes so that we were able to build on a solid foundation, taken us out from where we were at Plantocracy, from the old days when those who sat in this Chamber were the plantation owners, presented to us Adult Suffrage in 1951 and from there on we were able to move on to a state of a certain measure of internal independence. We move on to statehood and then to full Independence. We have to thank God for the men like Milton Cato who did much to bring this country forward notwithstanding the obstructionist tactics of those who did not want to attend the constitutional reform convention and to give us a constitution that would land us as a separate and independent nation. I heard one of the previous speakers said this morning that our constitutional reform is a precondition to our economic enfranchisement certainly he has a chance to say that now; I wish he had said that when the NDP was in power. He could not say it because the NDP paid lip service to constitutional reform but it took the ULP to come into office so that he can have a chance to speak so eloquently on this matter.

Mr. Speaker, there are many things we need to clarify as we enter into this exercise of a constitutional reform and I think the resolution is well worded for it speaks in its first

preamble about good governance which demands the active participation of the people in and control over the institutions which governs their day to day lives, we in the Unity Labour Party believe strongly in active participation by the people, and that is why we open the proverbial window and allow proceedings here to be broadcast live so that those who sit outside can know what their elected representatives are doing in their name. I recall when a certain radio station tried desperately to broadcast one of the sittings of our Parliament, albeit in delayed reaction way that panic broke out on the NDP they tried their best to stop it, they did not want the people to hear what was being done in this Council because they were anti-people, anti-democratic and we have always advocated in the Unity Labour Party that it is the people's right to know what is happening in this Chamber, what we are doing in their name though those who are sitting on this side might take coverage and comfort and saying well, we were not here, but they are the off springs of their paralytic political forebears. They are the progenitors of those who have had a philosophy and an ideology of keeping the people ignorant so that they could not know what was taking place in this Chamber and therefore expose their folly, and their incompetence and their "unconscionable-ness." Not only that Mr. Speaker, we have done our best to have every piece of legislation brought before the relevant, the appropriate interest groups so that those outside of this Chamber can make an input into legislation before it is finally voted on in this House, that is what we mean when we say that good governance demands the active participation of the people in and control over the institutions which governs their day to day lives. And that is what we seek to bring about in our constitutional reform. We have tried; one of the speakers said that the common day, the new day parlance, that we must try our best to get civil society involved in our constitutional reform process, we don't need any lecture in that, for we have since we have taken office involved every aspect of our society in the governance of this country. We have instituted a cabinet committee on the economy, we have instituted a tripartite council, we have instituted a council of social and economic development, all these we have done to make sure that civil society plays an intricate part in the deliberations of this country and to make an input in the economy of this country. So we march forward with the people.

Mr. Speaker, we do hope that not only us here as Vincentians would be able to get a chance to make an input before this commission for the reform of the constitution, but Vincentians abroad can make an input through the modern means of technology or through memos, however they want to participate. We hope that the Diaspora, Vincentians of the Diaspora will be able to also make a part, because they are a significant part of the Vincentian nation, a large part. We depend upon them to help our economy, I think they should have a right in making an input into what we are doing here, in reforming this constitution. One of the things we hope we will be able to accomplish as we reform this constitution, and that is to give consideration to the idea of having relevant experts, interest groups come and testify before this parliament on any piece of legislation which they may have particular interest and expertise. It is my

understanding that this is being done in Anguilla, I think, and it will certainly help if we were to invite those from the outside who can make an input to come and testify here, let us have the benefit of their insight and their foresight so that when we pass legislation we do with the full benefit of those who really could make a meaningful contribution.

Mr. Speaker, while the Constitution we are told is 22 years of age and needs some revision, there is certain verities that we must always keep in mind and must always maintain. And some of these are found even in the opening or two of our constitution which tells us that Vincentians have affirm that this nation is founded on the belief of the supremacy of God and freedom and dignity of man. Certainly we cannot move forward without the help of Almighty God, we have come this far through all the vicissitudes of life, through different forms of political organisations, colonialism, internal self government, full self government. We have come through many difficulties, eruption of the volcano, and hurricanes, and through it all we have been able to stand as a nation, and we have been able to do this because of our deep religious beliefs in the supremacy of God. We show this believe as we open up our Parliament with prayer. And we as a nation generally, we belief in God and in prayer, and in the values and virtues that have their roots in the Bible, love of our fellow men, peace, justice, all these are part of the Judo Christian concepts that find themselves in our society and in our constitution. And first of all we, must maintain our belief in the supremacy of God, and freedom and the dignity of man. That is why we seek to elevate our fellow men. We seek to lift the social standard, it is part of our policy of our party as enshrined in our manifesto. We seek to provide better housing for those who are in need, low income. We could easily take the part of the NDP and say we are not in the business of providing housing for poor people but we believe we should give a helping hand to those who are poor. Those who are vulnerable. And so we seek to provide housing for the poor. Job for the jobless and to meet the needs of the poor in every aspect of life. There are those from the Opposition who can say too much of the foreign aid is being earmarked for poverty alleviation but we say if we alleviate poverty in our country then that is all we need to do in order to uplift and build and make our country a truly great country, and to give dignity and freedom to our people. So when we talk about the freedom and dignity of man this is why those of us who are in the Opposition can sit here today because if we had gone ahead and just mimic the NDP we probably would have still been in Opposition, but the people of this country saw a difference in our policy. They saw a difference in our integrity and in our honesty and they said that it is time for a change in this county and they would give decent people a chance to run this country and we are here to do whatever we can, not to promote the interest of those who are well placed; those with influence and well but to do whatever we can to help those who are vulnerable, the poor, women, children, those who need a helping hand. We must take care that we do our best to put our women to the forefront, put them on equality with our men, and I am pleased that the Prime Minister has done his best and has intention to do even more to have our women take a

prominent role in the affairs in the politics of this country. So for the first time we have a female Attorney General, we have probably the highest percentage of women on the Government side in any Caribbean country. We have a Deputy Governor General who is a female. We have the a first woman Ambassador to the United Nations, so we are doing all we can in order to promote women in this country. [Interjection]

Well, having a Deputy Prime Minister that is a woman, that is fine, we need to have a woman Deputy Prime Minister. I know you have aspired and you said, don't forget you said on one of your talk shows that you think that you are one of the most capable persons to be Prime Minister to run this country. All right. I am glad you admit that you did say that. But unfortunately you are sitting at the rear end of the table. Maybe, after 20 years or so you might realize your dream, but you have along time in waiting, by the time you get there, I might be singing shall we meet beyond the river. But, it is our determination to put – let me make it quite clear to the Senator. I am not one of those men who covet positions, there are some people who feel very insecure unless they have positions of honour. I am not one of those. [Desk thumping]. I have always said and I bear it as a badge of honour that I come from very humble beginnings and where I am sitting now sometimes I have to pinch myself and ask if this is the son and grandson of an estate worker. I can only say by sitting here what ever has happened to me it is because of the goodness and grace of God; he led out for me and I have said there are very few people who could spend 31 years abroad and come back here and contest and defeat an incumbent member of the Government. So do not think I am feeling insure that somebody is going to take my place, that is not my thing. I would sit here at the pleasure of the Prime Minister until the Good Lord says well, I should move on to other things. And I have no hard feelings about that because I should let you know that I could have been deputy leader of this party when it started, when Ken Boyea became deputy leader, I had request from every constituency but I turned them down, including East St. George, that Stalkey was there, I turn them down because I am not a man to grab after position. It is people with insecurity, ---

**HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Member let us get back to the point at hand.

**HONOURABLE LOUIS STRAKER:** I would get back to the point, Mr. Speaker, but he provoked me into getting into the highways and byways. I come back to the straight and the narrow. I had to straighten him out, Mr. Speaker.

I was speaking about the dignity and the freedom enshrined in the constitution, that is the point of relevance and contact and not only for women but for children, after all it was our party that held the first symposium on street children, and even before that I had brought up in this House, when I went back there on the reclaimed lands there, and saw young boys and heard that gown up men would pick them up, and spoke in this House that something should be done for these street children and it became something that everybody lashed on to, but it is the aim and it is the purpose of this

party as part of promoting the freedom and dignity of man to take care of those vulnerable children and providing proper guidance and a proper future for them.

Mr. Speaker, some speakers have spoken about the different forms of constitution reform that we would like to see. One of the things that has been brought up is enshrinement in the Constitution of the position of Deputy Prime Minister. I would not say too much about that because much has been said and I do not want it appeared that I am trumpeting my own position. But indeed these are things that need to have its place in the constitution. We need to remove the ambivalence that some seem to have in certain areas, for example, with regards to our getting rid of the Privy Council and various interpretation. From a layman's point of view, it may appear that since it is a change in the basic document as it is now that we would need to have not only two-thirds majority here but a referendum among the people in order to effect a change, we need to have that clearly defined in new constitution so that there would be no doubt in our minds as to which it is. [Interjection] Our position has been - well I am not going to answer you.

**HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER:** I would also say that it is not question time.

**HONOURABLE LOUIS STRAKER:** Mr. Speaker, one of the other areas that we need to clarify beyond a point of a doubt is the constitutional problem that we encounter in 1989, where constitutional experts have said that the Governor General had abounding duty to appoint two Senators for the Opposition and thereby create an opposition, and others thought otherwise. We need to have these matters clearly spelt out in our constitution so that there would be no doubt as what should take place. Should those eventualities take place.

Mr. Speaker, the other question and other people spoke on it has to do with the citizenship and qualification to be a member of this House. I as a citizen of the United States and a resident for 31 years have had to surrender my citizenship as a United States citizen in order to be nominated to run for a seat in this House. There are Caribbean countries that recognize the dual citizenship to the extent that there is no necessity to surrender you American citizenship. But as part of the sacrifice that I had to make in order to give proper representation to my country and my constituency I did it albeit that I have properties in the United States and my family there, and I had to go back and stand on the line as a visitor, I do not mind because I did it for a higher good and that is to be able to make a contribution to my country. But I think consideration should be given to fact as to whether we really need to give up our United States citizenship in order to sit in this House.

We need to look also, and some speakers have mentioned that about constituency boundaries commission and the inequity that now prevails with regards to the various constituencies. For example a constituency of South Leeward might have as many

voters as the two constituencies in the Grenadines and maybe more. We need to look at that. Gone are the days when it would take us two days to get from here to the farthest island in the Grenadines, with the airports that have been built there, I would dare say we get from here to Union Island sooner than we can get from here to Fancy. So we need to look and see whether we need to have this disparity as provided for in the Constitution with regards to the Grenadine islands, but there again we would have to take that within the context of what form of Parliament, the House of Assembly, are we going to have. Are we going to increase the number of seats in order to bring equity to mainland St. Vincent or are we going to combine the seats and use proportional representation in order to have a greater number of seats. These are matters that we need to dwell on and a lot modern day political theorists are leaning towards some form of mixture of elected members and proportional representation. For the simple reason that it takes care of the anomaly in our democracy where you may have a party winning the large majority of the voters and still form opposition. And the party that forms the Government with the minority of the votes cannot speak for the majority of the people in this country and was the problem we faced in the last Parliament and that was the problem that stagnated this NDP administration that they really could not find their way because they didn't know for whom they spoke because the Opposition with all its vibrancy and with the mandate it was given could speak in a forthright and unequivocal way about the issues that confront us, because we knew we spoke for the majority of people in this country.

Then we have to decide whether we want a unicameral or bicameral legislature. Certainly the preference for me would go to the bicameral, where we could use a Senate to fine tune legislation to not to be influenced by the temporary passions of the people, so that they can in a dispassionate way look at legislation and give the benefit of their wisdom and their knowledge to help in shaping proper legislation to govern our country.

The matter of Supervisor of Elections, it is amazing you know, to see how many things the NDP administration paid lip service to but yet they were impotent, I call them paralytics, they could not execute what they were talking about. When I listened to the Senator talking about their long dream. That is all they were doing on this side dreaming, until they were waken up by the people of this country on April 19<sup>th</sup> into May, they were just dreamers. But dreamers with a vision, they were just nodding away as when I get bored by some of the speeches on the other side and I nod over here. That is all they were doing, because they themselves spoke in 1984 of setting up an electoral commission, this is what they said in 1984 and sometimes I feel sorry for them because if I was sitting over there I would have been embarrassed, that for 17 years they could not give effect to what they had promised the people. This is what they said in 1984:

**“It has also been seen that we need an independent electoral commission to supervise elections.”**

And for 17 years they could not even do that. And their offspring come here and no wonder they have to support everything that we bring because they know in their heart of hearts that this is the way they should have gone. And we have said in our manifesto that we should bring in an electoral commission, something that they just couldn't do. To speak nothing of integrity legislation. Imagine in 1984 the NDP again said on page 12 of their Manifesto:

**“The NDP will establish an integrity commission to monitor the financial gains of parliamentary representatives and those in authority dealing with public funds.”**

Nineteen Eighty Four, and these paralytic didn't have the strength in their ankles to get up and execute this promise, it took the ULP, soon after they came into Parliament in 1994 to bring an integrity legislation here and what did they do, hey. I recall one member on this side saying that that is just a piece of paper that they would have their own integrity legislation in three months, they couldn't even bring it in three years. This is the legacy of the NDP.

**HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER:** The members have seven minutes.

**HONOURABLE LOUIS STRAKER:** That is not what my watch say Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They could not bring integrity legislation and when they were so embarrassed that the ULP brought that piece of legislation they said they would bring theirs in three months and up to now they cannot bring it. My friend the Senator said, oh, since you are a man of integrity you don't need integrity legislation. Well we can say that for murdering, we can say that for stealing, that we do not need any laws against killing, we do not need any laws against stealing because all people of integrity so why bring laws. But we brought it here because we know something of the nature of human beings; and you know as well as I do that we need integrity legislation because there are people who succumb to bribe. There are those who become corrupt in public office, there are some of us who have come into this House with our integrity in tact, there are some of us who come with soiled integrity and we are hoping to make this House confer on us a certain amount of Honourable-ness and respectability, but we need integrity legislation to curb the greed and corruption that lie deep in the heart of some of our people. And this is why we have promised some of our people that we would have integrity legislation. When we pressed the point towards the end of the NDP administration and they were backed in to a corner, what did they say? Well, let us not go forward alone, let us wait until the other OECS countries come with legislation and we can have harmonized legislation. But that is not what they said in 1984 you know. It was only when they were backed into a corner when they were just

about getting out of office they use that as a back door to say that they are waiting on some OECS type of legislation. But we do not have to wait on that in the ULP. We will bring this legislation here whether it comes from OECS or any place else, because we have promised the people and we do not want to be like the NDP promised in 1984 and 17 years later we have nothing to give to the people, that is deception. That is fraud, when you tell the people one thing and when we see us moving in a progressive way, when you see us moving with energy, with honesty and integrity, if you have honesty and integrity that you speak inside of yourself you better join us or you will be left behind or you would be looked upon as those without honesty and integrity. So you have a chance to do what is honourable and right by latching on to the coattail of the ULP because the whole country knows that we are here not for fun. We have been going with lightening speed. The fact that we have this legislation here in so short a space of time is an indication of our seriousness. And throughout the length and breath of this country, those who were skeptical, those who were cynical whether they live in the Southern or Northern Grenadines, whether they live in Fitz Hughes or Petit Bordel they have realized that what we have promised is what we deliver. Whether it is to take care of the estates workers, or failing to take care of their severance pay, or whether it is to provide adequate schooling, proper facilities for our children to learn they have now come to realize that they can trust and believe and follow the lead of the ULP and that is why we expect to stay here for the next 20 years, because we deliver on our promises.

Mr. Speaker, we must of course, in our trust to broaden and to deepen our integration process, be mindful of the fact that our new constitution must not contain anything that would preclude or be as a stumbling block to the deepening of our Caribbean integration. It is unfortunate that very recently I was speaking at a religious service to celebrate our independence in Brooklyn and it was well attended by the diplomatic core, and I spoke not only of economic integration but of political integration and I was told of Counsel's General from one of the other islands that yes we believe in economic integration, but political integration that is a St. Vincent thing. Well it is a tribute of a sort that here in St. Vincent we have been speaking not only of economic integration but political integration, if it is a St. Vincent thing, well and good. We are taking up the torch that has been passed on to us by stalwarts in the Caribbean as Norman Manley, -- [Interjection] That's NDP, nobody bothers with NDP anymore. -- Norman Manley, Grantley Adams, Eric Williams, Marichou, Mac Intosh and of course everyone knows Milton Cato was a federationist. These are the men whose torch we must carry on, and if it is a St. Vincent thing well and good, and if it means we must soldier on alone, we would keep on soldiering on until someone has seen that light from that torch and realize that this is the only way we ought to go, because it makes absolute sense in a day and age when other big countries are coming together as a block for us to come together not only as an economic block but as a political block. And here we are Mr. Speaker, on the verge of voting for constitutional reform within the six months of being elected as a government in this country. We have started off well.

We have the admiration, not only of the whole country but of the Opposition. They know we are doing a good job, they know we are taking care of matters that should be taken care of and as we go through this resolution, almost say revolution, might be of a sort, as we go through this resolution, Mr. Speaker, I am happy that I am sitting as a member of the Unity Labour Party, being here with my colleagues to champion, to promote, to present this resolution to this House and not on the other side where I just have to tag along. I do hope that we all can take great pride in what we would have accomplished here after we have voted for this resolution. I do hope that with this commission that we would be able to have a broad base discussion and that we would have a very good constitution that would be supported by Opposition by Government, by every segment of this country so that we can move forward in a constitutional way and that we can be a model, a symbol of all the rest of the Caribbean. May God guide us in our deliberations.

**HONOURABLE EDWIN SNAGG:** Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I rise to lend my support to this motion of constitutional reform. Before I make my contribution which I expect to be fairly brief this afternoon. I want to extend my congratulations to St. Claire Leacock for his appointment as a Senator and a member of this Honourable House, I was not here last week, so I was not here for the wedding, but at least I am here for the second Sunday, so I want to welcome you, I expect that your contribution is going to be of a fairly high nature, and I expect it is going to be eloquent as it was today, even though somewhat robot like and Shakespearian, I probably thought you had practice all night last night.

However, Mr. Speaker, in all civic societies there are laws, regulations and rules that govern any people, and there comes a time when there is need for these laws, regulations and rules whatever we call them to be reviewed from time to time. It is like a man running his home and from time to time he has to make the necessary adjustments as circumstances unfold and so in this field of constitution we find that there is also need for us to look, to review, and to revisit our constitution, and we see necessary we form a constitution.

Mr. Speaker, this administration in its manifesto of 2001 promised that constitutional reform will be a very integral part of this Administration and its policies. And we have done so within a short period of time. As a matter of fact it was stated by our colleagues that at the very first working day of Parliament that this motion on constitutional reform was tabled before this Honourable House and it was because of the lethargy of the previous administration that we had to deal with so many bills and so many outstanding matters that were left undone, that we are now having this debate at this time.

But, Mr. Speaker, on this question of constitutional reform we ought to be ever mindful that there is need for education of the population on this matter as to exactly what is

constitutional reform, there is need for us to educate the wider population so that they will understand what this administration and what this Honourable House is about when we speak about constitutional reform. There is a pattern Mr. Speaker, that Bills are tabled before this House after having consultations with certain social partners or they will be there for public comments and it is the partner that people in our society tend not to make any contributions in this regard. I think Mr. Speaker, that on this question of constitutional reform that it will be imperative that a particular and special effort be made to educate this population that they must make their contribution in relation to the constitution because we must recognize that the last constitution has served us well, it is like grace in that it has served us well and it brought us safe thus far. And we do not know how long after this constitution is reformed and we have new constitution, we do not know how long it is going to last. We do not know how many generations it is going to last. We do not know how many lives it is going to affect, so we need to be extremely careful in terms of having the widest possible input in the construction of this constitution for future generation.

Mr. Speaker, the level of consultation that is necessary on such an important topic cannot be underestimated. Mr. Speaker, we will have the input of the constitutional lawyers and they are going to play a very significant role. We expect likewise that there will be those who are experienced in this particular field who will have to be probably brought in to the assistance of those who are already here. But Mr. Speaker, this consultation must include the wider body of our citizens. It must include the teachers, it must include the civil servants, even though we have in our constitution that public servants must not be involved in political matters, yet still that in itself may possibly need some review. Mr. Speaker, we need to have people like the Credit Unions, we need to have financial institutions, we need to have the fishermen; we need to have the farmers, Mr. Speaker, we also need to have the brothers on the block. And when I say the brother on the block, Mr. Speaker, I know you will understand what I am saying, because often times in illustrious places like these we tend to forget those who do not belong to this type, or this level or echelon. And we forget those who are thereby the way side, those who sit on street corners, those who have nothing to do when the day comes and we believe some how the contribution that they have to make is null and void, but sometimes you may be surprised, Mr. Speaker, that if you have discussions with some of those we consider to be none entities you will be surprised sometimes at the level of discussion and the level of ideas that one can get from them, and so Mr. Speaker, it is important that we try to make a base as wide and broad as possible for consultation on this important matter.

Mr. Speaker, as I said I believe my contribution is going to be a very short one, because the nitty gritty of this motion has been really spelt out here today. The details of the constitution have been gone into at various lengths. I have heard about integrity commission. There has been talk about the Public Service Commission. There has been talk about an Ombudsman. There is also talk about something like an election

boundaries commission. You might even want to consider the question of a teaching commission or a police service commission. And there are many things that could be brought in. All of these things, Mr. Speaker, are all well and good.

But Mr. Speaker, I heard coming out from the Opposition bench and I felt the pangs of it when one Senator mentioned that we should keep the monarchical system and another Senator said that we may think about a Republican system but still we ought to be careful. You see when you become a man you must be prepared to leave your parents house, you can't want to sit within the confines of their walls basically for the purposes of protection or for the purpose of having rest and shelter and in some cases for your lethargy and your laziness to forge your own forward way to wait for meals, for a meal ticket so we must not be afraid as a people to launch out into the deep. We must not be afraid to accept our independence in good grace and to come up with a constitution befitting a free people an independent people and we must have a constitution that is reflective of our own society. We must not be afraid to charter our own course forward. We have been so accustomed probably from the period of slavery, and other cases in the Caribbean indenture ship to being dictated and directed and believing that we must always be under the wings and shadows of some bigger bother, or some mother figure or some father figure and then we talk about having our 22<sup>nd</sup> year of Independence, but we cannot be afraid to be independent, we ourselves must display our own Independence and something that must come from our own society and so we must in the construction of our own constitution display that very independence for we talk and for which we so want to say that we glad it is our 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, but if it is our 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday then we know we have come of age because at 22 you are a big man, man, I ain't hear you.

Mr. Speaker, in this new constitution, in constitutional reform I expect that it is going to involve change of all dimensions. I expect there is also going to be the question of political change because we have seen, and it is not something that is new, but it has happened before in the Caribbean where because of the level of democracy and because of the system under which we live we find that government's take office in our democracy with a percentage that far below that which is necessary to govern and we have had a classic example of that in this country where the people were being governed by an administration that did not have the will, the support of the majority of people. So in looking at our constitution there are various things we need to look at. Mr. Speaker, for instance, based on this result could stand here and say that I speak for the people of the Grenadines and I think I could say that with a certain level of authority even not being the elected representative because I have received 45% of the votes and if the NDP could govern a whole country from 1998 to 2001 with 40 something percent of the votes then I am entitled and could speak for the people of the Grenadines with a authority after having 45% of the votes.

Mr. Speaker, I am very cognizant of the rules of this House and the Standing Orders 43 (1) because coming to speak at this point in time where there have been so many contributions, one is likely to be repetitious and one is likely to harp on arguments that have been brought before and I would really like to see this House move into a new and different direction and as the calypsonian 'Explainer' sang in his calypso one year in Trinidad, "in Parliament they kixing, kixing, kixing all the time and wasting everybody's time." Those were the words and lyrics of his calypso and so we have to be careful in this House that we do not waste the time of people, that we don't bore the ears of people who are listening on the radio and they hearing the same thing over and over again because members on this side of the House have given their support to this motion, members on the opposite side have also given their support to this motion and what you find is that sometimes you get a repetition of beautiful lyrics all saying the same thing.

So Mr. Speaker, I want to take this House for a short while on a tangent, I do not know if the 15 minutes that I talked about yet finished Mr. Speaker, but nevertheless, I want to take you off on a tangent because I believe that I have not heard or there was a brief mention of that by the Deputy Prime Minister and I want to take you to the fact that in our constitution there are certain shortcomings and when this commission, that this select committee is going to appoint or select, I hope that that commission is going to take a special and specific view of the relationship that exist between mainland St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and would feel a pain if I would stand here this afternoon and not make specific mention of the Grenadines. You see, Mr. Speaker, in any country where there is mainland and dependencies or where there are twin island States, there is always a feeling of alienation, there is always a feeling of, a word I like to use plenty, a feeling of marginalisation, and we as a people have to be extremely careful in terms of preservation of the unitary state of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in that we must ensure that whatever is enshrined in our constitution, encompasses as a body, the people of the Grenadines in a very significant way, And one would recognize and I suppose that all students of politics, all political scientists and even the layman on the street, would recognize, that it is inherent in every people regardless of how small their island may be, regardless to the fact that it may be a dot or a drop of rain in the ocean, yet still they feel a certain warmth and a certain feeling of belonging to that particular place. It is inherent and it is something that one must come from such a situation to understand what I speak about here this afternoon.

And hence the reason why I want to tread on a particular ground there. That in 1980 a document was written by Sir James Mitchell called the Grenadines declaration and in that declaration he wrote that we are a people capable of the management of our own affairs, and people of the Grenadines feel a certain sense of, how should I put it, let me look for a good English word in order to put it, because I am not so good at English but Mr. Speaker, they feel a certain sense of remorse in that they believe that they had followed Sir James Mitchell, because of the vision he had for the people of the

Grenadines. Mind you, I want to be extremely careful here, that I am not dealing with the issue of cessation which whether one wants to look at that particular declaration one could feel that there is an element of cessation being mentioned there and I want to be extremely careful this afternoon to this Honourable House that I do not speak of anything of that nature rather as I believe totally in the preservation of the unitary state of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. But rather I think that we need to look at the relationship between let say St. Kitts Nevis, probably the relationship between Trinidad and Tobago wherein there is a Tobago House of Assembly separate and distinct and Mr. Speaker, I think that it might augur well for us as a people to recognize. Because there are those in the Grenadines who feel that sense of belonging and believe that they ought to be given a certain level of autonomy, because even your children in your house does want a certain amount of autonomy, they will say here, what is happening? I do not want you to make my tea for me I will start to make my tea for myself. And do not mind how they make it they will be satisfied and they will drink it. But you might make it and they might tell you that it has too much sugar or they do not like how it taste, but if they make it for themselves they will go along with it and they will drink it. I suppose and I want to point out to you that certain level of freedom and that certain level of independence that each and every individual wants to have. I know this might be a very ticklish issue Mr. Speaker, but it is a reality and it is one that we will have to face sometime in the near future, and when Edwin Snagg leaves this Parliament, there will be others who will come after and who will continue to point on these particular aspects and so it is necessary that we seek to address it quite early and as I heard the good Senator saying, you do not wait until rain falling to pick up your clothes, when you see the clouds you pick them up, and I like that, because we must look down the road with a vision.

Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that such a statement could have been made in the Grenadines Declaration, along with other statements, that I do not want to go into now, but none of these statements, they were never made reality, that when it was written in 1980, Sir James Mitchell then became Prime Minister in 1984 and rally on until the year 2000 and did not lift a single figure to give the people of the Grenadines, that level of autonomy for which he wrote so vehemently in the year 1980 and this is indeed pathetic.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to each and every member, and I have noticed that that is the trend, probably only a couple speakers to come after me, to support this motion of constitutional reform. And I speak so with a particular passion because what constitutional reform ought to mean to a people, and I am of the firm belief that the intellectuals in our society will understand, the professionals in our society will understand, but there are those who are not so literate and I am very concerned, Mr. Speaker, that they will be left out of the mainstream of the decision making processes in this regard. And I am kind of worried as to how we can properly incorporate and include them in the question of this debate, because this debate ought to be a wide

spread debate, it is not a debate that must be confined to the wall of this illustrious Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, as I said I think that everything that has to be said is already said on the question of constitutional reform, I probably just was able to put a little cherry on the top of the ice cream cone and I want to give this motion my heartfelt and profound support. I am much obliged.

**HONOURABLE TERRANCE OLLIVIERRE:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to this debate in terms of looking at constitutional reform. Indeed our constitution has served us well in the past but however due to changes economically socially we have seen the need to embark on constitutional reform to meet our needs and to do so efficiently and effectively. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, this motion before us today has been debated widely in this House and as the main quest is to improve governance in this country we have seen all of the speakers, have unanimously supported this motion.

Mr. Speaker, I would not want to repeat all that was said before but I will wish to give honour where it is due and that is to our founding father Honourable Milton Cato for starting us on the journey and equally so to Sir James Mitchell for molding this country and bringing us to where we are today; and may be some where in the future in the history book the name of the Dr. Honourable Sir Ralph Gonsalves our present Prime Minister his name will be written there in his attempt to reform and improve the constitution of this country. However, Mr. Speaker, I stand here today just to comment on some statements that were made this morning in the debate. Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister of Works and Transport, in his debate said the NDP hides behind regionalism in its support of not bringing constitutional reform motion to this House. He further stated that the NDP refused to support integrity legislation for Parliamentarians. Mr. Speaker, this statement to me shows two things, it is either the Minister has limited understanding of the significance of constitutional reform or he trying to fool or mislead members of this Honourable House and this is borne by the fact that he said in his address and I quote,

**“The NDP refused to support integrity legislation for Parliamentarians.”**

Mr. Speaker, if indeed, if integrity legislation is to be meaningful it should go well beyond the point of few Parliamentarians that sit in this House. To give a few examples, Mr. Speaker, there are persons who sit on Tender’s Boards who awards and give contracts with million of dollars. We have Customs personnel who determine whether our consumption taxes are paid, who look after revenue matters and such things. We have members of the Inland Revenue. Senior Inland Revenue officials who adjudicate over revenue matters such which include license fees and other things. We also have the police who deal with weights and measurements, testing to see whether weights and measures are accurate, they also inspect vehicles of which a fee

is paid to the government. We also have magistrates and officials of the magistrate court, including Bailiffs, who are responsible for the imposition of fines and the collections of debts, and Mr. Speaker, I can go on and on and on but I just make these examples to make the point that for integrity legislation to be meaningful and to be effective that it must pass a wider net. It must encompass the net of people who deal with responsibility, who have the responsibility for administering such matters that deal with the good governance of our country, not just a few Parliamentarians in this House. The NDP was not prepared to be the laughing stock of the Caribbean in order to bring forth a piece meal legislation on integrity but I hope that whatever legislation that is brought forward that would encompass a wider group of people; people who are in the higher echelon of our country and who look after the governance of this country.

Mr. Speaker, it was the ULP who taught the people to break the law in this country by preventing those from exercising their democratic right from going about their business, and now the shoe is on the other foot are we seeing that they are now crying foul.

Mr. Speaker, another point is that the appointment of Senator Leacock had nothing to do with the Unity Labour Party, except to say that maybe when they tried to relieve the New Democratic Party of some untrustworthy members there was no constitutional measure that was contemplated by the ULP that affected the appointment of Senator Leacock and I will not make the Honourable Member of this House get away with such statement. The Honourable Minister of Transport and Works beat his chest about the live broadcast of Parliament meetings, but Mr. Speaker, where was he when the New Democratic Party declared that all ministers of religion who spoke the word of God should be provided time in the National Radio station for service which were broadcast live and free of charge. Where was he when the government, the NDP government open up the airwaves by bring legislation to have a number of FM radio stations in this country of which the Unity Labour Party virtually at a quick time, should I say became the virtually the owners of one of the stations. Again Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Works said that members on this side are speaking through two sides of their mouths, well I now ask the question after the statements he has made who is speaking out of two sides of his mouth, because we have seen Mr. Speaker, that they Honourable Minister of Works in trying to distort or give wrong interpretation of what the NDP was trying to do, has made some misleading statements and I think in this Honourable House that members should be true and sincere in whatever they put forward regardless of which political party had made their worthwhile contribution to this country, and I think if we are talking 'together now' I think well that would be the best step to take to ensure that we all work together for the benefit of this country. Indeed his statements would make a mockery of the Prime Minister's exhortation "together now" and once we are working on that precept I believe that all members of this Honourable House should put forward his – once we are supporting his motion, what we say in the debate should justly reflect that.

I would also like to support the point that was made by the Honourable Senator Edwin Snagg that while looking at the constitution the people of the Grenadines should be looked at very closely. Indeed before, we the people of the Grenadines felt very much neglected, we had to wait, for the coming into office of the New Democratic Party before we could have been given some measure of independence, some say in what happened in this country. And what I am saying we should not have to wait on any political party but that should be fully enshrined in the constitution of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. And I think if we look at the constitution of maybe Trinidad and Tobago as he suggested, St. Kitts Nevis, we will be able to look at it see its disadvantages, see its advantages, see what is workable so that we will be able to adapt some of that to fit our local situation in order to create a better constitution for St. Vincent and the people of the Grenadines, so that we would not feel alienated, left out or marginalized. Statements were made about Sir James but then if the people of the Grenadines full appreciated what he did and today we are saying if it were not for him we would not have been at the point where we are today, where he tried to integrate everybody from every community throughout the length and breath of this country, not only the Grenadines, but people at the far North constituencies. So Mr. Speaker, this is a new dispensation and I wish to give as I said before, congratulations where it is due and I wish to congratulate the Government of the ULP for seeking to implement such legislation that would look to improve deficiencies of our constitution in order to make St. Vincent and the Grenadine a better place as we progress through the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a time of changes not only socially, economically, politically but all the circumstances that may approach us as we progress to make this country a better place for all of us to live. And with this I like to wish this motion successful passage through this House. I am obliged, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

**HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER:** Any other debate on the Bill?

**HONOURABLE CONRAD SAYERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I rise today, Mr. Speaker, to make a very brief contribution to the debate on constitutional reform in this Honourable House. I must say, Mr. Speaker, that a number of contributions that preceded mine have covered by and large the broader areas of concern with respect to constitutional reform. But I would like to register my support for this motion because of the historical significance that it holds for us here in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. And it would be difficult to show and demonstrate that support without at least standing and say I support this motion. Hence I would be brief but I would like first of all to reflect on a number of areas concerning this debate today.

Mr. Speaker, I remember in the year 2000 when elections was in the air that a number of talk show hosts and their cohorts got on the radio and said that St. Vincent and the Grenadines is losing a golden opportunity to effect constitutional reform and they were castigating the then Leader of the Opposition, now Prime Minister, for being hurry for

power and unconcerned about constitutional reform and using it only as a means for getting into the House. And I was angry Mr. Speaker, because I knew and know my political leader and the sincerity of the ULP on this issue and rise to remind those persons and those who listened to them that we as an ULP Government are able to demonstrate the genuineness of our intention in taking the initiative to bring constitutional reform to this country, because indeed constitutional reform is something that has been debated as a need throughout the length and breath of this country among right thinking Vincentians, and therefore today's debate is not one that engenders a struggle of contending ideas but it emerges rather as a bi-partisan approach to a singularly important idea, one that has the national backing of our people. I like to commend this Government for this very important move because Mr. Speaker, for too long our people were regarded as audience in darkened theater, the stage of which plays the performance of the leaders in the lime light and the rest of the citizenry sit in that darkened audience hardly able to participate in the course of direction. We here say constitutional reform has been important in that it allows for the provision of the means so as to enable our people to participate fully in all the important institutions that govern their lives. It allows our people to shape the future and to lay the groundwork for the continued strengthening of the freedoms and liberties provided for in the present constitution.

I recall in 1979 when they were looking at the construction of this constitution that the then leader of the NDP refused to participate. I do not know for what reason, there is nothing wrong. The fact that they operate under that constitution shows that the constitution was in good stead and how would you not want to be part of the production of a document or a set of laws to run the lives of a people whom you hoped to govern. Because Mr. Speaker, the constitution could be liken to the Bible to Christians and the Koran to other religions in which it provides those rules, guidelines to improve the lives of the people, and hence all the more reasons why we should take this as a great opportunity to participate.

As I round up Mr. Speaker, I want to urge that as we look into reforming the constitution, that we must be careful to be able to ensure that the language is simple enough to be understood by the average person and it has enough clarity to allow our citizens to follow its content and to understand it with a sufficiency to enable it to make sense for them so that they can feel a sense of commitment: enabling them to want to be a part of the effort to promote and protect the rights and freedoms that would be enshrined in this reformed document. Let us therefore Mr. Speaker, ensure that every opportunity is provided for the constitution to be made available, the contents of it, to john public as it were, because there are many people who have not even seen a bound copy of the constitution, looking at it from the outside. Many Vincentians have not even seen a single copy, far much touching it, and reading it. I remember my first contact with the constitution came as student of the Teacher's College when we were made to study excerpts done by the then Governor General Sir Rupert John which

made it simple so that we can teach it to children in Social Studies and that made me understand the number of freedoms, rights and privileges that are there for us as Vincentians and the fact that we have to do all within our power to protect these. So Mr. Speaker, let us educate and re-educate, let us discuss, and I want to urge members of the public, I know our public are given to listening to music, in preference to listening to ideas, by and large, because it does take discipline to do that, but this is an opportunity for you to have input into the constitution that we are going to reform. This is an opportunity for you to bring forward the ideas, to say whether you want it to be a unicameral or bicameral legislature, whether you want us to have an executive presidency or you want us to have a ceremonial presidency or no presidency at all. An opportunity for you to say how the Government of this country must govern the lives of the people, regulate the relationship between government and the people and I dare you to take that opportunity with both hands and make your contributions, learn all you can about our constitution and therefore get into groups and discuss and make your input so that no one would say that you refused to take part and therefore you get what is coming to you. Because we believe that in the changing times in which we live that there is need for a constitution that befit a modern civilized people who are aiming at improving every aspect and facet of our lives so that we can indeed bring about greater enlightenment and greater development for all our people.

Mr. Speaker, with that I want to reiterate my total support for this move for constitutional reform since there are certain weaknesses and limitations in the present constitution that beg for changes. We are grateful for the purposes it has served but it is time for us to move on and prepare a document, a constitution that befits people who are forward looking and moving into a more technological political sensitive, more dynamic society. Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much, much obliged.

**DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES:** Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I want first to thank all Honourable Members who participated in this debate. The last occasion according to my records when this matter was addressed was on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May. And this House after it was formally opened after the election on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April according to my count, it is about 14 occasions we have met, I noticed some members of the staff smiling, the staff of the House, because we are now meeting here if we take into account the first meeting in April, April 17<sup>th</sup>, we are talking within six months this House has occasion 14 times to meet. I make this point because some may think that because the motion was introduced in May and it is now being concluded that the Parliament of this country has been idle; far from it.

Many things have been distinctive about this Parliament so far. First we have had no recess, and if I have my way for the next five years there will be no recess. And those who would want to take their holidays will have to take their holidays between meetings of the House. What we are doing Mr. Speaker as you noticed, to assist persons in taking their holidays that we specified the dates on which Parliament would be meeting

so you can plan your affairs as distinct from the old days when Parliament was sprung on you like a thief in the night ten days before and sometimes, two days before a letter arrive from the House. The Speaker, upon the advise of the Leader of the House, the Prime Minister find it inconvenient to meet upon the particular date and two days later, three days later they tell you when the meeting should be. So your schedule was in a total mess. Of course, those were the days when the Parliament of this country met with the frequency of Supreme Soviet under Breschnev. And I would want to ask any historian to go through and would find and compare the 17 years of the NDP administration and you would not find a year in which the Parliament would have met on 13, 14 occasions much less to meeting within six months in that time. And we have had a packed agenda. And a lot of our legislative work has been directed to cleaning up the mess which the NDP has left.

You would recall, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, what we have had to do in relation to the Merchant Shipping Act. What we have had to do with the legislation relating to Fishing on the High Seas, problems with ICCAT and of course, the Merchant Shipping Act with the IMO and all the various black lists, or threatened black lists which faced us. Because when we took office Mr. Speaker, and it is important in the context in the debate what we are winding up here, we were on a threatened black list for the Merchant Shipping Act, we are on a threatened black list in respect of the fishing of the Big Eye Tuna from ICCAT, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna. We were on a black list where counter measures were already in place regards the Offshore Finance Sector. We had had to do a lot of work cleaning up; at the same time to move the country forward. All the various bills we have passed. We have had to present supplementary estimates.

So Mr. Speaker, I want the public to understand that we are moving forward expeditiously with this matter of constitutional reform and the delay in the conclusion of the debate on the motion of constitutional reform has had to do with our packed legislative agenda and during that time too Mr. Speaker, it must be remembered that I had to make several official visits throughout the Caribbean to deal with a wide range of issues. I had to go to meet Prime Minister Blair; the Summit of the Americas, CARICOM, several OECS meetings to address conferences in St. Kitts, in Jamaica, in Belize, where I was feature speaker, guest speaker, in Dominica, official visit to London, to Tripoli, to Republic of China, now all those days you cannot meet because you are away. And Mr. Speaker, all those trips of course, visits, have brought back tremendous benefits to this country, every single one. There has been no joy ride by this Prime Minister. I had to go to the OAS, the UN. The first Commonwealth Caribbean Prime Minister to have gone to the OAS and the United Nation after September 11<sup>th</sup> to put the position not only for St. Vincent and the Grenadines but also for the Caribbean, those things are a matter of record. The they say-ers, and the doom day say-ers, they would not acknowledge all that, but fortunately the people are listening and they know what is happening, and that's why ULP Government cannot be

shaken, they might yap at the heels but they cannot even touch the hem of the garment. They might yap at the heels but cannot even touch the trousers much less to put a bite on the foot; rabid dogs, some of them.

So Mr. Speaker, this debate has reached the point where we now have to move forward. And today we will be setting up a select committee on both sides of the House as the operative part of the resolution of the motion indicates and this select committee will promptly set up a broad based and competent constitution review commission to begin the exercise formally, of fashioning a new, more democratic constitution as befitting a free people at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and then the report of that commission would be submitted to this Honourable House and then of course, when that report is submitted to this Honourable House there are legislative changes which would have to be made because the constitution has to be altered within the framework of section 78 of the constitution. You have to have a draft, that draft would naturally go to the people, then you will come here in the House, we will pass it here by a two third majority and then we would have to go to the people after the expiration of 90 days in a referendum, so this process is a very long and time consuming one, but it is one in which we in the ULP are prepared to exercise leadership, taking the lead to alter a country's constitution is not an easy matter. It is a matter of profound importance.

The constitution is not just a piece of paper to be laughed at. The constitution is the fundamental document of the land, the supreme law of the land, to which Parliament is subject, to which the law courts are subject so that in this exercise we are moving expeditiously, but we are not going to move in a manner where we will undermine the process by which we have to conduct this constitutional review and we are not going to proceed in a way which will permit other persons with other agendas to have us draft a document which is not well thought out and which would stand the test of time. So we are going to move expeditiously but we are going to move with care and we are going to move in accordance with well established principles in the law, in the existing constitution as to how we must change the constitution and the requisite of full civil society participation. So that it will never be said when this constitutional reform is concluded that you did not have a say, the only person who will not have a say is a person who has determined for himself or herself that he or she is going to be a recluse, separate and distinct from the society, be apart from it, do not want to have anything to do with it because the entire machinery of Government would be mobilized to ensure that the most fulsome debate takes place throughout the country.

This is not a document which is going to be drawn up by philosopher, kings, or legal experts in isolation of the people, the people will have not just a say, the people will present their ideas and there would be extensive and intensive debate and the Agency for Public Information and 705 Radio along with other radio stations would be mobilized to carry the message.

Mr. Speaker, it took us four, five months in the process of consultation, publicly to repeal the existing Banana Industry Act and to put a new one in place and that is the way we do our business. For the first time in the history of this country that the people of this nation had the opportunity to question the Prime Minister at a public consultation about a bill which is before the Parliament, a bill which was published in the newspapers, that is the way we do our business. It is an entirely new mode of operation.

Yesterday, Prime Minister referred at the end of the discussion on the banana situation when this Government spearheaded the move to stop WIBDECO in its tracks about reducing prices to banana farmers for their bananas, and after I thank everybody for coming, Prime Minister said, before everybody there, he said no Prime Minister we have to thank you, he said because there is something which can be called the St. Vincent and the Grenadines model which we have all fall in line on, that in the discussion of bananas, you have brought civil society and the banana farmers and their representatives to sit down with Prime Ministers, the European Union, all the donor agencies to discuss their business. So that, this is not something which is mere rhetoric or episodic; we are living it daily in our Government. And this is why we have been given commendations by the United States Government for our democratic thrust and our involvement of civil society and by the British Government and today, I will inform the House, this morning before I arrived here I had a wrap up meeting with the IMF delegation who is here doing their article for consultation, their annual for article consultation. The CDB, Caribbean Development Bank, the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank and officials of the Ministries at a meeting chaired by me, the last wrap up. It commenced at 7:30 a.m. I wanted it to start at 7:00 a.m. its only because other persons begged that you should have a little sympathy do it a little half an hour later and that meeting was concluded at 10 to 10.00 before I arrived here and when the article 4 consultation document is put out and it will be circulated to members of this House, we have nothing to hide, but you will see in that document for our seven months so far, we have been given high praise by the International Monetary Fund for our management of the economy of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. So these are things which the general public is seeing and those who are not yet accustomed to the fact that they are in Opposition, that they have lost an election that an event took place on the 28<sup>th</sup> March in accordance with the law of this land; those who for whatever reason, Mr. Speaker, want to engage in mischief making the fact remains that good governance has been the hallmark of this Government from the day it took office; good governance.

And Mr. Speaker, if I may say so, we received from the British Government debt relief, because we got the debt relief on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August, the letter was put in my hand by the Secretary of State for the Department for International Development of Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, in her office. And as soon as I entered

and sat down she said Ralph I have this for you. Ms. Claire Short, when I opened it was the debt relief I had applied for under the Commonwealth initiative. And do you know the criteria under which they grant it? 1. That as a Government you weigh down heavily on official corruption. 2. That you demonstrate good governance. And 3, that you have a focused policy and practice in dealing with poverty alleviation or eradication. Those three criteria. The NDP had applied for debt relief under the Commonwealth debt initiative and after 17 years in power they could not get it. I got it for the ULP government count them, April, May, June, July, August; by the end of five months. So the people voted for us overwhelmingly on the 28<sup>th</sup> March and the international community voting for us every day overwhelmingly, by their utterances and by their actions. So how are you going to touch us, as we move to this profound task of constitutional reform.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of the ideas have been put forward here as to areas in which we wish to reform the constitution but I do not want to rehash them. But I want to say that within the first month after we took office I held discussions with the UNDP and the OAS on the matter of assisting, giving technical, financial support to this process of constitutional reform. And Mr. Speaker, last week Ann Forester of the UNDP she is leaving the region and the person who is taking over is Dr. Rosalyn Wilchire Brodbur, and Forrester asked me if I know her, I said not only do I know her, she and I went to university together in the same department, in the same faculty and we lectured together at the same university in the same department, in the same faculty and I have already sent her a letter of congratulations on her appoint as the UNDP person in the area. And we will be getting assistance from the UNDP in civil society preparation for this exercise of constitutional reform. The UNDP has also been in touch with the Attorney General because we do not do things, -- all roads do not lead to this Prime Minister, I said to them you have to address the issue with the Attorney General's Office because that office will be a critical executing agency. And all the NDP Parliamentarians have commented, all of them, publicly and privately that the Attorney General's Office after six months under the ULP Government is the most professional Chambers they have seen in this country since independence. Now, those things don't come by accident. I say they do not come by accident. You do not build the institutional capacity as we have built it in the Attorney General's Chambers by guess. You have a good Attorney General. Good bright young people in there with her, whom we are encouraging, in a number of different ways. We have a very vibrant Parliamentary Council, Legal Draftsperson. Very vibrant bright Solicitor General, Director of Public Prosecutions. That is how we build the capacity, quietly. You see the schools Julian Francis built, I mean repaired, 72 of them in eight weeks that is there visible but the part that you do not see is even more profound. The part that is out there that is not flashy like the capacity that is being built on an on going basis in the ULP Government. And that is why they may yap at a distance at our heels but they cannot come close to touch the garments; the rabid ones.

The same thing Mr. Speaker with the OAS and recently when I was in Washington to address the OAS I had an audience with the Secretary General of the OAS, His Excellency Caesar Guevara and raised this question again and he assured me that we are on target for the Financial Year 2002 to get assistance in respect of supports for the process of constitutional reform. When people ask me how long I think the constitution reform process will take, I tell them I don't know, whether it is going to take two years or three years or more. All I know I want it to be done properly and fulsomely. Because I do not want to do this thing hurry; because as a young boy, taught the folk wisdom, that 'hurry, hurry bird, na build good nest.' We will move expeditiously but moving expeditiously does not mean that you are moving like a hurry, hurry bird. I do not know, I think maybe Senator Shallow is the only one on the Opposition side who has some understanding of the concept of 'hurry, hurry bird na build good nest.' He is a Countryman. But that is deep in our folklore.

Mr. Speaker, it has been said by one member from the Opposition, because I do not want to single out anybody for criticism on this matter because I know that we cannot proceed to real meaningful constitutional reform unless we have all parties support on the issue of constitutional reform. I have been in politics long enough and I know the requisites for the change of the constitution, and as a matter of policy I do not want it to be partisan. At least not politically partisan. not party partisan. But it was said by one person on the Opposition side that we hear about integrity legislation, talks about integrity legislation being bandied about, it was spoken about in very derisive terms, but Mr. Speaker, we promised that we would sign the Inter American Convention Against Corruption which Inter American Convention criminalizes or calls for the criminalisation of illicit enrichment. On the very Order Paper today you would see that there is a motion in the name of the Deputy Prime Minister, in a resolution that this Honourable House register its approval for the ratification of the Convention and the convention has been circulated in this House and sanctions the efforts of the Government to eradicate corruptions at all levels in public life. We are the only OECS country that has signed that convention. We are not waiting on people. Justly like I am not waiting on Antigua on the issue of freedom of movement of OECS nationals, I am not waiting on the slowest in the pack. That is a matter for Antigua public policy. But the others want to move ahead and we are moving ahead. Nobody holding us back. And if I may say Mr. Speaker, on that question last week I received necessary documentation from the OECS Secretariat Legal Department about steps, because I had asked for them to provide us with what all we have to do to have things in place for January the first, at least using that as the deadline. If I don't get it January 1<sup>st</sup> I might get it January 20<sup>th</sup>. I am still okay. And the way we function in our Cabinet that document has been circulated to every single member of Cabinet. This is not something which is episodic. It is not merely tactical, it is a strategic imperative and in the constitutional review, account will be taken for moving into a closer union with the OECS and the wider Caribbean. Barbados has a formulation in its constitution which

permits that and we need to look at that and see how we can enlarge on that. Barbados' is the only constitution which has such a provision.

But Mr. Speaker, just say that is bandied about, we are bringing the International Convention it is here, and I can say to you, Honourable Members that already drafted is a bill on integrity legislation. Attorney General nods her head. It has been circulated to members of Cabinet and it has been circulated to certain civil society component and I understand from the Attorney General, she is whispering to me, because she knows the policy of openness and good governance in together now and forever, that it has been circulated to the Opposition also even though it has not come to Parliament yet. That is how we do our work. That is how we do our work! And the only reason Mr. Speaker, why it has not come on the Order Paper last meeting 22 bills were on the Order Paper, I could not over pack the agenda. But it will come. It will come. And I am personally making a study of comparative legislation in addition to that bill, I have gotten bills out of Trinidad and Jamaica where in addition to what the Attorney General, the excellent work she has done in this particular bill, I as leader of the House it is my responsibility to make a personal study of these matters too. I have held extensive discussions with Parliamentarians in Jamaica, because they went through that exercise at a select committee and I have to get that right also. The NDP promised it for 17 years, never did it, we came to the House with a Bill on Integrity Legislation, the Government used its majority to ensure that it was not debated, but the people of St. Vincent in their wisdom have now given us the authority and nobody can stop us from debating it, other than the people themselves, and they are not going to stop us because they voted for us to bring it among other things.

Mr. Speaker, in the constitution in St. Lucia there is provision for an integrity commission and that is a matter which we would have to look at in constitutional reform but even if it is there in constitution you still have to give life to it, put flesh on the bones and demarcate the contours of integrity legislation in a bill before the House and have it publicly debated, and to have civil society input. To have the input of the public service unions, because provisions therewith which will touch upon and connect senior public officers and persons within the very senior ranks of the police force.

Mr. Speaker, a constitution which has been given to us by our founding fathers, spearheaded by the late great Robert Milton Cato is one which has tremendous strengths but also it is possess of weaknesses. Very often when people talk about the 1979 constitution in their critique of it they want to throw out the baby with the bathwater. No we can't do that. That is why we call it a constitutional reform, constitutional review, not constitutional abandonment.

Because Mr. Speaker, in our existing constitution representative democracies enshrined, fundamental rights and freedoms are there, separation of powers, and independent judiciary, an independence of a Director of Public Prosecution, of the

Director of Audit, one-man one vote. But as we all say there are all reforms which we can have, instead of a Supervisor of Elections we consider an Electoral Commission, instead of First-Past-the-Post electoral system we can consider other systems including, a mixed system between proportional representation and First-Past-the-Post. We can look as to whether we should have fixed terms or not fixed terms, whether we should have term limits or no term limits. Whether we should have one chamber of the legislature or two chambers. Should both chambers if we have them to be elected or one should be elected and one nominated, if so how is it to be nominated. Are we to continue with the Monarchical system, with Her Majesty the Queen representing us or are we to have a head of state in a Republic? And if we are having a head of state, how should that head of state be selected, and what kind of Head of State, should it be a ceremonial head of state or a head of state who is also head of government. All these are options which will go before the electorate, all of these things.

Should we have an ombudsman or a parliamentary commission, what kind should it be. Should there be one or should there be more than one ombudsman. Should there be an ombudsman for the health service and one separately for the public service. There are all variations which we can look at but this exercise is one which requires careful leadership. And the ULP Government is determined to provide the leadership for the most appropriate constitution for St. Vincent and the Grenadines in these times. In times when the State has had its authority or its power diminished as a consequence of globalization, trade liberalization and the spread of information technology. But the State is nevertheless the most important institution in the society, if only because it has the legitimate monopoly on physical coercion. And in this new system what should be the role of local government which is another motion we have before the House and which we are going to be late on implementing because we are hoping to have it within 12 months, but it that is going to be difficult but we have started the process.

The Honourable Minister of Local Government just showed me a document by a consultant, a senior lecturer at the University of the West Indies on the subject. How should local government fit into this new configuration. We will have it as genuinely democratic local government, but should it be direct elections, or an indirect system of appointments by persons who are in the Parliament with appointments from civil society for them to participate so that we do not have what we have at the national level the political divisions replicating themselves at the lower level and giving rise to garrison constituencies as the case in Jamaica or derisiveness as the case of local government in Dominica and the Trinidad and Tobago. All those are matters which again will go before the people for serious discussions, because I want to see civil society involvement. I am very persuaded by the writings in this regard by an American political sociologist by the name of Ameti Etzionie had written a great deal

about community base strategies. And that kind of a literature will inform discussion on these subjects.

This is a government which is not afraid of going into the broad heritage of intellectual thought and comparative government and to take out from that heritage of theory and practice and bring to bear on our own circumstances. And on the fact Mr. Speaker, that the persons whom we have today in our country are of a different kind that was contemplated in 1979. We were thought of in 1979, we were still a largely rural community. The levels of literacy were lower. The efforts of Robert Milton Cato in building all those primary and secondary schools certainly contributed immensely to the widening of literacy in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

We have people now using the telephone, before 1969 was the old crank up thing you had to use. People laugh when I tell them that before I went to the university of the West Indies I used the telephone two times before in my life. Two times. And when you go, -- if the mouth of the telephone is not a long one because you are not accustomed to this instrument you were in danger of putting the path where you suppose to put your mouth by your ear. Because it was a piece of technology. In 1966 when I went to university, it was not wide spread technology in St. Vincent. It is only in 1969 or 1970 I think Mr. Cato got Cable and Wireless to have a direct dialing system and so on and so forth you had to go through the old crank up system. I see a number of the young members of the House Assembly staff looking at me as though I am a figure from an ancient history. But that is the reality. Now there are so many cellular phones around the place sometimes I do not have one because I get enough telephone calls and to tell you the truth they are too expensive. Cable and Wireless is ripping off this country, with the cellular. So I am not into that. But now a days the figure show that usage of telephone by the people in the Caribbean is higher than the average in developed countries. And one of the reasons for this, that is a fact you know, higher. And one of the reasons for this that we in the Caribbean are the first genuine trans national community in the modern period. We have proportionately more nationals oversees than any other region in the world that is why we have to use the telephone so much to keep in touch with our families. So you are not dealing with classic cane cutter or arrowroot digger. You are dealing with an increasingly literate population well aware on the internet, cell phones, telephones, communication technology of a kind and that is why the NDP government with all respect to them, did not understand this new phenomenon and they wanted to run a commandist State when the objective conditions for a commandist state were gone, and that is why people laughed at them. So that when they came to the House with the pensions bill they call confessed including the Leader of the Opposition that they were surprised at the reaction of the people. Surprised, they openly confessed, they went on radio, they were bewildered. That was just a manifestation that they had not come to terms with the changing character of the State and the old way was no longer an option. The old commandist way that was gone. We in the Unity Labour Party understand the

changes which have taken place in the real world and we have to fashion and we have to fashion the constitution together with the people to make sure that we get the best possible constitution in all the circumstances.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know that during the course of this debate in public that there would be times when the NDP opposition and the ULP Government would have different positions on certain matters. I am hoping that the NDP will not permit its forlorn quest and hunger for power to determine its position and tactical approaches to the questions of constitution because whilst I am prepared to co-operate fully with the Opposition in this exercise, I at the same time sound a warning that I will go over their heads to the people if there are obstructionist or if they want to turn constitutional reform into a mechanism to seek a tactical political advantage, for I am satisfied that the people will come to us if they seek to be obstructionist. I prepared to co-operate but I at the same time give the warning because I know that out there, we have the two third in the House, the kind of constitution we envisage that we are going to have, we will have more than two thirds in the country to support it in a referendum. And if the NDP want to be obstructionist at any stage of the game we will go over their heads and go directly to the people and of course they will be wiped out completely. Because I tell them in advance, I will put the election date shortly after the referendum if they seek to be obstructionist and wipe them out completely, so they better decide to come and co-operate, so do not be – whilst we want to have them aboard don't believe that I am going to give them any space to play any politics. Because I do not want to boast about this thing, but my 33 years experience in politics from the time I was a youngster of 22 years old, in the aggregate is more than that of the entire opposition put together. Especially since they lose Burns. Of the entire Opposition put together, and I know that the people of this country want a thoroughly democratic constitution where their leaders are responsible to them and responsive to them. But I do not want this to be a political football, and that is why, even in my critique of individual, members on this issue I make a general sweep rather than to pin on any particular one individual anything to show them that the compass of the leadership of the Government is wide and broad and sufficiently encompassing together now and forever. I am obliged Mr. Speaker, I give the support to this motion.

Mr. Speaker, I move this motion in its operative clause: Be it resolved that this Honourable House establish a Select Committee of Parliament to set up promptly a broad-based and competent Constitution Review Commission to begin the exercise formally of fashioning a new, more democratic constitution as befitting a free people at the dawn of the twenty-first century and that the report of the Commission be submitted to this Honourable House.

I so move again, Mr. Speaker.

**HONOURABLE SELMON WALTERS:** Mr. Speaker, I second the resolution.

***Question put and agreed to.***

**DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES:** Mr. Speaker, in terms – now that the motion has been unanimously passed, because I did not hear any nays at all I want to suggest a select committee of 11 persons plus the Attorney General, so that will be 12 Mr. Speaker. I think normally we have select committees that are much smaller, but this involves the setting up of broad based and competent Constitution Review Commission which will no doubt involve the terms of reference and the personnel and we would have to have civil society involvement and I want to suggest the following persons. The Deputy Prime Minister the Honourable Louis Straker, Minister of National Security, the Honourable Vincent Beache, Minister of Education, Honourable Mike Browne, Minister of Health and the Environment Honourable Douglas Slater, Minister of Local Government, Honourable Girlyn Miguel, Minister of Tourism and Culture, Honourable Rene Baptiste, Senator Andrea Young, the Attorney General and the Prime Minister. Mr. Speaker, given the position of the Standing Orders I think the Opposition would be entitled to suggest three persons.

**HONOURABLE TERRANCE OLLIVIERRE:** Mr. Speaker, Members for that committee would be the Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Arnhim Eustace, the Honourable Member for the Northern Grenadines, and myself.

**DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES:** Mr. Speaker, I think perhaps, I don't know if we should call out the names again so that we are sure. Yes? The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of National Security, Minister of Education, Minister of Health and the Environment, Minister of Local Government, Minister of Tourism and Culture, Senator Andrea Young, the Attorney General and the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, Member for the Northern Grenadines, and Member for the Southern Grenadines.

**HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER:** Those are the names of members of the select committee. Do we have an approval?

***Question put and agreed to.***

**DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to indicate as leader of the House so that Members could be aware, I want to suggest and I would move the motion formally shortly for the suspension until the next sitting because we will use the same agenda as the one from the last time, unless the Clerk feels that we may have enough time, I want to suggest Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> of November. Do we have enough time to send out any Order Paper? Yes? So we can do the adjournment. I move the motion shortly Mr. Speaker. It is expected Mr. Speaker, that on the 21<sup>st</sup>, I had discussed this with the Leader of the Opposition already that we will have a

special sitting here for President Chavez and then without naming the date, I am hoping Mr. Speaker, that some time in the last week in November we will have the Budget presentation. And I am looking hopefully at the last week in November, first week in December at the outside; we are currently very, very, very busy in budget preparations and Mr. Speaker, it has been a very hectic time, very, very, very hectic with one set of events flowing upon another and we are trying to get the budget at least a three four weeks earlier than usual, we are trying to do that, we may not succeed, we may go into first week in December but we are hoping that we may have it in the last week in November or the last week in November going into the first week in December. I indicate those broad times Mr. Speaker, so that Honourable Members who feel that they have to take a holiday. I noticed Senator Shallow has looked at me, so he may need a holiday. I therefore beg to move Mr. Speaker, that this Honourable House do stand adjourned until the 13<sup>th</sup> November.

**HONOURABLE SELMON WALTERS:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

***Question put and agreed to.  
House adjourned accordingly at 5:41 p.m.***