

No. 2

TUESDAY

First Session

8th May, 2001

Seventh Parliament

SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

THE

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

ADVANCE COPY

OFFICIAL REPORT

CONTENTS

Tuesday 8th May, 2001

Prayers	6
Motion – Constitutional Reform (Continuation of Debate)	6
Honourable Arnhim Eustace	6
Honourable Michael Browne	15
Dr. the Honourable Godwin Friday	23
Honourable Vincent Beache	31
Honourable Joseph Burns Bonadie	42

Honourable Rene Baptiste	49
Honourable Selmon Walters	54
Dr. The. Honourable Ralph Gonsalves	60
Adjournment	61

THE

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE SECOND 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.

THIRD SITTING

8TH May, 2001

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

The Honourable House of Assembly met at 10.00 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

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 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 Telecommunications, Science
Technology and Industry
Honourable Dr. Jerrol Thompson

Member for North 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 Arnhim Eustace	Member for East Kingstown/ Leader of the Opposition
Dr. the Honourable Godwin Friday	Member for Northern Grenadines
Honourable Terrance Ollivierre	Member for Southern Grenadines
Honourable Juliet George	Government Senator
Honourable Andrea Young	Government Senator/Deputy Speaker
Honourable Joseph Burns Bonadie	Opposition Senator
Honourable Gerard Shallow	Opposition Senator

ABSENT

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Trade. Honourable Louis Straker	Member for Central Leeward
--	----------------------------

SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

TUESDAY 8th MAY, 2001

PRAYERS

Mr. Speaker read the Prayers of the House.

MOTION

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM - Continuation of the debate.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: We on this side of the House have some particular concerns, and I would like to refer, Mr. Speaker, at this time to some of those concerns; but I wish to preface my remarks in this regard on the impact of what is happening around us internationally on the nature of our economy, the nature of our social systems and there in that way highlight the concerns that I have, that we on this side of the House have in relation to the importance of Constitutional Reform in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, all of us are apprised in this Honourable House of the effects of globalization, we hear constantly, we see it on television about the impact that is being felt all over the world, and St. Vincent is no exception, in deed Mr. Speaker, we move towards globalization, and liberalization of trade is already impacting and at the present time, Mr. Speaker, impacting relatively negatively on our economy and on our social structure. And it is very important, Mr. Speaker, that we spend some time looking at this particular matter.

Mr. Speaker, one of the sections of the Constitution of some concern, Mr. Speaker, has to do with the Public Service Commissions vis-a- vis role, Public Service. It is our submission, Mr. Speaker, that the State will continue for some time to play a pivotal role in terms of the development of our economy. Notwithstanding the much vaunting desire, Mr. Speaker, to have the private sector be the engine of growth, and in that context, Mr. Speaker, the States role is very important, even though it is diminishing, it is important. And, Mr. Speaker, governments have a responsibility to develop policies and programmes for the betterment of the peoples of our country. It is a responsibility that no government can shirk, or it will not be a government, our government will vary as to what

extent they believe that the State has a role to play but the point remains, Mr. Speaker, that in small open island economy like our own the Government has a critical role to play. And when I say government, Mr. Speaker, I am not only referring here to the political directorate, not just to the politicians, but I include in that, Mr. Speaker, the public service, which has the responsibility, Mr. Speaker for implementing and indeed sometimes assisting in the formulation of Government policies, and how that Public Service functions, Mr. Speaker, what regulatory mechanisms that are in place, for example, the Public Service Commission, and how that functions and operates, or how it is established, is of germane importance to the performance of government. To the implementation of government policies, and therefore, Mr. Speaker, when we are examining this Constitution, we need to ensure that we have a very critical look at the whole concept of the Public Service Commission.

I say so, Mr. Speaker, because I am convinced from my own experience as a public servant, and now at the political level, that the management of the public service can be hamstrung by the way the Public Service Commission, its rules and regulations are structured. Many public officers at the management level, Mr. Speaker, complain that they don't really have sufficient authority to deal with issues, including personnel issues arising in the public service. They don't have the ability to reward, and where they want to discipline they are hamstrung by the long procedures that are involved. This, Mr. Speaker, is a very serious matter, irregardless of what sort of governments, or which government or which party is in power at a particular time, Mr. Speaker. The ability of that party to get its policies and programmes implemented is the function of how well the Civil Service performs, and how well the Civil Service performs is a function of its management, and a function of the flexibility that that management has, in terms of dealing with problems and issues as they arise.

So, Mr. Speaker, not only do we have to look at what is happening internationally, we have to be very clear in our own minds that the structures we put in place do not hamper the duly elected government from implementing the policies which form the basis on which it was elected. Otherwise the whole exercise of election, Mr. Speaker, would be a farce. Our populace, our people elect parties on the basis of the programmes and policies that they put forward to the public, and in that case, Mr. Speaker, that government should not be hamstrung by any inadequacies in terms of our Constitution. To the extent that it limits the ability, maybe it is the way it has functioned in the past. But certainly, Mr. Speaker, a process that takes two years for instance, to discipline a public officer really frustrates the manager in the public service. If one is going to take two years, because of the procedure to be followed to either reward or discipline persons, then Mr. Speaker, you can imagine the impact of that on managers in the public Service.

And for me, Mr. Speaker, that is a very critical concern when we discuss this whole question of constitutional reform. To me it is meaningless, Mr. Speaker, and we on this side have discussed this, it is meaningless to have Constitutional reform unless this

particular issue is addressed. I believe that everyone of us in this House, is aware of some of the difficulties associated with the implementation of programmes and policies because of some of these constraints, and we need to spend time, Mr. Speaker, in this discussion, and based on this motion when we discuss Constitution and changes to it, I believe we need to spend a lot of time on this particular issue.

Mr. Speaker, there is another aspect of that which is also vitally important, Mr. Speaker, in terms of our economy; we call it the fast changes taking place globally, the rapid changes in technology. There is need for more speed in terms of implementation, we have to keep up and sometimes we have to run ahead and anticipate changes. And to the extent, Mr. Speaker, that provisions, including some of those that relate to Public Service Commission, are hindrance in this regard, we have to address these issues very carefully. Mr. Speaker, we are speaking about the livelihood of the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. We are speaking about the economy of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in the future, and therefore to that extent, Mr. Speaker, it is of critical importance. So I am not only concerned with the ability to manage, but also, Mr. Speaker, with the ability to facilitate change at the fastest possible rate, given what is happening to us internationally. And this is changing Mr. Speaker, not only in the economy but also Mr. Speaker, when we look at the social sectors of our economy in particular, we need to be able to move speedily.

Mr. Speaker, another area of concern, and I think this was raised by the Honourable Prime Minister when he made his presentation, has to do with the First-Past-the-Post System which we now have in place here in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and many parts of the world. Time and time again, Mr. Speaker, the question has been raised in this Honourable House as to whether the representation in the House is a reflection of the popular will of the people as measured by the popular vote. This question has been raised over and over again, and I agree, Mr. Speaker, that it is a matter that we need to address, because Mr. Speaker, to some extent this system that we have, sometime may not necessarily reflect the popular will, and we therefore, Mr. Speaker, have to devise a mechanism which allows us to reflect more accurately the popular will of the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in terms of the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. And here again Mr. Speaker, we would expect that there would be considerable discussion on many issues, on this issue in our discussions on Constitutional Reform.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes we discuss these issues, and we discuss them in a vacuum, but sometimes, Mr. Speaker, if we apply some simple examples, one can be sure that with a change in the constitution we come nearer to the reflection of the popular will by certain types of amendments, and I recall that in his presentation the Honourable Prime Minister did make reference to other countries which had hybrid systems as he called it, I think he made specific reference to Germany and where you have a mix of proportional representation and the First-Past-the-Post System.

Mr. Speaker, all of these systems could be examined, as we get involved in this review. I try to do, Mr. Speaker, some simple arithmetic and evaluation to this particular question, and I applied that simple arithmetic to both the results of the 1998 Elections and to the 2001 Elections. Now, Mr. Speaker, in this House we have 15 seats. All elected on the First-Past-the-Post System, and we have six senators. Let us, for argument sake, Mr. Speaker, and this is not possible under the existing Constitution, but could be possible under the new constitution. Let's for argument sake, Mr. Speaker, propose that the whole 15 seats, and I am going to the hybrid situation referred to. Let us for argument sake, Mr. Speaker, say the whole 15 seats that we now have on the basis of the existing system, and then for argument sake proposed that there be ten or so seats which would be on the basis of Proportional Representation.

In practical terms, if we apply that to the last two elections, Mr. Speaker, it would have meant that in 1998, the ULP would have 13 seats and the NDP 12, if we had that sort of system in place. Because what would have happened, you would recall that we had 8 seats for the NDP, 7 seats for the ULP had, I think 55 percent of the vote, and the NDP 45 percent. This would have meant that out of the new ten, as has been proposed, the ULP on the basis of the popular vote would have gotten 6 out of the 10, and therefore would have had 13 seats, and the NDP on the basis of its 40 odd percent would have gotten 4 out of the 10, and therefore 8 and 4 make 12. So here you have a situation with the hybrid you would have automatically had different result at the close of election. I raised this example, Mr. Speaker, because I think it highlights very clearly the impact of what system we have on the results at the poles.

In similar results based on the last elections we had in March, there would have been 18 persons over there and 7 persons over here. The difference, Mr. Speaker, has to do with the introduction that we are proportion, that proportion can vary based on Proportional Representation and, Mr. Speaker, I think that this highlights clearly for us how important this exercise is, because it shows without a shadow of a doubt that system we have, or whatever system we put in place can be done in a manner which can either make things worse, or it can make things better. It can be more equitable or less equitable, the point is, Mr. Speaker, is that it is an issue that we must examine very closely as we go forward in this exercise.

The third issue I like to raise in this regard, Mr. Speaker, relates to local government, I should say one thing before I move on to local government, Mr. Speaker, we now have more than two political parties in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, any system such as the hybrid one which I just raised would raise the issue of the role of the parties that are less dominant and how are they impacted by that hybrid system. All I wish to say about that, Mr. Speaker, is that should we go for that type of system, we will have to have some sort of limit, some sort of minimum number of votes a threshold that that party should raise before we can even benefit from proportional exercise that we just discussed. Some say

10 percent, some say 15 percent, some say 20 percent, but there are issues, Mr. Speaker, of vital importance which run to the equity of the system.

Now I go to the third issue, Mr. Speaker, and that has to do with the question of local government. We have another motion before this House, Mr. Speaker, dealing with this matter. But it is possible that during the discussions on constitutional reform that we could have in fact some implications arising as far as local government is concerned, because, Mr. Speaker, one of the things we have to determine in local government is what sort of mechanism that we put in place for funding the operations of local government, quite apart from the exercise, the actual operations of local government. What sort of mechanisms, Mr. Speaker, can we put in place and do we need, Mr. Speaker, any such mechanism enshrined in the constitution of St. Vincent and the Grenadines as we move towards its amendment. For instance, Mr. Speaker, it is well known that it is possible that where you have a system of local government and there are elected representatives, it is quite possible to have area that where elections are held and the opposition is the winner in a particular area, and they are dependent on the central government for funding. And I think all of us know, Mr. Speaker, that in the cut and thrust of politics, sometimes that one is the one that would suffer. And on the base of equity, Mr. Speaker, we need, Mr. Speaker, to look at this matter as to whether the provisions of funds in this regard from the central government is a matter for the constitution. This, Mr. Speaker, is an important issue as we now before this month is out focus our attention also on the second motion that is before this Honourable House, and it is an exercise, Mr. Speaker, depending on the terms of reference, depending on the functions that we feel that local government must perform; the larger the function, the greater the risk, and therefore the greater the concern in terms of how one ensures that all entities, all local government entities are properly funded.

Mr. Speaker, I want to mention one other aspect of constitutional reform, and that, Mr. Speaker, has to do with the question of term limits. In several countries of the world, Mr. Speaker, this matter is being debated as to whether someone could serve as head of government, Prime Minister or whatever term you used for more than a specific number of consecutive terms. This is an issue to which I am sure there would be comment and representation made during the course of this review of our constitution. But, Mr. Speaker, I want to, having mentioned those few areas, I want to mention one more other general area, and that, Mr. Speaker, has to do with the constitution and the whole question of the rule of law and justice, and to ensure, Mr. Speaker, as we discuss that to make sure that at all times the separation of powers that we so often refer to, continue to exist.

Mr. Speaker, reference is made during this debate to a matter which relates sub judice, and I am not going into it, but I want to say here, Mr. Speaker, that we have to ensure, especially the type of international environment that we now face; we have to ensure that all persons both local and foreign desirous of investing in our country, feel comfortable

that at all times we will observe the rule of law. Mr. Speaker, I submit that in a country where we have to depend to a great degree for our future development on foreign investment we must always, Mr. Speaker, ensure that in terms of the rule of law that we are seen as beyond reproach. It is something that is critical, and very important for a person seeking to visit us in terms of the tourist industry, or persons seeking to invest in our country in whatever field, Mr. Speaker, they must be comfortable that they can go to the Courts and know that we could observe and always observe the decisions of the Court. Mr. Speaker, this is a vital matter and we need to take it very, very seriously and I expect, Mr. Speaker, that during the course of this debate this matter is going to come up. We have to make sure that at all times the framework is there.

Mr. Speaker I want to turn now somewhat more to the substance of the motion that is before this Honourable House. The very last section of the motion

“Be it resolved that this Honourable House directs the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines 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 21st Century.”

Mr. Speaker, I believe that it is fitting that as a free people we have a new or revised Constitution at the dawn of the new century, I think that, Mr. Speaker, is appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, the motion that is before us gives the Government, or asks the House to direct the Government to set that commission. The motion itself perhaps understandably, Mr. Speaker, does not go into great details on the structure of such a commission except to say that it is broad based. It says nothing, Mr. Speaker, and I assume that it means that the Government will determine or fashion the terms of reference, because I see here no provision for even consultation with the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, during the last election we on this side of the House our party received just under 41 percent of the votes and in that context, Mr. Speaker, we are concerned as to what role we are expected as representative of that 41 percent or so are expected to play in this exercise. Are we simply to be presenters of memoranda before the Commission, or are we, Mr. Speaker, to be dependent on “together now”. “Together now” Mr. Speaker, involves, and I am sure that the Honourable Prime Minister is very clear in his own mind as to what it involves. If “together now” Mr. Speaker, is to be a reality, then we on this side of the House must feel that reality. And, Mr. Speaker, this motion that is presented does not give me as the Leader of the Opposition, or my colleagues on this side, any feeling other than negative in that regard. And, Mr. Speaker, more so some of the matters taking place in our country today where we seem to be moving towards a level of victimization that we have not had here for a long time makes me question, Mr. Speaker, the whole concept. A lot of people, Mr. Speaker, in this country are now being

put out of jobs, a lot of people, and I am not sure what the reason is, but in many instances, Mr. Speaker, no reason is given.

Mr. Speaker, I think we need to look at this matter very carefully, because I am sure, Mr. Speaker, this matter extends not only to persons who are paid, Mr. Speaker, it extends to Justices of the Peace who are not paid, who have made and continue to make for many years, contributions to the development of this country. And most of them, Mr. Speaker, those who are perceived to be supporters of the New Democratic Party are the ones who are removed. There are a number of Justices of the Peace who were appointed by the New Democratic Party and they remain, they are untouched and therefore, Mr. Speaker, in that context it could only be victimization based on political affiliation. Because they are not touched. They are not touched. A number of people are not touched.

Mr. Speaker, the last set of Justices of the Peace were appointed a few days after I became Prime Minister, indeed their swearing in was one of my first acts as Prime Minister. There are persons who were appointed then who are still there, and those who are no longer there, and those who are there, Mr. Speaker, are those who we knew when we appointed them that they were not supporters of the New Democratic Party. So I don't know what sort of "together now" we are talking about, but Mr. Speaker, my concern about that, Mr. Speaker, and the concern of a lot of people in this country, is that these matters will impinge on the motion that we have before us today. Constitutional change, Mr. Speaker, would require that we have a two-thirds majority in a referendum and therefore, Mr. Speaker, our approach to this matter must be one in which both sides engage in it. Both sides, must be able to convince the supporters that this is something worthwhile. This is something in their interest. I am saying, Mr. Speaker, the present climate does not make that very easy. It does not make it very easy, Mr. Speaker.

I may not have been long in politics, but I believe I have a basic understanding of a lot of the issues. And, Mr. Speaker, I am concerned about that matter. It surely makes it more difficult for me to say to the supporters of the New Democratic Party that they must support this. Not that I have anything against Constitutional Reform, I welcome Constitutional Reform, but I must do a selling job, there must be open and fair discussions in all organs. And I am sure in both parties, and the third party that will take place, again and again, and one must be able to say this thing is good for us. This thing is good for the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Mr. Speaker, I was asked the question, yesterday by a number of persons, whether we are supporting the motion on Constitutional Reform, my answer is yes, in principle I have no problem whatsoever. I think it is needed, I think it is important for our future. But, Mr. Speaker, I have some concerns. I believe that this Parliament is the highest law making, policymaking body in our country. I believe that the constitution, Mr. Speaker, is the highest law of the land, I recognize Mr. Speaker, that the Government has the majority of the popular vote, but I also recognize, Mr. Speaker, that the New Democratic Party, also

has 41 percent of the vote. I recognized, Mr. Speaker, that this Parliament reflects to some degree the balance that is outside there in public, and I am saying, Mr. Speaker, that we have to play a more significant role than is being proposed in this motion. I believe that an amendment has been circulated which has been proposed at some point in time that will be dealt with, but Mr. Speaker, this is a very, very serious issue because fundamentally we are addressing an issue that is germane to the future development of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and to the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and we must all, Mr. Speaker, all of us have a responsibility to ensure that it is seen to be fair. Not necessarily cluttered by party politics and in that context, Mr. Speaker, I think this Parliament essentially is the body that should set up the commission, and this is the body to which the commission should be put.

Mr. Speaker, we have an opportunity at this time to go forward in this exercise, and we on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, are willing to go forward with this exercise. But Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure that as representatives of 41 percent of the population that we are more than simply presenting memorandum. Mr. Speaker, I recognize, and I am sure that those on the other side of the House recognize the seriousness of this matter, and I believe, Mr. Speaker, it is possible to have a meeting of the minds on how we go further. I do not wish, Mr. Speaker, for us to lose this opportunity. Because I am fearful, Mr. Speaker, if we lose it now, you lose it for a very long time, and the result of that, Mr. Speaker, would be to the detriment of the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Much obliged. Mr. Speaker.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: May I invite the Leader of the Opposition to actually move the motion as circulated, certainly the first limb, the amendment to the motion and I would second that amendment. The second limb of the amendment, it can also be put in, only that it is superfluous in the sense that it has to come back to Parliament either (a) because of Section 38 of the Constitution for the amendment procedure (b) now simply because there has to be a Select Committee doing the appointment. And the appointing body within the rules of the House itself, so I would say the second limb is superfluous and I think in the circumstances – it isn't that – it will be coming back to Parliament, if you wish to put it in I have no objection, it is only that it is superfluous. But if you wish to put in the superfluity I would also second the superfluity.

Order 71 and 72 of the Standing Orders, in any event it is the general proposition, you know, and the over riding section 38 of the Constitution. But I am inviting the substantive point which the Leader of the Opposition is making that is to say a select committee of this House appoint the Constitutional Commission, but I am prepared to second that amendment if the Leader of the Opposition so proposes, so that we can go "together now".

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: Mr. Speaker, what you are, - before I move the amendment to the motion, Mr. Speaker, I recognized what the Honourable Prime Minister refers to as superfluity, of course all Select Committees report back to the Parliament, but Mr. Speaker, my concern in this regard stemmed not so much from the rules of the House or the Standing Orders, but from the fact that I believe that it is important for the people listening to us to understand, and it was in this context that I included the second portion of the amendment.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, if the Honourable Leader of the Opposition wants to move the second limb of the amendment I also prepared to second it, only that it is as indicated in my speech moving the motion I fully expect to involve the Opposition in this exercise, and that is why we came to the House rather than doing it as an Executive Act which we were entitled to do on the basis of the Elections result. So I would, if the Leader of the Oppositions move both the amendments in the spirit in which we have addressed the questions, I am prepared to second them.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Maybe my question is are you satisfied that people understand now, the population on a whole?

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: I think it is better to have it.

Mr. Speaker I move with respect to the last paragraph of the motion that the proposed words:

“directs the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines” be left out and in its place the words “establish a Select Committee of Parliament” be inserted.

With respect to Roman II the said paragraph that the following words be inserted at the end as follows:

“and that the report of the Commission be submitted to this Honourable House.”

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: I do second those two amendments to the motion Mr. Speaker.

***Question put and agreed.
Motion is amended.***

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: We will not debate the motion as amended. The motion is now amended. We will continue now.

HONOURABLE MICHAEL BROWNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I understand it we are not actually going to debate the amendment as moved by the Leader of the Opposition per se but that we are going to deal with it in the context of an amended motion.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: That's right.

HONOURABLE MICHAEL BROWNE: Minister of National Security, go ahead. I would not want to interpret for the Minister of National Security, but I suspect that he has a concern in that regard in reference to the Standing Orders.

Mr. Speaker, let me start by saying that I categorically support the motion in its original form, and for purposes of the listening audience I just would want to read it very quickly so that they can follow exactly what the debate is.

“CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM”

WHEREAS the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is of the view that good governance demands that active participation of the people in, and control over, the institutions which govern their day-to-day lives;

AND WHEREAS in pursuance of the quest for good governance, and for active popular participation in the state administration, the people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are clamouring for appropriate constitutional reform;

AND WHEREAS the existing Constitution of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, despite its many strengths, has shown its weaknesses and limitations;

AND WHEREAS constitutional reform, through extensive and intensive public debate between and among the people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines at home and abroad, was a major plank in the Manifesto of the victorious Unity Labour Party in recent general elections of March 28, 2001;

AND WHEREAS the Opposition New Democratic Party has publicly stated its support for constitutional reform;

BE IT RESOLVED that this Honourable House (and in its original form it read) directs the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines 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.

Amended it reads:

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.

The essential difference then is that it should go through a Select Committee, but the substance of the motion remains intact. Mr. Speaker, I want to give categorical support to the motion in its substance as distinct from the procedural amendment because the amendment deals with process, the debate on constitutional reform. I categorically support it because I have recognized along with the other colleagues and many people in this country, the limitations of the present constitution. Many years ago I was extremely involved in the process in the Independence Constitution, we were engaged in a massive national public political education process, the length and breath of this country over a very extended period of time, not all of our submissions were accepted by the Government at the time, and I do believe that there was merit in a number of our proposals which had not been included at the time. But with the passage of time, and a new epoch have revealed the further limitations of the Constitution, and almost 22 years later it is certainly time for us to have such review.

The aspects of the constitution that I am philosophically opposed to and our party similarly has some serious differences with it and its operations. But it is important for us to deal very expeditiously even though carefully with this matter. Expeditiously, because as indeed the Leader of the Opposition pointed out that we need to move with more speed and a sense of urgency, given the broader ramifications and the context that we are living, but carefully because of the far reaching consequences of the amendments. So we have to strike the balance between being expeditious and moving it forward as quickly as we can, while being careful with regard to the substantive changes that we make. Because the Constitution is our supreme law, and because too many things are pinned to it, and because it impinges on so many facets of national life, it is necessary that this one be dealt with very quickly, and that we start with this important aspect of reform. For example we have another motion before this House, and that motion on local government is hitched to a large degree on the constitution. From the standpoint of my own Ministry we need to make some major amendments to Education Act of 1992. We need to put in place a Teaching Service Commission to which we are committed, and a lot of these have implications for the constitution. So it is appropriate that we begin the process with our supreme law, our fundamental law because other things derived from that. We intend to engage in a lot of other reforms in this country, education reforms being one of them, and it is necessary that we clear certain things before that process is put in place. Some things

we know can be done outside the framework of an amended constitution, and indeed within the current framework, but I am making the point that it is necessary for us to move with expedition on this matter. In this regard I do hope that the process of the Select Committee while important will not inordinately delay the process of taking it further among the people as we expect the Commission to do.

Our party is committed to constitution reform. We have made it a plank not only in our manifesto but also in our “100 Days” programme because of the urgency with which we see this matter. For example the manifesto of the party, Manifesto 2001 which has been made a document of the House it says:

“That ULP believe that central to the idea good governance is the active participation of the people in an control over the institutions which govern their day to day lives.”

Something which is quoted and incorporated into the motion. It is an important philosophical concept, Mr. Speaker, that is going to guide and permeate our actions as a government. We are committed to setting up this constitutional review commission “to begin the exercise formally of fashioning a new and more democratic constitution”, that’s on page 5 of our manifesto. On page 4 of our “100 Days” programme we reiterate with urgency that call “to set up a broad-based highly qualified constitutional reform commission to start the process of altering our county’s constitution for the better in a quest to improve our system of governance. To assist in this exercise of constitution reform, ULP published in July 21st 2000 a document entitled “Constitutional Reform, A discussion”.

Mr. Speaker, you will note that the objective ultimately of constitutional reform here is articulated in the “100 Days” programme is to improve our system of governance. There are many flaws and many limitations, and we believe that we should improve it of course with the view towards good governance which has been lacking in this country for a number of years. We put out this document, Mr. Speaker, and within the chambers of our party we have an extensive discussion on it and in the months that have passed since its publication, the present Opposition has sought to rubbish that document rather than taking it on board as a document which can provide some platform for serious national debate and discussion; they have sought to belittle it, to cast aspersion on it, and essentially to dismiss it. We are going to resurrect that, among other documents for this important debate and discussion. But it does smack of hypocrisy, listening to the Leader of the Opposition this morning, and quite frankly he came across as being very self-righteous when he fully well knows the manner in which they have dealt with this question of constitutional reform, and very specifically the matter of our document “Constitutional Reform A Discussion”.

When one reflects on the history of the New Democratic Party, we have seen that history has provided them with numerous opportunities to address this question frontally, and one would have hoped effectively. Seventeen years in office, and now we have an opportunity having moved from the Opposition to the Government, to have constitutional reform addressed in a very forceful way in this country. They had numerous opportunities, including the time when they had all the seats in this Parliament, and it is indeed unfortunate that such opportunities were missed. And I recall the exchanges in 1998 in the Post-Election period, and all of a sudden the issue of constitutional reform was made an important plank in the work of the then New Democratic Party Government, and I will go further to say attempts were made to use it in an opportunistic way, to gain, or attempt to gain political capital.

Our position on constitutional reform, Mr. Speaker, differs radically and fundamentally from that approach. Our approach starts from the philosophical position which has been articulated in the manifesto of our party and other document, that we believe it is necessary, that it should not be a political football to be kicked around at the whims and fancies of the New Democratic Party and others like them. We want to make that very clear. It is something we believe in that is intrinsic to our core of beliefs; so when we start this process by coming to Parliament which we did not have to do, we are sending a signal to this nation that we are very sincere and concerned about it, and indeed we want to address it with urgency, given as I pointed out the far reaching ramifications of this exercise.

When the Leader of the Opposition expressed his concern about the lack of consultation with the Opposition, I must remind this nation that he was invited to join a committee on social economic development, and as I understand it from the meeting of Parliament, he declined to be involved in that committee, which is his right. And when he repeated pointedly out, that they command 41 percent of the electorate, he conveniently forgets that we commanded 55 percent of the electorates since 1998, and they have always attempted to be little, to rubbish, to marginalize us. [Heavy thumping]. New mathematics, I imagine, a mathematics, which says that this 41 percent is greater than 51 percent, but that is typical of the New Democratic Party where it turns truth on its head. This is the same New Democratic Party, Mr. Speaker, which is making reference to “together now” in a manner that they hope to exploit, because it is the same New Democratic Party that rallied it’s forces yesterday at Mt. Wynne, and one of the recurring themes of that rally and that picnic was how they are going to undermine the Government. Because I got a phone call this morning, where somebody who went down there said that that was one of the strong talking points at the picnic at Mt. Wynne yesterday; how they could undermine the Government. We must point these things out, so when people come with “together now” conveniently, we must remind the people of that.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: We are not supporting any “together now”, you know, understand that, we are not supporting that.

HONOURABLE MICHAEL BROWNE: Oh, you are not supporting it. Well, that is the signal that went out, and more than that there is a stronger signal that went out to try and destabilize this government, but you have another thought coming. You have another thought coming. And when they talk, Mr. Speaker, about victimization and Justices of Peace, if I remember quite clearly, there is one St. Claire Leacock, the PRO of the New Democratic Party who remains a Justice of the Peace, isn't that correct? You don't want anybody who more patently partisan and anti-ULP than St. Claire Leacock, why you don't talk about that? All of a sudden we are the party of victimization. Members of our party who have been suffering for 17 years only because they have identified with the party, and the Constitution also addressed these things. I mean, - and I will deal with that in a little while in terms of certain considerations in the constitution. But it really ranks of hypocrisy to hear people on the other side stand up this morning to talk about victimization. It is galling. It is nauseating.

Mr. Speaker, just Friday I met with a number of people in the constituency of West St. George who have contracts to build roads and drains and walls, and a number of them are ranked NDP supporters who campaigned against me, one of them said the only reason he shooting my post, is because he can't shoot me directly, but he has a contract, I met with him, I told them election done, let we forget about the politics just give us a professional job in whatever you are doing. I said don't let one grain of sand go missing because I don't want anybody points their finger at this Government talking about corruption, I said account for every grain of sand. Because we intend to run a clean government, nobody is going to point a finger at this government in terms of corruption.

And one of the limitations since I am on that vain of the constitution, and I am sure we are going to address it, is the lack of integrity as enshrined in the Constitution. We cannot allow people to come into offices where they have power and operate like rogue elephants, because there is not enough constraints on them. You know there are a number of agreements and so on that we need to sign in terms of illicit enrichment, and things like that. But the constitution must address that question. We have attempted to address it in this Parliament when we were in the Opposition. Only to have, - which took many hours and thousands and thousands of dollars of work to research, spearheaded by the present leader of the government, the Prime Minister, and only to have the then government, the New Democratic Party Government throw it out and say it isn't worth the scrap of paper it is written on. But we can't allow a government to do that, that has to be so entrenched in the Constitution that people must abide with that. And when the debate starts in earnest I will have a lot more to say on that matter.

But the point I am making, whether or not those checks exist within the legal framework, or within more pointedly the constitutional framework, we intend in practice, even in their absence, to ensure that government is run clean. That is why I had to send a signal to a lot of the NDP contractors and others on Friday to say I don't want one grain of sand go missing in any of the work you will be doing. I say you all work good, do professional work, you have nothing to fear about future jobs because we not in this thing of victimization. And yet you come here this morning and hear this nonsense. Nonsense.

Mr. Speaker, I intend to do my part fully on this debate when it starts in earnest, but today we are just making some preliminary points and setting the framework, well a framework has already been set from the Prime Minister, and we would want, given the significance of this topic, I am sure all of our colleagues would want to say something. So I don't intend to take up my full 45 minutes, but I just want to raise a few other points, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, our nation is guided by a national philosophy that is embedded and enshrined in the preamble of the Constitution. I happen to believe that it is a preamble with the contained philosophy that still have some merit. Outside of the articulation of this philosophy I know of no other national philosophies that guide us. And I could be corrected and I hope I would be if there is one. But this one is what I consider to be our national philosophy. On page 6 of the Constitution, the one I have.

- “WHEREAS the people's of the islands of St. Vincent who are known as Vincentians,
- (a) have affirmed that the Nation is founded on the belief in the supremacy of God, the freedom and dignity of man;
 - (b) desire that their society be so ordered as to expressed their recognition of the principles of democracy, free institutions, social justice and equality before the law;
 - (c) realise that the maintenance of human dignity presupposes safeguarding the rights of privacy of family life, of property, and the fostering of the pursuit of just economic rewards for labour;
 - (d) desire that their Constitution should enshrine the above mentioned freedoms, principles and ideals;”

I really think that that's very rich philosophy, Mr. Speaker.

Our reform of the Constitution would no doubt be reflected on that, and perhaps would make changes, but I would campaign strenuously for the retention of everything that is contained therein. The first affirmation, Mr. Speaker, that the nation is founded on the belief in the supremacy of God and the freedom and dignity of man. I don't think anybody will question the first part nor would they question the need or the desire for

our nation to subscribe to the belief to the supremacy of God. The tragedy with this, Mr. Speaker, is that over the years many who have preached along this line have practiced very differently. That we believe is founded on the belief in the freedom and dignity of man.

Mr. Speaker, freedom is not simply the political right to cast a vote, freedom has to address the material context of Vincentians, because to the extent that people are entrapped by poverty, to such an extent that their freedom is circumscribed. Is constrained and straight jacketed. I say this because the last word of the preamble ideals bring to the fore a philosophical position that is referred to as idealism, that is a lot of ideas and so on, and it is good to have a lot of ideas and so on. And it is good to have a lot of ideas that can propel us in certain directions. Because some of them in a sense are leadership ideas that lead us, and push us forward. They are dreams, and that is good. That the preamble should contain these, but we have addressed, and in this sense I share the views of the Leader of the Opposition about not operating in a vacuum, but the material circumstances, the real life situation of our people and in us embarking on constitutional reform we have to deal with those two broad issues, the ideals and the real. What is ideal or desired, and what is real and exists, you have to strike that kind of a balance and see how best our constitution can indeed bring us as close to the ideals as possible. But I am suggesting to this Parliament that policies of the outgoing government, the New Democratic Party government has seriously undermined the freedom and dignity of our people, through the increase of poverty, through political victimization, which they practiced, because the Poverty Report of St. Vincent 1996, made the point very clearly that poverty was increasing under the New Democratic Party government. Today we have the frightening spectre of rapid increasing poverty in the rural areas as a result of the decline of the banana industry. A legacy of the New Democratic Party government, they can't run from it. The poverty report was 1996 12 years after they have been in office. They can't run from that. Their own report, they commissioned it, you know. They commissioned it, they were part of it. But they try to bury it because the findings were not very pleasing to their ears and their eyes.

Indeed, I know there were efforts to try and cut out, to edit so that things like those don't turn up. So we have to address the real life situation of our people when we are dealing with revision of the constitution. The reform of the constitution. We have to look at all those factors, nationally, regionally, and internationally that impact on our lives as Vincentians and as our people. Because our civilization is under threat, and many people, if I may make this point, in the context of what is happening in globalization and so on, many people are torturing themselves over what is happening to West Indian cricket, but losing sight of the fact that our cricket and our sport, like so many facets of our lives are under threat by a broader process which we are still not coming to grips with; it is not just bananas and that is important, but you see it impacting on all spheres of our lives including sports. And we need to situate that

debate in terms of Caribbean cricket and West Indian cricket within that broader frame. But the point is Mr. Speaker, we need to address that real life situation while we present these kind of ideals as contained within the preamble and enshrined in our philosophy. And it goes on,

“Desired that their societies be so ordered as to express their recognition of the principles of democracy.”

There has been some debate so far on that, in terms of how do we actually come up with a system, what the Honourable Prime Minister refer to as the hybrid and which was reiterated by the Leader of the Opposition, what sort of system are we going to devise to ensure that the democratic will of the people is truly expressed and reflected in institutions such as this. I would have a lot more to say on this, because this is a very comprehensive debate.

Free institutions. How many of our institutions can really deemed themselves to be free. Social justice, well we have just addressed that. You have seen the numerous injustices in our society. People are crying out. The reason why the present Opposition is in the seats of the Opposition is because of question like these. They refuse to listen to the voice of the people. They demonstrated a callous interagency while people stood up in the hot sun outside and clamoured and said no, give us some justice, it cannot be right that you all in the House taking advantage of your power position to enrich yourselves, to fatten yourselves and we outside working for those wages, if working at all. Equality before the law, you heard a lot of stories and there are legal personnel, I am sure they will address these matters.

Another item in the preamble,

“realize that the maintenance of human dignity presupposes safeguarding the rights of privacy of family life.”

Mr. Speaker, I have not made a systematic check of the words in the preamble, but I do know that the word dignity is repeated twice, and maybe the only word that is repeated twice. And it suggests that the founding fathers attached tremendous significance to the concept of dignity, of human dignity. And I believe that under this new administration we will see a dignity of our people rise to levels perhaps ever known historically. And I believe that it is not an accident that this word is repeated twice in our national philosophy. Family life, we consider that to be a corner stone of the work of this government to such an extent that we have named a specific department to address this question of family life.

Our family life is under threat. One, from the economic situation which itself has been worsened because of the policies carried out in the New Democratic Party

government, high levels of unemployment, low wages, etcetera, etcetera. Two, by the impact of various values and as a party we have to address the question of values education and even within the educational system we need to go broader than the concept of moral education to value education, so we could colour out clearly what are the values and what are the objective consequences of going down certain parts of values. But our families are under threat by values which are inimical to the development of the family and indeed to national life. The rights of property, and the fostering of the pursuit of just economic rewards for labour. We would want this addressed frontally and in the constitution, the reform of the constitution because we know the cry on the streets outside.

And these are very strong ideals, Mr. Speaker, and I trust that the reform will take them fully on board and that the amendments to the Constitution will not only reflect on and embody them but seek as best as they can, within the legal framework, and that becomes the power view of the legal people, because that is definitely outside of my realm, in terms of the technical aspects of law. But I would like as a layman in terms of the law, to see that these things be enshrined in a manner that they have practical manifestations reflecting the ideals contained in the preamble of our constitution.

Mr. Speaker, I will close by reiterating what I said at the beginning, that I stand categorically in support of this motion, that I trust that the amendment will not unduly delay, if accepted that is, unduly delay the process of going to the people for stepping up this debate. I will have some views to express in relations to the modus operandi. How we operate in relation to getting the views of the people. But I want to make it clear that I stand fully in support of this motion, and that I would like to urge the House to support it, and that we move speedily to have the commission set up following, if we agree the establishment of a select committee.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: Mr. Speaker, I rise to state my support in principle for the motion, and to commend the government for accepting the amendment that was proposed by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, as being in the interest of ensuring that the process of constitutional review and reform reflects the interest not only of the government side but also of the Opposition. Irrespective of what the Honourable Minister of Education might have said regarding the process of bringing this motion to the House and in proceeding with the process of constitutional review, the support of the Opposition is essential to any proposal that the Government makes and any serious review of the constitution that emerges from this beginning that has been made today. The New Democratic Party did not just simply state publicly it's support for constitutional reform, constitutional reform is a part of the manifesto of the New Democratic Party in the last general elections.

The New Democratic Party and the members sitting in the House recognized the importance of constitutional reform and wish to play a meaningful role in ensuring that that process is one which is broad-based, one which takes into account the interest of the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and not just the interest of the ruling party, or any political party in this country.

Mr. Speaker, a number of speakers before me have pointed to the historical fact that our independence constitution has been around for some time, but that in itself is not a reason for reform. What it seems to me is more important is that as a nation we really have not had a chance to reflect on our Constitution which is essentially, or as it is constituted now, determined how we govern ourselves as a people. When St. Vincent became independent the system of governance was essentially presented fait accompli. Our participation, irrespective of how busy we were on the ground here ensuring that we get the views of the population in the various organizations in our society essentially didn't matter very much in the eventual constitution that was presented to us.

So like the Leader of the Opposition, I agree that it is fit and proper that we should review our Constitution. There are many issues which might be addressed by the Commission. I am happy that the Commission will be appointed by a Select Committee of the House, and that a report will be presented to the House, and that is part of the motion. We have noted earlier the difficulty that has arisen with the First-Past-the-Post System which most of the countries in the Caribbean, and in fact the former British colonies have inherited and the difficulty there, or the problem that a constitutional review would seek to correct or to ensure doesn't arise is one in which the popular will is not reflected in the government.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition outlined in some detail a scenario in which there was hybrid system, which included Proportional Representation and First-Past-the-Post representation. To show the effect of such a system and its difference in outcome that would result if that system had been in place in 1998, or at some previous time. This is one proposal, which our party is looking at. The Honourable Prime Minister mentioned in his address last week that in other parts of the world, there are constitutions which dictate governance based by elected persons selected by a process of Proportional Representation.

Those of us who follow international events or indeed simply look at CNN, you can see from time to time the difficulties that are encountered in countries like Israel where there is a straight system of Proportional Representation. The problem there is that when the threshold for obtaining seats in the House is too low, you have essentially a splintering of the Parliament, it might be a more accurate reflection of the will of the people in the sense that almost every voice has representation in the House, but that has to be balanced as well with the responsibilities and the requirements of governing

in a democratic environment. By that I mean the House has to be able to make policies with some confidence that they can be put into practice. More accurately, I should say that the government should be able to propose policies with some confidence that those policies can be put into practice. And in a situation where you have every fringe group with some representation in the House, you can see that that could lead to a very difficult situation for government.

So what I am suggesting is that we have to pursue and it's a position that our party has outlined a situation in which there is a balancing between the requirements of seeking fair representation and a reflection of the will of the people in Parliament and on the one hand, having the necessary consensus or the ability to reach that consensus in the House, so that the Government can proceed with its business.

We have had First-Past-the Post system since we were permitted essentially to elect representatives, it existed under the Associated Statehood and continued into independence. Our people are used to that system and they have become attached to the notion of having a representative who represents their interest in their constituency. I know from my constituency in the Northern Grenadines that the people take great pride in having their representative elected in their constituency, representing their interest in the House, therefore there is, I believe, some important role for the continuation of a system in which there is constituency representation, one which will, I believe, be in accordance with the wishes of the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. But again these are just ideas that are being put out. The ultimate test will come when the commission has been constituted by this House and goes out and listen to the people and find out from them what exactly do they want in terms of the manner in which they are governed.

Mr. Speaker, since we are supporting the motion, and we would like to see the process of constitutional review go forward, I think it is important as well that we play a role in educating, or at least informing the people of some of the difficulties that have arisen in the past with the current system. We have in the current system a situation where one party might win all of the seats. As happened under the New Democratic Party in 1989, and by the way that is powerful evidence to the contrary of what the Honourable Minister of Education said with respect to the performance of the New Democratic Party government of the past. Because it indicated that the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines believed that the New Democratic Party was working in the interest of the people and therefore elected them overwhelmingly by giving them all of the seats in the House. That would not have happened if, as the Honourable Minister of Education would like us to believe, the fact that they have done nothing. It would not have happened, as the Honourable Minister would like us to believe, poverty and alienation increased under the New Democratic Government.

So, Mr. Speaker, in a revised constitution, or at least I should say in the process of reviewing our present constitution, one of the problems would be a situation like that of 1989 where essentially we have a system of government in place, the government putting forward its policy and vigorous opposition from the Opposition side to ensure that the policies can stand the test of scrutiny and vigorous debate. And incidentally, Mr. Speaker, this is why the notion of “together now” rings hollow with us, and it’s one to which we could never become party. Because we believe that our system functions better when we have effective opposition that performs within the bounds of the constitution, that performs within the bounds of our laws, and performs in accordance with the rules of the Standing Orders of the House, that is how the Honourable Leader of the Opposition indicated; that is how we intend to proceed, and that is what the Government side of the House should expect throughout the term of governance.

Mr. Speaker, we have as well, and this again is to the public at large the review would also address the situation such as we have back in 1972, ’74 period when essentially you had a 13 seat House, an equal representation from two parties, and an independent essentially becoming the leader of the government, now this was all fair and proper within the realm of the Constitution that we now have. But what we are asking is whether it is something that we wish to have in the future. There is the instability as well in the current system where if you have a slim majority on one side such as the NDP had in 1998, if you have a slim majority on one side, then that creates some instability because there is no effective way except by persuasion to have full agreement on government side to the policies of the government. In a sense, what I am suggesting is that with a slim majority, instability comes into the picture; and because members can cross the floor or choose not to vote on important motions and pieces of legislation, and that situation in conjunction with the motion of no confidence which can be brought to create instability in the government. I think that a serious constitutional review by a properly appointed constitutional review committee will have to look at that issue as well.

There is also the question of whether there should be fixed dates for the elections as they have for example in the United States, or whether there should be elections called at any time by the Prime Minister. Mind you, it doesn’t mean that simply because the Prime Minister may call an election essentially at any time, that he or she would wish to do so, because there is always the counter acting influence in a democratic environment of whether doing so would please or displease the electorate. In Canada recently Federal elections were called, I think it was three and half years into the mandate of the Federal government, and of course this question was raised as to whether the Prime Minister ought to be able to do that. Of course the Prime Minister would choose a time, I don’t mean just there, but any where when the chances for re-election would be best, and that therefore, if there is some windfall, the temptation would be to simply return to polls and get a new mandate rather than riding out the 4 ½ or 5 years that is customarily done. So the question as to whether there should be

a fixed date for elections, or elections should precede at the option or choice of the Prime Minister is another issue that should be examined for the Constitutional Review Committee.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the entire sort of modified Westminster System that we have in St. Vincent and the Grenadines will come under scrutiny, and our party will ensure that those concerns that were raised by the Leader of the Oppositions and by myself and others that will arise after we have had more time for consultation and reflection on this issue will no doubt arise and we will put those to the commission and to the people.

Indeed, even if the commission ultimately decides that this is the best that we can do, we will have the satisfaction of knowing that we as a people have examined the constitution,

have reflected on governance and the way in which we wish to be governed, and have concluded that the constitutional arrangement as it exists is satisfactory. I doubt that would be the conclusion, but in any event, I think the process itself has an inherent value irrespective of the ultimate recommendations. Now I say that, bearing in mind, and I'm very hopeful that the Constitutional Review Committee that will be appointed will be an expert committee, one which has people of distinction on it; people whose impartiality is above reproach; people whom the citizens of St. Vincent and the Grenadines can trust, and whose recommendations they will be accept as being properly arrived at, and as being the genuine reflection of the deliberations of the committee. So we will make all efforts to ensure that the committee that is eventually appointed is one that will inspire the confidence of the people. One that has the expertise, the experience, and the level of impartiality necessary to ensure its success.

Mr. Speaker these are fundamental principles by which we should be guided and they are timely as well, given that in short time in government very little has emerge from the government which has inspired confidence.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: You living where, on Mars?

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable members.

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition has pointed to the very serious issue of victimization which has been taking place, and which continues to take place. Individuals have said to us, have indicated that they have been dismissed from positions without just cause, and this is something which I wish that the government would reconsider and re-examine. We cannot at this stage create divisions that will not be overcome in order to promote the serious business of constitutional reform. It's not simply a matter of getting digs in at the government; the constitution requires two-thirds majority support in a referendum in

order to past. In order to achieve this there has to be very high rate of consensus in the population at large.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: You better watch your seat.

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: I challenge the Honourable Prime Minister to run as a Candidate in my seat. And I will accept the outcome happily.

Mr. Speaker, we in the Northern Grenadines, and indeed in the Grenadines as a whole have special considerations as well in this process of Constitutional Review/Reform. The separation by water has created a different and special relationship with the larger part of the country.

HONOURABLE JULIAN FRANCIS: You desegregating too?

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: Indeed Mr. Speaker, that situation or separation by water, not political separation has created a mentality in previous Labour governments which has led to the absolute neglect of the Grenadines. We trust that we can expect better from the present labour government, but we remain open minded, but as I said earlier our expectations have been fulfilled are so far.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister of Health keeps referring to the 17 years of NDP administration as if by some stroke of the pen the NDP was able to extend its mandate. That mandate was given by the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the same people in whose name we are proceeding with this process of constitutional review and reform, and the same people to whom you are entrusted, or the constitution has entrusted the final say into how we will be governed. This is an electorate which is experienced and one in which we have all faith and confidence even if the Honourable Minister of Health has less.

Not to be side tracked, Mr. Speaker, the point that I wish Honourable members on the Government side will take to heart is that they need the support of the NDP; they need to persuade the 41 percent of the people who voted for the NDP, they need to persuade the 76 percent of the electorate who voted for the NDP in the Northern Grenadines that the proposals that are put forward out to the Constitutional Review Committee are ones that we should accept, and the ones that are in the best interest of the country as a whole. We have all confidence in the electorate, because they have been good to the NDP in the recent past, and we know that they will be good to us in the future.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Not the recent past.

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister of Education derided the fact that the Leader of the Opposition, and indeed the Opposition as a whole, has declined to participate in the social and development committee; that as the Honourable Leader of Opposition pointed out is our prerogative. That committee is a committee for the Government, you propose policies social and economic, and then you come to House and defend them, and we are going to ensure that they can stand the test of scrutiny. We won't sell out the birthright of the party by essentially participating in proposal or policies and then come on the other side of the House and pretend to be debating them. That is why we can't participate in such a committee.

Mr. Speaker, it is important in a situation in which we are asking our people to become engaged in this process of constitutional reform, to essentially give up certain amount of time from their daily struggles of making a living, of taking care of their families, of improving their lives in this country, so that they could become apart of this process, it is important that a climate in which free expressions of ideas, in which association in whatever groups the people might choose, be it political or otherwise, that such a climate exists so that the people can express their views in accordance with their conscience. And a Government side does not have to fear a picnic that the NDP party had on the weekend, you don't need to send spies to listen to whatever conversations there were.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: You are moving a point of order or are you asking the Minister to give way?

HONOURABLE MICHAEL BROWNE: On a point of Order, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is attributing remarks to me and making implications or casting aspersions on my character, by indicating that I sent spies, because I am the person that made that statement today. And I think he should withdraw it.

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: Mr. Speaker, I attributed the comment regarding the meeting of the NDP supporters...

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, he is suggesting that you are suggesting that he sent spies, and he is saying it is an unfair comment, would you agree with that. I am suggesting that you withdraw the statement.

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: I don't agree, Mr. Speaker, I said that the Honourable Minister of Education made the reference to the meeting...

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: As far as I could remember he had a call from someone in relation to the matter. I would wish that you would withdraw the statement, and let's move on, because it may very well be an unfair one.

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: The context of my remarks is that, Mr. Speaker, there were no public speeches at this event.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Yeah, I am not too sure that is germane to what you are saying now. I would suggest that you withdraw the statement, Honourable Member.

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: In the interest of moving on, Mr. Speaker, I would withdraw the remark.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: You have somewhat infringe on your own time.

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: I know it is the objective of the Government side, Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Anyhow you have eight minutes more.

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, the point however is that Members of the Opposition, whether in a political party or otherwise, should feel free in a situation or in a context of this process of constitutional reform, to gather together and express their views without fear that those views might be misconstrued or misrepresented, and the Members on the Government side have nothing to fear except that there will be vigorous opposition, and that that opposition will come within the context of the rules and the context of the laws of this country.

Mr. Speaker, you see, it would appear that the members who would state that they would essentially, not, be co-operating with the Government is now afraid of having the same in return. We have already stated that we will co-operate when it is in the interest of the people. When it is in the national interest, and that we will oppose which is what we were elected to oppose, and we will do so in measures in the House and in the constitutional review process as well.

Mr. Speaker, this is indeed a very serious and important Motion. It is one which our party is happy to support, one which I am happy to support, given that the government has accepted the amendments proposed by the Leader of the Opposition. It is a process which is only just beginning, and one which will take some time, one which will engage our people, one which will engage us on the opposition side, and one in which the interests of the government, the opposition, groups in civil society, and the people at large will compete for the attention and favourable recommendation of the review committee.

Mr. Speaker, I trust that the government will do all in its power to ensure that the basis is set within the population by perusing inclusive policies to ensure that the interest of

all the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, irrespective of their political orientation are given equal consideration. It is only by doing so a serious commitment to constitutional reform can be asserted by the government. And it is only in doing so that the government can expect to obtain the support of the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the co-operation from this side of the House.

In concluding, Mr. Speaker, I wish to say that I am indeed delighted to be part of this process, and that I would play a role that take the interest of my constituency into account, and the interest of the Grenadines as a whole, and also the interest of all the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, it is now 12:20 p.m. I believe it is an appropriate time to have the adjournment for lunch. I was thinking, Mr. Speaker, if we could come back at quarter to two. At 1:45 just get basically an hour twenty minutes about there so for lunch. The Leader of the Opposition apparently have long lunches, so I would accommodate him with 2 o'clock.

Mr. Speaker, I had indicated to the Leader of the Opposition this morning in your own presence, Mr. Speaker, that we had suggested an earlier adjournment or break this afternoon at 4:30 p.m. because I believe that all members of the House have been invited to an activity to celebrate the 90th Anniversary of the Girl's High School. And I believe that we have in the House, Mr. Speaker the only graduate from the Girl's High School, who has ever been elected to the Parliament of this country, Ms. Rene Baptiste, so I think perhaps it would be appropriate that we cross that bridge when we reach it this afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

I move therefore, Mr. Speaker, that we take the luncheon adjournment until 2 p.m.

HONOURABLE VINCENT BEACHE: I beg to second the motion, Mr. Speaker.

***Question put and agreed to.
House adjourned for Lunch at 12:20 p.m.***

House resumed at 2:00 p.m.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: The debate continues. Honourable Minister of National Security.

HONOURABLE VINCENT BEACHE: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members we have been calling for constitutional reform for the past 10 years, or more than 10 years. The former Prime Minister, Sir James Mitchell, went as far as to say that the country would not be able to move forward unless there was constitutional reform. Even to go back

to 1984, 1989, in the Old Labour Parties manifestos you would see that there was a call for constitutional reform, and later on the Unity Labour Party continued to echo this call, and the New Democratic Party in 1984 paid slight tribute to this, and in 1988 in their manifesto they came out boldly for constitutional reform. I say this because in 1994 when the New Democratic Party hinted, for want of a better word about it, they were in a position after the 1989 elections to have constitutional reform, because not only did they have the 15 seats in the House, but if my memory serves me right, I think they had more than the two-thirds majority, more than the 66 percent of the popular vote, therefore they had no barrier, no barriers at all towards instituting constitutional reform. But they sought not to do this.

As a matter of fact the constitution was manipulated in 1989. I say this in that the then Attorney General, Parnel Campbell, and the acting Governor-General, Henry Williams, felt that the Constitution made provisions that in a case where you did not have elected Opposition members, that the Governor General had the right, and I agree with this, to appoint senators as Opposition members. And Parnel Campbell as the Attorney General then ruled that this was so. Sir James did not want any opposition, and so he sought advice from some councilor in England whom he says told him that the Constitution did not make provision for this, and that the Governor General had no authority to appoint Senators as Members of the Opposition. Parnel Campbell then backtracked and agreed with this ruling. I am saying this as back ground, Mr. Speaker, to let the public know about constitutional reform. We have been consistent about this and we have been principled to use the term of a former member of the ULP, consistent and principled, we have always been that as far as the ULP is concerned.

But I go further, Mr. Speaker, we are saying and mean it, and institute it, that we need a broad based constitutional reform commission, committee called it what you will, and the accent is on the word broad-based, and I tell you why I say this, so that we can look at the whole spectrum of the present constitution which has served us well. But like any other document, it has its weaknesses and it has its strengths, but the only thing that they say do not change is change itself. And after some twenty years, like Trinidad and some other countries it is time that we have an in-depth study of the present constitution and to amend or repeal it and institute a new one if that is what the commission would say, that would serve our interest and the interest of the country better than the present one.

When the British agreed to give us this constitution they thought that they were going to deal with people of principle, high moral principles. Some of us are, some of us are not. And we have seen the manipulation of this constitution by the New Democratic Party administration time and time again. And I will give you one example, when I was Leader of the Opposition, and I have the letters in my bag. I have them here, bear with me Mr. Speaker, so that I can emphasize the point and that is why they don't want me in this Honourable House, you know, because I know too much, and I have too much

in my head. But I will give you one example, Mr. Speaker, on the question of consultation with the Leader of the Opposition with relation towards the appointment of public service members; on October the 31st 1996 the Prime Minister wrote to me as Leader of the Opposition, and this is what he had to say,

“Honourable Vincent Beache:

Dear Sir,

Under Section 77 of the St. Vincent Constitution Order 1979 I am hereby consulting you with respect of the appointment of the Public Service Commissions.

That was his consultation. Full stop, that was 1996. The same thing on October the 9th with respect to the Police Service Commission. In 1994 it was even shorter, same thing, he said,

“Dear Sir,

Under Section 77 of the St. Vincent Constitution Order 1979 I am hereby consulting you with respect of the appointment of the Public Service Commissions.”

That was the level of the consultation. And I can go on further, Mr. Speaker, I wrote to the Prime Minister in 1985, I think it was when he wrote me that same letter that in accordance with such he consults me and I wrote back to him on the 2nd October, 1985 and I said,

“Dear Sir, Honourable Prime Minister I am in receipt of your letter dated the 1st October, 1985 and I am somewhat confused by the vagueness of its contents, I am unaware that the vacancy existed in the Public Service Commissions and so far such a vacancy has not been published in the gazette or reported in the news. If such a vacancy exists I will appreciate your letting me know the member whose place has become vacant. Section 71 (c) give the right to appoint not less than three members for more than one year. This right was exercised by appointment of only two members if you now desire to increase membership of the commission, I stand ready for consultation with regard to the new member to be recommended to His Excellency the Governor General.”

The Prime Minister did not deem it necessary to reply to me. This was when he had only appointed four members and he left one vacant. But I wrote to him earlier than that as well, on 9th of September 1998 with regards to constitutional reform. But I bring this, Mr. Speaker, so you can understand, and I have more, every time there was a

Public Service Commission appointed, this was the consultation that took place. We are not going in that manner, and I would not agree if our Honourable Prime Minister would desire that he would take this same line out of advance, because I think the constitution gives certain rights, and when I spoke to Sir James about it, he said the Constitution says you must consult the Leader of the Opposition, and by writing to me he has consulted me. New definitions.

The Honourable Prime Minister would remember that I was very strong when we were going to bring the OECS together the Constituency Assembly, that I was very strong that consulting and consultancy, and whatever consultation we must spell out exactly in the interpretation what those terms means. But I go further, Mr. Speaker, on the 18th September, 1984 after the New Democratic Party had won government, the Prime Minister decided that he must have a constitutional reform committee appointed. Listen to my words, appointed; and so in 1984, 18th of September he appointed a committee, he did not come to Parliament, all we are doing here now is to get the approval of Parliament to name a commission, we are not dealing with terms of reference yet. But the Prime Minister went at that date, and not only did he set up a review commission, but he also gave them the terms of reference at the same time. And let me read out what these terms of reference were.

1. To make recommendations for the establishment of an Integrity Commission to monitor the financial gains of Members of Parliament.
2. To recommend in the context of the foregoing whether certain public or other officials should be subject to similar scrutiny.
3. To recommend what measures and sanctions maybe introduced to preserve the integrity of office holders.

These three measures have to do with Integrity Commission.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: You would make available to us a copy of those.

HONOURABLE VINCENT BEACHE: Mr. Speaker, of course, I have no problem. Secondly Mr. Speaker, that was terms of reference number one. Terms of reference number two,

2. To recommend measures that may prevent any Member of Parliament whose candidacy at election preceding his or her entry into Parliament has been sponsored by a political party from remaining in Parliament after leaving or resigning from such party, bearing in mind the fundamental human rights and freedoms enshrined in the constitution.
3. To make recommendations for legislation or constitutional changes necessary to provide equal rights for women particularly with regard to citizenship.

4. To examine the desirability of the creation of the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner commonly termed Ombudsman and to make appropriate constitutional and other recommendations.
5. To examine recommendations referred to this committee by the committee on local government.
6. To examine any other constitutional reform deemed appropriate.

And the members on the committee, Mr. Speaker, were Sir Rupert John, Chairman, Mr. Parnell R. Campbell, Secretary, Mr. Henry H. Williams, Mr. G.C.H. Thomas, and Mrs. Yvonne Francis-Gibson. Nobody in the opposition was consulted, we didn't know, neither with the appointment of the committee nor of the terms of reference. But we are not going that way, Mr. Speaker, we are not going along that road. We have said that we are going to have open government, we want people's participation, and we intend as far as possible to ensure that this is so. Ensure that this is so.

But the point I further want to make, Mr. Speaker, you are having constitutional reform, you see how narrow these terms of reference are, you didn't have to change the constitution to bring in integrity legislation, but this is part of the terms of reference. You didn't have to amend the constitution to give women whose husbands are foreigners to give them their right to be citizens of St. Vincent without their having to apply; because these were done subsequently to, they did not need constitutional reform.

The ombudsman didn't need this, but if you want to say for safety, or whatever you want the ombudsman for, fine, but it is a very, very narrow area that this constitutional reform was supposed take place. And you did not need constitutional reform for local government. Because it was the NDP administration, well a precursor of the NDP administration, because I don't want them to come back and say the NDP was not in office at that time. A precursor of the NDP, that between 1972, 1974 in the "Junta Regime" that got rid of local government. And this did not need constitutional reform. This could have been done without constitutional reform, so in effect, Mr. Speaker, the only area that need constitutional reform was the last one that he puts there "to examine any other constitutional reform deemed appropriate." You understand. All the others could have been done without constitutional reform. So that is why the 1994, 1999 we were saying that the NDP, they were only paying lip service towards constitutional reform. We didn't think they were serious, at least under Sir James. I have no doubt now that the Honourable Leader of Opposition and other members over there are serious and really do want constitutional reform, because they had the opportunity for making constitutional reform if they felt they had any strong urge so to do.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard about how we are victimizing people because we removed some people from being Justices of the Peace. That is so, we have removed

some persons as Justices of the Peace, but we have not victimized anybody, as the Honourable Leader of the Opposition said. It is not job you get a stipend for, although some members, at least one I know of in Central Leeward, had set up an office as Justice of the Peace, and was charging people when they came there to get passport pictures signed and other things like this. I don't know if the Leader of the Opposition and other members of the Opposition know about this. And they can check it out. So this is a fact.

We have not taken off anybody off poor relief yet, but we will take off people from poor relief, because those persons who do not desire to be on poor relieve and I will give you one example, there is a woman George in Stubbs who died seven years ago, but somebody has been collecting poor relief for her for the seven years. She is dead. What I am telling you here is no joke.

There is another woman Gonsalves, for seven years the bath at Stubbs has not been in operation, no water was there, but she has been collecting monthly a salary for cleaning the bath. So you are telling me that we are going to continue and leave all of this like that, we can't. I don't know if she is related to the Honourable Prime Minister. I don't know.

And these are some of the things that are going. But we felt and you would notice that we have not appointed one politician or parliamentarian as a Justice of the Peace. Because we felt that politician should not be on, better leave it to somebody else. The Justices of the Peace, the police should really scrutinize this, and see where they are fit and proper persons, and obviously we felt that if you have a politician, the police might be a little bit bias in their assessment, and rather than putting the onus on the police that it better to leave it out, and therefore we felt that no politician should be a Justice of the Peace, and that is the reason behind what we did. There are certain persons here who we have not been taken off; I am not going to go through that now.

Mr. Speaker, Hon. Member for the Northern Grenadines said that the Labour Party Government in 1979 brought a constitution that was a fait accompli to a certain extent he is right, but he was right in that we had no choice. If you look at all the other constitutions, St. Lucia, Antigua, Dominica, Grenada, they all have the same similarities, because to bring home the constitution you had to get the agreement of the British Government and the British Government, at that time laid down certain rules, they were very strict in certain areas that this is the constitution you had in Statehood, we are prepared to make minor adjustments, we are not saying that you can't get greater adjustments, but if you want this constitution within a certain time frame you would have to agree with this, or otherwise it may be a long drawn out, may be three, four, five years or whatever it is. And I remember Ted Rollen, he is still a member of the British Parliament, I don't know what position he holds now. But at the time he was Junior Minister in the Foreign office, in the Commonwealth office. I think he was

Commonwealth Secretary. And we were advised well take the constitution we can always, if you have it, you can always go back to the people and have it changed without added referendum to the British Government.

And if you notice this is not the only constitution, they are all more or less alike, a little difference here and there, for instance I think in the St. Lucian Constitution there where as we only have a Supervisor of Elections, they have an Electoral Commission. And little differences like this. They have a Senate as well. They have a two Chair, Parliament, and Grenada as well has a two Chair Parliament. Dominica is a single House Parliament, and so on. You find that they are more or less the same thing, except maybe St. Kitts that has some great differences, because of their situation with Nevis. So we did not present to the people a constitution that is a fait accompli so to speak, because it was the same Statehood constitution we were dealing with, minor changes. Certain status were upgraded et cetera.

But I remember that when the Honourable Sir James Mitchell was Leader of the Opposition, and when the call came very urgently, because the British Parliament was going to recess, that we must come to England if we wanted to get this measure through before Parliament recessed and when Sir James was asked as Leader of the Opposition to attend and go with the delegation, he refused, but he will come back here and I have all the notes here, you know, what he said and what he did not say, et cetera, et cetera. But he will come back and say that he was not invited to go to England to deal with Constitutional changes that were supposed to take place in St. Vincent at that time.

Mr. Speaker, I am hearing all the time that the Labour Party Government neglected the Grenadines. And I am yet to find out in what way, that the Grenadines was neglected than mainland St. Vincent. I am not saying that there might not have been neglect but there was no greater neglect in the Grenadines than happened on mainland St. Vincent. The Secondary school in Bequia was not build by the NDP administration. The Secondary school in Union Island was not built by the NDP administration. The clinic, the hospital in Bequia was not built by the NDP administration. They might have done some renovation.

The electricity plant, I as Minister of Trade, put forward to Cabinet a measure to equalize the cost of fuel in the Grenadines because they were paying a lot more than they are paying now. And I felt that we were all one people, and therefore mainland St. Vincent took some of the brunt of it. You understand, Mr. Speaker. What I am saying. Telephone, I have to agree that Sir James Mitchell did get greater telephone access to the people. But we are paying for it. You remember where we were paying local calls, we did not have any limits and we accepted it. We never made any row about it. But what was even worst, to show you how neglect of the Grenadines when we bought the Roll-on-Roll-off, we made sure that it had special tanks fitted so we

could take water down to the Grenadines. And it served well. Noting was wrong with the Roro, but it was sold by the NDP administration to some relative of the former Prime Minister, not the Honourable Arnhim Eustace, I am talking about, Sir James, and that took out completely the water carrying capacity of vessels to take water to the Grenadines in cases of drought. Yet we didn't care about the Grenadines, and we neglected the Grenadines. Even the Hairoun Star that could carry fuel and water, even that was sold on credit, and I am not even sure that we had paid for it. To see whether the debt on that vessel has been satisfied, but I don't think it has. And these were areas that we were looking, so to say that the Grenadines was neglected as though we were doing everything on mainland St. Vincent. When the Grenadines had electricity and good roads, North of the Dry River didn't have any, it is just recently.

So I am tired hearing how the Grenadines were neglected, just as though everything is on mainland St. Vincent and nothing was being done in the Grenadines. I think we should think again about that. I think we should think about that. Because when you look back, tell me really, apart from the Canouan Development, which is causing so many problems, what has the NDP administration done in the Grenadines. Nobody can tell me. I hear we haven't done anything, but tell me what the NDP administration did, apart from the Canouan Development. Oh, they built a bank in Union Island, but that is private. I don't know why we had to build a bank in Union Island. But you say that the NCB government owns it so they built it. And they rented the Honourable Sir James Mitchell house for a bank in Bequia, and you know the story on that.

You know the story on that, Mr. Speaker. You talk about the Grenadines; NCB wanted some place to put their bank in Bequia, the Prime Minister who is Minister of Finance, and in charge of the bank realized this, so he borrowed the money from the NCB, bought the place and turned around and rented the place to NCB, and if I am lying, tell me I am lying. All this is what has been going on, eh, the same money that the NCB used to lend Sir James, they could have used it to buy the property and own it. So you understand what is happening. So don't tell me about the Grenadines and what has been happening, and that we have neglected the Grenadines. Don't tell me about this.

So we must be careful, Mr. Speaker, when we make these assertions, because you realize that the corruption that took place especially between 1989 and 1994, I don't know when we are going to finish investigating it, but investigate it we would. Better believe that, there is no doubt about that. The people are calling out for it. We have given them that assurance, and we would investigate it, and where the chips fall, there they shall lie.

Mr. Speaker, the constitutional reform is a very, very important issue. The people should be fully informed whether we are going to do it by Town Hall meetings, whether we are going to do it by memoranda, or whether we are going to do it by both, or

whatever means. Whether we are going to use the media extensively, to educate the people so they can understand. We want to see a constitution for St. Vincent and the Grenadines that is more or less 100% waterproof, that things in the constitution must not be left vague, for instance the Public Accounts Committee, to name one. In our Constitution, all it says is that there shall be a Public Accounts Committee and that should be constituted in accordance with rules of the House, or something like that. We feel that this must be spelt out in the constitution so that you are left with no doubt about what is happening.

And whereas now, it would seem to be arcane, you can only deal in the Public Accounts committee with the report of the Director of Audit and the Financial Statements, but this is all well and good if all things are equal, but when you have financial statements until recently, in 2000 the latest financial statements and reports of the Director of Audit was something like 1992, 1993 we are into 2000, that is seven years, it is very difficult for the Public Accounts committee to do its work. And if you really want checks and balances and you really want accountability you have to widen the scope of the Public Accounts committee so that they can inquire into things that are more current, and that would save a lot of people, from maybe dipping their fingers in the till. But when you have seven years, eight years before you going to look into the report of the Director of Audit some of those persons have retired from the Civil Service, some maybe have gone overseas, you can't get accountability and all these are areas that we would have to look at to make sure that you can have proper accountability because that is the name of the game. All the AID donors are putting condition, precedents, good governance. Before they would give you AID, they want to see that you have good governance. They want to see that you have an honest government. The Honourable Minister of Education told you about the poverty that exists. The constitution in itself cannot change that, but the constitution can make provisions that you can act differently to try to alleviate poverty more rapidly.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Member has 10 minutes more.

HONOURABLE VINCENT BEACHE: You said 20, Mr. Speaker, oh, 10, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So that Mr. Speaker, it is an exercise of great importance. It is an exercise that all right thinking Vincentians should be willing to take an active part in, because it is an exercise that you are not going to be able to change again, maybe in the next twenty years or so. So we have to try and get it right this time. We have to try and get it right. And there are things that some of us might miss out, that other people might see. So we have to listen. So when I say 'we' I am talking about all of us, the Commission especially. We have to fashion the terms of reference with the Opposition and other NGO's and so on. To ensure that the terms of reference would cover all the aspects. We are not like the British that do not have a written constitution, they go by

convention, but we are dealing with a different type of people. And they have been conditioned to these things. You can't jump a queue, they have been disciplined. You can't go in a bus line in Britain and go and walk in front of three or four other persons who have been standing up there before, the bus driver or the bus conductor would not take you on, if people complain. So they have been disciplined because maybe of the different wars they fought. And this is one thing we have to ensure that our people become disciplined, that we must bring back pride in this Nation.

We have to fight hard to try to get the cruise ship that left here to come back. And I am told that we are having some success in this, I don't want to talk too much, this, the Minister of Tourism will deal with that if she wants to. But it really irks me when we are given the reasons why the cruise ships decide that they would not come back to St. Vincent, because Kingstown is dirty, one. And two, because of the harassment they get when they walking along the streets. And so revenue that we need, we would be bereft of this because the capital Kingstown is dirty, I believe the people maybe be afraid, maybe that they are going to catch diseases, I don't know, they didn't say this. And in effect it is so.

I went up at the cruise ship berth there and up to this morning had a meeting with the Port Authority, the Minister of Port, and I asked the Civil Servants there whether the government had bought those two or three houses near the molasses tank below the road toward the sea, and I was told that the government didn't buy these. Well, government should have bought those because it is an ugly sight. It is really an ugly sight. I went up there and I saw some tattered curtains flying out the window, tourists don't want to come and see this. Certain tourists might like that because maybe they take their video pictures and go back and boast. But the average tourist doesn't want this. And the first impression you get is the lasting impression. And you come off a nicely appointed pier and then you walk a few yards and you end up in squalor and dirt. The molasses tank shouldn't have been there in the first place, it should have been moved, taken out to Arnos Vale, we are pumping gasoline up to the tanks in Arnos Vale, you can pump molasses the same way as they are doing it from there. And so if we really want to attract tourists and to develop tourism, at least the cruise ship tourism then we have to take certain decisions and do certain things to ensure that these people who are coming here are comfortable, otherwise we are going to lose it.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we on this side, we do not have to be sold on constitutional reform; we know there is the need for it. And if we can do it and do it well it can only redound to the benefit of the people, all the peoples of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. I have no problem and I know my colleagues here have no problem in supporting this measure. And we have no problem in going out there selling it to our constituents and selling it to the country, because it is necessary, vitally necessary, if we are to move forward, and if we are to move forward positively then we cannot continue to be

hamstrung by certain laws in the constitution. The body of the paragraphs and sections in the constitution, they are laws. It is the highest law of the land. And so that it is why it is so difficult to change it, because you don't want that you could change it at your whims and fancies, they must be good reasons. And I can assure you Mr. Speaker, that there are good reasons.

We brought into this Honourable House integrity legislation which we thought that everybody would be glad to adopt but it was defeated. It was defeated on a motion that this present constitution states that it is only a minister of government can move any motion or bill where funds from the Consolidated Fund would be used. And they say that we did not have, in Opposition, the right to do so. We had already spoken before that to ministers of Government who said they would support it and move it. Alas when we came to the House they retracted and so the motion was defeated. We even amended it as a matter of fact, as the Honourable Prime Minister is telling me, take out that part there and still they voted against it. Despite the fact that that same commission in 1984 stated, and let me read what it says Mr. Speaker, I will lay it on the table of the House. They say here on integrity commission,

“The committee feels very strongly that the integrity in the public sector is by no means a mere decorative ingredient for beautifying an administration.”

Do you hear the words? Beautiful eh? Really beautiful words, that

“Integrity in the public sector is by no means a mere decorative ingredient for beautifying an administration, it is rather a necessary foundation if the superstructure of a truly democratic, efficient, honourable, trustworthy and respective government is to be erected”.

These are not my words. These are the words in the interim report from the committee.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Member has two minutes.

HONOURABLE VINCENT BEACHE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So that Mr. Speaker, it is necessary and we would bring integrity legislation here, I don't know if it would be at the next meeting or whatever it is but it is coming. It was danced around that can't bring it because they want it to be an OECS thing. That all of us must bring integrity legislation together. So if one of the States in the OECS decides they don't want integrity legislation we can't bring it. But this was only dancing the tango, so all they were doing was dancing the tango, you know. They better dance the butterfly like me, and then they would have had integrity legislation here. And so Mr. Speaker, I give my wholehearted support fully towards this measure and I am sure that it would have an easy passage. I thank you.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Before I take the other speaker for debate. Honourable Members I wish to recognize with distinct pleasure the presence of the former Speaker of the House of Assembly, Mr. Monty Maule sitting in the gallery area. Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker, you are very welcomed.

Further debate. Honourable Senator Bonadie.

HONOURABLE JOSEPH BURNS BONADIE: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. Honourable Members, let me first give my unequivocal support to this motion as amended and to say that I hope that after twenty-one years of independence it is time that in revisiting our constitution as the Minister of National Security said we get it right this time.

Mr. Speaker, I think it has been recognized by all and sundry, and on the basis of what the resolution itself says, that the overwhelming majority of people in this country like to see a new constitution for St. Vincent and the Grenadines. A constitution that would reflect our present development after twenty-one years of independence, that hopefully those of us who are here, that we would contribute to this advancement of our nation.

Mr. Speaker, it has been recognized that there are shortcomings in our constitution, and from time to time we hear accusation from one side and the next as to attempts to manipulate the constitution by one political party or the other. I think, Mr. Speaker, that one can continue to provide these exchanges with any amount of frequency as one gets up to speak. The Labour Administration of course points to the manipulation in terms of the consultative process that supposes to take place between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. And that process was not done during part of the period of New Democratic Party administration. I think the Prime Minister did admit that the last Prime Minister under the New Democratic Party government did consult him, and likewise he reciprocated by consulting on the same basis. I think that that is a development. That is progress based on what we are hearing took place prior to that.

Mr. Speaker, I could say that the Labour Administration also manipulated the constitution, and we could continue, and I could say they did it during the process of changing the constitution to punish the New Democratic Party leader after the general elections where a member of the government's own party became Leader of the Opposition, and there are a lot of us who disagreed with that. A lot of people disagreed with that. But where do we go from here, Mr. Speaker, why we continue because we are living and dealing in different periods and different times, so I believe that we have an opportunity to go to the electorate, and I do not like the boast, so to speak, with which some members opposite spoke in terms of what they can do, in terms of setting up the constitution commission. You can't in one breath say that you

didn't have to bring it here, but you brought it, and the mere fact that you brought it you recognized that there must be some significant in bringing it before this Honourable House. So to go back and say that you have a mandate, you have a mandate, yes to govern. You have a mandate to do things that you said in your manifesto that you are going to do, but there are proper ways to do it.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that every member of the governing party of the opposite side knows fully well that no constitutional change can take place in this country without the support of the opposition party, none can take place. And I believe that we all would like to see a new constitution, and the Opposition has pledged its support in furtherance of this objective. So let us proceed on that basis. On the basis that we want a new constitution after twenty-one years of independence.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have had in the past a lot of things that we can all look back. A lot of things that we can point to and if we are serious in this exercise, then we must set the example in this Honourable House. I must at this stage say, Mr. Speaker, that it is quite heartening, and it was when the Honourable Prime Minister seconded our own change to the motion that is before this House. And that is a good start, a very good start, in that one recognizes that all empowerment does not rest with one set of people. That together we can move this country forward. And when the Leader of the Opposition made the point that what we would like is a select committee of Parliament, we were trying to convey to the members opposite, that if we have a select committee of Parliament then we all would become involved in this level, although the constitution makes provision that two-thirds majority can give safe passage to any constitution change in this House and you can do it, without us inside here, but you cannot do it outside in a referendum. So I am happy that at least that provision and that change was made, and in that light I believe the co-operation from this side of the House is assured. [Interruption] I am coming to that "together now", just now.

Mr. Speaker, the present constitution as stated by the Minister of Education could only be amended or altered by first a two-thirds vote in the House, and two-thirds of all votes that are validly cast in a referendum. And, Mr. Speaker, it means therefore, that both the Government and the Opposition must be on the same wavelength, we have to be on the same wavelength if we are to accomplish constitutional change, because it is imperative that to have a new constitution, we have go to the people together, and when we hear about a broad-based constitutional review team or commission, I would like to warn that from my own personal observation, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of institutions in St. Vincent and the Grenadines that purport to speak on behalf of what is called the people, I am hopeful that the Constitutional Review team will listen to the views of the people, and not views of the people put forward by chosen spokesmen, but to listen to the views of the people, and then after listening, come up with something that the House can go to the broad mass of the electorate with.

Mr. Speaker, certain things must be entrenched in our new constitution. Certain things that are existing in the present constitution must be carried over, the fundamental rights and freedoms, those, Mr. Speaker, must be maintained. Pension provisions for Public Servants, those must be protected. The Public Service Commission, [Interruption] I am making my contribution, Mr. Speaker, and I asked that you give me a chance to let me make it, or let me sit down.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable members, the member should be heard in silence.

HONOURABLE JOSEPH BURNS BONADIE: You don't tell me you know about that, I am saying what I want to see in the constitution. I don't know what you have in your brain. But I am making my contribution to a serious debate, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, these are things I would like to see entrenched in the constitution. The Public Service Commissions, the Police Service Commissions, and as the Honourable Minister of Education pointed out, a new commission, if possible, to take care of teachers. These are things which I support, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have to ensure that we have the independence of the judiciary. We have to make sure that we protect citizenship in our constitution, and we have to ensure that we carry over into a new constitution the appointments of particular officers who have complete autonomy under the present constitution.

I wish to commend, Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the Minister of Education for the point he made in relation to an accusation which was made in this House, about people losing their jobs, and when the Minister of Education says that he met with people, people who are NDP supporters who had contracts and he want to make sure that those contracts were fulfilled, Mr. Speaker, every member opposite cannot say the same thing, and we would be like an ostrich burying our head in the sand if we do not admit that, -- already and I am not saying that it is being perpetuated by some members who are Ministers, but it might be perpetuated by people who have a zeal to get even with people who they feel had been employed. A lot of people have lost their jobs. Mr. Speaker, I have seen letters written to people terminating their services with no reasons given, and the only reason I can say is political. I am saying, Mr. Speaker, that the constitution gives us the right to belong to the party of our choice, and it says, Mr. Speaker as the Honourable Minister of education pointed out, the resolution says

“Whereas the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines who are known as Vincentians have affirmed that the nation is founded on the belief on the supremacy of God and freedom and dignity of man.”

Mr. Speaker, a lot of politics take place in country. People get jobs because of their political complexion, and political parties get into office and they would like to correct some of the misfits that they might find in jobs that they are not suited for, but there is a

procedure. There is a way in which it must be done, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you do not write somebody simply terminating his or her services because you have the power to do it. We have laws in this country that protect people who are employed. And to satisfy some political sycophants you have to do things which are wrong. I am saying, Mr. Speaker, that cake must be shared by all and sundry, but there is a way to do it. And transparency is what the Government speaks about, and transparency is what we want to see, Mr. Speaker. I am not going to harp on people who are Justices of the Peace, and you take away the Justices, although I disagree with it. I am not harping on that, but I am harping on people who are employed and to say that they have been employed because they have been put there politically, you are going to remove them. Justice and fair play must prevail and the constitution says, Mr. Speaker that you can't take politics into account. You can't take somebody's political belief into account in terminating their services. That is against the constitution, totally against the constitution. And I am saying that the Ministers under whose portfolios some of the dismissals take place must look at what some of the people underneath are doing in an effort to demonstrate their loyalty. And you have to take the blame, the buck stops with you. I am saying, Mr. Speaker, that it is wrong.

I saw a letter written to a lady terminating her services on the 14th of May, and a second letter came after telling her to ignore the first letter, but her services would now be terminated on the 8th of June, in writing. Well it might be that somebody advised that if the person is working by the month, that you should at least give them a months notice, rather than terminate their services immediately, but it has gone further, where people have receive letters terminating their services in four days; four days notice that your services would be terminated. People who have a contract of employment, and a contract of employment, constitutionally is an agreement made by the employer and the employee even though it is not in writing. Once you have established a pattern, and somebody is accustom working and being paid by the month then one accepts the fact, that that person is a monthly worker. If they are paid by the week, they are due a weeks notice. If it is fortnightly, a fortnights notice. All I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is that such people should be accorded the minimum provisions and requirements of the law.

And I am saying that the slogan "together now" that's where I come to it now, Mr. Speaker. I heard what the Minister of Education said in relation to somebody who called him to report on what was discussed at a picnic. Mr. Speaker, we know as Vincentians when you hear a story, by the time it reaches you, it would be third hand, fourth hand, fifth hand and people would twist it for what it is worth.

But I want to say this, while we are busy, Mr. Speaker, doing this exercise, we must remember, Mr. Speaker, that all of us in this House at one time or the other during political campaign, that just past or after we like to quote the Bible, we love it. That is one thing Vincentians has the propensity to do. Mr. Speaker, the Lord casts out some

devils from some people at one time, some were blind, some were dumb. And after he cast the devils out those who were looking on said, after the blind started to see and the dumb started to speak, they said no, it is the devil, it is Beelzebub. It is the devil. You know what the Lord said; Satan cannot cast out Satan. Satan can't cast out the devil, but he said that a kingdom that is divided against itself cannot stand, and that is very pertinent lesson for us. We have a country to build; we cannot continue to talk about vision because whether we like it or not, political victories tomorrow, will not change what the Bible says. That if we are divided we can't stand. We might win a political victory today, the other party might win one tomorrow, but the country will suffer in the long run. And that is a biblical truth, and what it says further is that those of us who profess to say that we believe what we say, you know what the Lord said to those who were looking on, he said I know your heart. I know what you are thinking. So you could fool me, but you can't fool him.

And that is the point I want to make, Mr. Speaker. That this country has a golden opportunity now, where you have an Opposition that is prepared to cooperate and support the Government in advancement of this constitution; and I want to say to the Honourable Minister of Education that I unfortunately was not at the picnic, but I can say for sure that no discussion took place in relation to any plan to undermine this Government. And if any discussion took place, Mr. Speaker, I would be history; as a Member of this House because I want to say this, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition spoke on behalf of members present, and he said the Opposition is going to be a vigorous opposition, not an opposition that would support a question of making the Government's life miserable and unstable, I would never be a party to any opposition that wants to make this country ungovernable. I would not be here; I would leave. No matter whether I stay a Senator or not, I will leave, because that is not what I am put here for, and that cannot advance this country any further. This isn't any Tom Folly old talk. I am making a statement categorically that this party has never decided to set out on any clandestine way of over throwing this Government. And I am saying that if that is the plan, that I would be history in this House.

So, Mr. Speaker, if we are serious let us be serious. Let us put aside, after 21 years, childish things. We are now men and women, and let us operate on that basis. Let us behave that way, because we have a country to lead for the future generations. We are not like Methuselah. We are not going to be here for all the days of our lives, for hundreds of years. We have to leave the country for those who are coming behind to enjoy, and let it not be said that those generations to come will point a finger at those of us who are here who have a golden opportunity to provide a better framework to carry this country forward. [Interruption] Yes I am now recognizing it, and I am speaking it. And you have to sit down and listen to me. You have to sit and listen. Grow up. You must grow up. Listen. When you speak, I listen.

Mr. Speaker, I support the view that all elected members of Parliament in a new constitution must be given a role, and I say that because I remember what the Honourable Prime Minister said. And he said that we have separation of powers under the constitution. But in truth and in fact, what you have is a Prime Minister with Cabinet made up of the Government of the ruling party. And whatever decisions are taken by the Prime Minister and Cabinet are not subject to any over ruling in the House. And I am saying that I would like to see a House where the Prime Minister and Cabinet, or the President and Cabinet, or the President and his team, have powers to do things in this country, but at the same time, some provisions must be made for persons who are elected to truly represent their constituency and not have to wait to be on the side of a winning party. Because people who elect people to Parliament elect them for a purpose, and the constitution must reflect that new thinking.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to see provisions in the new constitution for tapping both professional, business, and the intellectual community. Bring them into the governance of this nation, because there are people, Mr. Speaker who will not offer themselves for public office. They would not offer themselves for public office because, 1. they do not feel that they can take the ridicule. They don't feel that they can take the mud slinging that comes with politics. But they want to make a contribution. And I believe that if we are to tap the resources of the people that we have, and we have a small country and we have to be able, Mr. Speaker, to exercise our rights to bring the best brains that are available for the development of our nations. So some provisions must be made in the new constitution so that we can bring these people in.

I recall reading, Mr. Speaker, when the late Honourable Dr. Eric Williams was proposing a new constitution for Trinidad and Tobago, coming out of the colonial period, many attempts were made at constitutional change, and they were short periods of time when people had to make submissions at the end of several exercises, but spurred on by the colonial office in some cases only 20 or 30 organizations or people that had made submissions, and Dr. Williams thought that if he had a blue print of a constitution, and he gave it wide circulation that the response would be better because of that mechanism which he had put in place. We do not propose, Mr. Speaker, it seems to go that way, in that we prepare something and put it out there, but it might be useful, that at some stage during the consultative process that a blue print be made available, for further ongoing discussions at town hall meetings, at meetings of institutions that are not related to our own political parties, so that we have an opportunity to canvas the views of those persons who would like to contribute, but we give them the framework within which to do so.

Mr. Speaker, if we do that, then we would have canvassed the broad cross section of people and we would have views. But what I am a little wary of, Mr. Speaker, is that if we attempt at the beginning of this exercise to put too much legal jargon in our constitutional approach, I believe we should leave that for after we have gotten the

views of the people, so that we can get the technical legal people to put our constitution in a proper legal framework. I believe if we do that we will not scare some of the people who feel that they would have a right to make a contribution to any constitutional debate.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to state that I believe that on the basis of what previous speakers have said, we are serious with this particular exercise, and I want to reiterate that a Government must feel confident that the Opposition is going to play its role and not approach the involvement of the Opposition in any tentative manner. We have spoken, the Leader of the Opposition has spoken, we have brought an amendment to the original motion, that amendment to the original motion, Mr. Speaker was accepted and seconded by the Prime Minister, and that is the basis under which we should move forward, and we should proceed. We can deal with our own political ranklings which are in the normal course of things acceptable but when it comes, Mr. Speaker, to important matters, matters like constitutional reform, let us approach them in a bipartisan manner.

Let us approach them in a manner that when the historians write about us who passed this stage, they would have said that despite the different views politically of the members of Parliament, they worked together to provide this nation of St. Vincent and the Grenadines a Constitution that they could be proud of. A constitution that could reflect the new thinking for the new century, because we have to leave, Mr. Speaker, I believe, old time behaviour behind, and it is doing us no good, if we as Opposition members try to put forward our opinions, try to put forward what we feel, try to articulate for the people who put members of the Opposition here and put them forward, people think we are not serious.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Security made a good point when he said that the New Democratic Party had a golden opportunity of Constitutional reform and that opportunity was not taken. Because at the time it appeared that they had both majority in the House and could safely have assumed that they might have gotten the majority in a referendum. It is a good thing, because we would have had to live with a constitution and to suffer the ridicule that is being leveled today, so it is a good thing that the constitution was not changed. Because it would have been a constitution that might not have been fashioned in the manner that this opportunity now gives us. So it might be a good thing, so now we can proceed and move forward.

Mr. Speaker, before I take my seat, the Americans like to boast that their constitutions is something that will stand the test of time, and it is something that every American holds dear to his chest. I would hope that at the end of this exercise that we could have people, future generations saying that this House, that this Parliament, a Parliament that shaped and fashioned the constitution that Vincentian people could be proud of, that we would have taken into consideration some of the rights of workers,

some of the rights of people, some of the rights of citizens and enshrined them in the constitution that down the road, years from now, a hundred years from now people can look back and put our constitution to the test and that it would stand up. That is what I would wish to be a part of, a part of a constitutional change that will stand the test of time. I know things change, I know things change over the years, but we are now fashioning a constitution to meet our needs, and to meet our own society and not a constitution that is dictated to us by Colonial masters with very little input from those of us who lived in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and that is the difference, that is the big difference between what we have and what we are going to get.

So Mr. Speaker, I wish to state that I support the measures being taken, and I hope that the Select Committee of the House could operate in the same manner whereby we can all have our input and that our representation would have equal strength in terms of its importance, and what we have to bring to offer to this important process of constitutional change. Thank you.

HONOURABLE RENE BAPTISTE: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I too rise in support of this constitutional motion or constitutional reform. And it is a wonderful thing to sit on this side of the House and have the support of the other side of the House, in the interest of nation building, but we must never forget that the reason we are standing here on this motion today is because something happened on March the 28th, the people spoke with loud voices and in an indelible fashion and gave us the right to lead, and we are leading by following what we told the people to have confidence in our word, in our manifesto, the general elections and in the discussion paper put before this country on the 31st of July last year. Mr. Speaker, over a hundred and fifty organizations were invited to that launching of the discussion, as usual, you know, some people don't like to be seen in an audience discussing matters faintly, remotely concerning political issues. Forever be that as it may, we on this side have demonstrated that we mean what we say, and faithfully and true.

One of the matters that touched me in this constitutional debate is dealing with one of the fundamental rights or provisions in the constitution, and that is the one dealing with deprivation of property, that is one we have seen over the passage of time, and it related and manoeuvre and just published in the Gazette without the process of consultation, be it in the case of acquisition of the Bequia High School, now known as the Bequia Community College. Mr. Speaker, because of those provisions and what it would normally take for some one to challenge in the Court, it takes money to bring a constitutional motion, let us not hold any water in our mouths and figure it is going to fall from heaven, it has to work here on earth. You have to get enough money to challenge something in the Court, especially in a constitutional motion, and perhaps this will give us the opportunity to examine those provisions very carefully because we have had the pattern of history before us, of what can possibly happen when someone

could be deprived of their property without proper constitutional redress, because it is too long winding and too expensive. In taking that into account, we have to look at the provision dealing with judicial redress in the court and what new provisions can be inserted there.

So I urged all persons listening to this debate to participate at the community level, at the school level. Sometime in the past you would hear people say, oh that is politics, we can't discuss it in the schools, the Constitution is your supreme law, Mr. Speaker, it is the foundation law of a civilized country, and we are fortunate, ours is written. And it has not been changing too frequently and I am urging our schools, our churches, all NGOs to become part of this debate, and not to take it for granted because certain provisions are in the fundamental rights and freedoms of the constitution, they must debate them in full, they must get people who understand it to come and help them to explain it to them so they don't become awed and didn't know a law past in 1990 in this House of Assembly, as some people recently discovered in the year 2001, be part of the national debate.

Mr. Speaker, in putting out the discussion paper we talked about several things, but at the time we didn't have the benefit of a judgment of our Supreme Court, that has now put the death penalty on its head. This would therefore be another issue to be discussed thoroughly because it may not be until another twenty years again before there will be a review of the constitution. Let us be clear in light of all the international conventions that sometimes have been signed without people understanding what they have signed, particularly those dealing with human rights, you sign conventions on the rights of the child, how many Vincentians know what that convention says on the rights of the child, you know a little of it because the Human Rights Association has taken to the airwaves to attempt to educate the public about the rights of the child. But there was no leadership on that issue where leadership ought to have come. This side of the House we are providing that leadership today, that is why this was brought to the House as a motion to be discussed in the people's Parliament and given the widest possible opening for people to know these are issues which must be taken into account at this opportune time, make use of it.

Another issue that I would like to see discussed thoroughly is the question of the appointment insertion in the Constitution provision for an Ombudsman, because it would help to buttress the work of the integrity commission which will be established by the Unity Labour Party Government. Because an Ombudsman will help to guide certain complains and issues, you know our people, we may have an organisation, we are not sure if it is the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Health, we are not sure if we should go to the Ministry of Works, or we should go to the Ministry of Airports, the office of the Ombudsman helps to direct where your complains, suggestions and ideas can be challenged.

There is much debate, and it has been debated, about the question about local government, and that debate would continue when the other motion is before you, Mr. Speaker, but we have to address our minds to it in this debate on the constitution of what would be the boundaries and scope and authority of viable democratic local government, we would not wish it to go the way it did in the 1972 - '74 period. We are building the blocks for a nation, we are putting up our constitution like the pillars that have stood the test of time, and the pyramids in Egypt. We must make sure that these things are inserted now, you are facing an increasingly challenging world, and when you try to get international monies to borrow you will get commercial agreements, that will start asking all sorts of questions that you didn't address your mind to, Mr. Speaker, and some of those things will ask you about the authority of your government to undertake certain projects, to deal with certain proposals, and then you have to fly back to Cabinet to make a resolution, come to the House, patch up a piece of legislation and you were not just aware of it before, read, get on the internet, ask people, ask questions, let us open our minds to these new things that are coming out, it is a new century, you know, by the time we are finished with this constitution and it has been enforced twenty years, some of us would not be in this room.

A matter that I am very, very concerned about is the proposal for an Electoral Commission; it is in our Paper that has already been tabled and made a document of this House on a discussion paper. And I am relieved that you would not longer have a one-man electoral god in the Supervisor of Elections. This commission must be an independent constitutional commission entrenched in the constitution and must function as such. Like you must leave the Director of Audit alone, you must leave the Director of Public Prosecution alone, that is what the Electoral Commission must be to function independently of political interference. I have heard some passing comments about the independence of the judiciary; well those of us who have had long acquaintanceship with judiciary know what they suffer. Magistrates, they don't have orderlies, Magistrates they don't have police officers to open the courts. Judges whose yards can't get their lawns mowed and there are people who have had long political experience who have written books, Mr. Speaker, saying they know how to deal with judges.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to see provisions and wide ranging debate on the independence of the judiciary. I agree with the proposal that we ought to start from the Magistrate's Court, in regionalizing the Magistrate's Court so that we attempt to even the playing field, because we must make no mistake about it, this summit of the Americas ought to have been an instructive lesson, what just took place in Quebec, that St. Vincent would either sink or float. And small as you are is a little vote in the United Nations, and again we have signed a lot of instruments that would impact upon the administration of justice, but we wouldn't know about it until the ninth hour. Several treaties and conventions have been signed because it floated across somebody's desk in the last 15 years and there has been no expose for the people, no opportunity for

the people to debate these issues, because it was not brought to the people's Parliament. I am asking that the boundaries commission, when we are going through the constitutional reform exercise that we look very carefully at the provisions dealing with the electoral boundaries, because we will have to look at it as well in dealing with the local government boundaries.

There has been a great deal of debate, Mr. Speaker, on whether or not we should have two Chambers of the House, whether or not both Chambers should be elected, whether or not the lower Chamber should be elected and the higher Chamber nominated, or part elected or part nominated in both cases, whether or not we will have the financial ability to cope with the extra work, the extra facilities and an extra building to put this other House to function. Is it necessary, would it help to secure the freedom and dignity of the Vincentian man? Mr. Speaker, I am urging all organizations, when the select committee of Parliament summons and prepares the terms of reference not to be left out of this debate, because we must have that opportunity to say when the people speak they would only have themselves to blame if they don't like the answer. They must have the opportunity going into the Town Halls, I know they go into the Town Halls, they like going to the meetings at nights in the schools, but this time you have to pack them, because it is the intention to ensure that we educate the people through the Agency of Public Information, through all the radio stations, through the television programmes, there is an extra programme, I believe on Wednesday night, utilize that programme to educate the people, to inform the people of what is going to happen with a new constitution.

I have heard the Senator on the other side say that perhaps we ought to have a framework document of a constitution that may come in the second half of the debate, but in the first half of the debate let's put down the main ideas and the main topics and flesh those out before we draft a document and attempt to force something to it and it can't fit. We have one working document already, the rest of civil society has the opportunity to put their documents forward, maybe they don't want to write it down because they don't want to be associated with having said, that is your right to say, it is your right to put it down, that is guaranteed to you in this constitution, put it down. I know what I am talking about because I know there are people who work in certain jobs which they think are sensitive, and they are afraid to express themselves; well I know in the era passed they were afraid to express themselves because they would get their names come off the poor relief list, some were afraid to come to say prayers at a meeting because they would come off the list. Now they should have no fear.

In putting together this paper or this document for further discussion we must bear in mind what is happening in the entire region, let us start from our little sub region of the OECS, the larger region of CARICOM, and wider region of the Americas, because that summit is the second one, I believe its the area is going to become more and more competitive. You take for example the European Union today, they have issued a

directive on Tourism, and that directive walked with the same two feet of an European tourist where ever that tourist choose, to visit. It has nothing to do with being in Europe alone. So you see independence has a price, Mr. Speaker, and that price is you have to come to grips with the realities of the famous word we call globalization. This is the first of great debates that would take place in this House of Assembly on matters that will impact on the life of every man, woman and child, because that's what the constitution would do when you frame it. It wouldn't take into account who is ULP and who is NDP and who is whatever party that may spring up in the future, it would take into account we are Vincentians. If you are not careful we would have to translate it in Spanish too, because that would soon be the second language of this region.

Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we have over the term of the campaign spoken about the fixed term for the Prime Minister, two consecutive terms. I think that in the Caribbean we have many, many living examples of what happens after two terms, suddenly becomes my property, my government, my police. Mr. Speaker, gets too familiar, and familiarity breeds contempt. And on this side of the House we do not want the people to be treated with contempt. To be looked upon only when elections are in the air, because you know some people say they didn't see some people in the first, second, and third elections, but they saw them in this one. So it is out there for general debate. It is in the public domain. Two terms, fixed, for the Prime Minister, because under the existing constitution of this country, the Prime Minister has an inordinate amount of power, but then the British Prime Minister even has larger powers, how often you would hear the debate whether or not that power has been abused. And it is not written anywhere, that is what so magical about the West Minister System. The British don't have a written constitution. We have one and it turns on its tail every now and then because of the flesh that manipulates it.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members there is another question that I must make mention about the calling of general elections. Is this a matter that we would like to see inserted somewhere in the Constitution about the life of the Parliament, that if it commenced on this particular date it must end on that particular date? Have we reached that level of development? Is this the moment and time in history when we must make our mark of this new civilization? Has the time come for that, Mr. Speaker? Maybe the time is right. Maybe the people would so decide, when they vote, when we vote here in the House and we vote in the referendum that the people would so determine. But the other side of the coin must be looked at, suppose you had a fixed term for Parliament, and the events that took place in April and May last year would you be left with a fix term of Parliament and endure, or would you still be going up and down in the streets and you look, like turning on the TV and seeing what is happening Slovakia. One-month, electricity workers, the next month, telephone workers, the next month, civil servants, and you go on and on and on, provided you do so within the bounds of the law. Or is it, Mr. Speaker, that we could live saying that the next election is within the next five years. Is it that we ought to have the opportunity to see if that

works? All these are issues to be determined by the people of this country, when they debate the issues here about constitutional reform.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard much discussion about the PSC and Public Service Commission and shook my head. We have always had a PSC in St. Vincent, but it appeared to have been a gift under a will. It just kept going on, and on, and on, and on and on. I don't think that they are one set of people who are blessed particularly, or you would have one doctor, one QC, one Magistrate, so provisions have to be made to avoid the ability in manipulating the system, to manipulate it to that extent that you have someone to carry out the political dictates and then come and write them out in a newspaper afterwards, breaching their own living code of ethics, you must live by something, even the beasts in the field eat only certain beasts, we must have some sort of code by which we work. I know we have a very vibrant Public Service union and an even more vibrant Teachers Union, and they have already, I am aware the teachers have already put together a document of what they would like to see reflected in a Teachers Commission, because they have been asking for this for years. But then it used to fall on deaf ears, now the ears are wide open, and this is their opportunity to put their case. I do not see them having any difficulty in getting the jury to give them the right verdict, they deserve to have their own commission, because of their type of profession. Because of the variables in their profession, because of the types of education, from pre-school to primary, to secondary, to tertiary level. The vocation, the technical, all the different aspects, who are their targets, what will be their target in the future, because we now have to educate not for the sake of being able to earn a living afterwards, but for the sake of being able to live in peace, because it would become a question of your disability of your country because you have a well educated population, so that we would not suffer upsets in the prison system, we would not suffer an increase in crime, and we would not be in a few weeks from now bring to Parliament the question of setting up a national commission on crime, so we could be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime, that should have been dealt with a few years ago.

Mr. Speaker, I will now close by commending the population of this country, try to get hold of a copy of this resolution, and when we are done with this debate in this Honourable House, Mr. Speaker, that they would become part of the national debate because this is then law. This is my law; this is our law, the supreme law of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. We are about to frame it anew, frame it afresh and give it a new life, be part of this new birth of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. I thank you Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE SELMON WALTERS: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I rise to give my support to this motion before us for the reform of our constitution that is in fact in excess of 20 years old, that is since independence. Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, this motion

comes at the right time, because I will point out to you some similarities at this present time in comparison to the 1984 when the New Democratic Party came to office and did something that came to naught where reform of the constitution is concerned. Mr. Speaker, in 1984 the New Democratic Party came to power with 12 seats, we heard of reform of the constitution that came to nothing, in 2001 the Unity Labour Party has come to power with 12 seats and we are talking about reform of the constitution in a more serious way. I listened to Senator Bonadie on that side, Mr. Speaker, and I was waiting for a reason why the New Democratic Party did not do the reform when they had all the seats in 1989 and I didn't get a reason. I really, really wanted to hear the reason.

Mr. Speaker, this exercise is demanded by all the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, regardless of what party the people support. The general consensus is that the constitution can go no further, and that we must change it. And in our party, Mr. Speaker, a lot of work has been done towards achieving this end, we have put out our document on reforms many months ago, it has been widely circulated and I believe many of our people are aware of our views in regards to changing that constitution.

Mr. Speaker, I am very happy that members on the other side are giving this motion their support, and while they give support to the motion in Parliament, we are hearing that there is no "together now". Mr. Speaker many of us who are familiar with what is happening in this House would realize when those of us on this side were on the other side, the contempt with which we were treated when motions were brought to this House, sometimes when questions were asked. And Mr. Speaker, in the new environment, with regards to what we call "together now", there is a new spirit, a new atmosphere because St. Vincent and the Grenadines can wait no longer for development, we simply have to begin the process, Mr. Speaker, like yesterday, the world is not waiting on us. We simply have to go forward.

Mr. Speaker, the amendment this morning to establish the select committee of Parliament to examine further this motion which was put forward by the Leader of the Opposition, seconded by the Prime Minister is quite interesting, because having recall, Mr. Speaker, the way we go about this process, we compared to what happened in 1984, the then Prime Minister himself as one man established a committee to look into reform of the constitution, and somebody said it failed because the Chairman is a man who is accustomed to achieve nothing. That is why the process came to naught. But, Mr. Speaker, in this new atmosphere, this new process, this new way, we have come to the Parliament bringing this motion involving the Opposition, involving all the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Mr. Speaker, this is a new democracy, it is a new process, like the broadcasting of the people's business in the Parliament. That is what the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines can expect from a Unity Labour Party Government.

Mr. Speaker, “together now”.

Mr. Speaker the last sitting of the House when my colleague the Minister of Health got up to give his congratulations to the Government on this side for broadcasting live the Parliament, I remember when we were in Opposition, Mr. Speaker, and we tried to get the people to hear the discussion of their business, the New Democratic Party Government took offence. I remember when somebody whispered to the Speaker then that the Parliament is being broadcast, he called a halt and he said he wanted to know how they were managing to do this. And the Minister of Trade then said, “Mr. Speaker, they are doing this surreptitiously, they are thieving chances.” It was stopped. In those days, Mr. Speaker, people’s business was hidden from the people, but in this new dispensation, the people’s business would be brought home to the people. And that is why we want the people to become very active in the governance of this country. Good governance, new governance, better governance, reform of the constitution.

Mr. Speaker, in the new constitution proposed we have to make government more accountable to the people, because after all it is the business of the people, it is not the business of those of us who sit in the Parliament; it is the people’s business.

Mr. Speaker, I recalled in the past administration members of the Cabinet gave the then Prime Minister, Sir James, all the power he wanted to negotiate on behalf of St. Vincent where Ottley Hall is concerned. One-man-ism, and I believe, Mr. Speaker, that is what brought us into the trouble we got into where that project is concerned, because no one person has all the ideas, no one person has all the answers, wisdom is found in a multitude of people.

Mr. Speaker, so from now on you would see governance where people are consulted, where laws are enacted for the development of people and State. You would not see on this side, Mr. Speaker, a return of what happened last year when the dreaded Pensions and Gratuity Bill came to this Parliament, hundreds of people, civil servants, and Vincentians of every persuasion stood on the street and they said to the New Democratic Party Government, do not pass the Bill. And Mr. Speaker, we stayed in this House until 8:00 p.m. or 9:00 p.m. and all the protestors had gone home and the NDP passed the Bill. I remember my colleagues Senator Slater then said, this is going to cause trouble in this country, Minister of Trade then said “nonsense” and that was his pet word “nonsense”; but Mr. Speaker, the rest is history.

Mr. Speaker, in this new dispensation, the Minister of Tourism said a while ago that in our present constitution the Prime Minister has enormous powers, and which is quite true, but it is quite interesting to note that what we are proposing is designed to curtail the powers of the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister is the man who brought this thing to the Parliament. He could have said “no leave it so, I love the power.” But I

don't know people are saying the Prime Minister is a man who is power hungry, if he was then, he would not bring this thing here, because it gives him all the power that he wants, he can appoint, he can disappoint, he can hire, he can fire, he is a powerful man, but he says "no, I don't need all that power," because it doesn't take us anywhere. If we are going to go forward, we need to empower our people to think and to make decisions, let the people be empowered. Mr. Speaker, that is in the spirit of "together now", the Prime Minister is the man who said "together now". So, Mr. Speaker if the way forward, is to reduce the powers of the Prime Minister then let the powers of the Prime Minister be reduced. If that is the way forward, Mr. Speaker, then we must go forward.

Mr. Speaker, mention was made as to whether or not we need to have a fixed date for general elections. I agree, Mr. Speaker that we need to do that because we say that the Prime Minister at the end of the five year period has the element of surprise, he can wake up one morning and hear that there is an election because something happened in the country that favours the ruling party, so the Prime Minister thinks that "boy this is a good time, so I call elections". Or if it is close to his wife's birthday and he say well let me give she a birthday present so he calls elections. A bad present. But, Mr. Speaker, we must also congratulate the past Prime Minister because I think the way be used the dates he actually missed the boat. He played with the date a little bit too long and we caught him. But, Mr. Speaker, I do support the setting of a fixed date where elections are concerned. It gives us something to work towards. The people are aware that elections must come at a particular time and both those of us in Parliament and in the civil service are working towards a point where the people would make a choice. I believe you would see projects being quickly implemented because I mean people want to be reelected and they work towards that, so the Prime Minister gives up that aspect of his powers and that would take us forward, then let us go forward.

Mr. Speaker, in 1989 when the NDP got all the seats there was much talk about whether or not we needed to have Opposition Senators, it was quite interesting. We were told by one school that yes, the Governor General has the right to appoint Opposition Senators. We are told by others that some intellectual by the name of Tuner Samuel said, no, and because of the uncertainty and no clarity in the Constitution, the NDP went ahead for five years and there was no opposition. And when history is written, Mr. Speaker, I believe it would be recorded that those could easily be the saddest years in the governance in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, the time has come for us to declare in our own minds should this situation reoccur what is the way forward, and I believe that the constitution must address this situation.

Mr. Speaker, integrity legislation, this is a burning issue, and we can not talk about it too much because when we were on the other side we brought legislation to this

Parliament, hoping that it would find favour with the NDP, it found no favour. Even though we amended it to suit what they said, it was still thrown out. We were told then that the NDP would bring its own legislation. We were told later on that legislation of this sort would come as a group in the OECS, but yet legislation of the sort never came to the Parliament. The people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines have our assurance that this Government would bring to this House integrity legislation and no longer, Mr. Speaker, would any Commissioner of Police be able to make loans from police welfare money, because the legislation would bar him from doing so. It does not only cover those of us in Parliament, it will cover Senior Civil Servants of this country. People would know what to expect when certain rules in the constitution are violated. So, Mr. Speaker, let integrity legislation come to the House.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed constitution must also address people who are elected on one party ticket, and within the life of the Parliament want to switch to another party, or they want to form a new party. It is all part of integrity, Mr. Speaker. Because quite naturally, if you come into this Parliament let us say you are on a ticket of the Unity Labour Party, and somewhere down the line you decide to leave then the people voted you into office on the ticket of the ULP, and if you find it necessary to leave the party, then you must go back to the people and tell them, well you voted me in as a member of the Party but I am leaving, I am asking you to renew the mandate. The new constitution, Mr. Speaker, must make provision for that. And no longer can anybody switch from one party and still remain in the House as though nothing had happened. It brings into question, Mr. Speaker, the integrity of such individuals. No doubt, Mr. Speaker, such people who did that in the recent past were classified as traitors, renegades and castaways. And when those people face the poles again, Mr. Speaker, the people would let them know exactly how they think of such lack of integrity and honesty. So, Mr. Speaker, let all that be enshrined in the new constitution.

Many years ago, Mr. Speaker, when I studied at the Teachers' College as a student, I remember there was a debate that questioned whether or not we need to go forward with the Queen as our Head of State, and I remember many of our colleagues then said no, we are independent we need to go forward taking control of the country, so we no longer need to keep Her Majesty the Queen as our head of State. Many people, Mr. Speaker had put forward various proposals as to the way forward. In one school of thought we were talking about having an executive president as our Head of State, Head of Government and then again enormous powers reside in the hands of that person. We are talking of a ceremonial presidency as in the case of Trinidad and Tobago and Dominica. People are talking about a one party state; various ideas are put forward but, Mr. Speaker, it would be a good thing when we do the consultations to learn exactly what our people are thinking. For my own part, Mr. Speaker, and I speak for myself, I would prefer to see ceremonial Head of State, perhaps ceremonial president elected by the Parliament and the Prime Minister still will curtail powers as Head of Government. But I really think the time has come for us to reform broadly and

widely and let St. Vincent and the Grenadines be St. Vincent and the Grenadines. So no longer, Mr. Speaker, we need to remove all aspects that remind us of colonialism, because colonialism was a system that all of us would like to forget. And I remember a couple of years ago in this Parliament, I said we need to rename the Police Force. And call it St. Vincent and the Grenadines Police Service. It is the general feeling that many of our officers, even with good intentions misunderstand the word force. Let it be called the police service. Let it be called the teaching service, the nursing service, because we see ourselves as servants of the people of the country.

Mr. Speaker, with regards to the judiciary, there is tremendous discussions in the Caribbean at large as to whether or not we are going from the Privy Council. It seem as though the broad consensus is that the Privy Council should remain. Somehow in these small islands people do not trust the political directorate, it is always the feeling that somehow the political directorate manipulates justice in the Caribbean, maybe with some justification, because there are quite a few cases, Mr. Speaker, where cases were thrown out in the Caribbean and the people went to the Privy Council and got justice. So when we talk about replacing the Privy Council people feel trepidated as to whether or not this is the way to go. Maybe, Mr. Speaker, we could have a wider Caribbean Court of Appeal that takes in the entire CARICOM region, but for my own part I would like to see the Privy Council remain as the final appellate body, because when you put matters to the Privy Council, Mr. Speaker, the Lords or whoever examine the cases, they are not seeing faces, they are not hearing voices, they are examining cases on paper and easier and more satisfying that you get better justice from the Privy Council.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to join the Minister of Tourism to call for the establishment of an Ombudsman within the Civil Service structure. We need an Ombudsman, Mr. Speaker, who can listen to people's grievances and make recommendation, make redress to certain things that the bureaucracy might have done which trampled on the rights of certain individuals.

Mr. Speaker, much ado was made by members on the other side talking about victimization, about people loosing their jobs, et cetera. I remember, Mr. Speaker, in this Parliament about a year or so ago, I made a big noise over the dismissal of a gentleman from the Community Development called Mr. Michael Akers. I remember people saying to me man, you got very emotional and I said I did, because to him it is not fair. So members on the other side talking about victimization, we can give you a litany of people who were trampled by the NDP Government, lost all their rights and their privileges. We are a new government, Mr. Speaker, it is quite obvious we would have to make changes. It is quite necessary that people who got monies and would not work, people who were politically appointed to do certain things for a political party, when a new government is coming into place that there must be changes. And I think the broad spectra of Vincentian people understand and appreciate.

And so Mr. Speaker, I commend to this Honourable House this motion for a reform in the Constitution. I believe with all my heart that it is the way forward, and I know that people of the country would appreciate what we are doing. After all we are just one month old in Government, and we are on the right track. After 17 years the New Democratic Party didn't do it, and in one month we are about to fulfill our pledge to the people in terms of our "100 Days", it is well on track, Mr. Speaker, and I have no doubt that this is the way forward, Mr. Speaker, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines can expect something new, something better, better government, decent government, democracy at its best. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, as we have indicated this morning at 4:30 p.m. we will have the adjournment. Of course with a speaker, if any one comes on now, they would have the right to go on beyond that time, so perhaps it is better that that person start on another occasion rather than break his speech, because we had an understanding that we all go the Girl's High School 90th Anniversary, at least those of us who have been invited. I believe everyone has probably been invited.

Mr. Speaker, I had discussed with the Leader of the Opposition that the new date for the House should be the 29th May, I want to develop the good habit, it is a new habit to discuss with the Leader of the Opposition the date. This has never been done with me hitherto and the suggestion of the 29th that date, Mr. Speaker being the third sitting of this new session, would be the Opposition business up to 5:00 p.m. will have priority. So I say that so that the public would understand and we want the Opposition business to have priority in accordance with the rules unless the Opposition would like to have a later day, we could accommodate that, but that is something which I can speak to the Leader of the Opposition about.

Mr. Speaker, before I move the adjournment, if I maybe permitted just to say one thing, because it has being drawn to my attention that in the public media there has much fear and alarm been broadcast that this Government has removed the names of persons from the Public Assistance list. I want to say that that is an untruth. This Government has made no such decisions, and that the Public Assistance Board has taken no such decisions and only those two authorities, Public Assistance Board, or the Government, that is to say the Public Assistance Officer acting under the direction of the Cabinet and none of that has taken place. What is in fact taking place is a review of the Public Assistance list, and we will make sure all persons who are elderly, all persons who are infirmed, who are sick, all persons who are disabled, all young children who are orphaned who are on the Public Assistance list will remain on the Public Assistance list regardless of their political affiliation. But dead people's name will be removed, and strong young men like me, and like Senator Shallow, and the Honourable Member for the Southern Grenadines, will be removed as is right and

proper because Public Assistance, if we have to move to a situation where we have to have unemployment benefit that is a different concept all together, and we may well move to that concept but we are dealing here right now with public Assistance. So I want to make that absolutely clear, so that there can be no public mischief continued on this matter. That Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence I move that this Honourable House do adjourn to Tuesday 29th May, 2001 at 10:00 a.m.

HONOURABLE VINCENT BEACHE: Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly at 4:20 p.m.