

IN PARLIAMENT

Sturge: 'Crying assassin' minister killing used-car industry

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TRADE Minister Paula Gopee-Scoon has been given the sobriquet "the crying assassin" by United National Congress (UNC) Senator Wayne Sturge.

Speaking in the Senate on Friday night, in the debate on the Finance Bill, at Tower D, International Waterfront Centre, Port of Spain, Sturge said Gopee-Scoon had been given the title of "best actress" on social media for "the crying that we saw earlier in the day" when Gopee-Scoon shed tears while addressing an American Chamber of Commerce business meeting in Port of Spain.

However, Sturge said a better sobriquet was the "crying assassin" because Gopee-Scoon had "assassinated the used-car industry by putting measures which would lead to the cost of foreign-used vehicles increasing by \$30,000 for an ordinary sedan".

He added that Gopee-Scoon had also put in place a quota system which was "discriminatory" against used-car dealers.

The minister announced a revised policy for the regula-

tion of the industry on Friday. "There is no quota with respect to big business and big financiers—ANSA McAL and Southern Sales, and the list goes on," Sturge said. He said it was clear the policy of this Government was to help the rich while declaring war on the poor.

Sturge said the purchasers of luxury items—"those who buy luxury cars from ANSA McAL and so on—will see a reduction in the prices of their high-end cars. There will be a reduction in the cost of golf bags, golf balls and clubs—I saw someone receiving one (golf bag) recently. Reductions for the 'wedding crashers'", he said, in a thinly veiled reference to Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley.

Tax conglomerates and banks

Sturge said if Finance Minister Colm Imbert wanted to get an extra \$3 billion in revenue from taxes, he should increase corporation tax.

"The businessmen will always tell you, 'if yuh raise corporation tax, ah go have to close down.' Any of them



'WAR AGAINST THE POOR': Opposition Senator Wayne Sturge speaks in the Senate on Friday.
—Photos courtesy The Office of the Parliament

close down? No! Yuh feel the Syrian community, the Syrian junta, ready to close down and run back to Syria? You (Imbert) are waging war on the poorest while you have four to five conglomerates

He asked: "Why yuh

don't dig out the banks' eye, the same way they digging out we eye. Every single transaction you do at the bank, they charge you for it. Why not put a tax on every charge the banks put on the customer?"

He accused the Government of waging "class warfare", "with some Afro-Saxons dressing up nice and playing chimpanzee, 'we in charge, deal with it' party while assaulting their own supporters and keeping them in bondage".

Digging out of poor pockets

Government was digging out of the poor man's pockets, Sturge said.

Agreeing with Independent Senator Dhanayshar Mahabir, he said the rich spent five per cent of their income on food.

"If you are rich, that is enough for food, unless you are 'Big Mama', who cannot be dismissed or else she will beat up the entire Cabinet," he said, in an apparent reference to Government Minister Marlene McDonald.

He said the poor man

spent 50 per cent of his income on food and would therefore feel a bigger pinch on his income with the removal of items from the zero-rated list.

Sturge said People's National Movement (PNM) founder Dr Eric Williams had said the great equaliser was education, but a PNM Government was now taxing books and had stopped free schoolbooks and laptops.

He asked what would be the fate of "those who working in a cloth store and have two children" who were seeking to give their children an education.

He said he couldn't even tell people to "suck salt" because that, too, went up.

Sturge said Rowley, in his "state of the union address—(he walks to [party] conventions with 'Sasha and Malia'... like Obama)", spoke of using housing construction to revivethe economy.

But Sturge said Government needed to develop the manufacturing sector, agriculture, tourism sector, including sport tourism, if the economy was to become truly diversified.

Some advice for Mr Sturge

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WAYNE STURGE, United Nations Congress (UNC) senator, was quoted in yesterday's *Sunday Express* as having stated the following at last Friday's Senate sitting

"Yuh feel the Syrian community the Syrian junta, ready to close down and run back to Syria?" i am perplexed as to the identity of that "junta", defined as a military group controlling a government after taking it by force!

Am I included?

My deceased parents came to this country from Syria, as

youngsters with their parents and families, and made T&T our home of choice for a better life in the Americas.

As a financial services professional for the last 45 years, I have served T&T on numerous advisory committees and boards, spanning several governments without political agenda or directives, and continue to play my part in the private sector, abiding by the laws and paying my taxes diligently and on time.

We have three living genera-

tions residing in T&T, and have no intention to "close down and run" to any other country.

Do Mr Sturge and his colleagues have any more rights and duty than my family and I have to T&T?

My advice to Mr Sturge and his former cronies and current colleagues in Parliament: focus on contributing to the urgently required transformation, and desist from divisive and destructive politics!

Joe Esau

18 January 2016



Senator, our country needs real options now, not vulgarity

I FELT a sense of sadness and shame for our Parliament after reading the remarks made by Wayne Sturge in the Senate on Friday night.

I was taught at childhood that those who have no worthwhile argument to make often resort to insults and nonsense.

Such seems to be the case in the attempt by Mr Sturge to sully the name of the Syrian community; a community of which I am

proud to be a descendant.

It is going to be a long, cold and, may I say, fruitless battle against the economic predicament facing our country if every initiative is greeted with this type of naked vulgarity.

What we need is sensible analysis and an examination of optional adjustment policies for our economy.

Where better a place to expect this than in our Parliament?

Shamelessly foisting the very class warfare that he complains about, Mr Sturge is providing no answers to a society that is so badly in need of honest intelligence and noble leadership.

Instead, he is baiting a vulnerable section of the society to participate in the failed strategy of "us versus them" that has never helped to liberate the less fortunate from difficulty.

His ugly remarks border on

incitement and are yet another reason to examine the complete removal of parliamentary privilege as this immunity continues to be so badly abused.

It seems rather ironic that after more than 125 years of presence in Trinidad and Tobago members of our minority community have to still defend our citizenship against cheap insults that defy the valuable contribution that we have made and continue to try

to make to the upliftment of our country, Trinidad and Tobago.

The behaviour of Mr Sturge may possibly be seen as a reflection of those that he is associated with and of the party that he represents — another teaching from my childhood, "Show me your friends and I will tell you who you are."

Gregory Aboud
Port of Spain

Unfair attack on a Trini minority

I MAKE no apologies for having said in the past that the Syrian/Lebanese in Trinidad and Tobago were one vague circumstance away from becoming this country's Jews. Once again, it would appear, that a demographic minority is becoming the subject of baseless lies and dangerous aspersions in spite of that group's many contributions to nation-building.

Since their arrival on these shores just over 100 years ago, immigrants from Syria and Lebanon have aspired to the same ideals as the groups that preceded them and those that came after. They have worked hard as a group and fought hard to assimilate in a new country, making this their home and that of their progeny.

In spite of the sacrifices and the proclamations of our own sense of belonging to these two islands the community has often been treated with scant regard and suspicion.

From my own family have come not only entrepreneurs, employers and landowners but also public servants, pan men, mas makers, calypsonians and national athletes.

In spite of the stereotypes I am not the owner of a cloth store and I am not the offspring of two cousins.

I have laughed off the thinly veiled insults too many times to recall, my temper held in check by the memories of the beautiful and humble people that my Lebanon-born grandparents were. In their day they were proud to conform and assimilate. They were hopeful of acceptance. And failure to do so was never considered an option.

But now, 100 years later - 80 years since my grandparents first arrived - the presence of our community is still under threat from ignorance and envy.

It makes me physically sick to hear a member of this nation's Upper House of Parliament make reckless allegations that impugn my "ethnicity" in its totality. But it makes me angry when the rest of the nation remains almost silent in response.

In a world where such silence may be mistaken for acquiescence I am obviously concerned for people who look like me. Who sound like me. Who have names like my own.

Instead of widespread condemnation and a belated retraction, Senator Sturge's remarks have given birth to a wave of sentiment in seeming support, at least when one examines the social media pages aligned with the political party of which he is a part.

As Rome was not built in a day, the tide of public

sentiment against Germany's Jewish population did not turn overnight. History shows us that what occurred in Germany happened as a result of the re-education of an entire population that was made possible largely through public apathy and was facilitated in part by economic collapse the decade before.

In Trinidad and Tobago, we have already witnessed apathy and economic difficulty. Is Senator Sturge the beginning of the re-education process

that will help to recast the Syrian/Lebanese community as being both alien and harmful to our society and in so doing setting up an economic power grab not witnessed on our shores since the arrival of Columbus in 1498?

Watch out my people. Watch out.

George Elias
Cassaro