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BHOE: BIPARTISAN APPROACH NEEDED ON RECOVERY POLICY

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One thing with your MP Dr Bhoendradatt Tewarie, he is not afraid to stand up for what is right! Read these reports of what he said in Parliament on Friday when the Speaker tried wrongfully, to curtail his time and he stood up like a man, to prevent her from taking his time to stop him from saying his piece. Your MP may not look for trouble, and he avoids nasty politics, but he is not afraid to stand up and fight for what is right and he cares deeply for you and the people of Trinidad and Tobago". The headline should read: "***Bhoe: Bipartisan approach needed on recovery policy***" -

Story by Ria Taitt. THE Government finds itself between a rock and a hard place. So said Caroni Central MP Dr Bhoewar Tewarie on Friday as he piloted his motion in Parliament calling on the Government to facilitate a genuine bipartisan collaboration towards a national policy for recovery and growth in Trinidad and Tobago.

'What we are dealing with in this motion is the issue of legitimising a national agenda or a national plan for Trinidad and Tobago that meets with public favour and widespread acceptance in the midst of an unprecedented crisis of health and economy but also a crisis of confidence in the Government,' he said. However, he said, 'The fact is that where we find ourselves today makes it very difficult for the Government to exercise any moral authority whatsoever in anything.... to summon any credibility...to elicit any receptivity from the population or to engender any trust from the vast majority of citizens.

Tewarie took note of recent events, namely the resignation of Robert Le Hunte, who was the road map to recovery chairman, the controversial visit of Venezuelan Vice-President Delcy Rodriguez and the equally controversial sale of fuel by Paria Ltd. Tewarie said given the now, likely, inevitable imminent call of the 2020 election, the credibility of any document produced by the Road Map Committee as a non-partisan, stakeholder-guided document of national consensus has been severely undermined and can be hotly contested. 'So the Government by its own reckless actions have served to undermine any good intentions it may have had and have rendered any proposal for a recovery plan by the members opposite, suspect,' he said. He said this might have been avoided had the Prime Minister heeded the call on March 16, 2020 of the Opposition Leader to establish a bipartisan committee to include a range of other stakeholders in business, economy and society. Instead of doing this, the Prime Minister appointed a Road Map Committee of selected individuals, ignoring the Opposition entirely.'

When the Prime Minister announced his carefully selected team on April 20, glaringly absent from the team were university economists, except for Prof Karl Theodore, and the Opposition UNC,' he said. Tewarie said there was a 'needless controversy about his serving on the Road Map Committee. Which of you on the other side would have served on Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar's Committee of anything, without first raising it with Dr Rowley? Why the double standards?' he asked. Dread years Tewarie said the five years of the Rowley Government have been 'dread years'.

'The pre-Covid normal was horrible and undesirable. And then came Covid-19. And every vulnerability was suddenly exposed,' he said. Tewarie said while the UNC had a post-Covid plan, management during the Covid phase was important. 'It is in this survival and emergency phase, where relief measures are not reaching the people that citizens in real distress,' he said. 'Some cards for salary relief did not work at the ATMs. Some people who had food cards in their hand could not have the payment processed at the grocery... And there have been problems generally in getting through the paperwork and with actually securing any and all of these grants,' Tewarie said. He said while there had been a lot of information on allocation and on the amount of money spent, there were hardly 'real numbers about actual people reached and benefiting from these grants. We do not know the reach or the impact but we have reason to believe that it is not good...How many have actually used the credit union \$100 million facility and the Tobago hotel \$50 million facility?' he said.

Tewarie said the VAT refunds could not be counted as Government support, since it represented Government debt to business. He said it is in this survival period when businesses had not received a cent of Government support that the threat of closures loomed. He said there were 17,000 small and medium businesses facing a bleak future. He said in all the malls closures were the norm. Noting that the Government has begin phasing in commercial activity,

Tewarie said as time passes businesses will try to recoup from losses to become profitable again and on the basis of these old businesses setting back on their feet, the Government hopes for a recovery. 'That cannot and will not happen,' he said. 'Eighteen consecutive quarters of economic decline up to December 2019. Four and a half years of recession yielding a depression. 'Business knew it. The middle class felt it. The poor and the vulnerable lived it and tried to survive it,' he said. He said the State also ran up a \$101.3 billion debt according to the Central Bank Report of January 2020 and the Exchequer account was overdrawn by \$41-plus billion, according to the Attorney General.

'The prospects are not good going forward under this Rowley Government for Trinidad and Tobago. May citizens of this country have the courage and strength to save this country,' he said.