



**Movement for  
Social Justice**

**MSJ'S ROADMAP  
FOR THE RECOVERY  
AND CHANGING  
OF  
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**



## **The Five Strategic Objectives**

- **Step 1 – Saving Lives, Saving Livelihoods**
  - **Safety and Security**
  - **Social Economy for Equality**
- **Sustainable and Sustained Development**
  - **Social Justice and Solidarity**

## **The Vision**

# **Towards the Second Republic!**

**2020 May 7.**

**A Working Document**

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## Introduction

The Movement for Social Justice (MSJ) has prepared this, our ***“Roadmap for Recovery and Changing Trinidad and Tobago”***, as our contribution to the national discussion on how we not only recover from the impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic, but also to seize the opportunity provided for ***re-imagining our future*** and taking those actions that can lead us to a changed, evolved society and better lives for all, not just the few.

We will be making our proposals public because we are committed to transparency. We will, of course, be submitting our Roadmap to the National Recovery Team for their consideration. Even more importantly, we have defined our Roadmap as a ***“Working Document”*** as this is not a Blueprint cast in stone. We do not claim to be all knowing or wise. We will be organising an extensive and inclusive process of engagement with individual citizens and interest groups and organisations throughout Trinidad and Tobago and the Diaspora, using our Roadmap – and those proposals by others - as the starting point for a truly national debate. We will do this because we are totally committed to deepening the democracy of Trinidad and Tobago and we believe in participatory governance.

At the end of this process we hope that we would have contributed not only to the ideas for recovery and change, but to uniting our people across all the historical lines of division: race, religion, social class, party, age, gender, geographical place of residence. In this way we are walking the talk of providing serious leadership for Trinidad and Tobago.

## Crisis and Opportunity

There is a well known cliché that the Chinese character for “crisis” is the same as that for “opportunity”. The Covid 19 global pandemic, which ironically originated in China, presents us with both an undoubted epic health, economic and social crisis and an opportunity to bring about change.

### The Crisis

We need not detail the dimensions of the interrelated crises as these have been expressed many times over. Suffice it to say that:

- Virtually every country in the world has been affected as this virus is extremely contagious;
- The number of persons who have contracted the virus and the number of people who have died in a very short period of time, is staggering;
- The rapid spread, the newness and severity of illness and the absence of both proven treatment, cure and vaccine have caused even the most developed health systems to be overwhelmed;
- The only proven way to break the virus' spread is by proper hygiene , “physical distancing” , and isolating persons who have contracted it, leading to governments closing borders and getting everyone except essential workers to stay at home;
- This stay at home strategy, either legally enforced or by way of suasion, has meant that economic activity has all but come to a complete halt, all over the world at the very same time, which is totally unprecedented;
- The result has been: huge business losses; supply chain disruptions that threaten countries and companies sourcing crucial goods; sudden job losses resulting in many hundreds of millions of workers becoming unemployed overnight; rapid increase in poverty and hunger;
- Governments seeking ways of providing social support for those adversely affected by the pandemic and some providing support for businesses that are in trouble.
- Governments losing tax revenues as businesses close, workers are unemployed, commodity prices fall and supply chains break, while at the same time having to confront large unplanned increases in expenditure to finance social and business support – leading to draw downs on sovereign wealth funds, increased borrowing and sale of state owned assets;
- Countries losing major sources of foreign exchange earnings as key sectors are closed and/or commodity prices crash, while prices of imports rise due to supply chain problems and shortages of certain goods as production facilities are shut down – leading to a worsening balance of payments situation

***Trinidad and Tobago has experienced all of the above impacts, except that we have managed the health crisis very well to date, with the result that the numbers of persons who have contracted the virus has been fairly small and, fortunately, the numbers of person who have died is also very small. Our health system has also been spared the challenge of being overwhelmed. For this we must thank***

*and congratulate our public health care professionals and the Ministry of Health, supported by policies and actions by the Government.*

## The Previous Historical Moment of Global Crisis and the Outcomes

The world has not been in such a cataclysmic moment since the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the resulting Great Economic Depression that affected the entire western world throughout the 1930's. This economic crisis created the conditions for major social and political developments:

- The rise of fascism in Europe, with its underlying ideologies of racial supremacy and the conquest of other nations;
- The consolidation of the 1917 Russian Revolution;
- The New Deal in the US, Keynesian economic policies and the decline of the “liberal” school of economics that emerged in the inter-war years in Austria and which advocated for unregulated capitalism;
- The rise of the labour movement in the US;
- World War2.

In the ashes of World War2, the key issues were – “what kind of society is desirable” and “what type of world order is necessary”?. We shall not address in detail how the second issue was resolved, suffice it to say that:

- Europe and Japan were reconstructed with economic support from the US and in the case of Japan the condition that it not develop an offensive military capacity;
- There was agreement (the Yalta Agreement) on a bipolar military and diplomatic world - USA and the USSR – a divided Europe (East and West) and related military blocs (NATO and the Warsaw Pact) and economic relations, and with the US and the USSR each having a nuclear capacity that would act as a deterrent for war in Europe;
- The Washington Institutions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (popularly known as the World Bank) were created, while the International Trade Organisation was stillborn;
- The United Nations was brought into being; and

- A process of decolonisation began with India in 1947.

The West agreed, in general terms, to a “*social settlement*” that was based on the premise that the State is responsible for the “welfare and wellbeing” of all citizens (the welfare state – not as providing welfare for people, but being responsible for their welfare). This would be achieved through policies such as:

- The wealthy paying high taxes (a progressive tax regime) and the state then providing subsidised education, health care, public transport, utilities (electricity, water), housing so that every citizen would have access to their basic needs and the opportunity to live a decent life, with social mobility giving hope to those who were less well off;
- The establishment of state enterprises that would be a balance to private capital and ensure that key sectors are owned by citizens through the state;
- A strong regulatory system to reduce speculation, limit excessive corporate power and profit taking by large firms;
- Providing the legal framework for strong trade unions and collective bargaining to ensure that the working class had a fair share of the wealth and that individual workers could earn a decent income – thus maintaining some level of equity and a certain harmony between the social classes;
- Liberal democracy – individual rights including the right to property, a system of democratic government through elections and an executive held to some level of accountability by an elected parliament (this varied from the British Westminster to a Presidential system), among other characteristics;

In sum, this was the era of “Social Democracy” which was strongest in Europe and weakest in the United States. This has been under attack since the 1980’s with the advent of the Reagan-Thatcher era. The dismantling of the post-war social settlement that has been underway since the ‘80’s with the dominance of neo-liberalism (the resurgence and further development of the liberal school of economics of the 1920’s) has seen the rapid increase in inequality of wealth and income within countries and between countries. This inequality has been studied and measured and the evidence is undisputable. Even before Covid, it has been identified as the principal threat to the stability of societies.

We in the West Indies, through the mobilisation and articulation of the labour movement from the late 1920’s and more particularly throughout the 1930’s, **that is even before WW2**, demanded fundamental change (See e.g. Labour in the West Indies by Arthur Lewis):

- Universal Adult Suffrage (the right to vote/ democracy);
- Self-government (or independence/end to colonialism);
- Federation (regional integration);
- National ownership of key natural resources and economic sectors;
- Land reform (including breaking up plantations and land for small farmers);
- Major social reforms (health, housing, education, end to discrimination, labour rights and fair/decent incomes and terms of employment).

*These demands, the continued progressive role of the labour movement and the Western post war social settlement together laid the foundation for the post Independence society of Trinidad and Tobago. That is, out of the crisis, there was an opportunity for major change. That opportunity was seized and significant, far reaching changes were made that laid the foundation for modern West Indian and therefore, Trinidad and Tobago society.*

## Today's Crisis and Opportunity

In spite of undoubted gains and progress in the past six decades since independence, this Covid 19 pandemic has cruelly exposed major fault lines; gaps; weaknesses and problems in the economy, social structure and polity of Trinidad and Tobago, some of which we highlight below:

- An economy dependent on one sector (energy) and which sector is extremely vulnerable to external shocks (market prices over which we have no control, shifts in demand for our commodities). The production of natural gas in quantities that exceed in value the production of oil and the establishment of a downstream petrochemical industry based on natural gas as a feedstock expanded the output of the sector but did not transform our economic structure since it represented diversification within the energy sector and thus when oil prices fall, so too do the prices of gas and the petrochemical products. This energy sector has also been identified as being “offshore” that is one that is primarily foreign owned and has few connections with the local economy in terms of jobs, the demand for local goods and services;
- A “Rentier State” which obtains “rents” in the form of taxes from the “offshore” energy sector and then distributes the “rents” to citizens by way of contracts to the local private sector, incomes to workers employed in the

public and state enterprises, and a variety of subsidies to citizens. The State then becomes the primary link between our principal economic sector and the rest of the economy. This system has created a culture of dependence on the state for patronage which also means that political control of the state has become a plum prize, and with it attendant corruption on a widespread scale;

- A local private sector that for the most part has been focused on traditional merchant type activity, that is, it is engaged in the importation of goods and services and retailing these for a profit. This has meant relatively little innovation and investments that are not transformative;
- A pattern of ownership that has resulted in more and more inequality of wealth and incomes (available data suggests that between 15 and 20% of the population lives below the poverty line and that more than 10% of the labour force work for the minimum wage or less) in a country that has a relatively high GDP per capita and has enjoyed several periods of very significant growth;
- National institutions (Judiciary, Parliament, criminal justice system including the Police) that are antiquated and in need of major reform and in which there is a low trust by the citizens;
- An education system that is not working for the majority of students as evidenced by high failure rates in exams at primary school leaving, secondary school leaving levels and a significant drop out rate in secondary school. This together with the fact that there is little or no connect between skill set/training of graduates of the education system and the labour market/industry/employer requirements means that many young people are frustrated, disillusioned and or migrate to find employment;
- A social structure that is broken and/or dysfunctional as evidenced by the attractiveness to many young people of criminal gangs, which is just one very stark manifestation of the deep seated culture of violence in the society, inclusive of gender based violence;
- A political culture and a governance system that excludes people from decision-making, divides the population by race, religion, party affiliation and geography, and in which there is little or no trust. This has worked against “national unity” even in the face of a pandemic, and has meant that at any given time we do not have all of our human and other resources working towards a common, shared goal;



These are just some of the key problems that have to be solved. Now is the time to begin to tackle them. There have been too many stop and start efforts at economic diversification; constitutional reform and other plans for bringing about change. They have all failed. This is partly because of the oil and gas booms that we have had which have given the country the illusion that things are good/have gotten better. We thus wasted the opportunities of using our significant cash windfalls to make the investments that would have yielded real change. In addition, our fractured political system and broken culture of division by party and ethnicity have made it almost impossible for any continuity of policies. Instead we have gotten short term, vote winning policies and actions by successive governments that have frustrated long term, fundamental change.

The old saying that “*necessity is the mother of invention*” is very true. Today we have no choice but to change. The forces causing the crisis – and who would have thought that a virus could generate such powerful forces on a global scale in such a short time – cannot be controlled by us, nor do we have any windfall to buy us the illusion that things are better. Indeed, if this pandemic doesn’t force us to recognise that we need to work together for change, nothing will!

Our history tells us what we achieved in the previous moment when we had no other choice. During WW2 Trinidad and Tobago was forced to become very self-reliant. We became largely self-sufficient in food. People made sacrifices. Oilworkers, for example, did not get the wage increases that had been agreed upon by an Arbitration Tribunal after the June 1937 strike, and settled instead for a “war bonus” that later became the cost of living bonus. People who had more financial resources invested in “war bonds”.

We became creative and inventive. Workers fabricated equipment, including a massive vessel – one of the largest in the world at that time - for the refinery at Pointe-a-Pierre. From the late 20’s right through the 1940’s our creative people were doing fantastic things – literary and debating groups flourished; local dance and music emerged into the mainstream. And out of the barrack-yards the steel pan was born!! We are back to a WW2 moment.

## The First Imperative: A Shared Vision

It is not enough to say that we will change. The question must be – what kind of change? To answer this we must first ask – what kind of society do we wish to have? What should Trinidad and Tobago look like after the pandemic has passed or a vaccine has been developed to keep us safe and healthy? This speaks to the issue of a Vision. Covid 19 gives us this opportunity to “*Re-Imagine our Future*”.

For the MSJ these are the crucial questions. If the Government, the Parliament or the Cabinet appointed “*Recovery Team*” do not have a clear vision of where we need to go then all the decisions that we make today will take us nowhere. If they have a vision that seeks to maintain the status quo of an unjust and inequitable society where the majority do not benefit and many are discriminated against and the relations of social, economic and political power remain unchanged, then the lives of the majority of people will be no better off 5,10, 15 years from now. Every decision that we take now – be it to deal with an immediate problem of growing hunger and rapidly increasing poverty – or a longer term plan to create new industries – are inter-related. There is no distinction between the short term and the long term as all short term plans add up to what happens in the long term.

The MSJ states that the country already has articulated a Vision of the kind of society that we wish to be. It is to be found in the Preamble to our Constitution. Specifically:

*“We the People, respect the principles of social justice and therefore believe that the operation of the economic system should result in the material resources of the community being so distributed as to subserve the common good, that there should be adequate means of livelihood for all, that labour should not be exploited or forced by economic necessity to operate in inhumane conditions but that there should be opportunity for advancement on the basis of recognition of merit, ability and integrity”*

*“The People of Trinidad and Tobago have asserted their belief in a democratic society in which all persons may, to the extent of their capacity, play some part in the institutions of the national life and thus develop and maintain due respect for lawfully constituted authority”.*

The former speaks to how we organise the economy. The latter speaks to the requirement for participatory governance. The Covid 19 crisis presents us with the *opportunity* to develop, for the very first time, a shared Vision for Trinidad and

Tobago, based on the position, held by a very significant majority of the population, that the crisis threatens us all and therefore *“we are all in this together”*.

**The ability of the Government to seize the moment for creating a Shared Vision and then getting citizens - across the lines of race, religion, age, gender, social class, geography and party affiliation – to believe in that vision and commit to the Actions that would achieve that Vision, is the first and most important task at hand. No Covid Recovery plan will succeed without this first step. It therefore requires National Leadership that:**

**(a) itself has a clear Vision for progressive change;**

**(b) can build unity around the Vision and Action Plan**

This suggests a leadership that recognises the importance of, believes in, and demonstrates an inclusive and participatory governance process. It also challenges all others in the society – those whom our very important thinker Lloyd Best described as the “validating elites” – who hold some position of leadership: the Official Opposition; Independent Senators; Leaders of Political Parties not now in Parliament; Leaders of Civil Society – business, labour, Community Based Organisations and NGO’s, Professional Bodies; Faith Based Organisations; our Academics, Professionals and Technocrats; the Media – to demonstrate maturity and commitment to the national interest.

## Re-Imagining the Future: The Second Republic

The MSJ has offered as a Vision – the Second Republic. This re-imagines the society of Trinidad and Tobago as evolving from its current state to a new one. It recognises that we have evolved – out of slavery, through indenture, up to freedom starting with Independence in 1962 and then to becoming a Republic in 1976. It also recognises that this journey *“Up to Freedom”*, is not complete and that the First Republic (1976) has failed in many respects:

- The systems and institutions of governance (the Constitution);
- The values that we practice (the lack of individual and collective responsibility);

- The economic structure that is not only unsustainable but generates inequalities of wealth and incomes;
- The education system and how we organise our human resources;
- The broken political culture;
- A culture of violence (inclusive of gender based violence), discrimination, social exclusion and injustice.

We therefore need to evolve to “*The Second Republic*”. Covid 19 presents us with a unique opportunity to articulate the issues that need fixing and start such a process of change. How do we get there? **The MSJ offers Five Strategic Objectives.**

The First is *Step 1 – Saving Lives, saving Livelihoods* - since there is an urgent need to address how we begin to restart the economy while continuing to prevent any further loss of life due to Covid. At the same time we must tackle the critical issues of hunger, massive unemployment, people not having any money at all to deal with their basic needs, the loss of incomes and the dangers of many businesses-people and the self-employed not being able to get back on their feet.

**The Strategic Objectives 2 to 5** are the cornerstones of the Second Republic and comprise a new Social Settlement, that which will replace the Post-Colonial or Post Independence Social Settlements of Independence (1962) and the First Republic (1976). The Actions identified in these are essentially short term, but can easily transition into longer term objectives.

- **Step 1 – Saving Lives, Saving Livelihoods**
- **Safety and Security**
- **Social Economy for Equality**
- **Sustainable and Sustained Development**
- **Social Justice and Solidarity**

# The Five Strategic Objectives

## 1. Step 1 – Saving Lives, Saving Livelihoods

The MSJ has not at any time during the pandemic second guessed or questioned the advice of the health care professionals who have guided us through the health crisis. We thank them for taking the actions that they have so as to save the lives of our people. We need to continue to follow their guidelines for saving lives. This has to be our first priority.

### **Saving Lives**

With no new cases of Covid for the past 10 days and no evidence of any further local spread and no community spread at all, the time has now come to begin to gradually ease the “*Stay at Home*” restrictions. This is necessary so that on a phased basis, businesses can start up and workers begin to earn wages and salaries. We suggest, *assuming no further positive cases of Covid 19 and subject to the advice of the health care professionals*, the following:

- That face masks be made mandatory wear in public spaces (businesses, offices, public transport, on the streets etc) under the Public Health Regulations, given the lifting of restrictions;
- That immediately, restaurants and food vendors be re-opened for pick-up customers and that after 14 days, if there are no new cases of Covid 19, they be opened for in-house dining once the businesses can guarantee that the required protocols are effected;
- That catering businesses be allowed to operate;
- That the number of persons allowed to gather be increased from 5 to 10, and that this be increased to 25 after a further 14 days and thereafter to 50 after 21 days assuming no additional positive cases of Covid 19, thus facilitating persons attending religious observances;
- That immediately businesses such as landscaping, grass cutting etc be allowed to function;
- That immediately construction activities, including renovations and repairs and maintenance to private property be allowed to function;
- That immediately public service offices that are not in essential activities be allowed to open;

- That immediately businesses such as bookstores, copy centres etc, florists, be allowed to open;
- That after 14 days other retail stores, tyre repair, auto parts and mechanic shops, businesses engaged in manufacturing and private offices be allowed to open;
- That after 21 days and no further cases of Covid 19, consideration be given to the opening of other businesses such as barbershops, hair dressing and nail salons, bars, gyms;
- That after 21 days recreational grounds, beaches, river spots etc be opened, assuming no new cases of Covid 19.
- That those schools - where there are challenges for students being prepared for exams via online learning - be partially re-opened in 14 days *for exam class students only*, and *with the class sizes reduced to no more than 10*; and careful supervision for ensuring that protocols are in place and being observed;
- *All of the above to be conditional on the businesses, offices and other places of work being re-opened guarantee, under penalty of the Public Health Regulations, that the required Protocols (facilities – sanitisation, physical distancing, ensuring mask wear etc) are in place.*

### **Saving Livelihoods**

The above gradual lifting of the restrictions will begin the process of saving livelihoods. This will enable many workers to receive some pay by the end of May.

This will not however address the fact that there is a tremendous amount of pain as hundreds of thousands of people have no jobs, no income and have no savings. Thousands are facing hunger. Many are in danger of losing their shelter. Many businesses also do not have the cash flow to enable them to restart even with this phased opening up and will not generate enough cash to pay their workers at month end, plus meet their legal obligations for NIS etc.

**The MSJ therefore advocates:**

- That the Salary Relief Grant payout be increased to \$2,500 and continued for the months of May and June even for workers who have returned to work in businesses which have a cash turn-over below a certain

threshold. This to be paid out through the firm's payroll system direct to the worker's bank account. The firms are to provide the details of its cash flow to facilitate these payments and are to be registered with the BIR and NIS. A secure communication link be provided to employees to "report" their employer for failure to effect the arrangement for their employees to access this benefit. No retroactive penalties for non-payment of NIS, tax to be imposed. This will ensure that workers receive a minimum income and at the same time provide cash flow relief for small and medium size businesses;

- That instead of food cards for families who have children in the school feeding programme, that meals be provided so that the caterers can resume business and that no family is excluded due to the lack of food cards or political favouritism, the meals being collected at the children's school. This will also facilitate farmers' having a guaranteed market for produce;
- That the food card distribution be extended to persons who were unemployed prior to the pandemic and who have no income as there are many thousands who qualify for a food card but are not in receipt of this support;
- That Rent Control Legislation be immediately passed, given that the previous legislation that provided some protection to both tenants and landlords lapsed ten years ago;
- The Consumer Affairs Division undertake to provide consumers with the "fair price" of goods so avoid price gouging;
- That the OJT programme be increased with the young people employed being deployed to various functions such as:
  - (i) data collection/verification of persons/businesses in receipt/need of state support;
  - (j) data collection re the tax and NIS systems;
  - (ii) assistant teachers to do tutoring of students who require support in the on-line learning system;
  - (iii) labour inspectors;
  - (iv) OSH Inspectors;
  - (v) consumer affairs to identify price gouging;
  - (vi) Setting up the data base of tenants and landlords;
- That a number of our initiatives outlined in subsequent sections (eg food security) be targeted for immediate action;

- That the lending policies of the banks be further amended so as not to have the deferred payment arrangement on loans (individuals and firms) seeing borrowers paying more in the long run;
- That consideration be given to the subsidising by the government of interest rate payments for businesses deemed micro, small and medium;
- That there be no reduction in the tax rates, however, business levy and green fund payments should be suspended for businesses whose turnover is below a certain threshold and green fund payments for all businesses except those whose profits are above a certain threshold be suspended for the rest of fiscal 2020 and the first half of fiscal 2021.
- That tax collection system and the NIS net be improved through the use of cross-referencing data sets (details which the MSJ will provide separately) and taking advantage of the requirements for salary relief grants, rent control law above;
- That the Ministry of Labour ramp up its Labour Inspectorate Division to ensure workers are better protected in this period;
- That Unions be allowed to take up individual workers' matters/grievances that may have arisen due to employers' actions during the stay at home and have these matters fast tracked through the system;
- That the proposal for a "pandemic leave" be implemented for those workers who have to work, but whose children are at home and are unsupervised together with the opening up of community centres and /or spaces near workplaces organised by employers as "day care centres" and with unemployed persons in the community hired to supervise children – all based on limited numbers to ensure a certain physical distancing and with protocols being in place;
- Priority be given to the proposals (establishment of more shelters for women and children who are victims of abuse; ramped up support re mental health etc) to address vulnerable groups as per the section below on **"Social Justice and Solidarity"**

That with respect to economic activities that can create some stimulus to the economy, the following be undertaken:

- Housing projects (both public and private);



- The projects proposed by us in other sections (agriculture, flood mitigation, start of retrofitting buildings to mitigate natural disasters, increased maintenance of public buildings);
- The urgent conclusion of the sale of the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery and port operations to Patriotic Energies and Technologies Ltd. This will see an immediate inflow of forex (some knowledgeable persons have estimated this to be up to or exceeding US \$500 Million) as the international finance is obtained for the first phase of restoring the asset integrity of the plant and equipment. This will also create thousands of good paying jobs over a 6-12 month period before the actual refinery start up and will activate many companies in the energy service sector. The multiplier effect will be significant. This is at *no cost* to the government;
- Restrictions on the use of forex for consumption that is not necessary (motor vehicles, luxury foods, alcohol, credit card on-line purchases). Restrictions can be via a variety of mechanisms – very high taxes on “non-essential goods”; limits on forex available on credit cards; temporary bans on imports of “non-essential goods”);
- The immediate implementation of the Regulations and full functioning of the Public Procurement legislation;
- The immediate upgrading of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, its Regulations and the staffing and capacity of the OSH Agency to address the many issues that now arise for safety and health at workplaces and establishments due to Covid 19;
- The immediate engagement of our Diaspora to involve them in the programme of recovery and change;
- The strengthening of CARICOM and engagement of the Greater Caribbean in trade, economic, travel and other integration;

## 2. Safety and Security

Covid 19 exposed: (a) the requirements for our personal safety and health; (b) the insecurities and vulnerabilities of many in our society; (c) our vulnerability to dependence on imported food. Safety and security therefore requires actions that would:

- ***Recognise that Health care is a Basic Right.*** This means that we ensure our maintaining a strong public health care system can deal with any future threats. **The MSJ advocates:**
  - (i) that all professionals in the public system not be allowed to practice in the private sector;
  - (ii) the strengthening of primary health care by increasing the hours and work days at all health centres so most will operate 24/7;
  - (iii) that we employ all our local doctors and nurses who have been trained at our expense but who are not now employed, to function in the primary care sector;
  - (iv) the Act passed by Parliament (in 2007) to regulate the Senior Citizens' Homes be proclaimed and implemented.
  
- ***Address the insecurity of employment and incomes experienced by the majority of working people who live from pay day to pay day, and many of whom are working poor - living at or below the poverty line.*** This means shaping a labour force that is well trained, but also decently paid and with proper terms and conditions of work. We do not accept that the so-called “new normal” which may require persons to work from home, or that the shift from shopping in retail outlets to on-line purchasing, should result in workers being placed at greater risk of insecure employment **The MSJ advocates that:**
  - (i) employers in the private sector, including those in the service sector and small and medium size businesses take on board the ILO’s Decent Work agenda;
  - (ii) there is tripartite agreement to reject the neo-liberal policies of “austerity” that will increase insecurity, even as we acknowledge that major adjustments will have to be made;
  - (iii) the Industrial Relations Act be amended to provide for a speedy and easy process of recognition for trade unions;
  - (iv) there is a policy shift away from a minimum wage to a living wage;
  - (v) starting immediately with the public sector, with commitments from private sector to adopt this policy, a move away from short term contract employment, temporary and casual employment into permanent employment since the former “precarious work arrangements” are the source of great insecurity;

- (vi) a policy (voluntary for private sector, mandatory for state sector) of an agreed acceptable ratio of total income between the top managers and the lowest paid employees;
  - (vii) there is a definitive timetable for the amendment and/or repeal of labour legislation (Retrenchment and Severance Pay Act, Supplemental Police Act; Workmen’s Compensation Act);
  - (viii) we begin to create a culture of individual and collective responsibility at the workplace by participatory management and individual rewards for productivity – can be started with Workplace Councils in the public sector;
  - (ix) there is strong institutional support (finance – credit on concessionary terms, marketing, management) for the micro and small business sector and for the self-employed. These will assist in addressing income inequality. The “social economy” model described in the next section is the approach to be taken.
- ***Prioritise Food Security.*** The importation of food sucks up foreign exchange (> \$1 billion US per year) that has become increasingly precious in this crisis, while also leaving us at the mercy of the global supply chain for basic food needs, a supply chain that is easily broken. **The MSJ advocates that:**
    - (i) the immediate approval of a land use plan to ensure that all existing agricultural land is preserved for food production;
    - (ii) arable state land (ex Caroni, ex Petrotrin) be identified and put into production through the creation of farms with a viable size, such farms to produce root crops and provisions that can replace wheat as our staple carbohydrate. Farms to also increase livestock/meat production and targeted vegetable and fruit crops. Such farming can be done as both large acreages - co-operatively or single ownership; small farms - single ownership. Lands to be leased exclusively for agriculture, leases to be non transferable by lessee, and process to be overseen by independent agency invested with the power of the Commissioner of State Lands;
    - (iii) existing bona fide farmers be allowed to access incentives even though they do not have a farmer’s license due only to the failure of the distribution of land leases;
    - (iv) fisherfolk be supported – security, low cost fuel, facilities;

- (v) families and communities be facilitated to grow their own food, utilising methods that do not require any arable land;
- (vi) the decision by the previous government to allow ex Caroni workers to sell the 2 acre agriculture lots to be reversed, any idle lots to be re-allocated as per above and commercial activities that were set up on these lands to be taxed accordingly;
- (vii) incentives (tax credits) to be given to: manufacturers who ramp up processing of local produce; fast food restaurants that replace imported inputs with local produce; start up companies and SME's which are processing local produce; exporters that process local produce;
- (viii) the School Feeding programme to be expanded so that all children get two meals (breakfast and lunch) in school which utilise primarily local produce, and using a means test certain parents pay a percentage of the cost of the meals. This will help to shift tastes;
- (ix) there is a strong buy local drive coupled with measures to limit the importation of food (see section re sustainable and sustained development);
- (x) support for the expansion of the cocoa and coconut industry (and downstream products) be given priority;
- (xi) studies be undertaken as to the viability of a sugarcane industry on a small scale, heavily mechanised and able to produce sufficient sugar, alcohol for the local market and with by products that can be used for animal feeds and other products;
- (xii) there is the urgent implementation of a CARICOM Food Security Plan, given that Trinidad and Tobago cannot be 100% food secure, utilising previously developed plans and agreements by CARICOM

### 3. Social Economy for Equality

The issue of wealth inequality is an urgent matter to be addressed as major global studies and even commentaries by some of the world's wealthiest, have shown that inequality is the source of societal instability. In Trinidad and Tobago the growing inequalities in wealth can be linked to the growing inequalities in: (a) ownership of capital; (b) opportunities through education. The wealth gap globally has been fuelled by what has been aptly described as "casino capitalism" where money (finance capital) has become a commodity used to speculate in the liberalised

market places of bonds, stock, commodities, currencies, other financial instruments. Investors engage in this activity and not in investments in the “real economy” that would increase the production of goods and services and thus create decent, secure employment. This “model”, popularly known as neo-liberalism will, if continued in Trinidad and Tobago, worsen to the point of social instability the income and wealth inequality that now exists.

Trinidad and Tobago has had a history and culture of successful co-operative economic activities such as: (a) Sou-Sou; (b) Len Han’ or Gayap; and (c) Credit Unions, in which many hundreds of thousands actively participate. We have to capture this strength and build on it by promoting a culture and system of the Social Economy (the International Labour Organisation refers to it as the Social Solidarity Economy). The Social Economy “model” of development will create a wider “ownership” of assets and capital thus creating a more shared commitment to Trinidad and Tobago as larger numbers of citizens and families have a stake in the country’s development and success. The Social Economy “model” will enable workers to be owners; and communities to take “ownership” of state assets thus fostering a sense of collective responsibility – a move from “it’s d government” to ‘it’s ours”. The Social Economy “model” will also facilitate a shift in culture from one of dependency to self-reliance.

**The MSJ advocates that:**

- (i) the aforementioned ramping up of the school feeding programme should involve additional catering firms established as co-operatives;
- (ii) the provision of subsidised meals by employers (grouped together if necessary) to workers be provided as per (i) above;
- (iii) the provision of subsidised day care centres by employers (grouped together if necessary);
- (iv) CEPEP be converted from a system of contractors who employ workers to a system of community/worker owned c-operatives, and that the worker/owners be trained/up-skilled to enable the co-ops to engage in the maintenance of public facilities/infrastructure in their communities (schools, recreation grounds and pavilions, etc);
- (v) the re-forestation programme be resumed immediately utilising the worker/community co-op model;
- (vi) titles of ownership be given to those persons/descendants of persons who built their homes on lands (whether state and private) that have been

- rented and/or squatted on for 20 years or more. Thousands of persons particularly those living along the foothills of the Northern Range would benefit from this and this will enable them to own their property and use this asset as collateral for investment in businesses or home improvement. This will also foster a greater sense of ownership – “this country is mine, I have a stake in it” – especially among the youth and provide a horizon of a secure future;
- (vii) agreement on new/amended legislation to regulate the Credit Union sector be implemented as per the proposals of the Credit Union Movement;
  - (viii) a large acreage of land be made available to the Rastafarian community and other traditional users of marijuana for them to cultivate, under the approved license, preferably in a co-operative, and to give priority to this community of traditional users licenses for the setting up of businesses to manufacture and sell oils, teas and other products from the marijuana plant;
  - (ix) that funding for the establishment of the co-operatives described above come from the Credit Unions, as other experiences (such as in Canada) have shown that the link between financial co-ops (credit unions) and the new producer/service co-ops have been very successful, especially in a time of economic recession/job losses. This will also reduce the need for state funding, though the credit unions will require initial liquidity support;

#### 4. Sustainable and Sustained Development

There is no doubt that the pandemic has set back the economy of Trinidad and Tobago by many years. Our national economic pie (GDP) has shrunk significantly. Our traditional lifeline of the hydrocarbon (energy sector) is in a grim state (not yet in the ICU but certainly in the HDU) with collapsed oil and gas prices, falling commodity prices, no buyers for our oil and the shutting down of plants in the downstream petrochemical sector.

The failure to diversify the economy has now caught up with us as we have no new sectors and industries that would earn or save foreign exchange and create new jobs to compensate for the weak state of the energy sector. Local private sector investment has primarily been in real estate or the retail sectors. These have not

contributed to the increase in the country's production capacity and in the case of the retail sector has ramped up consumption of imports. Globalisation (trade liberalisation) has weakened our manufacturing sector as several multinationals have closed down (Arcelor-Mittal, Unilever) to relocate production centres elsewhere.

The requirement for a partial national shutdown has compounded our predicament of a collapsed energy sector. Therefore:

- Investments and expenditures by government, the private sector and individuals must now lead to sustained growth of our national economic pie and very, very importantly the creation of sustainable jobs and incomes for our citizens, especially the youth;
- Necessity being the mother of invention we now have little or no choice but to urgently focus on investments that would lead to diversification. Diversification is really about increasing our tradables (goods and services that either earn or save forex). This is extremely urgent given the very large decrease in forex from the energy sector and our declining reserves of foreign exchange;
- We also need to move beyond only diversification. Investments must also lead to our economy being restructured from that of a “plantation economy” which means that we cannot replace energy with a new “monocrop”. It has to be more resilient to shocks whether caused by natural disasters, pandemics or global economic and political events. Economic growth cannot depend on one sector alone – all our eggs cannot be in the same basket.
- Given climate change we have to shift to a philosophy of sustainable development, for example by reducing our carbon footprint and engaging in economic activities and social behaviours that preserve rather than destroy our environment.
- Restructuring must take into account the acceleration of the use of technology in the production and delivery of goods and services, caused by the pandemic as firms and individuals find new ways of operating and living. We must also factor in that some industries and sectors have/will become obsolete due to huge and rapid advances in technology such as Artificial Intelligence, while new opportunities have been opening up.

In tackling this huge task there are challenges, some of which are:

(a) the shortage of capital for investment as the Covid pandemic has placed great pressure on government's fiscal position. There is a limit to how much can be borrowed. Our debt profile and especially our foreign debt, needs to be carefully managed. Money does not fall from the skies. The private sector has also been affected as for many firms, revenues have declined, profits have fallen and cash flows significantly put under pressure. This has weakened the capacity of the private sector to finance investments. The same goes for the financial institutions which may have to write off loans that cannot be serviced, thus challenging their balance sheets and liquidity. New foreign investment is also less likely given the global situation. Therefore all our investments and recurrent expenditures (public and private) have to be carefully prioritised; sequenced and mechanisms put in place to prevent wastage, corruption and inefficiencies;

(b) the absence of completed fore-sighting exercises and/or industrial planning that would identify what sectors/industries ought to be invested in. Where work has been done there is the need to adjust these for the new local and global realities;

(c) the lead time between identifying targets for investment and the returns on that investment.

At the same time there are assets on which we can build, such as:

(a) our proven creative and artistic capacities;

(b) our human resources much of which is underutilised (for example retrenched skilled and trained workers, unemployed university and secondary school grads);

(c) very significant investments in facilities and personnel for the delivery of tertiary education;

(d) the significant growth and range of the micro and small businesses that are engaged in the manufacture/production of goods and the delivery of services such as can be seen at trade fairs, pop up markets, roadside vending of farmers' produce and food etc.;

(e) the extensive national plant that we possess, ranging from a network of community centres to world class sporting facilities, to performing spaces; to schools;

(f) production capacity in the hydrocarbon sector and an energy services sector;

(g) a strong financial sector and substantial private savings in both TT\$ and USD (the latter held in both T&T and overseas);

(h) other infrastructure (electricity, telecommunications);



- (i) natural resources of land and sea;
- (j) the availability of international funding (private and multilateral) at low interest rates due to the pandemic;

The challenge is how to turn these assets into activities that generate economic growth, earn forex and create sustainable jobs and livelihoods.

**The MSJ advocates that:**

(i) the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund be immediately split into two – the Stabilisation Fund to be used for meeting critical gaps in the government’s fiscal situation due to unforeseen declines in revenues/increases in expenditures caused by some shock; and the Heritage Fund to be drawn down only for projects/investments specifically approved by Parliament as having an intergenerational/long term benefit. This to be done prior to the drawdown of the approved \$1.2 billion US from the existing HSF;

(ii) that the sum of US \$1.2 Billion to be drawn down from the Stabilisation Fund be used for the immediate fiscal crisis, and that the consequential injection of forex be allocated to critical imports;

(ii) two National Recovery Funds, one in TT\$ the other in US\$, be established financed by the issuing of bonds. Citizens, including the NIS, pension funds and mutual funds, to be encouraged to buy bonds – from small amounts of \$100 or less to as much as they can afford, as their personal/institutional contribution to the recovery of Trinidad and Tobago. This is to build a sense of commitment to the nation. Those who have savings of US\$ abroad should be encouraged to bring a significant amount back to buy bonds as interest rates here as better than in the US. These Funds are not to be controlled/placed in the Consolidated Fund by the Minister of Finance, but to be managed under a legal statute similar to the HSF by a Board appointed by the President, after consultation with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition. Funds to be disbursed will be targeted to projects to achieve diversification and transformation of the economy, including investment in agriculture. While these bonds will have to be backed by a government guarantee thus pushing up national debt, the projects invested in by the Funds should enable a rate of return that can pay back bondholders. The target is - \$7 billion in the TT\$ Fund, \$700 million US\$ in the USD Fund.

Our proposals below that require public funding will have to be evaluated utilising a cost-benefit analysis that takes into account social, economic and environmental

costs and benefits as per the framework developed by our own academics and technical professionals at UWI some 15 years ago, and then prioritised by the Board of the Funds. Public procurement law will govern procurement and there must be full accountability and transparency. This approach to funding should mean that there will be no need for further sale of CLICO assets or the sale of other state assets;

(iii) there be substantial investment in increasing our capacity for the production of steelpan, including the requirement to develop more highly skilled pan tuners starting with the expansion of training from secondary schools through to a “Master Tuner” programme at UTT/UWI/MIC. This will enable the export of “made in T&T” steelpan to new markets, with our best steelpan branded as ‘best in the world’;

(iv) there be a policy for target of 50% local content on television and on radio, beginning with 25% and increasing to 50% in three years and local cable companies to provide funding for the Film industry. TTT should be significantly supported in its broadcasting of local content. Major investment by the private sector in the production of documentaries and films, including the recording/filming/reproduction of previously held concerts, theatre productions/shows;

(v) the construction of East Port of Spain into a Heritage City, focusing on its cultural and historical heritage; utilising but not limited to the already existing capacity of many pan theatres and concerts, and the branding of Trinidad and Tobago as a destination for culture, festivals (food, film, literary), fashion and regularly scheduled events (concerts in all genres, theatre, dance) in a country that is Covid free, so when the tourist industry picks back up, we can take immediate advantage of it;

(vi) support be provided for creative hubs (where possible as co-ops) as incubators for young artistes and creatives;

(vii) the local garment industry be revived, utilising the strength of our designers, and the establishment of a factory hub and individual cottage type production (which capacity became very evident during the Covid period);

(viii) there be agreement by carnival bands that they will have totally locally produced costumes;

(ix) there be developed in Fyzabad a Labour Museum and Heroes Park, together with an Oil Industry Museum and Information Centre. These along with the Pitch Lake and the site of the Banwari Man can form a major complex of education and tourism (locals and foreigners);

(x) support be provided for research being done on traditional and herbal medicines (including medical marijuana), with a view to having these patented and commercialised and to form the foundation of a bio-technology sector in Trinidad and Tobago, funded by the Green Fund;

(xi) immediate tax credits for firms that invest in Research and Development, including funding research being carried out at our tertiary institutions (the potential of this collaboration was evident in the manufacture of face shields during the pandemic) and to include research into the development of AI and training in its application for business processes;

(xii) there be a halt on some of the government's approved capital projects such as the Toco Port, with funds being re-directed to improving the on-line delivery of government services and the application of AI in the public sector, a start being the development of a single National ID card system tied in with all State agencies and with the necessary protection for citizen's privacy;

(xiii) priority be given to the maintenance of public buildings, instead of the construction of new buildings, except where new buildings are deemed vital for the public interest or community use such as community centres and recreation grounds/courts where none now exist (this maintenance work be carried out as far as is practicable by the aforementioned community/worker co-ops);

(xiv) there be an intense programme of retrofitting buildings (including homes) to a minimum standard that could withstand tropical storms and earthquakes – to build resilience to natural disasters and to save lives, properties and considerable future expenditure. This work to be undertaken by small contractors, community/worker co-ops, self-employed persons who have/are trained to effect such works;

**NOTE:** Items (iii) to (xiv) above to be funded from the Two National Recovery Funds, except where the private sector is identified.

(xv) a similar approach be undertaken to engage in flood mitigation works; which mitigation would be beyond the ritual clearing of watercourses to include creation

of retention ponds to store water for irrigating farms in the dry season. This can be funded by the Green Fund;

(xvi) investment in solar energy be given priority as a renewable energy source, such investment can be financed through the Green Fund;

(xvii) our solid waste management, including but not limited to recycling, be upgraded utilising the Green Fund;

(xviii) with respect to the tourist sector in Tobago in particular, that private sector projects should be encouraged/identified in the “eco-tourism” category to significantly expand the hotel plant as visitors may be more likely to be attracted to smaller hotels that are environmentally friendly and in a destination that is relatively safe from pandemics. The same can apply to locations in Trinidad – e.g. the North Coast;

(xviii) that considerable emphasis should be placed on encouraging domestic tourism in Tobago so that more persons from Trinidad choose Tobago as their vacation destination – thus maximising existing hotel plant, saving forex otherwise spent on overseas vacations, and with the advantage of Tobago being relatively safe re Covid;

(xix) there needs to be an urgent review and re-negotiation of the contractual arrangements along the natural gas value chain to ensure that there is fairness between the values accruing to the upstream producers, the downstream users (especially the petrochemical industry and electricity generation), and the National Gas Company which must continue to be a key component of the value chain and a major contributor to national rents and development;

These are but some of the very many initiatives that can be undertaken. Other proposals will we, are sure be developed after inputs from the national community. The key is to have a mix of activities that together diversifies, recovers and restructures the economy.

## 5. Social Justice and Solidarity

We return to the question – what kind of society do we wish to have? During moments of crisis, including the pandemic, we displayed admirable values of solidarity with many assisting those who were in need of help, and our frontline

and essential workers giving of their very best. However, these values need to be manifest at all times – good and bad. We need to therefore not preach social justice but to embed this principle in our economic structure as mandated by our Constitution. This we have sought to do with our proposals for the Social Economy and for Sustained and Sustainable Development.

Social justice must also be embedded in our social fabric by tackling the culture of violence, incorporating a gender analysis. The pandemic and the stay at home requirement sadly brought out some of our worst behaviours as domestic violence increased.

Inequality and discrimination, whether by gender, age, sexual orientation, race, religion, place of residence, party affiliation or any other factor can no longer be tolerated, far less accepted.

During the pandemic there was an increase in mental health problems, a fear for the future which is uncertain, and other anxieties, including financial pressures. The lockdown did not create new problems but amplified them.

At the same time, we also were forced to recognise and appreciate the value of labour, of the worth of workers for whom we have had little or no previous respect but, without whom, we could not have lived through a lockdown. So the worker who lives from pay day to on a meagre wage and who comes from a so-called “hotspot” has to be viewed differently now, as does his/her community. They are part of this society and are as important as the CEO who is financially very well off and who lives in a luxurious community.

The inequality in the education system was also exposed as “online learning” replaced the face to face classroom. However, those who had (a) no device with which to access the online teaching; (b) had no internet access; and (c) did not have either parental or a domestic environment that was supportive of the student as he/she grappled with this new learning process, were at a significant disadvantage to their peers. This disadvantage will widen the inequality gap between those students who attend the so-called “prestige schools” and those who are in the schools that do not have a record of academic success. We cannot continue with an education system that creates inequality.

**The MSJ advocates:**

(i) the complete overhaul of the education system within a two year timeline starting in the new academic year: no more tinkering. This to include: restarting

apprenticeship training schools so that we have the skill base for maintenance and service sector jobs and self-employment; smaller class sizes and the establishment of many more homework centres in communities/for schools where the students are not doing well academically; inclusion in the curriculum through an extended school day the involvement of all students in sport and/or artistic activities “including pan in school”; greater emphasis on the STEM subjects as well as history, social studies and ethics/civics; the use of technology to facilitate learning;

(ii) major investment in the training of persons for the professions of guidance officers; counsellors; mediators, psychologists and social workers as well as strengthening the programme of mentorship to support students and young people as they navigate the worlds of school and work. This capacity will also contribute to interventions to change the culture of violence, including intimate partner violence and violence against and abuse of children;

(iii) the establishment of many more shelters for abused women and children; and utilising community centres and other “neutral” spaces” where people can access counselling and other assistance.

(iv) NGO’s, Community and Faith Based Organisations already engaged in positive social interventions need to be supported and not pushed aside, starved of funds or replaced by state interventions.

*Very importantly, the values of social justice and inclusiveness cannot be fulfilled unless all citizens can “participate in the institutions of national life” as mandated by the Constitution. This requires constitution reform and local government reform. **The MSJ therefore further Advocates that:***

- (i) there be a tripartite (including civil society) agreement and a commitment by the parliamentary parties and those contesting the upcoming general elections to start a participatory process for comprehensive reform of our governance systems and institutions, beginning immediately after the conclusion of the elections;
- (ii) immediate passage of legislation for Political Party financing, including campaign finance regulations.

## Conclusion

The specific proposals identified in our Five Strategic Objectives are not to be considered as either exhaustive or the best possible solutions to the Crisis. We recognise that the specific proposals that we have articulated need to be buttressed by additional, longer term plans and projects. All that we have proposed can be tackled in the short term, some require planning start up, others can be implemented right away. We will be reducing the proposals to several Tables/Charts so that they can be more easily read and digested.

However, the MSJ strongly believes that the Framework that we have provided, which has been developed in the context of both a historical and philosophical analysis, is the only way to approach the herculean task ahead of us as a nation.

We look forward to the contributions and interventions of many others in the days and weeks ahead.

May 7, 2020.