Leave of Absence

Thursday, January 23, 1992

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 23, 1992

The House met at 1.35 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER in the Chair]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to bring to the attention of this House a letter that I have received from Mr. Alloy Lequay in his capacity as General Secretary of the National Alliance for Reconstruction, with respect to the absence of the Member for Tobago East, from this honourable House. For purposes of the record I wish to read this letter:

"Dear Madam,

Mr. A.N.R. Robinson, Member of Parliament for Tobago East who is at present in Miami, has requested me to advise that circumstances do not allow him to return to Trinidad until the end of January.

As a consequence, he is requesting leave of absence from the parliamentary sittings during his absence from the country.

Your kind consideration will be appreciated."

I find it passing strange, and very unfortunate, that the hon. Member chose not to communicate with the Speaker or the Clerk of the House with respect to his absence from this honourable House, but indeed, with someone outside this House. I think this is an appropriate time for me to bring to the attention of Members, Standing Order 84(1) of the House of Representatives, which reads as follows:

"Any Member who is prevented from attending a meeting of the House shall acquaint the Clerk as early as possible of his inability to attend."

This is why I find it, as I said, passing strange, and very unfortunate.

APPROPRIATION BILL

(BUDGET)

[THIRD DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [January 17, 1992]:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.
The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Dr. The Hon. Keith Rowley): Thank you for your recognition, Madam Speaker. I would have preferred to be standing after brighter news, but it seems to me that no matter what I do I cannot shake off certain things.

Madam Speaker, permit me in my first contribution in this honourable House to congratulate you on your elevation to such high office. I know that you will do us all proud, and not just the ladies of Trinidad and Tobago. I am sure that you can count on the total co-operation of this House, as you have observed yesterday.

It was a pleasure for me to sit here yesterday in the company of the Members of this new Parliament, and as a Minister of Government. I have listened very carefully to all the contributions. Permit me to congratulate those new Members, like myself, of this House, who made their maiden speeches particularly the Member for Chaguanas, who spoke from the heart, and the Member for La Brea who spoke with the skill with which we know he is endowed. As the Member for Laventille West said, he should have been in this House a long time ago.

I was hoping that the Leader of the Opposition would have been here because it was my intention to congratulate him personally on the occupation of his favourite seat, because we had made a bet in 1987 when he turned up in the Senate, unannounced and unrequired and accidentally took part in a debate. But because of my admiration for his oratorial skills I was too concerned about trying to learn from him than reading the Standing Orders against him. So he had the distinction of participating in a debate in the Senate when he had no business so to do.

I can give him the assurance that I do not intend to pay him back with his new Senators, but I hope we shall have the time to take a drink on that.

Mr. Humphrey: On a point of clarification. Was the hon. Member, Leader of the Opposition, or was he a Minister of the Government at the time?

Dr. Rowley: Yes, but the debate had to do with something completely outside his portfolio. He should only have spoken on something under his portfolio. But he got away. I say that to indicate the spirit in which we intend to treat with the Opposition.

But having spent four years myself in the Opposition, I know there is something called Opposition licence, which is a tax that you sometimes do not have to pay, and yesterday we had quite a bit of that.
We have heard contributions on the budget and they were all in the same vein—that the budget was not comprehensive enough, the budget did not deal with, or in enough detail with. That is a reasonable position. But for all those who made that observation, I am sure they will accept that it is just not possible for a budget statement to deal with everything or to deal comprehensively with most things.

The budget, as it was presented in its brief form, was one and a half hours long. I wonder how long it would have taken if the budget was all-inclusive and all-encompassing. It just was not possible.

But one observation made by the Leader of the Opposition was that we have heard it all before. There is some truth in that, because as long as we remain nationals of Trinidad and Tobago and as long as this country remains what it is, with its intrinsic problems, we shall hear the objective over and over, because I do not believe that there is any divergence of view with respect to the objective. What is our goal, what are we all trying to do, Government, Opposition and the missing Members, what are we all trying to do? We are trying to build a better Trinidad and Tobago. So over and over again, that will be the objective, whether it is 1956 with Eric Williams, 1981 with George Chambers, 1986 with the Member for Oropouche, who was a Minister of Finance incidentally—or in 1991, the objective is the same. What varies is the pathway to this objective. In fact, because of the nature of the problems, many of the solutions are prescribed along very narrow paths. The options are not very wide. So it is quite possible that you would hear solutions which sound quite similar. However, in short, there are a number of ways of doing things, and as we have a mandate from 1991 till whenever, 2020 or whenever—this first mandate is till 1996—and what we are really debating here, is the pathway chosen by this Government.

We also heard statements which gave the impression that we did not have two elections since the PNM was the government. We hear of 30 years of PNM and we hear of—much to the discomfort of my friend across here—30 years of PNM mentality, and PNM this, and PNM that. This country elects a government every five years, and what in effect you get, is a new government. It might be the same party, but it is a new government which would have come to you on the basis of positions taken in the manifesto.

1.45 p.m.

So, I want us to be seen in that context. With respect to the party which forms the Government—no apologies to anyone. In fact, we are very proud, and
what I should have done, if I was a betting man, when the Leader of the Opposition told me on that fateful day, when he entered the debate improperly, he told me, "Never will you see a PNM government." He again. I told him, "Next election you will see the PNM in government." He did not believe me, but I hope he is believing us now as we put plans for Trinidad and Tobago, because these are not sectoral plans, they are the plans for the advancement of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We accept our responsibility like that.

The Member for Couva North had much to say about unemployment, which he chose quite correctly, as the number one issue in Trinidad and Tobago today. He accepted the figures presented by the Minister of Finance which showed that we have been, in the recent past, cooking the books on unemployment. Whether he agrees or not with how we deal with unemployment, one thing we cannot agree on, is to disregard the threat of unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago. We do that at our own peril.

The Member said, and it was said earlier on by the last government, that the approach to unemployment is not what is called 'make-work' but permanent jobs. A laudable goal, yes. If we could find the mechanism to create 80,000 permanent jobs now, that would be the mechanism to be followed and this Government would follow it now. It is just not feasible to create 80,000 jobs in this economy, now or even in the near future. If we create a few thousand permanent jobs a year we would be doing well.

However, we all agree that we have in this country over 80,000 unemployed people with dependants. So even if we find the mechanism which will take us towards permanent jobs, the horse has to eat while the grass is growing. So we cannot accept that the early approach to the unemployment problem is seeking permanent jobs. It is a three pronged approach. The medium term, the short term and the long term. Yes, we are always seeking permanent jobs, because that is how you will make the situation more manageable as you go along; reducing 80,000 as the case might be.

In the meantime, whatever you call it, DEWD, LIDP, this country has to have unemployment relief. It is a mistake to think that it is charity. It is also a mistake to believe that any approach dealing with the unemployment problem must have, as an integral part of that programme, corruption, nepotism and patronage. It is like saying that because there is a bank robbery, you should not have cashiers or banks. These things, as they occur, you deal with but focus on the objectives.
A lot was said about equity in unemployment relief programmes. I give the assurance, as we said in our campaign, that it is our intention to bring a new political culture with respect to decency and behaviour in dealing with the people. I have good reason to believe that every Member of this House will subscribe to that. As I go to my constituency during the week, 99 out of every 100 persons I meet, come to me seeking to get on the unemployment relief programme. I see this as a spin-off from their recent experience where they believed that to get on the unemployment relief programme, whenever it is started, whatever it is called, you have to have the sanction of the Member of Parliament of that constituency.

I want to say here publicly on behalf of my colleagues on this side, that individuals who ought to be beneficiaries of the unemployment relief programmes, need not see the Member of Parliament for sanction, you will get your chance on the basis of equity, on a fair, rotating basis. Whatever there is to be shared, we give the commitment that we will ensure, as far as is possible, that there is equity in the system and, in fact, you do not need the sanction of the parliamentarian. That was an unfortunate part of our recent past, and we wish not to subscribe to it in the future.

We heard the Member for Couva North say that our attempts in the budget to use fiscal policies to generate employment is less than serious. In the budget we introduced something called “a $12,000 tax relief” for maintenance of private dwelling houses. The Member for Couva North said that it is basically minimal; saying that it only involves 7,000 claims. Well even if it involves 700 claims it is 700 more than we have now. Because, I believe that there has been a very great reduction in the number of persons who use that mechanism to encourage themselves to repair their dwelling houses. When the repair is done to a dwelling house—I heard the comment made that it is the rich that will benefit. That is not true. One does not have to be rich to own a house in Trinidad and Tobago. Under successive administrations in the last number of years, especially under the PNM Government, a number of persons who were not rich ended up owning their homes.

Today, this measure will encourage them to do the necessary maintenance and most of them would not have the skill, time nor the inclination to do that kind of maintenance. If the tax measure will cause them to do the maintenance, as I am sure it will, they will have to hire people to do it on an ad hoc basis. You need painters, masons, joiners, carpenters, skilled tradesmen; we have 40,000 unemployed people in the construction sector, many of them will get work on a three, 10 or 15-day basis working for someone in a private capacity, outside the
Government. That is employment creation. If you work it out and say okay, we have 7,000 house-owners, who will do that and to get $12,000 of permanent work, you might need, I would say, possibly 10 man-days of work—that is a conservative figure—we are talking about creating 70,000 man-days of work. Tell that to the unemployed who out there see no hope—that there are 70,000 man-days available and you might get a chance to get some money. That will go a long way.

We believe it does not end there. Because the support for the construction worker, some surveyors will tell you, the backward linkage is as many as six since they have to use materials; materials have to be transported, materials have to be sold in the stores; you need to have clerks in the stores, and as you use, you will encourage unemployment along the way. So it is not just those who are directly employed.

Of course, this would come on as quickly as the users take advantage of it and claim their benefit in the next year, so it is postponing the call on the Treasury as we go along, but in the meantime it would have the effect of generating activity as quickly as the public seeks to understand this measure and take advantage of it.

We talk about solving the unemployment problem. Yes, that is a laudable goal, but realistically we are really talking about alleviating the unemployment problem. Given the fact of the size of our economy, the outlook for growth—even the most favourable outlook for growth—in the long term, given our natural birth rate, survivability, we have 20,000 young people coming on the market every year; realistically we are talking about alleviating it and managing it. Solving the unemployment problem is a long-term goal. Immediately, in this budget and in this five-year period, we are talking about serious alleviation.

1.55 p.m.

We had what I considered to be a very interesting debate on CNG and the Member for Naparima is very stunned that the Minister of Finance—he was very surprised—could have put in the budget what he called a surprise measure on CNG. I wish to comfort the Member for Naparima by saying that there was no surprise. In fact, if he had disregarded the back and the front of the manifesto and had gone to page 22, paragraph 4, he would have seen where we spoke about using the proposed Natural Gas Act and the “pioneer” users on a cost-related basis. So we talk about pioneer use of natural gas, that is what CNG in motor cars on the roads in Trinidad and Tobago is and we go on further: we say the
Government in its overall science and technology policy will include the processing and the use of natural gas as a key area for attention. Clear?

The manifesto was precise and clear and it is out of that paragraph that comes the Minister of Finance’s measure. It was unfortunate that the Member for Oropouche fell below par yesterday and sought to impute improper motives on the part of the Prime Minister, that he had some connections with the beneficiaries of this measure. I wish to warn the Member for Oropouche.

**Mr. Sudama:** Madam Speaker, I merely recorded what was being said on the outside. I in no way tried to impute improper motives to the Member for San Fernando East. I merely related to this House what the masses of people were saying about the special relationship between Member for San Fernando East—

**Dr. Rowley:** While I am extremely gratified to hear that from the Member, I will now accuse him of being irresponsible in the extreme by using his seat in this honourable House to bring in such rumour which could only seek to undermine the integrity of the Member for San Fernando East. I will give you the assurance the character and integrity of the Member for San Fernando East is on solid ground. Madam Speaker, when a Member of Parliament gets up and for whatever reason makes statements like that he is not only talking to me or to anybody here; he is also he is talking to our children. What he is saying to them is, “Look, Prime Minister or no Prime Minister, regardless of how you see them, do not see them as exemplars, see them as crooks, thieves, vagabonds and contact men,” and that is unfortunate in the extreme. I am glad to hear that he did not believe what he said because nobody believes that. I would appeal to the Prime Minister not to even bother to respond to that.

The Member for Oropouche also made a comment about our move towards developing high cost methanol and similar types of energy-based industries in certain parts of the country. He cushioned it in such a way as to say that it is a deliberate strategy on the part of this Government and previous governments to facilitate developments in certain favoured areas of the country while deliberately ignoring other areas, the rural areas in particular.

I want to challenge that statement for the last time, because the first industrial estate which was developed in that context was done in a rural constituency, Couva South, which today is the most industrialized constituency in Trinidad and Tobago. I want to say further to the Member for Oropouche that there is no merit in that argument, for the argument is based on a wrong premise. The premise is this, that if we say no, we do not want methanol and we do not want it in Point
Fortin that investment capital would be available to grow rice in Oropouche and tomatoes in Toco. Nothing is further from the truth. The investor will choose the location based on solid geographical and economic considerations which have nothing to do with Machiavellian politics. And put that in your pipe and smoke it.

I wish to turn to agriculture. We heard a lot yesterday about agriculture and we also heard about what was termed our manifesto betrayal. I want to start by directing all those who spoke yesterday to the manifesto on page 17 and I want to read for the benefit of Members, especially those who spoke about not keeping faith.

Under Agricultural Organization, page 17 of the PNM manifesto it says:"

"Currently agricultural development in Trinidad and Tobago is being pursued by four Ministries and the Tobago House of Assembly with little coordination among them."

That was our observation and the commitment we gave is that this effort is unfocused and counter-productive and we will retain the overall direction to agricultural development in the country more feasible to a single ministry. We have done that. We have taken agriculture from the various areas in Government, out of Works and LIDP and out of Planning and out of Environment and whatever there is and we brought it under the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. Administrative, organizational improvement and focus. We said that here. We said for example, horticulture and forestry which are now in the Ministry of the Environment would be brought into this Ministry. We have done that. We said the THA shall be encouraged to work in close association with the Ministry of Agriculture. We have done that. We went to Tobago recently, met the THA and I will be going to Tobago some time in the very near future with my team of technocrats from the Ministry to carry out the beginning of that commitment. That is how we are going to operate. We put it there and we will do it.

Madam Speaker, you have to understand that some things in this manifesto can be done immediately, others not so. But insofar as we have taken the major direction, all I can ask Members on the other side is to have faith, we believe in what we put in this manifesto and we intend to keep our commitment.

2.05 p.m.

With respect to focus in the Ministry, the Ministry of Agriculture [Interruption] Stop talking about 30 years, you are embarrassing the Member for
Caroni East. At least we are not going around saying 30 years of ULF futility. Madam Speaker, am I going to have any injury time on this matter? If you say, yes, I will take them on. I was saying that the Ministry of Agriculture is one of—

Madam Speaker: I do not want so early in the day to bring Members’ attention to the Standing Order on interruptions. There is much leeway that we allow on both sides but I think it is only fair that Members be allowed to make their contributions in as civil a manner as possible.

Dr. Rowley: I was about to say that what we have in Trinidad and Tobago is a highly qualified, well-staffed Ministry of Agriculture, with very qualified technical people. I am sure you will be greatly impressed if you look at the line-up of technical people in the Ministry of Agriculture. There is a misconception in this country that the Ministry of Agriculture is a food producer. We wish to redirect that conception because we believe that food production is done by farmers. It was a misnomer to call the Ministry the Ministry of Food Production in the first place—agriculture is not only food production—because it gives the impression that the Ministry is about going out there hands-on with respect to producing food. I wish to tell you that the Ministry's main role has to do with setting, monitoring and vetting of policy in national agricultural objectives, and on top of that, services.

I saw recently in the newspapers where someone wrote a letter to the newspapers criticizing the Ministry of Finance for giving salary increases to public servants, "that bunch of pen-pushers". I wish to tell whoever wrote that letter that in the Ministry of Agriculture, as in many other Ministries, the pen-pushers are the people who provide the national community with crop protection, supply of feeds and plant acquisition, livestock breeding and replacement, animal health services, infrastructural development, forestry protection and reafforestation, conservation, general research in respect of animal and plant life in our country, project evaluation and development, land management and distribution. If that is pen-pushing; well the Ministry of Agriculture is a great pen-pushing Ministry. As you would gather, Madam Speaker, that is not pen-pushing, that is a large body of technical and support services for the agricultural economy of Trinidad and Tobago. This Ministry will focus very sharply on that—service and support for farmers rather than whatever else we are thought to be.

What is the background to agriculture? Like the person who wrote that letter, I am of the view that the national community does not have a clear perspective of the national economic effort and it falls to the Ministry to correct that because
very often we hear statements which are not correct and they serve only to undermine national effort. To put in perspective what we are going to do, it is important for me to tell you where we have been and where we are.

With respect to arable land—that is land fit for cultivation in one form or the other—in Trinidad and Tobago we have 131,000 hectares. There are some countries in the world, like Australia and the United States where one farm is bigger than that. There is a point of view in this country that if we do certain things we will be able to feed ourselves and grow all the food we need. That is not correct. What I think is being said if one examines that statement, is that we can make greater use of what we have available to us, and no one can quarrel with that. What do we have available to us? A total of 131,000 hectares. What is the position today? We have 81,000 under cultivation, 21,000 abandoned or semi-abandoned. That is the position, so any proposal, any plan, any initiative from this Government will have to do with maintaining, in the first instance, the 81,000 under cultivation and seeking to take initiatives to bring into production, in as quick a time-frame as possible, the 21,000 or part thereof which is lying abandoned or semi-abandoned. It is that kind of thinking that informed our policies.

What is the position with respect to employment in agriculture? We hear about how many people have left the land. In 1982, we had 36,400 persons on the land. By 1990, we had 50,590. So there has been a significant increase over the period of time, although it fluctuated in between. However, the general picture is that we have been putting more and more people on the land.

With respect to progress in the last 10 years in agriculture, there are some interesting figures. We have had significant successes in the area of poultry. Table eggs: where in 1982, we were producing 2,300 crates, by 1990, we were producing 3,638. Pork: 1982 we were producing 2,931 kilograms, by 1990, we kept that steady. Beef and veal, roughly the same thing. Milk, 7,800 litres in 1982, 10,800 in 1990 and we have maintained that level more or less.

With respect to our traditional crops: coffee; roughly 1,700 kilograms in 1982, 1,900 kilograms in 1990. We managed to keep it steady. We want to increase that. Citrus: in 1982, 661 kilograms of oranges, by 1990, 1,016; in 1985, we had 3,600 kilograms of grapefruits and that fell to 1,700 by 1990. What I am trying to show you is that in some sections of our agricultural economy we have had significant progress which we have managed to maintain; in others we have had significant losses. Worrisome fish production—4,200 kilograms in 1982, by 1991, we were producing only 3,000 kilograms. We have to address that.
What about imports? We hear about how much food we import. The impression is that we import and eat, directly, millions of dollars of food. In 1982, we were importing $120 million worth of meat and meat products. By 1990, we were importing only $86 million. Fish: $30 million in 1982 and $16.5 million in 1990. I am rounding off the figures. Fruit and vegetables: in 1982, $157 million worth; we were still importing by 1990, $162 million. Animal feed—which incidentally goes down under the food import bill; when you hear that figure for food importation, a significant portion of it is animal feed—1982, $127 million, by 1990 we were still importing $92 million of animal feed. I shall come back to that later on.

2.15 p.m.

But to get to the picture. We heard from the Member for Couva North that one of the initiatives of the ULF—UNC, sorry, no offence meant—the UNC, would be to seek bilateral free-trade agreement with North America. I would ask the Members on the other side if they thought that through seriously, and maybe someone can tell me what effect that will have on local agriculture. My Ministry intends to do a comprehensive survey on the effect of the CET on the agricultural sector, because over the years, we have spent a considerable amount of money and effort in building up our agricultural sector, and I wonder if we are prepared to defend that sector, or if it is that we are prepared to have it exposed to certain denegration and death by measures such as bilateral free-trade agreements. Maybe the other Members on the other side could enlighten me.

I want to draw to your attention, the fact that 69 per cent of all our cultivated land is under sugar, cocoa and coffee, only 12 per cent of our cultivated land is under food crops and vegetables and 92 per cent of all our holdings are less than five hectares, a lot of small holdings. Between 1963 and 1982, the amount of land under agriculture declined from 131,000 hectares to just over 100,000 hectares. I raise this while I ask the question: would this free-trade agreement that we are going to negotiate in any way continue this undesirable trend downwards, or will someone on the other side tell me how it will reverse that trend that I have just outlined? Because that is the state of affairs.

Support for agriculture, sugar-cane, copra, milk production, oranges, grapefruit, rice, every single one of these products coming from the major agricultural sector, ends up in this document, on this page, because they survived on guaranteed prices and subsidy payments from the taxpayer of Trinidad and Tobago. So when we get up and talk about policies, I want Members to bear that in mind.
Our agricultural sector is extremely fragile, and is being supported to an extent which the average person out there does not understand. I am of the view that our agricultural sector will not survive carte blanche competition. We have to take a look at others elsewhere in the world and see how they manage to protect and nurture their agricultural sector. For those who want to find out how it is done, I draw their attention to the collapse of the Uruguay round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

One other point of great interest is that in Trinidad and Tobago, the state owns 52 per cent of all the arable land. That puts the state in a good position to influence agricultural policy directly, and to discharge its responsibilities as it sees fit. That brings me to Caroni Limited.

Caroni Limited is a major part of our agricultural resource. There can be no success in the national agricultural effort without success at Caroni Limited. But this might be a good time for me just to mention the historical perspective of Caroni Limited.

When we became independent someone in London cast an aspersion in the direction of our then Chief Minister or Prime Minister I think he was then, that he might be a Prime Minister of a country where large areas of the country will be closed to him by the closing of gates. What the person was referring to was the fact that a huge portion of our landspace was owned by private enterprise in a foreign land. Texaco had owned south Trinidad; Tate and Lyle had owned central Trinidad and we had not yet gotten back Chaguaramas. It is in that historical context that Caroni Limited was bought for and on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

So it fell to what we now call the Corporation Sole to be responsible for this major resource. Suffice it to say that what this country has done since 1975 to now is to wrangle over Caroni (1975) Limited. While we have been wrangling over Caroni (1975) Limited, what is the position there today? The position is that it has on its payroll almost 10,000 employees. There are very few sections, however, outside the direct state employment.

I do not believe that any other sector of the national economy can boast that it provides employment for 9,542 employees of which 2,000 are seasonal. So over 7,000 regular jobs of which over 1,000 are monthly paid, largely skilled employees, some of them highly skilled. Good, but how do we maintain that? Because of what was conceived in 1975, we never had a christening where we could celebrate, we always were worrying about the pregnancy.
So, if we look at Caroni's requirement for the last five years as prepared by the Board and presented to the Ministry—and I want you to hear this in the context of what I said just now in the support for agriculture not just Caroni (1975) Limited, support for agriculture in general—specific to Caroni (1975) Limited the Board would have said to the Ministry in 1987 that it required $270 million to keep Caroni's head above water. The Ministry would have provided in direct subvention to Caroni just about $105 million. In 1988, the company would have said, "We require $229 million." The Government could have provided from our resources $147 million. The company said, in 1989, $189 million required; the Government could have provided $121 million; in 1990 and 1991, the Government provided $100 million in each year. But the company said they required $188 million and $176 million. The point I am making is that the company has serious need for substantial injections of cash just to keep its head above water.

So the fact of the matter is that there is a serious section of our national economy in this position. What do we do about it? I spoke about 10,000 employees. As I immersed myself in my Ministry, one of the first things I did was to go down to Caroni, touch base with them directly. I came away with the view that manpower resource in Caroni is an area of serious concern.

Madam Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Hon. K. Valley]

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. Rowley: I thank hon. Members, Madam Speaker.

I asked the chairman to give me a quick overview of the manpower situation at Caroni, given what I have just said about Caroni's 9,000 employees and its critical importance in the national economy. The comment, if I may quote from the response of the chairman is that:

"The board has identified the company's human resource department as an area of weakness in the overall effective functioning of the organization".

There are five bargaining units—I should just say as an aside, and he goes on to say:

"Historically, human resource management in Caroni appears to have been deficient and resulted in cumulative decisions that have contributed to the company's extremely weak position."
"Any attempt to turn around the company as a business entity and to improve the industrial relations climate, as well as realizing gains in productivity must address the problem of human resource management as a priority area."

So we have a situation of 10,000 employees in a state enterprise, with a comment like that.

I wish to give you the assurance that as Minister of Agriculture responsible for Caroni, I do not intend to conduct a holding operation. I assume that the nationals of this country are reasonable, and as I said earlier, that we have the same laudable objective. I believe that we want to correct the situation as quickly as possible.

What I wish to say this evening is that consequent upon the recent visit of the hon. Prime Minister to meet with the representatives of the sugar workers, and in keeping with our manifesto pledge and other more recently stated positions on the principles of consultation and participation as integral components in the decision-making process, we propose to take some new and far-reaching decisions with respect to Caroni (1975) Limited.

As Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources with responsibility for Caroni (1975) Limited, I propose to take before Cabinet in the not too distant future, a Note seeking authorization to initiate high-powered tripartite action on all matters relating to Caroni (1975) Limited.

This approach will require that the state, on the one hand, the union on the other hand, and the company will identify suitable representatives who will be required to sit and negotiate. Each representative will carry the authority to make binding decisions. This Government believes that once this body of responsible nationals is authorized to address this intractable national problem, it will be possible to put the national interest first, without sacrificing the legitimate concerns of all those who are directly involved in the industry.

Under these circumstances, the Government gives the assurance that it will eagerly await agreements of this tribunal and stand ready with the political will to implement as progress is made. That brings me to the 15 per cent increase in the price of sugar as indicated in the budget speech.

I wish to say, that I was one of those wearing red on November 19, 1989, who went down to see a football match—my colleague here was down there as well—we went in our thousands to the stadium to see a football match where our
national team was involved. After that there were a lot of people interpreting for
us how we had come together as one and what a wonderful day it was and how
we had behaved so well and all of that. I am afraid that the opposite is true with
respect to the 15 per cent increase in the price of sugar. Because already I have
heard that members of the national community, some of whom might have been
there in the stadium talking about what a wonderful people we had become and
how we had become our brother's keepers—already I have heard that sugar has
gone up by 15 per cent, that the price of sugar-using products has also gone up by
15 per cent.

I take this opportunity to call on members of the national community not to
engage in price-gouging, and to see what we are trying to do. Because contrary to
the line of argument of the Member for Naparima yesterday, what we are trying
do is to take the decisions that have been suggested as a result of much clear
thinking. If one listened to the Member for Naparima yesterday, one would have
got the impression that the increase in the price of sugar was the brainchild of the
Minister of Finance. I say no. Long before that, the argument of discrimination
was used by spokespersons for the sugar industry, some of whom are present here
today. The argument goes like this: That the discrimination comes because the
Government of the day—and that usually is the PNM—has taken a conscious
decision to allow other products to seek their market level, but deliberately puts a
cap on sugar so that sugar workers and cane farmers will be discriminated against
by not getting a fair value for their effort. That is the argument [Interrupted] I
have never heard cement put in that context.

So I was very surprised to hear that an increase in the price of sugar by 15 per
cent with a clear objective was being attacked by Members from the other side.
The question I want to ask is: Are they saying that the increase was not high
enough? I did not know that. What they were saying is that the increase would
cause all kinds of problems in the country. And all I would wish to ask is: When
the suggestion was made long ago that part of the solution to the Caroni problem
is an increase in the price of sugar, where was this argument about what it will do
to grannies who cannot buy a sweet drink? But I leave that there, Madam
Speaker, because I say what we have done is to permit Caroni Limited to earn
from the sale of sugar a further $20 million per annum. What that represents is
commitment to a philosophy that Caroni Limited is not a Caroni problem; it is a
problem of the people of Trinidad and Tobago from Charlotteville to Cedros.
Any solution to Caroni Limited's problems must involve the people of St. James,
Toco and Caroni. So as they buy their sugar, paying 15 per cent more, as we have
said in our campaign, we are sharing the burden equitably, and we have said that that increase of $20 million will not go into the Consolidated Fund and disappear in there as we were cautioned, quite correctly, by the Member for Naparima. It is meant to provide additional resources to Caroni. Of course that would bring up all kinds of skeletons about backpay.

What we propose to do, is to instruct Caroni (1975) Limited to let those workers on its payroll who did not benefit from the court award initially—I am not here talking about backpay—the Court had made an award of a pay increase which had created retroactive accumulation—but there were some workers in Caroni who were not paid even that increase. First call on this money would be for those workers. They will get almost $1 million of that money. What that will do is, in keeping with our commitment to honour the court awards across the board, all workers so affected would have got their new emolument.

Secondly, using the Seemungal formula, this increase in the price of sugar will make available, through Caroni, a further $3.9 million to cane farmers. So the computations in my Ministry indicate that cane farmers can now look forward to a further $6 per tonne. This is in keeping with our philosophy that the cane farmers will take on an additional burden with respect to the rationalization of the industry. So as we go in that direction we give them the encouragement and the support.

I want to say that as we give them that, we want to call on the leaders in the cane farming industry to ensure that while the grannies are making the 15 per cent sacrifice as they buy their soft drink, as we heard yesterday, that cane farmers strive to provide Caroni (1975) Limited with the best quality cane. That is their obligation.

It will further leave Caroni (1975) Limited with about $15 million. This will permit the company to address its past obligations while it remains focused on its future objective. I would not be particularly enthralled if I become the Minister who solved the Caroni backpay problem. I would be delighted if I am the Minister under whom Caroni’s future is put on the right track. So we have to take care. We cannot surrender the future for the past; we have to balance it.

Caroni now has a guaranteed stream of revenue to deal with its past obligations while it also keeps its eye on its future. By this, I mean, Caroni has some cash-generating projects on the shelf which, for the want of small capital investment, the company cannot move into. We believe that this decision will
give the company that opening to do that as part of the continuation of the diversification programme.

We do not confine our effort to Caroni (1975) Limited. I use Caroni to illustrate what has to be done, what can be done in the agricultural sector. I can go up north, where we have a similar, though not such a large-scale situation, Nonpareil Estate, which the state also owns. I give you the assurance, Madam Speaker, that by the next budget debate, much will have happened with respect to Nonpareil Estate. Once again, I give you the assurance that I do not intend to conduct business as usual with that estate. It is a resource that needs to be brought into action as quickly as possible. I will not stop with Nonpareil Estate.

On my desk right now is a file which shows all the estates owned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. I was very surprised to see the amount of land owned by the state under all kinds of terms and conditions. What I propose to do is to bring a mechanism to the Cabinet which will have as its goal the pulling together of all these disparate pieces of agricultural land under what, at this time, I am calling an agricultural land authority, an agency which will be mandated to bring those lands into commercial operation as quickly as possible by whatever initiative the authority deems fit. That I see as a cash-generating venture, while the target remains economic expansion in the area of agriculture.

What are we going to do with this land when we get it? Once again, solutions are within sight. Because the state also owns National Flour Mills, which happens to be the largest agro-processor in the country—state land, state decision-making, National Flour Mills. I am of the view with that the success that we have had with the rice growing experiment, with support in its various forms from National Flour Mills, the time has come to branch out into other areas using the support base that National Flour Mills can provide.

By this I mean we are currently toying with the idea of re-activating small farmers to produce crops which we are now importing in large quantities. Because when you look at the food import bill, you see that we imported in 1991, $50 million in yellow corn. The projection for 1992 is $66 million. I am saying, notwithstanding the quick advice we get from the economists, the reason that small farmers are not producing any part of it is that economically it is not feasible. I am saying as I stand before you that now I do not believe that, and I shall have to be convinced that a portion of that cannot be made available to the small farming community so that you can say, “Where you are buying it? What you are paying for it?” I believe once you can say that, if even 100 farmers respond, it would be 100 more than we have today.
In the face of 25 per cent unemployment, I refuse to accept the argument that with 20,000 hectares of idle arable land, and probably 40,000 unemployed farmers, if we manage to agree on a price that we pay for locally produced corn, that nobody will purchase it. I do not believe that. I believe that there are a lot of lands that can be used, and I speak from personal experience. We might not be the world's best producer of corn, we might not produce the highest yield or the highest quality, but this is a start in using what we produce. In any event, it is going to be a small part of our needs, because we shall still have to import. All I am saying, is that the will has to be there to say what little we can produce; we add it to what we import. We cannot take the position that since American corn is cheaper, from now until doomsday, all we can do and all we must do is to use our scarce foreign exchange and support the American farmer. I cannot accept that; I have to be convinced.

So when I see you again in the next budget debate, I hope to tell you of initiatives we have taken in this Ministry to deal with this kind of approach. Initially, I am talking about quick action with respect to some experimentation in seeking to establish varieties that can do well in our conditions, possibly this year, so as to prepare us for next year. I am confident that if all goes well, we would have something good to report. These are a few of the initiatives that have been attracting the attention of the Ministry.

Another major initiative has to do with land policy. What is the policy we follow with respect to the handling of agricultural land in this country? As I told you earlier on, we have a comparatively small acreage of agricultural land. I should like at this time to have the national community resolve itself to a strict observance of zoning of agricultural land with a view to preserving what little we have left. The question of tenure is being addressed in a comprehensive land review policy.

On the development programme this year we are currently completing a study on the availability of land and I hope to get a final report by the end of this month with respect to an IADB funded investigation in Nariva, Oropouche and Caroni Swamp, areas which incidentally account for 30 per cent of our land surface. These studies were done, and we entirely support the initiative and will continue in that direction to see how much more land we can bring into agricultural production by reclaiming the fringes or the inundated area of the major swamp areas. I have every confidence, having spoken very briefly to the consultants, that we can expect some good news, and my information is that funding for further development of this initiative would be forthcoming through international agency
support, once projects are identified. Project identification is a major part of the Ministry's initiative.

2.45 p.m.

I want to, very briefly, mention the Agricultural Development Bank. As you have noticed, Madam Speaker, that too has now been brought under the aegis of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. We believe that this bank is integral to any developmental effort. The bank, yes, is operating more like a commercial bank than an Agricultural Development Bank. The main reason for that is the availability and price of money. We will have to take steps to see to what extent some soft money can be made available for the Agricultural Development Bank programmes. At the moment, the bank is lending at 12 per cent, and it is my view that 12 per cent will not attract the kind of initiative that we are talking about in the agricultural sector.

Having said that, I am very disappointed indeed that those who pay the greatest lip-service to the need to reduce agricultural imports into this country, and who are in a position to do something about it, take the position that since agriculture, by nature, is a risky matter they want no part of it. You would find that you can get investments, if you are lucky, in virtually every area of economic activity, including cocaine, but you cannot get funding for agriculture.

As Minister of Agriculture I publicly call on the banking community to do more than say what should be done about agriculture. We have a well developed banking sector in this country and it is really unacceptable that none of these banks has a significant soft window for agriculture, even if they say, “We will only lend our tried and trusted clients.” If you are so afraid of the risk, I ask you to encourage your tried and trusted clients to get into agriculture. I believe that farming can pay.

Farming in 1992 cannot be seen as the enterprise of surplus labour, given the kind of costs and competition involved. In 1992, farming is technology, it is capital investment, and it is training. To that end, we intend—not after a month as in this case—in the not too distant future to keep our manifesto pledge, to take initiatives to encourage into direct commercial farming, some of those people who have been trained in agriculture at the university and at the Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry (ECIAF). No longer can we train people in agriculture and have them only look forward to a public sector job in the Ministry—in fact, there are very few openings, if any.
If we are going to save the agricultural faculty at the University of the West Indies, what we should be doing now is training agriculturists for farming. It will fall to this Government to put aside a small amount of our small national cake to provide capital support and possibly collateral to encourage and support young trained people, especially young trained people who come out of the agricultural communities, who would have a feel for and some exposure to agriculture to encourage them to say, "Yes, farming can pay and it can be my career"—and they will have the training to do that. Only then will we be able to get the kind of results that will make a significant impact on this elusive massive food import bill.

The Development Programme also talks about support for forestry through Tanteak. I wish to give you the assurance that we have not just taken the Ministry's name and changed it. Our efforts in horticulture and silviculture will be just as rigorous.

With respect to bankable projects, in the very near future, I propose in the Ministry to focus the national community on farming by hosting a seminar which will have as its objectives, the goal to seek to create employment in agriculture, on the one hand, and also to make available to the national investing public, bankable projects in which our more fortunate brothers and sisters might want to invest. In fact, I wish to tell you that pretty soon IICA will be hosting in Trinidad a conference which will give us a great opportunity to bring to the attention of our investing public, investment projects in agriculture. The Ministry intends to highlight that.

Madam Speaker, as I wind up, I wish to give the assurance that it is our belief, on this side, that the national budget, as presented, is not “pie in the sky”. It is not the comprehensive story, it is the starting story. As the Minister of Finance would say, as he understands now, he might experience the loneliness of the long distance runner but at the end of the day he, more than anyone else, knows what great feeling it is when he breasts the tape.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Shamshuddin Mohammed (Caroni East): Madam Speaker, I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin West, on his maiden contribution in this House, I wish him the best in his future contributions.

The Minister has been, however, very provocative...
Mr. Palackdharrysingh: Arrogant!

Mr. Mohammed: ...so far in the House and has been poking certain statements at the Member for Caroni East, which normally one would allow to rest, but having regard to the fact that his indulgence in that exercise has been persistent, I think it becomes incumbent upon me to say a few words about the matters which, although I call them sotto voce, were indulged in by my Friend, the Member for Diego Martin West.

I think that my position is undoubtedly a unique one in this honourable Chamber, in the context that for many years I was on that side—if that is a cause of their concern—and now I am on this side. It is a great pleasure to me having extricated myself from the amalgam that constitute that side. I consider that side to be the patronizing elements of a past era.

2.55 p.m.

This is the budget. This is my first contribution and there is need for me to put these matters in perspective. I consider that that side and the party, as now represented, as being the symbol, of having become virtual institutions of discrimination, tokenism and cosmetics in the society. I consider that they represent what is hypocrisy in the politics of this country. They fail to listen, become arrogant; and as I say, as it is a pleasure to be here, it is a greater pleasure to be out of there.

While it is good, as the Member for Chaguanas has pointed out, to indulge in the economics and in the statistics, it is important that in the politics and the government of the country we must have people, we must have the feelings of the people; and we must take into account what is truth in our society, because after all, the implementation of any programme depends on people.

If I am here it is because I joined the leader of this alternative government who has been fighting for many years for equality and justice in our society. I say this without any fear of contradiction—many leaders have traversed the soil of Trinidad and Tobago. When we think of people like Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela, the only living epitome of such a person in this society is the hon. Member for Couva North. I make no bones about that. He has demonstrated to this society, in no uncertain manner, the efforts he had made in order to unite the peoples of this country; and this country will only move forward, if we have true and meaningful unity—not so-called unity, cosmetic unity. We must have unity that brings our peoples together, and the
contribution of my leader, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is, without doubt, unparalleled in this country.

If we go back since 1966, he never went PNM, he never went DLP, but he charted a course and brought with him the African brothers who were in the political leadership in that situation at that time. I refer to people like the late C.L.R. James, George Weekes, George Bowrin, Joe Young. He did it. This leader whom they accuse of being racist. This very leader brought them together, and he continued later on. He gave them positions in the Senate [Interruption] You wait, you are going to get it, and I am going to come to that. Do not be impatient. Whether they are here or they are not here, I am dealing with an undisputed, historical fact. This was continued with efforts to bring our brothers and sisters together and the coup de grace was in 1986 when he gave up his position to another who became the Prime Minister of this country. Why do you wish to accuse this side of having any ideas or intentions of being racial, when the contrary has been the truth?

Dr. Rowley: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The Member is imputing motives which is not proper, and I will not accept it. Madam Speaker, I ask for an apology. No person on this side accused any person on that side of racism. If he wants to talk racism he is free, but do not get this side involved in the talk. Carry on.

Mr. Mohammed: Madam Speaker, with the greatest respect to my Friend, I never imputed any racism to him or to anybody on that side.

Madam Speaker: I cannot have two Members standing at the same time, please. I think both of you are quite experienced and know your Standing Orders.

Dr. Rowley: Madam Speaker, could you rule on my point of order, please?

Madam Speaker: Yes. The objection is sustained. I am afraid, hon. Member for Caroni East, there has been no mention in this House about race or any imputation of race and so, maybe, you can just confine yourself to the budget and to what has been actually addressed in this House.

Mr. S. Mohammed: Let me make it abundantly clear. I did not point a finger at the Member for Diego Martin West. Is he labouring under a guilty conscience? I do not know. But I never said anything about any Member of the House. I was talking about truth and seeking to put some things in historical perspective; and I know that the truth offends. We have been trained, some of us,
to speak the truth and what we are saying is, we must seek to proceed with our programmes because we are human beings and we wish to unite this community.

We must seek to get out of this bogey that seems to afflict the society; and tell me if we can say that we are satisfied in our minds every time the issues come up, that there is quickness to point a finger. We do not want that. This side stands united for a united Trinidad and Tobago. The evidence is there. The evidence is clear, and we have demonstrated that more than any other party or any other grouping of people in Trinidad and Tobago. That is the point that I wish to make, and I am making that call. I am making the call in the context that we are here presenting a budget and if we need to implement—and we have to implement successfully—what is contained in the budget, my appeal is, let us be true to ourselves, let us be true to our nation, let us get rid of those things that are hidden below the carpet that seek to stultify the progress of this country. Let us be broad-minded enough to move in a united way, as this United National Congress has attempted to do and will continue to do, so that we can have that strength to move forward. That is the point that I am making.

It may appear to be awkward to some people but it is the God-given truth that I am talking about, that if we want meaningful development we must take the human resources, we must take into account people—the sensitivity of people—as we move forward. So I thought I would mention that because of the intervention. Nothing is wrong if I left a party and joined another. My friend, the Member for Arouca South, was in another party and he is now on the Government Front Bench. Nothing is wrong with that. My Friend the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre—was in the UNC—he is now over there. What is the big thing? The Minister of Education was a damaging critic of the People's National Movement and he sits on the Front Bench of the PNM. What about the Minister who presented the budget? He was on the other side too. He is now on the Front Bench. So, be careful how you throw your pokes at me! They have caused that. I did not have to say that. I did not propose to say that. And each time, I assure this House, that there is any issue relating to that, I shall reply accordingly.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture. [Interruption] I do not have your problem. I want to congratulate everybody. I heard the Member for La Brea yesterday. I was so proud to listen to him, and the Minister of Agriculture said today that he should have been in this Parliament a long time. But I ask you, why is he not in the Cabinet? His contribution was so good! My Friend said that, and he congratulated the Leader of the Opposition. This is what the hon. Minister said in his contribution a while ago. He congratulated the Leader of the Opposition, not
on the masterful presentation and the incisiveness of his analysis and his comparison; he congratulated him for remaining in his position as Leader of the Opposition.

3.05 p.m.

That is why I have dealt with what I have dealt with at the beginning. Prophet Job had worms in his belly for 400 years. Patience and tolerance; when you are committed to a cause you do not look at the trappings of office. If the leader of my party and Leader of the Opposition remains, as Leader of the Opposition now and 20 years from now, and he remains committed to the cause of advancing unity in this country, that is the paramount consideration.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, I appreciate all of this. I think you have spoken so vociferously and very meaningfully on that, but maybe we can think of the relevance. I urge Members in their contributions to bear relevance in mind, at least to some extent.

Mr. Mohammed: Madam Speaker, this is the budget and in my respectful submission, when we deal with the budget, we deal with the goods and services and the finances of the country. But I do submit that credibility is an important part of this dispensation. I do submit that it was my Friend the Member for Diego Martin West who made that remark about the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I dare say Smithson's Manual of Evidence does not govern this, the highest court of the land. This is the court of the people and I am more so submitting and bringing issues which I know others will be fearful to bring to this honourable House.

So that is the point of my friend, the Member for Diego Martin West. He said that the Leader of the Opposition went to the Senate, and he contended that he was improperly there. He said so many things that are inaccurate that I would not get to the meat of my contribution...

Madam Speaker: This is the point I was making to the hon. Member.

Mr. Mohammed: Let me repeat it. The hon. Member for Diego Martin West made a categorical statement to this honourable House—that the hon. Leader of the Opposition went to the other place and that he was improperly there, and he allowed him to speak. I did not know he was in control of the other House. I thought it was the President of the other place who would have ruled the hon. Member out of order. So I am kind of puzzled about his budget contribution, if he could say that.
If my Friend is contending—he ought not to have mentioned that in this honourable House as Minister making a budget contribution. That is why I tell him, be careful when he throws his boulders what will ricochet.

He said that the Leader of the Opposition said that he heard it before; it was the same PNM budget, and proceeded to criticize the Leader of the Opposition, when in fact, the gravamen of the submission and presentation of the Leader of the Opposition was to the effect that there were no new ideas in the budget presentation of the Minister of Finance. That is exactly what he was saying.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture, spoke categorically and said that this is a pathway chosen by his Government. That appeared to me to be inconsistent with what had been said before, that there was only one month to prepare the budget. He was giving the impression to this honourable House that all those proposals on what he was mentioning were definite actions taken by this Government which is in office only one month now. Then on the other hand, the Minister himself has said, even on the national television, that many of the projects are carry-over projects. So I do not understand how, within the month and from that statement by the Minister of Finance on national television and the presentation of the hon. Minister today, they could have concretized, or he could have made a positive statement to that effect.

Then my hon. Friend raised a very interesting point. I should really like to know the thinking behind it. He says that many individuals have been coming to him about jobs. I do not know, Madam Speaker; those of us who are elected MPs, we know that people would come...

Dr. Rowley: Madam Speaker, on a point of order once again. I am sorry to interrupt the Member, but he persists in misrepresenting what I said. I made no statement that they did not have to see their MP. The statement I made was that they do not require to see their MP to get sanction. The Member is imputing that I am saying a constituent should not see his MP. He is seeking to misrepresent me and I ask your protection.

Madam Speaker: If I recall—actually I was paying very close attention. May I remind the hon. Member for Caroni East that what was said was that there was no need to see the representative for sanction for jobs on those projects. That is what was said.

Mr. Mohammed: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The nicety of that distinction is irrelevant and of great unimportance. I should like to see the hon. Member for Diego Martin West go up in the hills of Laventille or come down in
the plains of Caroni East and make that statement. When you are in the campaign, you say all sorts of things, but you choose this national forum of Parliament, and however you disguise it, it is what people would perceive to be what you say, and that is, that the MPs do not want to see their people. I am not talking about the mechanics of the dispensation. What was the need for making that statement in this honourable House? I will tell them, I am not going to do like the Member for Diego Martin West—"Brother, you come for a work; I cannot give you but I will give you a note; go down by the department that is handling it". If he had said that, it was something else, but he did not.

Then we go again—on the question of the house repairs. The hon. Leader of the Opposition, when the figures were brought forward—about 7,000 claims—was using them in the context that that facility given in the budget speech would not, in effect, make that significant dent in the unemployment situation. That is the point that Leader of the Opposition was making. Not that he criticized that per se, because indeed every job that is derived as a result of any measure is something that will improve the unemployment situation in our country.

He made a bold statement, the mechanics of which I fail to comprehend, and he is telegraphing to this national population that all that the Government could do is alleviate the unemployment situation but cannot solve the unemployment problem. That, I do not understand, but it is a statement that the Minister of Agriculture, one of the deputy political leaders and one of the drafters, I suppose, of the PNM manifesto, is making to the country at large—that they are incapable of solving the unemployment problem. The mechanics and the details of that, I suppose he will have to explain to the national community.

He also raised a point accusing the Member of Naparima of imputing improper motives in connection with the name of the hon. Prime Minister being used in relation to the CNG. But I was present in this House. If, in fact, improper motives were being imputed...

Dr. Rowley: On a point of order. I cannot allow the parliamentary record to go like that. I made no such statement with respect to the Member for Naparima.

Mr. Mohammed: Or is it Oropouche? What is the difference, really? I am dealing with substance; he is dealing with trimmings. What he has done now is to admit, in fact, that he made that statement. Whether it is Naparima or Oropouche is highly irrelevant. But the point is, in order to correct the records, if, in fact, the Member for Oropouche made that statement and it was an improper imputation of motive, why did not the hon. Member, or anybody on that side not, get up on a
point of order and make objection? That is properly one of the areas in accordance with our standing orders, where one can object.

3.15 p.m.

Then the Minister went on to talk about Couva South and rural constituencies and so on. But, I believe all those industries that have been located in the Couva South constituency were put there because of the facilities that are available. The impression one gets is that the government at the time said: "Look, this is a nice area, let us put it here because of the people of Couva South." That may be so, but I should have thought that it is because of the facilities that are naturally existent, or which could have been made easily available, that those industries were put...

Hon. Member: Ask him how many people from Couva got jobs.

Mr. Mohammed: I do not know how many from Couva got jobs—

Mr. Panday: None, none!

Mr. Mohammed: Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, I am very glad to note, has paid tribute to officers of his Ministry; they are highly qualified; they are well-trained, nobody would deny that, but the question is, are they being properly and effectively used within the Ministry in order to maximize the benefits that could accrue under the Ministry of Agriculture? At a later stage, if I get the opportunity, I shall deal with that matter as it relates to some aspects of the portfolio of the hon. Member for Diego Martin West.

My Friend also made a statement, and allow me because I have the greatest admiration for him. He has made provocative statements but he also made other statements, and I do believe that he should exercise some judicious care before he utters them. He said, that this national community of Trinidad and Tobago does not have a perspective of national effort. That is an attack on the population of Trinidad and Tobago. Anybody is denying that the hon. Member said that?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Mohammed: The hon. Member said that this national community has not got a perspective of national effort, which is an attack on the population of Trinidad and Tobago, and I caution him to be more careful in those submissions that he makes to the honourable House.

Then my Friend proceeded—you see how much time it is taking to deal with him? When am I going to get to the meat of my contribution on agriculture?
Madam Speaker, I daresay that this is a very bad start in this honourable House. I hope it would not be the case time after time, but before I get to the meat of my submission, I am to advise my Friend and give him some suggestions on agriculture, I will do so in due course.

Madam Speaker [Interruption] It will lessen the mistakes. That will give me more time. He proceeded to attack the bilateral arrangements enunciated by more than one Member on this side of the House. He is asking if we would allow the community to be exposed to competition. That is the strangest statement that I have heard. In this world today the movement and the order is, even for the industrialized and the developed countries, to gravitate towards each other and to form groupings. What about the United States, Canada and Mexico? They have gotten together. Japan is seeking to do that in the Far East.

Our colonial masters, the seat of democracy, the democracy that we now enjoy, with the mace and the sartorial elegance that we all indulge in so greatly, the mother of Parliaments; 60 million people, have now gone to Europe to form a union. If Canada, Mexico and the United States of America could do that; Japan could seek to do that, and England can go to Europe, what has happened to Trinidad and Tobago; a small market? Are we going to depend on Caricom, with an overall population of five million people? When the United States of America, with Canada and Mexico give you 300 million people and Europe over 300 million people, are we not folks too, to seek to get avenues, in order to improve the lot of our country?

What does bilateral agreement mean? You are going to conduct yourself and negotiate in a way that will benefit your interest. But you see, inherent in this proposal for this bilateral arrangement is making the kind of impact on the unemployment situation in our country which that manifesto and 200 more pages of it will not yield. We are talking about making a significant dent in the unemployment situation. That is why we have put forward that idea. But do not close your minds to it. We are saying on this side to carry out the studies, carry out the surveys how best you can and let us see what openings will come. I make the categorical statement here this evening in this honourable Chamber that we cannot and must not depend on Caricom alone. We must take our vistas and our horizons far beyond the Caricom area—carry them if need be, but let us explore the bigger markets. That is what our submission is.

My hon. friends sought to downplay the idea put forward by Members on this side on bilateral arrangements. I dare submit that will have to be the order for the future advancement of this country. The unemployment situation is too grave.
The Member on that side himself—figure we have been getting—20 per cent—but he put it at 25 per cent, which I do agree is the more realistic figure.

He went on to deal with Caroni (1975) Limited. I do not know why the hon. Member had to lay such emphasis on the subsidies that were given.

But is Caroni (1975) Limited the only area where subsidy is or has been given? Why do you play up Caroni (1975) Limited like that? What has happened to WASA and PTSC? Have they not been given subsidies. There has been a serious omission in all the calculations and computations of Caroni (1975) Limited. I dare say this, I do not know any of our statutory authorities that receive money from Government that builds its own roads, recreational facilities and provides some social infrastructure for the people. All others that we have in the country are substantially subsidized, but Caroni (1975) Limited in fact carries out this type of activity of maintenance on these facilities. But what credit is given for that. No credit is given for that and I think that what we need to do is to shake off the hypocrisy in our thinking. And that is my mission here!

3.25 p.m.

Think of all the perspectives in our society. Only talking about Caroni (1975) Limited, Caroni (1975) Limited. You do not see the historical value of that enterprise. What it has done for families in this country, what it has done to provide foreign exchange for this country. Do we really fully appreciate that? Do you really appreciate that where subsidies go elsewhere to what extent we get the foreign exchange? Madam Speaker, that has been the role of Caroni (1975) Limited. It has been the role where so many different plans have come, where you see the sugar workers agree on the one side, saying they want a directional plan, you have another committee coming, another committee being formed, and what the workers want they are not agreeing with it. So I am happy to know that the hon. Minister in the true spirit has said that he will have tri-party consultation with the people connected with Caroni including the workers so that proper solutions can come forth. I do commend him for that very sincerely.

Madam Speaker, I have about five pages and I had better leave those—the first encounter—I am merely the shadow, he is the substance, five more pages to go. I cannot. I have to bring to his attention some matters that affect agriculture where people are involved. I am not talking about statistics now, and the book work, the papers being written and all that.

I do really believe that the hon. Minister of Finance in this his first presentation—I have the greatest admiration for him because he himself is a culturist, like me—he is a horticulturist. And he has the most beautiful
construction up in the foothills of Santa Cruz. I am so pleased, I am so proud of him and I congratulate him on his budget presentation to this honourable House. But I do believe that he should have levelled with this House and with the people and should have said quite frankly, that “I am presenting a budget for three months”. He has presented a budget and somehow or the other the idea is getting about that if it received scrupulous consideration, and making provision for the Caroni workers—but you have to be realistic—and he did in fact say in his television interview that there were no problems, just that we are going to have to carry over some of the development in capital expenditure. That is what he said. But I feel he should have levelled with this population and come back with a budget in three months’ time. That is my respectful view on his presentation. But we all know that in truth and in fact, nothing much has been really said in the budget about agriculture. The hon. Minister at page 12 of his budget speech made a passing reference to it. You get the feeling sometimes that everybody recognizes the importance of agriculture and the role that it can play in lowering unemployment and for generating foreign income.

Everybody recognizes that, but when it comes to the nitty-gritty of impacting on the situation and doing something substantial for agriculture, it is not forthcoming and to the extent of what it really requires to have anything meaningful. So we submit that foreign exchange saved is foreign exchange earned. In other words, you are not selling a commodity to get some foreign dollars, but agriculture can provide the medium whereby you can save on your food import bill, you will create employment and you can also save on your foreign exchange. So we say again, foreign exchange saved is foreign exchange earned. That is what I should like my hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture to take cognizance of.

I should like to draw to his attention because it is important to him in going through the coming months and putting his programmes together, that he ought properly to take some very important matters into account and, I hope notwithstanding the boulders and so on, that he will listen carefully to some of the problems that I would wish to point out to him now.

Flooding: One of the impediments to successful agriculture is flooding. It is heart-rending, heart-breaking, to see that people toil for days and weeks and before their plants can mature and bring forth fruit, and can be reaped, the rains come, the floods come and their crops are decimated. The loss is very heavy and, this is a problem of grave magnitude to all producers of food. In some areas we have the situation more intensive than in others, and we on this beautiful side of
the House propose for your kind consideration, and the vibes I am getting from
the hon. Member for Diego Martin, West, I think he has some agriculture in him
too. The way he spoke about the corn I can see that and I am sure that with the
good ideas and good instructions emanating from this side with the proviso that
he is adequately receptive, he will blossom.

The UNC is proposing and many of our proposals are there. I know what will
come out of that—where are you going to get the money from? But where does
the money come from for anything in any case? You ought to sit down. We have
heard all the mechanisms put forward by the hon. Minister of Finance and another
Minister, I think it was Planning, on how they are going to work it out. But the
fact of the matter is, when it comes to the question of money—do not throw that
and say you are hitting with boulders. Where are you getting the money from?
That is a common reply. We want a better reply than that.

Show your openness of mind and say “we will look at the proposals, we will
sit down and discuss” and just as you find money, or just as we write off money
from Trinidad Cement Limited, you can find some other mechanism. You can
find some way to get it but we are not dealing with that right now—it is an idea
and we wish the hon. Member for Diego Martin West will consider it. And there
have been studies. The Minister of Planning had a study, the University of the
West Indies had a study and WASA had a study, and I think it is common
consensus that the ultimate way to control the flooding is to create flash-flood
reservoirs in the hills.

The object of that exercise will be that during the heavy rains we will hold
your water and therefore it will prevent the flooding in the low-lying areas. And
not only with; agriculture, there are many homes that are subjected to this type of
flooding—Pam? [Interruption]

Madam Speaker, You see what sotto voce can do. I heard a voice coming
from the rear—but we have now been told we do not have only a Pam from
Tobago, but we also have a PAM from San Fernando East, and nobody must turn
that way, and I have to be careful about talking about PAM because I think the
initials of the hon. Prime Minister are PAM—for Patrick Augustus Manning. So I
caution what damage the sotto voce can do, and I have no fear for the Member for
San Fernando East, but I have to be careful because a Pam is right behind me
here, and there is a copious supply of missiles. So we on this side are an
endangered species.
We are putting forward this idea and, as I said, the studies have supported this type of idea, and I am sure the hon. Minister when he looks at these studies he can examine them and see what we can do. Because when you hold the water there you prevent the flooding. You assist in avoiding the denudation of the hills, and at the same time during the drought period water can be released for proper irrigation of the crops of the farmers. And pending these huge reservoirs, we must direct our attention to smaller ones in areas like Aranguez, Oropouche, Penal, Debe and other areas. I know there is a man from England, Mr. Monirajah, who—I am sure the hon. Minister would have seen that study—has done some work and has made some recommendations. Our submission on this side, because of our concern for cutting down the food import bill, our concern about unemployment and the foreign exchange, need to have a more dynamic approach to the whole question of agriculture and this one is a killer—the flooding.

Another area is the cost of production to the farmers. I think that it is an area to which the hon. Minister must direct his attention. It is amazing what the cost of chemicals, fertilizers and equipment is to the farmers. A little calculation has been done and I would like to give some indication to the hon. Minister and to this honourable House, to tell you the scenario that exists in the food production area of this country and that we need to have a more positive approach in dealing with the problems of our farmers.

What I have here is a rough computation. A gallon of Roundup in 1982—$225; in 1991, $360, that is a 60 per cent increase. A bag of 13:13:20 fertilizer—$50 in 1983; $95 now. A kilo of Trimelekey-4, you will know that Hon. Minister, that is the fungicide that you use to spray your crops, the greyish/bluish one—$18 in 1983, $45 in 1991. A litre of Perfekthion, that is an insecticide, $22 in 1983, it is now $35. A knapsack sprayer, 3 gallons, 1983, $225, it is now $500; that is an increase of 122 per cent. A litre of Tambo, one of the most potent insecticides, was $40 in 1983, it is now $105. A gallon of gramoxone—that chemical is popular—$75 in 1983, $110 now. Carlnitro, which is another fertilizer with a heavy calcium content, $40 in 1983, $95 now. One ounce of Cascade tomato seeds—one of the best quality tomatoes there is. I am sure that you have seen and known about it—the Leader of the Opposition knows and I know—that is a nice small tomato—$90 in 1983, now $340. Quarter pound packet of cabbage seeds—$50 in 1983 is now $150. The Royal Sweet water melon seeds, $200 in 1983 are now $650. Gasoline, $2.85 in 1983, $8.82 now. A Briggsand Stratton 7 hp
engine, to run in 1983, $11.40, now to operate that is $35 a day. A three-ton Mazda truck doing 24 miles, ordinary runs, $7.00 per day, now is $25.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member's speaking time has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Mr. R. Palackdharysingh]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Mohammed: I want to thank honourable Members for their indulgence.

The increase to operate a pump and a vehicle for the month—the increase alone—now stands at about $1200 so that you will see the astronomical rise in the prices of chemicals, equipment and fertilizers over this period. In our system there is no price guarantee for the sale of these commodities, so that no one knows when he goes to the market what price he is going to get. His cost of production stands at $1.57 per pound based on the figures I have been given and this is a wholesaler. Very rare will you get high prices. And it is very risky business. Look at the cost to production of chemicals and fertilizers—but you could have all of this, that is the point I am making—and you go and produce a beautiful crop and the fruits are lovely, but when it is time for you to reap the fruit, you get the floods. So what is happening? That is why the Minister of Agriculture has to do something as a matter of priority in connection with the control of prices.

I feel that there are conglomerates involved in bringing in insecticides and fertilizers. I urge my Friend to take a note and see how best he can look at this area. Why is it that some mechanism cannot be found where the government—through any one of the agencies that exist, or any one of the companies, because some of them are already producing chemicals—let these things come in so that some control with regard to the selling price can be implemented. You do not know when you buy a packet of seeds, or you buy insecticide or that fungicide, how much is written up as profit. There is need, Mr. Minister, to look at this area and look at it very, very seriously.

Another area, assuming that you do not get a flood, and assuming you get all the fertilizer and all the insecticides and you use all your talent to bring up the crop and you pick the crop and it is time to go to the market, what is happening down there? I do not know when last the hon. Minister went down to the Central Market but I hope he will do so with expedition. I do not mind going with him
because I am his shadow, and I propose to shadow him until the shadow blossoms out into reality.

3.45 p.m.

There is definitely a very serious situation existing and that is when people talk about equality, discrimination and injustice. Just as the hon. Minister said that the national community does not appreciate this, I am making a statement about a perception being held by people, and we are talking about marketing which is an important component in the success of agriculture, whatever the crop. It is staggering, it is dehumanizing to know the conditions under which those people who have to endure sun and rain and lose sleeping time and have to go to the market to dispose of their commodity, the extent to which they are subjected to pressures.

Let me bring to the attention of this House and particularly for the kind consideration of the hon. Minister, a memorandum that was presented to me by farmers. They have complained to me about the severe and unprecedented hardships they are experiencing in disposing of their goods at the market. They claim that never before in the history of operations there have they been subjected to the volume and intensity of problems that they are now experiencing. They contend that as a law-abiding and peace-loving people involved in providing food for the nation they should not have to endure such hardships. According to them, the situation demands immediate and effective action by the authorities concerned.

The wholesale market built for farmers some years ago is now virtually a white elephant. Farmers no longer use this facility and they have given their reasons. The entrance into this market is the cause of huge traffic jams causing interminable delays. Parking facilities are woefully inadequate. Farmers and wholesale vendors are constantly charged by the police for breach of parking regulations. Farmers and wholesale vendors are regularly attacked by bandits and other criminals. Lack of protection, generally, lack of proper supervision, harassment of farmers and wholesale vendors by officials, police, lack of adequate basic facilities such as water and toilets.

In fact, farmers and wholesale vendors were requested by the authorities to operate at the site that they now occupy though that market has been abandoned. The market that was built there nearer to the flyover is a ghost town. The farmers do not use it and they have given their reasons why. Where do they use? There
was some kind of hodgepodge arrangement between the authorities concerned and they are now using the retail site operated by the City Council.

Farmers and wholesale vendors were requested by the authorities to operate at the site that they now occupy. Since the new system has gone into operation, farmers, wholesale vendors and others have been experiencing the worst period of their working lives at the market. For example, they are now being made to pay a fee to enter the market with their vehicles; VAT is charged. The goods transported are substantially non-vatable items. Farmers contend that they should not be made to pay any fees whatsoever for entering the market. Barriers have been placed at awkward locations causing jams and preventing speedy and effective offloading of their produce, no proper parking facilities have been provided. The system of collecting fees is dilatory, discriminatory and highly offensive. Water and toilet facilities are virtually non-existent. Some farmers have complained of being charged a fee to use certain toilet facilities on the compound. Can we be satisfied that this is a satisfactory situation? I trust that I am moving the Minister's heart on behalf of the people who produce.

There is constant police harassment and pressure in implementing the foregoing rules. On many occasions tempers have flared and it is unlikely that peace will remain; very likely that violence could erupt in this oppressive environment. Customers of the farmers and wholesale vendors who previously came inside the market to make purchases, load their vehicles and move off, are now being prevented from entering the market, and they go on with a number of complaints. They ask, philosophically, "What of the weather?"

It is unbelievable that in this day and in this period of our history citizens who are engaged in producing and supplying food for the nation have to be so brutally exposed to the vicissitudes of the weather. There is no covering. When it is sunny, the heat is intolerable and many items that are produced are subject to spoilage. When it rains, the position is the same; when the rainfall is heavy it is not uncommon to see their goods immersed in water, sometimes even floating away. Added to these disgusting aspects of their operations, farmers, wholesale vendors and their customers are exposed to various illnesses. (There are three more pages; I shall be happy to make a copy available if I see the requisite interest is evinced in the particular exercise).

Associated with that, there was brutality. I have a letter here, and this is from a man who works in the garden, a vendor, to give an idea of what these wholesalers are subjected to, and what these producers of food are subjected to. The letter states:
"Around 12:30 p.m., I was on my way through one of the main gates which lead to the weekend market when I was approached by a young gentleman who told me I could not pass through. When I asked him why, he said 'I tell you you cannot pass through'. He was dressed in a blue round-neck jersey and a brown pants. He never identified himself as an officer of the law. So I say that I am going to pass through because I always pass through. So he just push me against the gate and then pulled me and throw me on the ground and started to beat me. On seeing this, one of his colleagues came and started beating me also. The gentleman which was beating me at first, pull out a gun from his waist and started to hit me all over my body with the gun. They then held my hands behind my back and carried me to the market office. On reaching there with my hands behind my back, a woman who also did not identify herself came out and hit me a slap on the left of my face. They continued to beat me with my two hands behind my back. They then pushed me into the office and handcuffed me".

This is what a farmer, a producer of food, had to endure and he is supported by another person who testified to the accuracy of this. The farmer showed me a medical certificate from a reputable doctor stating five sets of injuries that he got on his body. That is a farmer. That is what he is being subjected to. Who really cares?

They have brought out a company. That CMA has been virtually abandoned. By Act No. 16 of 1991, a new company was born and it is called NAMDEVCO. If you look at this Act, the functions of the corporation are to create facilities and maintain an environment for marketing. And the appointment of the board is what you have to consider. You are dealing with a sensitive situation of marketing. This is where we go wrong in this country so many times; we cease to become sensitive to people's feelings and to their aspirations, and the wanting to belong to the decision-making process.

They appoint—no objection to any of the appointments, you know—one in business management, one in finance, one producing, marketing and trade, one in food technology, agro-industry, information technology, agricultural production, representative from the Ministry, representative from the Tobago House of Assembly, Chief Executive Officer, ex officio member. How many producers of food do you have there? How many producers of food who work in the field do you have in the composition of this NAMDEVCO Board? This is the omission that we make in considering the operations of these enterprises. I ask the hon. Minister, not only to look at the composition of the board, but I am asking you
through this honourable House, to also launch an investigation into the whole operation of NAMDEVCO since it came into being a couple of years ago.

I am informed that facilities that were built at the Central Market in Port of Spain, costing some $9 million were sold recently for some $240,000 and bought by a known conglomerate. There were 70 workers for years working there at that Central Marketing Agency, and those workers are now in a state of limbo. I am instructed that there are many buildings within the compound of the Central Marketing Agency, Sea Lots in Port of Spain. If you go there you will see for yourself. The CMA, I am informed, has adequate space right now—rats, cockroaches and scorpions have taken over a downstairs portion of thousands of feet of available office space. But you know what is happening? That is not being used.

This same NAMDEVCO—and I want the Minister to investigate in this time of scarce solid liquid cash—I am instructed that the CMA pays to the City Council $1,500 a month for rent and I am told that a certain conglomerate is being paid $15,000 a month for rental of offices for NAMDEVCO. I ask the hon. Minister to ascertain the veracity of the information that has been transmitted to me by relatively reliable sources—$15,000 a month—and I do not think one of the occupants of that office ever went to a tomato field or ever went to any place where they are cultivating anything. That is what is going on, and that needs to be investigated. [Interruption] Whether it is old, medium or new, that is irrelevant. That is why if I am not there and I am here you will see how relevant that is. Well, at least the hon. Member for Arouca South will understand that situation because he has passed through that experience.

I am asking the hon. Minister—it is Act No. 16. Look what has happened; what has NAMDEVCO done? The hon. Minister of Planning announced here that in March of this year—with great respect to my Friend the Member for Oropouche, I do not know if it is in his constituency—they are opening a wholesale market in Debe. I hereby predict with the greatest respect to my Friend, that this is going to be the biggest white elephant that this country will ever have, that Debe wholesale market.

I have spoken to the farmers. Who is going to occupy and trade in that Debe wholesale market? People from Maraval, from the hills, people from Toco, and the hundreds of acres in the San Juan, the Arouca, Tacarigua areas with their vegetables, are they going to go up to Debe? I wish the enterprise every success, but I have my apprehensions about its success because there is not enough education in our whole system of the farmers to teach them and to train them for
true appreciation of these outlets and of the facilities, and in terms of economics, the time and the energy, and the money that they can save. So that I do not want it to happen, but I fear that we may end up with that as a white elephant.

They have also announced plans in the development programme for another wholesale market at Orange Grove, and in all of these things, the body of farmers, a sufficient body—they might talk to a fellow, get a few ideas, but there is no consultative mechanism in important areas like this. When you are going to construct a market, you should have discussions with all the interests concerned. Call the producers from the area or the different areas, have some seminars with them and get their ideas, get their feelings as to the suitability of the site, because they are the ones to use it.

So I am calling on the Minister, through Madam Speaker to launch an investigation into the operations of NAMDEVCO. That is a matter of priority. Right now there are workers at the CMA, 70-odd of them, who are complaining bitterly about their existing status quo and their terms of operation with the CMA. Because the intent was that NAMDEVCO would take up and take in the CMA.

The hon. Minister, quite rightly made reference to imports and what efforts are being made and what efforts will be made. It is our view on this side (on his own admission, a vast acreage of land is available for use for agriculture) that we have to direct attention in a more positive way, notwithstanding what may have been done in the past. With everybody hugging and getting together, as a country we have to get together and try to chart the course that will best serve our interests.

Why is it, that we have to be importing citrus concentrates into Trinidad and Tobago in order to make juice? Why is it, with the abundance of land that we have? Why is it that we have to import tomato paste in order to make ketchup? Why? So we need to do it. I am aware of some things that Cariri is seeking to put together with regard to tomato juice. You know the hotels and everybody, whether you like cocktail or you do not like cocktail, it is one of the musts that you must have in the winter, the tomato juice. But then people who do not necessarily take them at a hotel or whatever—it is a beautiful drink which people could have in this country once they are introduced to it in a big way.

We are importing into this country tomato paste in order to make tomato juice, and you have farmers who have that expertise. You just have to choose the right type of fruit, the right quality seed, have proper irrigation systems and develop an associated agro-processing system with these kinds of crops that can
be cultivated in our country. We have the lands, we have the know-how. A little more on the technical side needs to be put in, in order to assist the farmers, and this sort of thing. But these things are there and we would save foreign exchange.

What about rice? We commend the efforts that have been made over the last few years with rice. Madam Speaker, I do not know whether you will recall, or how many will recall areas in Trinidad where rice was cultivated in a big way. Nobody bought rice long ago. In certain areas they hardly bought rice. Everybody had a big box of it at their house. You planted your rice and you filled up that box and you had enough to eat for the year. You plant two rows of baigan, tomatoes, you have enough choka and talkari to eat for the year. That kind of self-sufficiency we had—we have to become familiar with these expressions, they are part of the national culture of Trinidad and Tobago. Dhal—you know dhal, that comes from here; you know about aloo pie. We have to do what we have to do.

The point I am making is that, we grew a lot of rice at a time when we could have been virtually self-sufficient, at least there were certain areas that were self-sufficient in rice. Take a place like Felicity, in my Friend's constituency. Lots of rice used to be planted long time down in Felicity, in El Socorro, that whole expanse going down to the River Bridge a lot of rice was planted there. Oropouche, the Oropouche Lagoon or Barrackpore, all about. But salt water came in, all sorts of things happened, and the people who could have planted rice in my age group, long years now, have stopped planting it. You lose the touch of how to do it. So the younger generation now, all they know about rice is what they see on the plate from the pack, nothing about growing it.

But I am saying, we are still short in terms of our needs for rice in the country. This is another area where we can direct attention in order to save on the food import bill, to create employment, and to save in foreign exchange. It is important that we do that.

Nariva Swamp is a vast area; while some work is being done there and so on, there is need for more direct and positive attention. So we need to expand and to do more, because these are the areas that will really generate the employment and save us and help us. We have to become self-sufficient in food. A nation that becomes self-sufficient in food is a nation that can survive. Irrespective of what other hardships may exist, it is important that we consider that. Then we must commend Caroni (1975) Limited on all the work that they are doing on their rice development programme.
We need to direct our attention to this area. I am sure in the discussions with Caroni (1975) Limited—there are very good representatives representing the sugar workers there—due consideration will be given to their advocations and their pleas and an attempt made to settle once and for all the problems they have in Caroni about having a positive system to move forward. You cannot move there until you take into account the 10,000 workers that the hon. Minister spoke about. You have to take them into your confidence. Give them the lands. The directional plan of Caroni calls for the distribution of 21,000 acres of land. Give them the land. Make them feel that they belong, that they are important. That needs to be done. I hope my hon. Friend will take that into account.

National Flour Mills: Imagine they are the ones who are responsible for the rice mill at Carlsen Field. But do you know there is no rice grower on the board? I do not know if one has been put on now. I ask the hon. Minister to look at that as well. We cannot operate a system where people who are directly involved in producing the commodity, are without representation. How could you operate a rice mill, taking in 40 or 50 million pounds of rice for the year and you do not have a farmers' representative on the board? How is that? We must correct that situation and let people feel that they belong in our society.

Coconuts: There is a problem with coconuts. Right now nobody can sell their coconuts. We hear that they have too much oil. There was a newspaper report and the hon. Minister can look at it. There is need for an investigation there. About 12,000 people are involved in the coconut industry, and we understand another conglomerate was given a licence to bring 70 tonnes of oil into the country. The people who are growing the coconuts down in Icacos and Cedros and these places, cannot sell their commodity. How is their family going to live? I want the hon. Minister to look at that. Pick up the phone tomorrow morning and call and investigate what is happening in the coconut industry. You have to meet with CGA and Lever Brothers and the growers, have a meeting with them and try to work out something, otherwise this whole industry will be annihilated in a short space of time.

I urge you to do that. That is what we on this side are thinking. We want a praedial larceny court set up. Praedial larceny is rampant in this country. Farmers are producing a nice commodity and fellows just going with a bag and walking away or carrying their vehicles and taking it at their leisure and nothing is being done. You cannot depend on a regular court to hear these cases with 29 or 30 adjournments.
Madam Speaker: If the hon. Member could give some consideration to winding up, I would just draw his attention to the time.

Mr. Mohammed: That is what my hon. Friend the Member for Diego Martin West has caused. You see, Madam Speaker, if he had come with his first presentation and proceeded without the polemics—I have so many things to say. We will deal with them at public meetings; that is what we are going to do.

I congratulate my Friend. The proposals we have for agriculture—we are concerned about Caroni (1975) Limited, we are concerned about the tenure of land in Nonpareil. We have provided in our manifesto the solution for the lands at Nonpareil, making them available on long leases. We feel that the estates in Trinidad should be developed, private and otherwise, and we feel that we could have a look again at the marketing system that exists in our country.

I assure the Minister that I am available for any consultations that he may deem to be appropriate with regard to the advancement of the cause of agriculture and the virtues and values of agriculture. I am a firm believer in the dictum enunciated many years ago, Madam Speaker, with malice towards none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right. Let us strive to finish the work that we are in. Thank you very much.

The Minister of Local Government and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Madam Speaker, permit me to congratulate my Friend on the other side, the Member for Caroni East on his return to the House and on a good contribution this afternoon. One can see quite clearly that he was missing this House quite a bit. Welcome back.

I rise to make a contribution to this debate, and I want to make two observations very quickly. The first is that Members would note that we have not distanced ourselves from the budget documents. We are taking any blame for any of the documents, they are our documents. Secondly, Members would note that there is no unfinanced gap in this budget. As a matter of fact, one would note that there is a positive change in cash resources of some $156.7 million in the overall budget. That is quite unlike 1987 or 1988, when our Friends, or most of our Friends on the other side were in Government.

But since this budget was presented last Friday, we have had several persons making comments criticizing it, some valid, some not so valid. I think we must admit, as the Minister said on page 11 of his budget speech, that the major focus of this budget is the immediate stabilization of the economy. We had to do that,
as we were constrained by a number of things. We were constrained, first of all, by a shortage of foreign exchange. I do not know how many Members would know that on December 31, the foreign reserve was negative US $17 million, the net position.

There is also the requirement to reduce the Central Bank’s holdings of Government securities, because—I really would not want to sound like some other people, but simply to make the case that our focus in 1992 had to be the stabilization of the economy; we had to do a number of things. The Central Bank’s holdings of Government securities is over limit by $316.6 million with respect to overdraft and $229.3 million with respect to treasury bills. Obviously, in 1992 one would want to be able to allow the Central Bank to reduce its holdings, to bet back within what the law provides.

4.15 p.m.

Then, of course, there was that external debt situation. The Minister of Finance spoke about that in his presentation also. As a matter of fact, the external debt increased over the period. We have had a situation where we have not been servicing that external debt. Over the next three-year period there will be quite a bunching of maturities and we would have to be taking care of that. Although we do not plan, at this time, to approach the IMF for standby facilities, we know that because we may need some type of accommodation with respect to the level of the external debt, we may have to get their blessings. And that is the concept of the letter of comfort that we have heard so many persons commenting on. The Letter of Comfort—the IMF saying, "yes, you are running the economy in a good manner and you have got to disengage slowly with us.” That is the situation. We are very clear in our manifesto with respect to our approach to the public debt.

We say quite clearly that:

"The PNM proposes to manage our external debt by:

- using the opportunity presented by the reduction in international interest rates to lock in lower interest rates through swap transactions and negotiations with lenders."

There is an opportunity today—the US dollar interest rates are quite low. Most of our commercial debts are at floating rates, and there is an opportunity on the market to do some swap transactions and move from flexible interest rates, or floating interest rates, on the commercial debt to lock in fixed interest rates thereby securing lower interest rates on these debts forever. If we were to do that,
it would affect our debt service and put us in a better position to service our external obligations.

Secondly, we said, quite clearly, that we want to stimulate growth in foreign exchange through exports. I want to comment a bit further because there is the feeling that we have done nothing in this budget to stimulate export.

Thirdly, in the manifesto we spoke about:

“earmarking part of the proceeds from the divestment programme for debt servicing.”

Later when I speak on our divestment programme you will see that we do have a plan for using some of the proceeds from divestment with respect to paying off our public debt. We are delinking the selling off of our assets to pay public servants. That clearly is not our policy. We see a connection between our public debt, our public external debt, and our divestment programme. If one buys the concept that we borrowed to fund certain of these state companies, therefore, if we are now pursuing a divestment programme, it makes sense to use part of those proceeds to reduce our external indebtedness.

We have been constrained, and that is a fact. This is our first budget. It was delivered just one month after we were elected. There were a number of things that we would have wanted to do. We feel that we have started to set the institutional framework, the framework which we consider necessary for growth and transformation of the economy.

I want to look at some of those areas. First of all, in this budget we are encouraging savings, and that comes through clearly. It is not simply a manifesto promise. If we say, "look, we want investment in Trinidad and Tobago," and if we say that investment can come only by your savings, then the first thing we have got to do is to encourage savings in the society. And we have to target a market that has not really been touched. We want to target the small savers, the middle income persons. This is why we have changed from a deduction to tax credits.

A number of commentators made the point that before there were fewer than 7,000 persons using the tax-free bonds and they were all high income taxpayers, and they did that for a special reason. If a person is in a high marginal tax bracket, and if it is a deduction rather than a tax credit, then it means the benefit he is getting is equal to his marginal tax rates. So that if he were in a 40 per cent marginal tax bracket, one's benefit would be 40 cents on the dollar, whereas a
person whose marginal tax bracket was merely 20 cents on the dollar, obviously, his benefit would merely be 20 cents.

In moving from deduction to tax credit, we have levelled the playing field—everybody who now buys a 10-year bond will get a 25 per cent tax credit. It does not matter whether your marginal tax bracket is 20 cents or 40 cents. By so doing, what in fact we are doing is encouraging the lower income, the middle income people to save. They are getting the benefit. The person who is now, say, 20 per cent marginal tax bracket—25 per cent—he is getting a higher benefit than a person whose marginal tax bracket is 40 cents on the dollar. We want to do that. We want to tap that market. The concept is that the rich will save because they are making so much money; they just cannot spend all. We want to do that. And we are doing that by the tax-free bonds, we are doing that by the increase in the credit union deduction, and the increase in the tax credit with respect to credit unions and the Unit Trust. We are encouraging the small saver.

With respect to the corporate level—and this is a bone of contention. Honestly we wanted to go a bit further. We have had a committee which over the last year-and-a-half was engaged in looking at a number of areas, a committee which was engaged in looking at the economic aspect of the manifesto. But that committee did not stop there, it went on to outline an action plan for each of the short-term measures outlined in the manifesto. We got into Government and we have to listen to our technicians. There were some ideas that the technicians said, "Fine, no problem." There were others which they thought needed a bit more time for them to consider. We said, "okay, that is no problem." So that if we erred, we have erred on the side of caution. We said that we will go with some measures. We are talking about short-term economic recovery. This is only one month after the election—we believe that the short term ought to be at least 18 months.

I want to give this House the assurance that two committees will be established very soon, one, to look at the other areas of not only the short term but other aspects of that economic plan and to make recommendations. We will be keeping this House informed, keeping the House apprised as to the work of that committee, and we will be bringing legislation, as required, from time to time.

At the corporate level, yes, this year we are putting an interim measure and also at the personal income tax level. We would want to take that off as quickly as possible. But given the need to stabilize the economy we had no choice. Yes, it goes against our overall direction. I want the corporate sector to note that we consider our manifesto to be our covenant with the people. We look at that as a
very short-term measure, and the quickness of the removal of that measure will have to do with, to an extent, the ability to encourage or to allow employees to save via the tax-free bond.

If, for example, employers were to allow the employees to save as they earn rather than wait until the end of the year to buy tax-free bonds, save as they earn and so get the tax benefit on a monthly basis, then obviously, they would quicken the rate of savings in the society, as a whole—an essential for investment. That would assist us in removing that five per cent. Not only that five per cent, because really, we want to go lower than that. We understand the need for encouraging businesses to finance their growth by returned earnings. We want to go that way. We are constrained in this our first budget. That is not the situation that you are going to find over the life of this Government.

4.25 p.m.

We have also in this budget allowed the net exporter more flexibility rather than being constrained by the Central Bank. He now has more freedom with respect to his domestic foreign currency fund. Again, we would have liked to go much further on that measure. As you know, our manifesto said quite clearly that what we want to do initially is to allow individuals—both residents and foreign-based nationals—to hold domestic foreign currency accounts, in addition to the net exporter. We are allowing non-residents now. We did not go further with this measure because the Central Bank said, "Look, hold your hands. Let us look at that a little bit more."

That is a measure that after consultation with the Central Bank one can expect to see legislated later in the year. That is one item that is going to one of the committees. One committee will be looking at tax matters; the other committee will be looking at the financial infrastructure—a number of items that I would want to talk about in a while, for example, such as the Companies legislation and the whole security exchange area which will be referred to that committee. We would want to look at that. We shall want to ask that committee to look at that and see whether we can bring legislation before the end of the year to take care of those matters. The Minister said, quite clearly, in his presentation that in the months ahead we shall be undertaking the detailed, technical work required to convert our ideas into a fully coherent, consistent, medium-term economic strategy and investment programme. That is what we are doing. We did our homework, but we have got to listen to our technicians with respect to these matters.
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  

[HON. K. VALLEY]

The same applies to small business. That also is going to the committee. The investment allowance that we spoke about, all of these things will be referred to the tax committee and, as I said, one can be assured that not only in the 1992 budget, but also in the life of this Government, there will be no surprises.

So, as I said, based on our covenant with the people, also, with respect to setting the stage, we have attempted to stimulate the construction sector. But we have heard quite a number of comments that we have done nothing for the construction industry. My colleague spoke about the repair and maintenance allowance. We consider that to be just one pillar. As I say that, I know there was a comment also with respect to the previous abuse of this measure. Persons are saying that, look, we are getting back to a situation where we are putting something that we cannot control. We are aware of that, but one must always be careful. To use an old cliche, "You must not throw out the baby with the bath water".

If something is good, then we have got to determine what we are going to do, and what controls we need to put in place to ensure that it works for the benefit of the economy. Members will remember that, really, long ago there was no value added tax, there was not VAT registration, and if Members would think—just simply having that VAT and the VAT registration perhaps it would give us a bit more control with respect to this measure. So that when our committee looked at this it was determined to claim the deduction, the following rules would apply:

“All supporting receipts for goods or services per se must be supported by proper invoices or receipts.”

This will encourage VAT registration of companies and suppliers currently outside the VAT net and discourage the practice of selling goods and services without the payment of VAT. So that before you can claim this deduction, you have to state the VAT registration number of the person, the hardware store, and so on from which you purchased the material. But more than that, we would be looking at strengthening the VAT office because we understand that hardware dealers are among those who avoid, most often, the payment of value added tax.

4.30 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

5.05 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Hon. Valley: Madam Speaker, when we took the break, I was looking at the measures in the budget with respect to the construction sector. I had made the point that the first thing one would see under the short-term economic recovery
plan is the re-introduction of the repair and maintenance allowance at the level of $12,000. I was moving on to make the point that we have also increased the amount that the institutions can lend on a property, from 75 per cent to 80 per cent. A small increase, but nevertheless, again, to assist the construction sector.

Thirdly, what we should like to consider a very innovative approach in the budget, is the allowance to young persons to access their pension contribution. One of the main problems young people face with respect to home ownership is that they are unable to find the down-payment necessary. Meeting the normal mortgage payments is usually easy, because rather than rent, they now have mortgage payments to meet, and the interest element, at least, is tax deductible. One would know that for the first 10 years of the mortgage, normally, most of what is paid is, in fact, the interest element.

So we thought that the problem was finding a way to allow those young people to find the down-payment, and this is why we allow them to access their pension contributions. Let us give an example. A person under age 35, who has been a member of a pension plan for some 15 years; he started working at age 25; he joined the pension plan; he has been making contributions; his employer has been making contributions; there is the interest accumulation on the contributions, but he does not own a home. We are saying, under this provision, if his pension plan allows it—we are now allowing it in the Act and the rules of his plan will have to allow it—he can take out his contribution, plus his employer's contribution, plus the interest on those contributions, for the purpose of making a down-payment on a home. What that would mean is that he would then start accumulating pension credits afresh.

Now people would say, what is going to happen at age 60. I say at age 60 at least he has a home that he can sell to augment his pension. We are allowing it in the pension legislation. Before any firm can do it, they must allow it in their rules. I say that because this is one measure that I had to argue for, quite a bit, because even some persons in the committee thought that it was risky. I am saying that the trustees have got to determine whether they want such a provision in their plan.

Then, of course, my colleague, the Minister of Planning and Development, spoke quite eloquently yesterday concerning the capital expenditure programme involving some construction, including the down-town rehabilitation programme. We should have liked also with respect to this, to allow the tax exemption for bridge financing as provided for in the manifesto. That is another measure that I am sorry we have to send to the tax committee.
We had it included in our manifesto. Again the technicians say, “Wait, let us watch that.” I would just look at it very quickly. We were saying that we are going to exempt interest paid on residential property, bridge financing. The purpose obviously is to encourage the increase of residential construction and so stimulate the local construction sector. What the measure would have done, was to allow interest paid during the bridging finance stage by individuals on homes for owner occupation, as a deduction for tax purposes, subject to an overall maximum limit of $36,000 per annum on such deductions and mortgage interest. In other words, one could not get $36,000 for bridge financing as well as for mortgage interest. As I said, that measure will be referred to the tax committee, and we should hear more about it later in the year. So that in setting the environment, we have targeted the construction sector as a fact, because we know that employment is extremely important in this economy.

Thirdly, in this budget we have assured that the public sector pay accumulation is stopped. There has been much talk about that. But we had the situation since 1987 where there was this accumulation. We were accumulating debt without any asset to show for it, year after year. I simply want to bring to Members' attention what the situation would have been if we did not decide to pay the public servants. Very simply, if we had taken a decision not to pay the public servants their correct salary, then there would have been no rationale for increasing taxation. I am sure everybody would accept that. No Government would have been able to increase the price of gasoline, increase personal income tax or corporate income tax in an environment in which the public servants were still being denied their correct salaries. No Government could have done that.

I made that point because I am hearing from persons as though we should have taken the money we raised there to do other things. Before all the fiscal measures and before taking into consideration the payment of the public servants their correct salary, the overall deficit was some $530.4 million. On the current account there was a small surplus of a mere $39.7 million. After we had taken a decision and given all the fiscal measures that we have instituted, we have a situation where the current surplus is now $237.8 million and the overall deficit is reduced from $530.4 million to $332.3 million.

In other words, having taken that decision—we could have taken other decisions to stabilize the economy. But more importantly, we do not have a situation where that debt continues to accumulate. In my own view, the Government should have taken that decision since 1987. Because what it means is
that a burden which has been shared so far by the few—only the public servants—will now be shared by everyone, and so it is much lighter.

Right now we owe public servants about $2.5 billion in arrears, I think it is. What we do know is that it is not getting higher. The other thing is that we know as a fact that the public servant has suffered tremendously. He has lost his home; his car, and so forth, over the period, and we believe that as a Government, we must stand by the law. To us, it is not only the manifesto pledge; it is good industrial relations practice.

The other issue deals with the arrears, because some people are saying also that the manifesto does not touch the arrears. Obviously, those persons who were making that point are those who would like to see us sell our companies to pay arrears. As the Minister in charge of investment, I would let them know quite simply, that and God's face they will not see—quite simply. We have said quite clearly in our manifesto what our plans are with respect to the arrears. We say on page 53 of our manifesto, that we are going to settle the issue. We say, first of all, we would pay public servants their correct salaries and thus stop the accumulation of arrears. We have done that.

Secondly, we said we would enter “into negotiations with the representative unions with a view to arriving at an amicable arrangement for the payment of the arrears, bearing in mind the general acceptance that the arrears cannot all be paid in cash at this time”. We have said that and we plan to do just that. We want to sit with the unions and work out an arrangement with respect to the arrears.

5.15 p.m.

Then there is the issue with respect to Caroni workers. They are saying, why are we not paying Caroni workers? First of all, as far as I know, Caroni workers are getting their correct salaries. Those who were not, are getting their correct salaries today. With respect to the arrears, again, in the manifesto, no surprises. You will find it all here. That is the only place you have got to look. We have said, on page 53, with respect to Caroni that:

"The PNM acknowledges Caroni Limited's liability to its workers and a PNM Government will negotiate with the relevant trade unions for an acceptable schedule for payment."

That is what we plan to do.

The other criticism relates to the increase in direct taxation, both at the individual and the corporate level. The argument is that for some time now, the
last Government, under its tax reform package was going the other way; reducing
taxation, and now we would change all of that. I made the point some time ago,
that, yes, we are doing that this year—it is an interim measure—that is not going
to be the pattern. But more importantly, we must ask: at what cost did the last
Government reduce taxation? We have seen what they have done with respect to
advances from the Central Bank; going over the limit. We know as a fact that
there was some US $727 million in re-scheduled indebtedness. So it is very easy
to reduce taxation if we are not paying our bills. If we want to stabilize this
economy, we have got to pay our bills. That is really the simple point.

To move on, we can say really, that the budget sets the environment for
stabilization and growth. That is what we are doing in this budget. We, as I said,
will be setting up these two committees—one to look at tax matters and the other
to look at the financial infrastructure. We have a vision to make Trinidad and
Tobago the financial centre of the Caribbean and we have to put certain things in
place to achieve that. This, our first budget, one month after being elected, did not
achieve everything that the manifesto said. We expect that we will be making
good headway with respect to this in our next four budgets. Of course, lastly,
there is that underlying theme, "We care". Our social programmes; our
allocations—as we said in the manifesto—with respect to the relief of
unemployment.

I want to move on because I want to say a bit about state enterprises and
divestment, and also a bit about local government.

With respect to state enterprises, again we go back to the manifesto position
on page 12 of the manifesto, where we stated quite clearly, our position with
respect to state companies: That Government has a role to play in the state sector
and that participation will continue at the appropriate levels where—

"- the industry or enterprise is of strategic importance, e.g. oil and gas, and
telecommunications

- the enterprise provides a major social service, e.g. T&TEC, WASA, PTSC

- the industry or enterprise is essential to the economic diversification drive
and the private sector is unable to channel financial resources into such
investments, e.g. downstream petrochemical plants from urea, methanol or
natural gas
- a foreign investor is interested in a major project but wishes to minimise country risks by including the State as a partner

- Government shareholding in the above companies will be reduced over time through a programme of divestment."

More than that, we said that there are companies which fall outside those parameters and they also will be divested in an orderly manner over time.

We say, however, that in any divestment we would ensure that there is as wide a participation as possible. What I want to do this afternoon is put Members on notice that, in fact, this Government will be pursuing a programme of divestment. We will be looking at those companies in which we have minority interest, first, of course, and those companies which fall outside the parameters enunciated here. The programme will be structured in an orderly manner to ensure the widest possible participation in our profitable state companies.

More than that, to facilitate this wide as possible participation in share ownership, the Government will implement the following specific measures, all of them coming from the manifesto:

"- a regime of incentives designed to encourage new shareowners in the country and to facilitate investment in shares that have been divested

- incentives for the continued development of Employees Stock Ownership Plans

- an education programme to inform the public of the benefits to be derived from share investments and ownership

- review of the operation of the stock market to facilitate the widest possible participation in the ownership of newly divested companies."

We say more than that,

"... a small shareholding of selected state enterprises will be offered on the stock market to ensure higher levels of accountability by mandating these enterprises to adhere to the rules of the re-organised Stock Exchange."

I said before, and I will say it again, we are delinking divestment and the settlement of public sector pay rise. We see no connection whatever. Members
would know that the previous Government has spent a considerable sum within the last 12 months on the concept of the National Investment Company (NIC), an institution which was supposed to divest state companies to pay public servants. I inform Members that really, we are not going that way. However, we do see the need for an institution charged primarily with the responsibility of preparing companies for divestment. We need some type of institution that would prepare the companies that have been slated for divestment in an orderly manner.

We believe that perhaps a restructured NIC will be that appropriate institution. We are looking at that. This company could, for example, be a mechanism for implementing divestment of these selected companies, some part of the proceeds of which could be used to reduce payment of our indebtedness, as I said earlier. Such a company can also be instrumental in ensuring that the divestment programme leads to the wider participation and ownership in shares in the divested company. In other words, it can be the institution to push the divestment effort and also to educate the public with respect to divestment.

5.25 p.m.

That institution can also assist in the structuring of venture capital firms that we spoke about in the manifesto. We said that what we need to do in Trinidad and Tobago is to use the concept of venture capitalism, using tax benefits provided by the business expansion scheme which has been on the books since 1988 and we believe that this institution, clearly a financial institution, can assist in developing venture capital firms, pioneering the thing in Trinidad and Tobago.

We can also charge the institution with doing the ground work necessary with respect to the financial infrastructure, all in keeping with that vision of making Trinidad and Tobago the financial centre of the Caribbean. So that one needs such an institution. That institution can also be the vehicle for encouraging savings in the middle and lower classes using again the tax-free bond concept, encouraging persons to save as they earn; spreading that message.

So we see the need for such an institution and we are looking at NIC, given the fact that at last count we have come very close to spending $20 million on NIC. Given the fact that we have spent so much money on that institution we are looking at making use of it.

Madam Speaker, you will recall that during the boom years the Government of Trinidad and Tobago loaned quite a bit of funds to other Caribbean countries
and we are having difficulty in getting the money back, at times because of foreign exchange. Perhaps what we need to do is to convert some of those loans into equity using some of our state companies for investment in these countries. We would want that institution to look at these things and view the possibilities. You will see that the Government intends to pursue an active divestment policy all in keeping with its manifesto position.

I now turn very quickly to my other hat, local government. Again, I would want to go to our manifesto position because that is the start. Whatever we do we are keeping faith with the population, and our manifesto. We said there that we re-affirm our commitment to a system of local government which ensures that the people have the opportunity to assume authority and management of their own communities. Government is conscious of the fact that participation at the local level requires the development and strengthening of other communities and local institutions such as village councils and youth organizations to ensure the widest possible participation in the local government process. And note the point again, we are looking for “widest possible participation”, not only in share ownership as in the case of divestment but also with respect to local government—the widest possible participation by the people. Because what we want to do really is to take government to the people; a participative democracy which is one of our fundamental goals, fundamental objectives.

We endorse the establishment of Chaguanas as a borough and the establishment of corporations in the areas formerly served by county councils. However, we disagree with the proliferation of regional councils provided for in the new Municipal Corporations Act. We find these latter arrangements cumbersome and unnecessary and will therefore amend the Act to correct this deficiency and to remove other areas which we consider to be inconsistent with good public policy. That is our manifesto. As Members may know that is one of my first acts—

Madam Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Mr. B. Panday]

Hon. K. Valley: I thank most graciously the Leader of the Opposition.

Madam Speaker, I was making the point that one of my first acts as Minister of Local government was to review with my technicians where we were with respect to the transition to the municipal corporations and after spending some time with them we decided that what was needed was a reconstituted supervisory
committee, charged with the responsibility of overseeing the transition to ensure that the new Government's policy with respect to local government is reflected in the legislation.

We have reconstituted the committee; and it is now chaired by the former Major, Stevenson Sargeant and on that committee we have union representation. There is one person representing the daily-paid employees—NUGFW—and another representing the public sector union because really, we feel that the union input is extremely important if we want to have the best arrangement. We have done that and the committee is to report by the end of February after which we will make the necessary recommendations to the Cabinet and to the Parliament with respect to the Municipal Corporations Act 1990.

Secondly, on January 6, I set up an internal committee as I thought it necessary to look at the present administration of the Ministry of Local Government, given that we were now talking about municipal corporations, and also to make proposals and recommendations for the effective and efficient transformation from county councils to corporations. As you know, the manifesto position is clear. We have no problems with moving to the regional corporation, so I thought that we should look at that to see what it entails.

We wanted to enable those corporations to discharge their varied, and what I considered, multi-dimensional and in some cases new functions. If one looks at the Act one would see that there are new functions, functions which the county councils did not have.

There is a perception that the effective and efficient operation of county councils in the past has been hindered by antiquated management systems, also by inappropriate personnel in some instances and in others, just poor work ethic. It is my hope that we can eliminate or at least reduce these weaknesses in the shortest possible time, hence the reason for the establishment of this committee. As I see it, we have got to have an implementation committee at Kent House, the local government quarters, to assist these corporations with their transition and with their work programmes, to give them some direction and so forth.

In the light of what is expected of the corporation it is envisaged that an appropriately competent management and development administration will now be required, as I said, a sort of implementation committee at Kent House. Emphasis will be on taking government to the people, and on service deliverability, a key function of local government. Thus, our short-term programme with respect to local government consists of the work of the
supervisory committee on which we are now awaiting an examination of the Municipal Corporations Act to determine what amendments are necessary.

5.35 p.m.

Secondly, there is a comprehensive review of the present operation of local government, that is the work of the internal committee. This requires an assessment of the deficiencies in the management systems, techniques, methods and practices of the current system. It requires also an assessment of the levels of competence in place and the real needs of the people, an inventory of equipment and equipment required. That is one of the problems of local government. We have people but sometimes we do not have the equipment necessary to allow them to perform their functions. We also need to do an assessment of engineering, health, accounting, general administration and other requirements of local government. We are trying to do an overhaul of the system. [Interruption] We will be looking at that also and I want to inform my brother Minister of Finance that we shall be looking at unspent balances to see what could happen in this respect.

We shall also do a review of the fees and other charges currently scheduled, and an assessment of the local revenue potential—what is available in the short term. In the medium term we shall continue this position. We want to upgrade the support services we have been able to provide as a centre and also action will continue on the identification, on prioritizing of regional needs.

That is basically our approach to local government. We have extended the life of the advisory body which we have met in place. Those bodies were set up on October 1, by the Government for a three-month period, rather than holding the elections. The life of those committees expired on January 7, and we have taken steps to extend their lives. We have changed their terms of reference. We have asked them to act more like councils within the law. To do that, they have to advise the Minister who would then advise the administration. We did that because heads of councils were complaining that they were not getting direction. Normally it is the council which determines the order in which projects are done. In the interim, until such time as local government elections are held, we shall strive as much as possible to have the councils operate as efficiently as possible.

Mr. Maharaj: Can you tell us how long before this takes place?

Mr. Valley: As you know, elections are in the hands of the Prime Minister.
Madam Speaker, I thought I would make this intervention this afternoon with respect to the fiscal measures of the budget, with respect to our approach to state enterprises and with respect to local government, a very important ministry, for which I have responsibility at present. I thank you.

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (Fyzabad): Madam Speaker, the achievements in one's life must be recognized and spoken about moreso when that person's beginning has been a humble one. In this regard, I wish to convey to you, respected Madam Speaker, my sincere and warm congratulations on your appointment as Speaker of this noble House, and by extension all the ladies present in this House and in the country.

Respected Madam Speaker, the very professional and caring manner in which you have been conducting your business here in the House tempts me to call you some time Bahine Speaker or Sister Speaker but I will not do this, I assure you. I also feel certain that you will continue to make us all proud.

I have been trying to come up with some kind of title for the budget presented to this House. The only thing I can come up with to describe this budget is a "Whe Whe" budget. "Whe Whe" as many of us know is a game of numbers. If we were to look at the debate presented by Members on the other side, it is all numbers. If we were to look at the history of the numbers since the budget came into play: Parliament was convened on January 13. Number 13 is crapaud. It appears as if crapaud smoke the PNM's pipe. Also, the budget was presented on January 17. The number 17 is bird and we know the dragon was removed and the dove doing its numbers was placed on the Red House.

This debate is of extreme importance and must be so viewed moreso by Members on the other side. The people of Trinidad and Tobago have placed their confidence and trust in us for a better life for all of us. We must do everything to improve the quality of their lives—to make sure that the basic necessities of their humble lives are met. By this I mean roti, capra, makal—food, clothing and shelter—are within the reach of everyone here in Trinidad and Tobago. In this regard, Members of this House would now be required to do some deep soul searching and to reflect upon their own lives in view of the many promises made to the electorate, so as to arrive at meaningful ways to attend to the needs of the people. No effort must be spared in arriving at and delivering the best package to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

As I reflect on the contents of the PNM manifesto, I suspect its intentions to be noble, but certainly out of reach. The kinds of moneys required to fulfil such are
simply not available, even at the high estimated price of oil at US $19 per barrel. In this regard, I invite Members of the PNM to put pride and ego aside and employ a workable manifesto, that of the UNC.

In 1987, when the budget was presented by the then Government, the NAR, it gave the country the first indication that the NAR would not have been here in 1992 to present another budget. It seems that history will repeat itself.

5.45 p.m.

The budget presented by the PNM Government will not permit them perhaps to deliver another budget in more than five years. The debate in this House must not be an exercise in public speaking, or test in mathematics or a cover-up as had been done by Members on the other side. The debate must address, as a matter of urgency, the pains and sufferings of the masses of people of Trinidad and Tobago. This budget when implemented must reduce to a minimum the number of people who grow hungry every day, the number of children attending school in Trinidad and Tobago without food and books and without bus services.

The frustrations of our people must be reduced, the drug addicts must be helped, the people in the hospitals must have proper medical facilities, the employment situation must also be addressed, small business must be encouraged and assisted. The people of Trinidad and Tobago must be made to feel safe and secure in Trinidad and Tobago once again. The beautiful people of Trinidad and Tobago must be returned to a sense of belonging once again. People must be encouraged in meaningful ways to contribute to nation building. All of this can be achieved if we all work together and adopt and implement the UNC manifesto.

The manifesto is a political bible that attempts to establish the pledges and workings of the party to its supporters and to people at large. It is a work of people by people for people; provision for human error must be accommodated. My humble finding is that the PNM manifesto has many human errors, the UNC manifesto which is available to the people of Trinidad and Tobago has fewer errors.

As a vegetarian, I wish to get into the vegetables of the budget. I also raise the question of vegetables, because I hope that when I go to the tea-room in the future, some provision will be made for me because I do not consume meat, eggs or fish. In this open economy, real economic growth is influenced by external circumstances, and since oil is a determining factor for revenue earnings in Trinidad and Tobago, we have to keep our fingers crossed so that no adverse effects confront us in the short term in the event that oil prices fall. We cannot
depend on the manufacturing and the agricultural sectors, but this budget is
totally silent on any incentive in these sectors.

We must not forget our roots. We must pay tribute to our ancestors, moreso
those of us of African and Indian stock, for our forefathers and mothers came to
work on the sugar plantations. We must continue going for cane, the sugar of life,
and make Trinidad and Tobago more productive. Everything must be done to
renew our relationship with the land. Let our bare feet touch the soil once again;
let us grow food and nourish the people of Trinidad and Tobago; let us ensure
that our people never go hungry again. This will be a great tribute to our
ancestors who travelled under terrible conditions from Africa, India, China and
elsewhere. May God bless their souls. In this context I hope the Caroni workers
will be duly compensated. I know of the shortage of money to pay sugar workers,
but let there be meaningful dialogue and meaningful compensation. Money is not
everything. Payments can be made in land, in savings bonds, perhaps.

The coconut growers of Trinidad and Tobago are having many problems with
their copra. I know some of us, the Member for San Fernando West included,
have our “navel strings” buried in the Cedros area. In 1991, for over five months
the sole purchaser of copra in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Coconut
Growers’ Association, stopped purchasing copra from the coconut farmers and
suppliers. Only the members of CGA were able to supply copra. The consequence
of this, is that the entire south-western area, Cedros and further down south, was
shut down. Workers had no money, shops refused to supply the workers with
goods on credit; children could not attend school. There was an entire atmosphere
of gloom and despair. The last administration took a long time to have the
situation resolved; it is still not yet resolved. At present, CGA has advertised in the
daily newspapers that it has stopped receiving copra from its suppliers until
further notice. Copra is starting to pile up, and the same problems are arising
again. It is my hope that the Minister of Agriculture will make some meaningful
effort to assist those people in Cedros, and make sure that some degree of
normalcy is returned.

There is a large market for foreign produce in the USA, Holland and
elsewhere. The large cruise ship business in the United States and elsewhere
where millions of dollars are spent, is prepared to buy all the tropical fruits we
can produce and at good prices. This will bring us a lot of foreign exchange.
Transportation, storage and packaging education is required to make sure that this
happens. Again, I want to ask the Minister of Agriculture to make sure that some
kind of dialogue takes place so the farmers and the workers of Trinidad and Tobago are given an opportunity to participate.

The farmers of this country are among the hardest working people one can find: men, women, children, African, Indian, Dougla, from early morning in the hot sun, in the rain. I remember only recently whilst on the campaign trail, I had cause to go into the lagoon area where I met some ladies cutting rice, and I decided to go into the field and talk with them. So I took off my shoes and socks and went into the lagoon.

Whilst there, there were seven ladies cuttings some acres of rice, a young lady, maybe 18 or 20, started coming towards the group. Unfortunately, she slipped and fell. She had a paper bag in her hands. Only then I discovered that paper bag contained the lunch for these working ladies. It was bodi and aloo which was in a plastic container, and rotis wrapped in a cloth. It fell into the water. The plastic container with the bodi and aloo was saved, but the rotis got soaked. These ladies then took the cloth and spread it on a near bank, dried the rotis and ate them. The lesson here is that these people work extremely hard and they are not rewarded nor are they recognized in Trinidad and Tobago.

In this regard, we owe an apology to the ladies of this country. The Member for Chaguanas indicated that something must happen to recognize the working mothers of Trinidad and Tobago. More provision must be made for them all. It is my view that we rethink the policies in agriculture. I know the Minister of Agriculture is from a humble home and has agriculture at his heart, but to make it work we must have it work hand in hand. We in this House are now one large family, working for the betterment of everyone. At times there may be conflicts of personality, there will be brow-beating et cetera. But we must remain good Christians and continue in the service of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The service sector, which seems to be a growing sector in the economy, leading to employment creation, could also be affected by the increase in income tax, which leads to reduced incomes, thereby having a negative effect on the service sector. The ability to consume goods and services would be lessened in this context.

The oil and gas-based industry is obviously the dominant source of comparative advantage in our economy. The hon. Prime Minister laid emphasis on gas throughout the last election campaign, yet there is no real policy laid out in this budget. I hope this is not done without due consideration.
You are aware, respected Madam Speaker, that the constituency of Fyzabad is oil and gas-related. Unfortunately, there is nothing I can say to the people of Fyzabad that would develop from oil and gas. There are no provisions made in the budget. I wish to draw the attention of the Minister of Energy and the Minister of Industry to the available markets in the United States and the Far East for oil by-products. Just to mention one that some consideration may be given to: In the United States, oil additives—the market in the USA alone is US $940 million. To set up a factory that will produce something similar will cost only about TT $10 million and if we were to get one per cent of the USA market, we would be earning revenue in excess of TT $50 million per year. I hope the Ministers responsible would set up such a manufacturing outlet in the constituency of Fyzabad in view of the fact that the CNG outlets will not be coming to Fyzabad, but going elsewhere.

Yesterday, whilst listening to the Member for La Brea, for a moment I thought he was the MP for CNG. If we are to spend $7,000 to have these things installed in the motor cars, where are many of these people going to get this money? With some effort, some provision could be made to have negotiations with the banks to have loans made available. The question of car stealing in Trinidad and Tobago is relevant. Would people now steal cars for CNG apparatus? We need to consider these things.

Coming out of the budget is that $12,000 for house repairs. I think it is a very good move. The reason I say so, is that I suspect this $12,000 can now be used for home owners to install burglar-proofing in view of the high crime rate and to replace window panes that are broken when people come to steal their cars; they pelt, and break the window panes. So I think the $12,000 will go a long way.

The UNC is here for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, a new dawn is on the horizon, the ideal situation and solution would be for the unity of all the nation's constituency representatives to give unlimited national commitment and in so doing, unite the nation's children, unite the national culture, and together dissolve the nation's crisis. These are some of the pledges of the UNC manifesto, our own political bible.

I assure the people of Trinidad and Tobago, through this House, that under no condition will we on this side of the House allow those on the other side to hoodwink us, to mislead us, to misrepresent us any more. The Prime Minister has indicated—I know he is a sincere man, a sincere soul—that consultation will take place at all levels, and that all the people of Trinidad and Tobago will benefit
from all packages to be presented, and that development will not just go in 
selected areas as has happened in the past.

On the question of international affairs, I draw the Minister's attention to the 
embassies that are non-functional and are not doing any meaningful work for 
Trinidad and Tobago. I want to highlight the embassy in London, and perhaps ask 
the Prime Minister to explore the possibility of moving to smaller quarters where 
less money can be spent, and to make sure that political appointments are 
minimal so that we can have meaningful and productive results coming out of it. 
Perhaps in down-scaling the London embassy we should explore the possibility of 
going to Germany and Japan where there is new growth and a stronger economy. 
The embassy should have some technical staff to make sure that we benefit from 
trade and product information.

We must also declare our position in relation to other countries and make sure 
that the intentions lead to positive interests. We also require people to lobby for 
Trinidad and Tobago, as Jamaica does with great success. I think we should 
explore technical co-operation with Spain, which has a similar situation to 
Trinidad and Tobago and which is doing very well; Italy which has advanced 
technology; Holland and Germany.

The Minister of Finance has emphasized the importance of exports; I have 
heard this for 15 years, and my political leader has heard it for 20 plus years. This 
country and Government do not operate within a meaningful policy framework 
for an induced policy package to encourage exports. From time to time we talk 
about exports and if one were to look at Appendix 19 of the Review of the 
Economy, one would recognize what has been happening; and we need to make 
sure that this is corrected.

Some value has increased in exports over recent years, mainly due to the 
imperative of survival, both in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors. There 
is need for active policy to liberalize the economy both in the investment and 
trade areas. The commercial policy of Trinidad and Tobago leaves much to be 
desired as a negative list is a source of economic strangulation. The so-called one 
stop, one shop, activity of the IDC is now non-functional—too much red tape. The 
need for a smooth, effective and high-powered system must be made available as 
soon as possible if we are to become serious about attracting foreign investment.

Streamlining the channels of communication among the various Government 
agencies, for instance the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank, the Ministry of 
Trade and the IDC, should be done without delay. The review and implementation
of the Foreign Investment Act, 1990, the Export Processing Zones Act are in need of rethinking.

Market access is not a problem for Trinidad and Tobago goods and/or services. Competitive risk is the name of the game and the ability to produce and supply. CBI, Caricom are both willing to purchase from us. We need to be able to supply.

Some general thinking on the budget: The rise in alcohol taxes will lead to smuggling, also decreased sales, which will lead to less revenue. People will resort to the use of illegal substances and perhaps a rise in the drug trade. Caricom has become very important to Trinidad and Tobago and we must continue to play a major role in developing integration to the highest level. Efforts to include the greater Caribbean area should be explored. We have in Trinidad and Tobago the stock, the personnel, the manpower and the education to develop same. If this is done, I feel certain that the financial capital of the Caribbean will come to Port-of-Spain.

Because of the challenges we face from the international community, our next best area for trade and co-operation will be our own neighbouring countries such as the greater Caribbean area and the Latin American countries. We must explore this to the highest level. The UNC manifesto again touches on this. The treaty to be explored with the United States would give us an opportunity to take care of some of the unemployment here in Trinidad and Tobago and to bring in much needed foreign exchange.

I feel certain that the earlier thinking on floating the Trinidad and Tobago dollar is no longer valid, and I assure the other side that floating the dollar will lead to all of us sinking.

I must now touch on the constituency of Fyzabad. Before I do so, I wish to extend, on behalf of the people of Fyzabad, greetings to this House and to assure you that the people of Fyzabad are prepared to participate in nation building. The people of this constituency were represented for more than 30 years by the previous governments. The fact that they have elected a UNC representative indicates their disappointment with the past governments. Now is the time for all of us to make sure that the people of Fyzabad get their just due. The pains and the suffering of the people are too much, the need for a better water supply, electrical connections, better roads, recreation facilities, vocational training, small business assistance, recreation are some of the much needed and immediate needs of the
people. These people are not asking for hand-outs; they are asking for equality, justice and fairplay.

I know we owe people a lot of money, close to $2.7 billion, but I want to draw to your attention the fact that Guyana owes us in excess of US $300 million, Barbados owes more than $10 million, Jamaica $2 million, Antigua $3 million, St. Lucia close to $3 million. I am suggesting that the Minister of Finance communicate with the Ministers of Finance in these countries and ask them to raise their taxes by 10 per cent so that they may repay us our moneys so we may service this foreign debt.

The tax-free bonds and the unit trust are good ideas, but it is only for people who have extra money, those in the higher income bracket. The majority of people in Trinidad and Tobago do not have that kind of funds at their disposal, so the tax-free bonds and the unit trust would be meaningless to them. I am hoping that the Minister of Finance would come up with something more meaningful so that they may participate.

The social ills of Trinidad and Tobago must be addressed. The high level of alcoholism, broken homes, child abuse, teenage pregnancy, the high stress level, disappointment by those in power, poor unwed mothers, are some of the areas that we must make sure to address so that all people in Trinidad and Tobago will have happier lives.

To increase international trade we need to become more marketable, and by becoming marketable, I mean not just the ability to sell and provide goods, but also to make sure that the Government makes an input to the number of small business people who are in need of some kind of assistance, not only financial but technical advice. And some kind of provision should be made for these people to benefit, and by so doing we would be able to address the unemployment situation. I do not think we should go in the way of “ten days”; I think there should be a permanent lid on LIDP and redirect this revenue and these resources to developing small businesses to a larger scale.

In terms of export promotion, we need to sell ourselves better. We need to make sure that those abroad will have confidence in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the ability to make the goods and services available. We need to secure from the developed countries, technical co-operation. These people are willing to lend it to us. We need to communicate with them and make sure it happens.
In conclusion, I invite all Members of this House, first to take a minute off and reflect on our own selves. Trinidad and Tobago needs us. We have come a long way. We owe it to the people of Trinidad and Tobago to provide a better country. We owe it in tribute to our ancestors to make sure that wherever they are they would be proud of us, and if we subscribe just for a minute to the Hindu thinking of reincarnation, we must so labour here that in the event some of us come back here as people, we would be proud of the work we do today, tomorrow and in the years ahead. May God bless all of us. Thank you.

6.15 p.m.

**Mr. Cyril Rajaram (Pointe-a-Pierre):** Madam Speaker, I too should like to join with other Members in congratulating you on the very elevated position you now occupy. You have done us all proud. You are the very epitome of all that is good.

The Member for Fyzabad—the position which this young man now occupies, has made us very happy, very proud. I shall leave the rest for him to let the other Members know.

I have sat here and listened very carefully to the contributions of the various Members, and I must say that I am thoroughly satisfied and very proud to be here today, and yesterday, to listen to them. The Members have prepared their contributions and they have delivered them with eloquence.

Madam Speaker, I have heard so many negative things about the budget, not one word coming from Opposition Members pointing to the budget. They have all spoken in negative terms. Am I to believe that the budget is not good?

**Hon. Members:** Yes.

**Mr. Rajaram:** I am sure that the budget has many, many benefits. There are many credits in the budget. We must not be deceptive in our ways, we must come here with noble intentions. We must not try to pull wool over people's eyes. The expressions of Members of the Opposition on the budget are very negative. What they are saying here is contrary to what the people on the street are saying. I have proved that in many areas—in the constituency of Pointe-a-Pierre, in San Fernando—and I have spoken to hundreds of ordinary people and the feedback I got from these people is that despite the hard times, they are very cognizant of the fact that the country is experiencing difficult times. They know that the country is in a straitened economic position, but they are expressing the feeling that the budget is a reasonably good budget. When we come here and paint such bad
pictures of the budget, we are not expressing our true feelings. The budget must have virtue. I am sure that if Members of the Opposition examine the budget closely, they will see good aspects in it.

The budget has been painted as a super draconian budget, one that will bring hardship, destitution, and poverty to the country. But this is not so.

The hon. Member for Chaguanas in her contribution, expressed certain fears of discrimination, alienation and victimization. I assure her now that those fears will not materialize. The Government with which I am associated will not discriminate against or victimize any section of the community.

Mr. Maharaj: If they do that, what will you do?

Mr. Rajaram: I am tempted to tell the hon. Member what I will do.

Mr. Maharaj: Tell us.

Mr. Rajaram: But I am a person at whom nobody, even where I am living or in any part of Trinidad and Tobago, can point an accusing finger and say, "Mr Rajaram was dishonest".

Hon. Member: Do you hear that?

Mr. Maharaj: All right, I will remember that.

Mr. Rajaram: I will not cross the floor. [Laughter]

Hon. Member: Take that, you begged for it!

Mr. Panday: We will not hold you to that promise.

Mr. Rajaram: I am happy that my Friends are enjoying themselves. I am happy that, at least, they can laugh—laughter is the sign of a healthy conscience.

I have heard so many negative things that I am bewildered as to what can be done in this House.

Members have dealt comprehensively with the budget, they have touched on every aspect of it. I will not repeat what was said by them. I shall confine myself to a small area of the budget.
I have been asked to speak on the impact of the budget on the squatters in the Pointe-a-Pierre constituency. Pointe-a-Pierre is not a rich constituency as many would want to believe. Despite its refineries, oil installations, and business centres, certain areas in the Point-a-Pierre constituency are relatively poor; the people who live there are very poor, but they are people who are satisfied to live on the bare necessities of life.

Hon. Member: They voted for the right person.

Mr. Rajaram: They are people who can confine themselves to the simple things in life. I have visited some of the areas and I am appalled at the standard of living—they live in poverty.

Hon. Member: Next five years you will relieve them.

Mr. Rajaram: When they heard the budget they were not negative in their thinking like Members of the Opposition here. They were promised certain things during the election campaign by the People's National Movement. When the budget was announced they were more interested to find out if the PNM Government had honoured some of the promises it had made, they are satisfied that it had done so. These people are not concerned about the arithmetic of balancing the budget, nor are they interested in paying foreign debt. They are principally concerned about Government's promises to them in removing the VAT from books. This was fulfilled, and they are very happy and proud of it. They were also interested in the removal of VAT from certain prescribed drugs. This was honoured and they are very happy with it. They were interested in seeing whether the Government would do anything about old age pension and public or social assistance. This was also honoured and these people are satisfied.

6.25 p.m.

They are happy that they have voted for the People's National Movement. They are happy and proud that they have voted for a party they can trust, a party of which they can be proud. They are also happy that this Government will amend Act 20 of 1986 so that their land tenancy can be regularized, and I am very confident that the Government will fulfil these people’s dream.

These areas along the San Fernando and Marabella waterfront are some of the areas that have been occupied by the squatters. You have the Tarouba area, the Harmony Hall Railway Line. These people number about 266 families. They have always voted for the People's National Movement. They see a caring government. The amenities that they enjoy at the present time have been
provided by the last PNM Government. From 1956 to 1986 they have always supported the PNM. The Government will see to it that the lives of these people are made better. These people consider the People’s National Movement a caring government—a government that will take care of them. They were not enjoying certain things, but PNM governments, prior to 1986, provided roads, electricity and water and these people are very grateful. They have supported the People's National Movement from 1956 and will continue to do so in every election. Such is the confidence that the people have in the People's National Movement. They have given me the assurance that no other party will ever win the Pointe-a-Pierre seat. They have denied the Member for Couva North the privilege of speaking for the Pointe-a-Pierre constituency. I have the assurance that if God wills it, come 1996 the people of this squatting population in the Pointe-a-Pierre constituency will again vote for the People's National Movement. Thank you very much.

Mr. Sahid Hosein (Siparia): Madam Speaker, let me also add my congratulations to you on your elevation to the position of Speaker. I assure you that I will do all within my power to give you my personal support in ensuring that the dignity of this House is maintained. I also take this opportunity to congratulate the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre on his maiden speech. I do not want to sound uncharitable if I say that is the only thing I can congratulate him on.

I have no doubt that the PNM cares about people, as they have stated on the cover of their manifesto and elsewhere. For, given the provisions of the 1992 budget, they have shown, beyond the shadow of a doubt, whom they really care about in this society. They are a new Government and they plead that they are a new PNM, and so we on this side expect them to make mistakes. It will be our task, at this time, to show them the straight and narrow until they can get their bearings.

What we on this side felt the gentlemen should have done, is to come out and tell the people of this country, in clear language that they would understand, what are the economic realities of today, giving a best-case scenario and a worst-case scenario. However, like the NAR, they have chosen not to take the public into their confidence and so when they talk about divestment I am worried. Divest which companies? I know their manifesto says that they are going to divest. Divest which companies and on what terms? Are these companies going to be sold on the stock market? Or are they going to be given away in sweetheart deals? Will due consideration be given to the fate of the employees of these companies, and how will the national interest be affected?
If the Government believes in the widest possible participation, then the first thing it should be giving thought to is anti-trust or monopolies legislation as a prerequisite to divestment. And even so, this country needs to take a long, hard look at the companies to be divested, so as to ensure that we have not overlooked avenues of profitability. We on this side feel that common sense applications have withstood the test of time and since man, by nature, is competitive and thrives on incentives, the way to go, we feel, is to give him a personal stake in what he is doing. A case in point is ISPAT, where they have this worker incentive scheme and production has increased by leaps and bound.

We propose that where feasible the trisector approach be used where the state, private enterprise, and the workers each own one-third of the shares of the companies—that way ensuring the survival of the companies. Where companies are vital to the public and national interest, there should be meaningful worker participation in the decision-making process, the object being to improve productivity and reduce alienation.

There is also need to increase to realistic levels the remuneration paid to the directors of state enterprises so that they will have a greater incentive to ensure the survival of these companies. As it now stands, the chief benefits of being directors are entry into the cocktail circuit, or usage of one's position to enhance one's own business. It has been a past practice to use those state companies to foist party-hacks and hangers-on in key positions without recourse to their suitability for the job, much to the detriment of these companies—a case of square pegs in round holes.

6.35 p.m.

Unfortunately for us, as a small country, we are locked in a system where, no matter how competent a person might be, no matter how patriotic a citizen of this country might be, so long as he holds a view that is different from the Government of his day, his services are of no use in the development of his own country. The time has come where, if we are serious about national development, we must be prepared to use the talents of all our citizens, regardless of party affiliation, race, creed or colour.

We therefore need to look at these alternatives before we decide on outright divestment. We need to look at the national—and since we are committed to Caricom—and the regional interest. At a time when it is almost certain to become
the regional carrier for Caricom, is there need any more to sell BWIA? Do we want to expose our Caricom brothers and the tourism trade, which is the lifeline of some of those countries, to the vagaries of the airline industry?

We also need to take a hard look at the future of our iron and steel mill, Caribbean ISPAT. Only recently ISPAT bought a very large steel mill in Mexico where both fuel and labour are cheaper, with an eye towards benefiting from the expanding North American market. What, therefore, are the implications to our own steel mill? Indeed, what are the implications for future foreign investment in this country?

We also need to examine whether the expansion of the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery is in our national interest. We need seriously to rethink this question. With refurbishing and automation of the plant, it is certainly going to mean retrenchment. May I ask, is that one of the conditions of the IADB loan?

In a situation of scarce foreign exchange, how are we going to pay for the oil imports? Where are the markets for the end-products? Is it the United States? At present the petroleum market in the United States is soft and is expected to continue so in the short term. Last year the United States sold one million cars fewer and the outlook for this year is even worse.

Additionally, both Ford and Chrysler corporations are heavily into CNG technology, to imply a further reduction in the usage of gasoline. Or is it that the only benefit of the IADB loan for the refurbishing and construction works at the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery was so that the jobs would have been given to American contractors and they would have been in a better position to ride out the recession?

I want to make it absolutely clear, because we are a forward-looking party, that we on this side agree totally with the use of CNG as an alternative to gasoline—for all the obvious reasons, environment and what have you, we agree totally on that. We hope, however, that it is not a red-herring to distract from the steep increase in the price of gasoline, or that monopolies would be allowed. I know yesterday certain allegations and insinuations were made, but I know the PNM is a new PNM and they would not be involved at this stage in their development, if indeed they are a new PNM, nor will the born-again Prime Minister, the hon. Member for San Fernando East, allow any untoward events to take place with regard to CNG.

I want to say, as regards CNG technology, it is certainly not a matter of simply converting a vehicle to the use of CNG without due regard to design and safety
requirements. Let me at the same time compliment the Member for La Brea on the comprehensive presentation he made. It was a learning exercise for many of us, with regard to CNG. I want to differ slightly, because the Member would agree, having done quite an extensive bit of research on CNG, that it would seem that no two authorities on CNG could agree totally on the basic functions and uses, in terms of standards. Each authority has come up with a different standard. While he mentioned that CNG has been in use for quite some time, the real development of the technology is still in its infancy, and there are very serious considerations with regard to standards controlling storage, for example, whether you should use porous carbons or you should use other materials; what pressures—there seems to be no agreement on that—are safe for transport and storage and what not.

We on this side advise prudence and caution in the installation of these CNG stations, with safety being one of the major considerations. What we need to examine, however, is the level of royalty to be obtained from our natural gas since this is going to be the fuel of the future.

All revenue from state enterprises must by law, be deposited in the Consolidated Fund. It is therefore technically a breach of the law for state companies to be using their funds to repair and to refurbish schools and works of this nature, especially when there are relevant agencies to deal with these matters. While these are laudable endeavours, these companies have been used in the past by politicians and by the Government of the day—

**Mr. Valley:** Madam Speaker, just a slight correction. The net after-tax income of the state companies, depending on the dividend policy—it is only the dividend that the state company gives the Government. There is no law stating that all revenue of state companies should go to the Consolidated Fund.

**Mr. Hosein:** Technically, the Member is correct. As I was saying, these companies have been used by politicians and in some cases by the government of the day, to extract political mileage from some of these projects.

The other concern is whether proper tendering procedures are being observed in these projects, or whether these funds are properly spent. I have information to the contrary, which brings me to the role of the Central Tenders Board. There is urgent need to restructure the operations of the board in order to shorten the delay between notification to publish, publication and award of contracts, especially in local government. Since it is a matter of national interest, we on this side, should
like to know what role the Central Tenders Board played in the community projects undertaken by the Prime Minister's Office; whether these projects were advertised, etc.

Another matter of concern for the Minister of Local Government is whether the Central Tenders Board intends to invite tenders for the supply of truck-borne water on behalf of the local government agencies.

6.45 p.m.

I wish now to look at the provisions of the budget for local government. Local government is the cradle of democracy, for it is at this level there is the widest possible interaction between representatives and the citizenry at large. One only has to look at the present situation, therefore, to understand, as a country, how democratic we are. If we accept that the definition of local government, as was spelled out by the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central, as being an indigenous institution for delivery of goods and services to individuals and communities who could not themselves provide these services on an individual or collective basis, then local government is certainly drawing its final few gasps of breath, and should either be mercifully put to sleep or resuscitated with haste. By their many measures, in this regard, in the 1992 budget, the PNM has indicated the way it intends to go.

The hon. Member for Diego Martin Central, the Minister of Local government, tried to bluff this House with regard to local government. I am going to call his bluff now. He talked about widest possible participation. He talked about new functions. What new functions? New functions to do what? You have functions that you cannot perform at present, given the financial constraints and the constraints in terms of equipment, but he talked about new functions. I should like to give him some advice.

I have worked with a number of people in his party who are well-versed in local government; who know local government very well, one of whom is the representative for Arouca North. I think if he is serious about doing something about local government, if he is really serious about addressing the concerns, especially of the grass-roots people of this country in terms of delivery of services, then he should, most expeditiously, get together with his local government people and learn to understand the systems; understand what are the concerns of local government.

I want to advise him at the same time, that there is already an inventory. I understand that in the Ministry of Decentralization, there is an inventory of equipment of what used to be the county councils and the corporations and what
MR. HOSEIN

have you. So that exercise does not need to be gone over. There is already a
requirement as to what new equipment is needed, and I am most certain about
that. In this day and age, especially after we have had the NAR Government, to be
a local government representative is to be employed in an exercise in futility and
frustration. I having been a local government representative—you would bear
testimony to that.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Minister of Local Government and Minister in the Ministry of
Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing
Order 10(11), I wish to move that the House continue sitting until 10.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker: We shall move this procedural motion at 7.50 p.m., in
accordance with the Standing Orders.

APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I merely wish to ask the hon. Member—he
has spoken about a new transition team, or a new supervisory team, I believe the
term is, to advise on Act No. 21 of 1990—to state exactly what the terms of
reference of this transition committee are. Is it to set the stage for elections? The
old transition committee, under the NAR, its terms of reference were to develop a
position paper for the development of each individual region, the emphasis being
on the industry in the area. For example, if it was an agricultural region it was
expected that a position paper would be prepared along the lines of further
enhancing agriculture in that area. So, I should like to know whether the terms of
reference are the same.

At the first glance, I was happy to see an increase in the allocations to local
government bodies, but closer examination has revealed that these increases are
for wages, and for the filling of vacant posts. So, what this administration did was
to simply fudge the previous year’s estimate and add on the arrears in wages
without any consideration for the present state of local government. I am
disappointed that the Government did not see it fit to indicate the individual
disbursements to the regional corporations.

With regard to the vacant posts, who fills them? Is it a case of jobs for the
boys and girls? If you look at personal expenditure in the same light, there are a
number of other bodies. WASA, for example, I believe there was a provision of
$3.5 million for the filling of vacant posts. We on this side can only hope that in
the national interest, these posts are filled on the basis of merit. Local governemnt bodies impact upon every aspect of our citizens’ lives and, therefore, they must have a minimum of resources, both financial and in terms of equipment, if they are to be minimally effective.

6.55 p.m.

To illustrate what I mean I shall use the example of St. Patrick where I was a sitting councillor in the last term. St. Patrick which has a population of approximately 180,000 people has two functioning dump trucks, two cess pool emptiers, no back-hoes, no tractors, no rollers, no portable welding equipment, to service the county and in fact, the equipment that they have most if not all, is over 15 years old. Yet you talk about giving new functions, but without providing the basics to ensure that there is at least a minimal operation of local government. It is the same with all the local government bodies throughout the country. In fact, the situation is so critical; it was raised by the Member for Princes Town and I hope the Government takes note. We have reached a situation where there is a crisis with regard to the emptying of cesspits and latrines and so far we have been extremely fortunate that we have not had an epidemic in this country, given the fact that cholera is sweeping Central America.

What is needed in local government is an injection of capital to purchase new vehicles and to refurbish those that can be reconditioned. When one looks at the allocation for St. Patrick of $500,000 in 1991, to repair over 600 roadways, over 190 wooden bridges, to replace broken cylinders that were laid down 30 and 40 years ago, to lay inverts and what have you, one wonders whether central government has any interest in really delivering service, or is it the intention to close down these local government bodies? In 1990, the allocation was worse, $225,000 and in 1989 it was $250,000 dollars.

In a country where we have all types of aggregates, pitch and oil sand, there should be no reason why our roads should be in the condition that they are in and it is an indictment upon the government today. I wish to advise that maybe if we look at the possibility—seeing that we have been unable to do it over the past years—we need to look at the possibility of asking Lake Asphalt to enter into a joint arrangement with a private sector company so that we could implement a programme of fixing pot-holes in this country. We need to examine that. One has to wonder, as my colleague from Princes Town asked, is the Government of the day in cahoots with the people who sell spare parts? One has to wonder what imaginary sin the motoring public is paying for at this time. Then this new PNM comes along and adds insult to injury, they raise the price of gasoline.
The situation is the same in all the other areas in local government. If you go to the markets, and if you go to the abattoirs especially and you see how animals are slaughtered and you see how meat is being prepared, it will turn your stomach. You will refuse to eat meat coming from those markets and abattoirs.

The same thing happens in the development of recreation grounds. By the time they give out contracts for the preparation of cricket pitches, the vote is exhausted, so you have absolutely nothing to spend for the rest of the year. Are we really serious about the provision of services? Are we not operating a dole system in this country, especially in local government when the majority of the allocations are going towards paying wages leaving very little if any at all for the provision of goods and services? More importantly, it is the little people of this country who need these services, people whom the PNM profess to care about. So in the allocation for local government I expected much more from the caring PNM.

Maybe the Member for Diego Martin Central is not on good terms with the Member for St. Ann’s East. Year after year we have been clamouring for change in the fiscal year so that we can benefit from the dry season and so optimize the use of scarce funds. Will this administration have the courage to so do? For if the previous government had done so, today the Katwaroo and Sanoo Trace bridges in the Siparia constituency would have been built. The Member for Oropouche made that significant point. He spoke about unspent balances lying in commercials banks earning interest.

What happened in 1988? These two bridges were undertaken during the rainy season because it was then that the moneys were released. We had unseasonably heavy rainfall during that year and we thought it prudent to cease work on these bridges and return the money to the Government. For two years we pursued this matter with the previous Minister of Works and Local Government and every time we spoke to him, the Permanent Secretary was to prepare a Note to take the matter to Cabinet so that the moneys could have been released. I recommend that in changing the fiscal year, that there should also be a provision where unspent balances should be carried over into the next year for at least one quarter, so that you would have projects being completed and the moneys would not have to be returned unspent.

The constituency of Siparia is primarily an agricultural one and we have a special interest. Agriculture is near and dear to our hearts. If you look today at most of the successful economies, there are thriving agricultural sectors, or their success was built initially from this sector. We need to understand that once we
are self-sufficient in food our country will be on the way to self-determination. But there are those in our country who will continue to advocate that it is cheaper to import food, and that we should continue to ignore agriculture. It has been shown time and time again that food is used as a weapon by the developed world against Third World countries.

This is an extract from an article that first appeared in the *Economic and Political Weekly* of India and it was written by one Vandama Shiva. It states that in a letter to *Time* magazine Sen. Rudy Bostwick, a spokesman of the Regan Farm policy, stated that their policy was aimed at putting Third World food exporters out of business. He wrote:

"If we do not lower our farm prices to discourage these countries now, our worldwide competitive position will continue to slide and be more difficult to regain. This discouragement should be one of the foremost goals of our agricultural policy."

When he was saying that they should lower farm prices, what he was saying really was that they should subsidize the allocation to the farmers in America. The very same thing the IMF and the World Bank, whom they control, are telling us to remove. That is significant.

7.05 p.m.

When you would have read the *Express* of Friday, July 28, 1989 on page 5, you would have seen, "US $20 million credit for Agriculture" and significantly it states:

"The United States Department of Agriculture is to make $20 million in credit guarantee available to this country for the purchase of US agricultural commodities."

This is in addition to US $40 million in similar credit guarantees for 1989 which Trinidad and Tobago received. So they are not giving you money or lending you money to develop your agricultural sector, their policy is to give you money to buy their food. It is time we understood where we are at.

A country develops in the use and mobilization of its raw products. Other than oil which is a wasting asset, we have the agricultural sector, which is the cheapest and most profitable to develop in the short term, provided we have the will. First,
we need to put in the necessary infrastructure: flood abatement, agricultural access roads, and mechanisms to stimulate and encourage agriculture.

I want at this juncture to congratulate the Member for Diego Martin West for the enthusiasm, if nothing else, he demonstrated for his Ministry. It is my hope that he will continue to have that same level of enthusiasm and genuine commitment to the development of agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago.

In Siparia the farmers are tired of planting crops and having them flooded out. They go through this cycle over and over again. You need to have as a priority, if you are serious about agriculture, the desilting of the main watercourses in the constituency and, indeed, throughout the country. Some of these are the Coora and Corampo Rivers, the Coromato River, the CDR Channel, the Jochan Channel, the Blackwater Channel, among others. Indeed, you have to begin a programme of reconstruction of broken bridges. We have situations, because of the way they have developed, where communities are divided and farmers have to make detours of five and six miles to get around to the other side to get a scale to sell their sugar-cane or other product. Indeed, one of these unfortunate areas is the Boodoo Trace Bridge No. 3 and I hope that the Minister of Works will pay attention with a view to having an early resolution of that problem.

It would be remiss of me if I did not say that something needs to be done about the overfishing of the Gulf. The time has come when restrictions must be imposed or limits placed on trawling in the Gulf lest we leave nothing for our future generations. Indeed, only yesterday morning in the newspaper, we read where the US has banned the importation of yellow tuna from this country. We need to examine that arrangement we have with the Taiwanese in terms of subsidized fuel to see whether advantage is not being taken of this situation and whether it is in the national interest in the long term to have the present arrangement continue.

The question of pipe-borne water is critical in Siparia, in that at present all of the constituency is on a schedule. Because of the inadequate supply of water, very many areas do not get it most of the times, and the problem really is with the supply of water. I was happy to hear the Member for La Brea say how elated he was about the extension of mains in St. Patrick. I do not want to deflate his happiness, but the problem is not the laying of mains, the problem is having an adequate supply of water. Does it mean, having laid new mains in La Brea and Point Fortin, that you are going to divert the water from areas that get water at present, into these areas? You see, this is a hangover from the last regime where the Minister in charge of Public Utilities always expressed this view, despite
advice to the contrary, that there was no problem with the supply, and that what was needed was the laying of new mains.

Yes, I agree that you need a mains programme, but why you need a mains programme is for the changing of the mains that were laid down 40 and 50 years ago where mains have become severely encrusted. This is why you need the mains programme, not an extension. The original arrangement was that the Caroni/Arena Dam and the treatment plant would supply Central and South with 30 million gallons of water per day. Point Lisas today takes 12 million gallons and as Point Lisas is going to develop in the future, it is going to take a lot more water. And so today the reality is approximately 17 million gallons of water comes down this way, so if Point Lisas takes 12, it leaves precious little for the rest of the South: 5 million gallons, when the demand is in excess of 10 million gallons today.

I hope that the Government is looking at alternative supplies of water. I want to refer their minds to the Moruga Retention Scheme, feasibility studies of which were done by the previous PNM administration. I think that the time has come, if they are serious about providing this commodity to the people in the South, for them to take this study off the shelf, dust it and have a serious go at implementing it.

7.15 p.m.

In the interim, there is a need to ensure that the water supply is distributed equitably, but what is unfortunate, to show how unjust this society is, is that affluent areas get water 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, while other areas in this country are lucky if they get water once a week. In certain areas, if water is locked off for two hours, the next day in the newspapers there is a story on it. But there is absolutely nothing about us, the people in the rural areas, who have been suffering for month after month from lack of water. So, if we are serious, and I am sorry, the hon. Minister of Public Utilities is not here, because I feel that he cares about the small man in the society—

Madam Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Hosein: I thank hon. Members, Madam Speaker.
If they really stand for equality, then there is a project, a Sou-Sou Lands project in Penal called La Costena which from its very inception six years ago had water-mains installed according to proper specifications and guidelines, and up to this day, six years later, those water-mains have not been connected to the WASA line which runs adjacent to that settlement.

We hear a lot of talk about equality. What is the reality? Indeed, I must bring up the community of Mohess Road which most people who follow the news would have remembered, a whole village applying for refugee status because they could no longer bear the situation, the neglect, the deliberate discrimination against them. What makes it worse, is that this community sits astride two oilfields, Penal and Barrackpore. It must certainly pain these villagers, as it should pain all of us, that you have a major portion of the revenue of this country generated under the very earth that you live on, and the road that you are supposed to drive on is impassable. Government seems to have virtually given up on that road. It has been so for the past 10 years.

These people have been clamouring for a school. All they got from the last administration were promises. My understanding is that the job was tendered, and I hope that this tender will be honoured and that very shortly, the PNM administration will see it fit to allocate funds for the construction of that school. I will take you up on that.

A village where unemployment is over 90 per cent because the main contractor Garib Dass and Company went into receivership—a whole village was dispossessed and deprived of hope, in addition to the neglect that was exhibited by the Government and I am not talking about water at all; they simply do not get. So, can you blame the people if they feel that they have been left out of the mainstream of Trinidad and Tobago and they apply for refugee status? It takes much courage, a great deal of thought; one has to undergo much pain before one takes that decision. I hope that those on that side would see it fit to address some of the issues in this community.

There are several squatter settlements in the Siparia constituency where occupants have been promised regularization over the years, even prior to the previous administration. Yet to this day, they live in limbo. I have seen nothing in the documents given to us in terms of squatter regularization. Some of these are the Wilson block, the Manohar block, the Market Hill Flat and the Diggity Trace, to name a few, where people have been squatters for over 30 and 40 years, living from generation to generation. How can you expect people—you say that you have given an incentive for the construction of homes and what have you, but
how can you expect people having no sense of security to take advantage of what you call a benefit?

There is need to build a strong and caring society. The way to go is to start in the schools. We on this side feel that there is need to establish a proper sporting regime in the primary schools with competitions organized on an intra and extra-regional basis. It has worked wonders for Jamacia. This is where they have started their programme—in the cradle—and it has worked wonders for them. This should be continued into the secondary school system, because right now the emphasis is on passing common entrance, passing examinations, and those who fail are made to feel that they are failures—and they contribute to the problems of our society. So if you have a regime like this, those who are not successful academically will have something to fall back on.

At the same time, assistance should be started in schools to ensure that a book exchange among pupils could take place annually to cut down on the cost of books. For the past few years I have been operating a book exchange during the month of August and it works marvellously well. Quite a large number of people take advantage of this facility, and I think the Minister of Education needs to examine and set up a mechanism in school where the Standard II child will bring in his books and a Standard III child having brought in his, the Standard II child would get that and you would have this exchange process going on. If we are really serious and if we are caring, we need to set up this new system.

It would be of help if VAT were removed from the inputs of publishers and printers; for example, the paper they buy, the ink they use to print and publish books, school books, especially.

To give greater meaning to life, every society needs leisure facilities where individuals and families can go to relax. It enhances, as we all know, the quality of life of our citizens. We on this side feel a special emphasis should be placed on the establishment of recreational areas and parks, and two such areas come readily to mind in the South. The previous administration started something with Palmiste Estate and I think that should not be allowed to go to waste, even if it means having to make a private sector arrangement to have this park developed. The other one that comes to mind, is the Mora Dam, an area which is controlled by T&TEC, which T&TEC can develop as a source of revenue where you can have boating, you can have fishing, you can have various attractions at no cost to the Exchequer. Of course, I must not forget the Oropouche Lagoon.
What may also be done, at least once per term, is that we can have a school project, children going to assist in the development and the maintenance of these recreational facilities as school projects, for which they would be awarded marks, and in order to encourage and engender from a early age, citizen participation.

The time has come when this cumbersome procedure, where we establish recreational grounds, should end. You have to go through a long process of having section 1 and section 2 and sections 3, 4 and 5 published and it takes years before a recreation ground can be established. If we are serious about taking the youths off the street, if we are serious about getting an avenue for them to exhaust and expend energies, then we need as a matter of urgency to shorten this process so that recreation grounds could be quickly and readily established.

Additionally, there is an old proviso that only one recreation ground should be established within a three-mile radius. Madam Speaker, that has got to be ridiculous. We know how many sporting clubs and organizations there are within a three-mile radius and the time has come when we must revise this arrangement.

If we are serious about building a nation, then the Government must have the political will to address the issue of productivity. For it is time that we as a people understand that Trinidad and Tobago is ours, and it will be by dint of our own efforts that we shall be able to get out of the mess that we are in today, a mess which is the making of the old PNM and propagated, I am reminded, by the NAR. We must understand that the agenda for our development has been determined since the arrival of Columbus, by outside forces, and the present administration, like all those before it, has demonstrated in its budget that it is merely a manager of such agendas and policies. It is an imposition, that is what it is.

They have decreed the jacket and tie in place of our dashiki and korta. They have determined what food we eat through the manipulation of the media. They have determined what education we should have, that we should live a lifestyle alien and unsuited to us. So we have completely lost our identity and faith in ourselves. We have become a greedy and selfish people; every man for himself; I am number one, not country. Until we are prepared to stay on the job after four, until we are prepared and we have the will to develop agriculture and to eat local, until we are prepared to work towards true national unity where everyone is recognized as an equal partner in society, until jobs are allocated on merit, and until we are prepared to put country first, we will forever be a country of minutemen, fully at the mercy of the international order. I thank you.
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Works and Transport
(Mr. Jarrette Narine): Madam Speaker, I too join other Members of this honourable House in congratulating you on your appointment as Speaker of the House of Representatives. I know that for the next five years we shall have meaningful leadership in this House, and meaningful contributions coming from both sides.

I should also like to congratulate the Members of the House who have been elected to represent their various constituencies, especially those who were my colleagues at local government level.

I was a county councillor for eight years, and I was in the unfortunate position of being in the Opposition for those eight years. My colleagues on the other side were in Government, both in the St. Patrick and Victoria County Councils. They did not have any crossing of the floor in the county councils, like in this House, so that they remained from 1987 in the various counties. But one of the problems—and I congratulate the Member for Siparia, for mentioning some of the ills of local government.

In the county councils, when you are in Government—and I speak of the St. George East County Council, which is supposed to carry a cadre of 1,260 workers—because of the political interference with the government of the counties, the St. George East County Council now carries over 1,500 workers, thus leaving very little expenditure for goods and services. Therefore, you have to pay most of your funding for labour. For six months of the year construction gangs are being made to do sanitation work. The matter of allocations is one of my concerns.

But tonight, I should like to congratulate the Member for St. Ann's East on his budget presentation, as far as the industrial climate of Trinidad and Tobago is concerned. I refer to page 23 of the budget speech where the cost of living allowance and the two per cent across-the-board increase were allowed to public servants, a welcome sign that the People's National Movement, in keeping with their manifesto promise, are fulfilling a commitment that was observed up to 1986 and the PNM was recognized by the labour movement in Trinidad and Tobago as a Government that cared about the working masses of this country.

The Minister of Finance in his budget presentation indicated also, on page 33, a trade union membership allowance to a maximum of $200 per year. I am sure that some of my colleagues on the other side would welcome that, because it will increase their membership, the Government having given an allowance of $200
per year would increase and stimulate the awareness of new workers in Trinidad and Tobago as far as trade unionism is concerned. Once you get some benefit, you are going to come in droves.

The unions, regardless of what has been said in the press—I have come from the bowels of the trade union movement and we are welcoming a Government that cares. Even the Member for Fyzabad's entire contribution was begging the present administration to bring the country back to where it was, which means that for 30 years Trinidad and Tobago saw economic growth as was never seen in the last five years. So he is asking, and we will welcome that, that we carry the country forward which means back to where it was where they benefited over the 30 years of People's National Movement Government.

The cares of the Government go beyond what has been stated in the budget, and the promises that were made as far as the manifesto is concerned. The matter of consultation is what is most welcome by the trade union movement today. We have seen a deterioration of that since 1986 when the trade union movement would be called in and handed a paper and told this is what we are going to Parliament with—without consultation. With the present system of Government, approaching the unions on their own turf—they welcome the fact that we now have once again a caring Government.

The cost of living allowance did not come just by the way. You must understand the country over the last 35 years or more, before you could appreciate what has happened in the forward thrust of the PNM of 1956, in that the COLA removal in 1987—and some Members of this House voted to take away that cost of living allowance, and in this entire budget debate I have not heard that they have retracted what they have done to the public servants of Trinidad and Tobago in 1987. But the cost of living allowance during the war days in the 1940s—

**Mr. Humphrey:** Would you give way to a question?

That remark, Madam Speaker, that some Members of the House took away the cost of living allowance, is the Member certain that the Member who took it way is a Member of the House? He is absent.

**Mr. Narine:** Some Members of the House, I said—those who supported that move to take away the cost of living allowance in 1987.

One remembers in 1987 that the hon. Member for San Fernando East in his contribution warned that the removal of the cost of living allowance from the
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economy would have caused many problems to the working masses of this country. We have seen that happen over the last five years or so, and I am still of the opinion that, looking at figures in 1987, coincidentally, the funds paid per year towards the cost of living allowance were the same amount needed to start the deep water harbour in Tobago. If we look at it, it is approximately the same amount, about half a million dollars.

So that you have a cost of living allowance which started in the war days as a temporary war allowance (TWA) which was given at 72 cents a day to buffer the cost of living. Some time after 1986, the TWA was still there, the temporary war allowance. The labour movement feared that this would have been removed, because the war was long gone. But it was a caring Government that turned that temporary war allowance into a cost of living allowance. More than that, instead of leaving it at 72 cents, they did something with the cost of living allowance in aligning it with the index at retail prices. As the index rose, the cost of living allowance rose. Thus, in 1984, you had a cost of living for daily pay at $12.84. So that the removal of this cost of living allowance was problematic for the public servants of this country.

In 1986, with oil prices at $9 US per barrel, or a little above, a six per cent salary increase was offered to the public servants. To consolidate that six per cent with the cost of living allowance would have meant that more than six per cent would have been gained had the trade union accepted. This was rejected. But history records that for the first time in five years, they are now getting a two per cent across the board, because you have a caring Government, and according to this manifesto, we do care.

For the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, we saw the state borrowing money from the workers. The removal of the cost of living allowance was borrowing money from workers—the poorer masses of this country. Taking away the 10 per cent was the same thing. As a matter of fact, the Water and Sewerage Authority branch of the trade union movement took the matter to the courts and were awarded a three per cent last year as interest on the moneys that are owed to them. At this point I would not go further, because the Water and Sewerage Authority has appealed that decision.

How well has labour been treated over the last five years? Loss of COLA, 10 per cent of salary—Act No. 5 of 1989, where workers lost 10 per cent at this level, instead of negotiating at the CPO and the Industrial Court. They lost 10 per cent here. Apart from that, merit increases were taken away from workers, and then you had 30,000 jobs lost over the last five years.
Prior to 1965, the system of industrial relations was based primarily on the voluntary concept. Parties were encouraged to settle their differences by methods and procedures previously agreed between themselves, with a minimum of third party intervention. The present Government's main role in industrial relations is confined to fostering the voluntary system and wherever necessary assisting through its conciliatory and advisory service in strengthening and supplementing arrangements evolved by the parties themselves.

Between 1959 and 1963, however, there was a marked deterioration in the effectiveness of the system. With increased industrial unrest manifested mainly in the form of strikes, with Government's industrialization thrust, it was considered necessary to introduce a system of legal regulation of the country's industrial relations. It was against this background that in 1965 the industrial relations system was given the legal framework by the enactment of the Industrial Stabilization Act, which introduced a new period in the history of labour relations, really the commencement of a new era.

7.45 p.m.

The main purpose of the Act, as given in its long title, was to provide—

(1) for the compulsory recognition by employers of trade unions and organizations representative of a majority of workers;

(2) for the establishment of an expeditious system for the settlement of trade disputes;

(3) for the regulation of prices of commodities; and

(4) for the constitution of a court to regulate matters relating to the foregoing and incidental thereto.

This historic piece of legislation curbed the rising incidence of strikes and other forms of industrial unrest. At that time, between 1960 and 1964, there were 230 strikes which involved 74,574 workers, a loss of 803,899 man-days. The oil sector accounted for almost one-third of the workers and man-days involved, and the sugar industry accounted for one-seventh of the total number of workers and one-sixth of the total number of man-days lost.

The Act placed upon the Minister the duty to determine claims for recognition referred to him, to conciliate trade disputes reported to him under the provisions of the Act, to submit unresolved disputes to the Industrial Court for settlement,
and to approve industrial agreements prior to their submission for recognition by
the Industrial Court. The conciliation staff at the Ministry of Labour was
strengthened to cope with the disputes and other matters which were to be
reported under the new legal compulsory system which was regulated by statutory
time limits.

The Industrial Court establishment under the Act made its mark early in the
industrial relations system. The court was welcomed in some circles, and
criticized in others. There is now no doubt, however, that it has become a highly
respected institution—from 1965, 147 industrial relations settled disputes, to
1970, 710, and that has been increased.

The Industrial Stabilization Act was reviewed by a tripartite committee, and
in July 1972 a new Act was introduced, the Industrial Relations Act. The
Industrial Relations Act repealed and replaced the Industrial Stabilization Act,
and was introduced to make better provisions for the improvement and promotion
of industrial relations. It contains measures which permit strikes and lockouts
which were virtually being curtailed by the Industrial Stabilization Act. Almost
1,000 trade disputes were reported between 1972 and 1985. In 1981, there were
667, and in 1985, there were 878.

The Industrial Relations Act also provides for the establishment of the
Registration, Recognition and Certification Board which has been given powers
for final determination of recognition issues. This tripartite board is also now a
fully accepted institution in the country's labour relations system.

The labour force in Trinidad and Tobago increased from 39,000 in 1973 to
463,200 in 1985. Unemployment in 1982 was well under 10 per cent, and one
wonders.

By 1982, a standing tripartite mechanism was set up for the purpose of
monitoring and facilitating continuous dialogue among the social partners of
industry and industrial relations matters, and to make recommendations from time
to time on national industrial relations policies.

The main matters dealt with, so far, and follow-up action taken on them are as
follows:–

(1) Amendment to the Shop (Hours of Opening and Employment) Act and
the Liquor Licence Act of May, 1984, to provide for the opening of
shops any day of the week and any hour of the day.
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SITTING OF THE HOUSE

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I now call upon the Leader of Government Business to move a procedural motion.

The Minister of Local Government and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order No. 10 (11), I beg to move that the House continue to sit until 10.00 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)

Mr. Narine: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and Members of this honourable House.

I proceed:

(2) Raising the ceiling of tax exemptions for severance payment and retirement benefits by way of amendment to the Income Tax Act, effective January 1, 1983. The ceiling was raised from $40,000, when one retires, to $80,000.

Employment exchanges were introduced in Port-of-Spain and San Fernando. This was done because of the system of employment at that time. It was getting out of hand, so these employment exchanges were introduced by the Government of the day. O’ Level graduates were allowed to come in with one O’ Level subject, and over 5,719 youths were employed under that programme. They were also allowed to go back to school on a part-time basis and gain their five O’ Levels. Those who did that remained in the public service.

The Government at that time, that was 1968, also negotiated with the Canadian on their Seasonal Labour Programme. Locals are still being recruited as a result of these arrangements between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the government of Canada.

The Unemployment Levy Programme started in 1970. It was the PNM in the 1970s that introduced the Occupational Training Programme.

All this was done because you had a government that cared and made it possible for the people of the country to move forward with stability. The Government moved forward for 30 years with stability, and people in the outside world looked forward to coming to Trinidad and Tobago because they knew that the industrial relations climate was a good one.

**Hon. Member:** You were not here in 1970.

**Mr. Narine:** The staff of the National Insurance Board increased from 228 in 1972, to 808 in 1986.

The Cipriani Labour College was established by the PNM in 1966, to provide training in labour education and co-operative studies. Up to 1986, a total of 5,552 students had been trained in that college.

Apart from that, the climate of the industrial relations field was also carried forward into the housing programme, where the People's National Movement Government of the day assisted the trade union movement in providing homes for their employees. At Lopinot Road, Arouca, which I have the honour to represent—Arouca North constituency—there are 375 building lots which were ready in 1986. Construction on these lots has not started as yet because it was only last year that the Government gave the Labour Congress the approval to construct homes on that site. Pleasantville, 428 lots; Real Spring, Valsayn, 276 lots. So it is because it was a government that cared that you had the industrial climate in the country as it was and you could have encouraged foreign investment and other activities.

7.55 p.m.

In 1956 we had a two-page agreement for daily-paid workers, and one would remember that workers who were working task were not entitled to any benefits, like vacation leave and so on. And you had a system under which workers were not paid severance benefits. Over the years, because the trade union movement was allowed to blossom, you had benefits like regular workers. "Regular workers" refers to persons who are employed on a regular basis, and this was introduced to the agreement in order to facilitate the working masses of this country. Effective years of service to encourage severance benefits. You had shift workers getting special privileges for overtime and shift premiums and so on. You had work centres and work areas so that if a worker had to travel a distance he was reimbursed with part of his travelling expenses. A caring Government, Madam Speaker, a very caring Government. You had full pay. You had seniority for service. Promotion was done by way of seniority. If those things are not
observed today, it is because people are there who do not know what they are about.

I will ask the Minister of Local Government and the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central to look into that seriously as far as local government is concerned. Because there are people who are interfering with the system of employment and bring in family and friends totally disregarding the memorandum of agreement. Seniority lists are drawn up for classification and this is widespread throughout the ministries. So that you had conditions of service, hours of work. Livestock workers who were working shift were treated in a special way. In certain aspects of their employment—if they were working in drains and if they had to use certain insecticides and pesticides they normally worked fewer hours; they are allowed to visit the doctors on certain occasions. All these aspects were brought in because of a caring government and the only government that is caring is the present Government, the party of which was in exile for only five years. I promise that we are not going to go out of office very soon. You have cost of living allowances, overtime payments for extra work done.

Public holidays were recognized as days that workers should stay at home. When I started to work in 1963, we had to work on Saturdays. It was the People's National Movement Government that absorbed the four hours on a Saturday into the five days making it a five-day work week of 40 hours. Nobody lost one cent! We had done that. The union did not make any representation for the $200.00 per year but we gave it to them also. Sick leave was introduced, extension of sick leave, maternity leave.

Madam Speaker, I had the opportunity to represent my trade union at a congress in 1984 and I was surprised to know that Spain was only now trying to introduce legislation for maternity leave. The women who worked in that country, when they got pregnant they lost their jobs. They were not given equal pay. All that has been abolished by People's National Movement Governments over the years. A male checker in government works for the same salary as a female checker. That does not happen all over the world, but in Trinidad and Tobago, PNM Governments introduced all that. Some of you may want to come over on this side by the time I am finished.

Casual leave was taken because workers had things to do but which did not qualify them for sick leave. You were not sick but you had an urgent matter to attend to. Your son or daughter got ill, or your husband or wife got ill and you had to take the patient to the doctor. Casual leave was introduced for that. So that you would not be taking illegal leave.
Bereavement leave was recently introduced; a death in the family, next of kin: wife, husband, child, mother, father, sister, brother. You have three days off granted by a caring government, again. The leave of workers other than permanent workers—negotiated by a PNM Government as well. A caring government, listening to and consulting with the labour movement.

You had union representation. One had to allow a worker who is representing workers in a department to have time to do so. And up to today you have the situation where the union representatives will be paid on their jobs to go to the Chief Personnel Officer, the labour court or to the employers to represent their workers. The shop steward on the job gets that time.

You had leave for union business. One can attend a seminar at Cipriani Labour College for about a month or two months. Someone can, without any qualifications, get time off to do a diploma course at the Cipriani Labour College for two years. You do not even have to attend a secondary school—once you have the ability and you are recommended by the trade union movement. You are paid on the job for two years to be educated. People in Trinidad and Tobago do not know the benefits that have been derived from 30 years of government under the People's National Movement. We are here for five years so that there will be enough time to say the rest. This is only in respect of the labour movement.

Annual allowances—subsistence allowances, meal allowances, travelling allowance, bicycle allowance, tool allowance, instructor's allowance. If you were to teach a group of persons you are paid to do that. So that is why we had a stable country, where the country could have moved forward. This is why we were able to survive over the last five years we were in office because we had things in place up to 1986, and workers did not feel the crunch, because of this agreement. We were able to work with this agreement but over the last five years we had no agreement whatsoever. One would understand why we do not have an agreement for eight years. We rejected the 6 per cent.

8.05 p.m.

The payment of wages, severance benefits, as I said before, up to $80,000, is tax free. So if a worker is going home and he gets less than $80,000, he does not have to pay one single cent. He goes home with his entire purse—a caring Government.

We had miscellaneous provisions for shelter, housing loans, commencing rates, protected rates and re-employment. Work in a higher or lower occupation—if you were promoted for one day, you get paid for that.
Wage difference for supervision: If you are supervising persons, you have a wage difference to get. Confidential reports, increments, rain time. You know, when I went to work in 1963, if the rain caught me, I had to go back home. I was living at Arima and working in Port-of-Spain, and I was not paid for the day. Over the years, this has changed; there was an allowance for rain time. After a while you had a fifteen-minute grace period that you can reach a bit late because of circumstances on the road with transport and so on.

Over the last five years things have deteriorated and we do not have that type of traffic jam any longer. A check-off system for union dues, medical checks, service qualifications, sanitary provisions for dumping grounds, where you had a special place to put your food and all that. You had to provide that. You had to provide toilet facilities. You had a principle for task work. A promotion policy was introduced into the whole system that gave you that incentive to go forward. You also had a grievance procedure from step one to step seven.

I shall pause here to say how that came in. It was because of the PNM Government which cared. Every year, the Labour Congress gave persons free flights to attend the ILO conference in Geneva. The industrial relations climate throughout the world was brought to this small Third World country by a caring Government.

You had disciplinary procedures, and so on, and you go right down to suspension, dismissals, and everything. The agreement does not go one-sided. If a worker is delinquent, you have a system here to deal with him. There is the notice, so that a worker is not punished on the first occasion he makes a mistake. He is given a written notice a couple times, then you deal with him. You do not fire him. We brought that into the agreement. You do not just fire off the bat like that.

Many people do not know how the industrial relations climate in Trinidad was brought about. When the labour movement started in 1937, there were no benefits. They marched from South into Port-of-Spain and they struggled over the years. It is only after 1956, that the late great Dr. Eric Eustace Williams and the People's National Movement brought sanity to industrial relations in this country.

You have wages, job evaluation and shift work. You also have reclassification of jobs. Every three years you sit down to negotiate, you reclassify people, and you have a situation where this country has moved forward because of that.

Today, I am appealing to the trade union movement in Trinidad and Tobago, having been an active member for the last 28 years and being in the National
Union of Government and Federated Workers, which sat year after year and negotiated in good faith. One of the bad things about the trade union movement is that when they get outside on the streets, everybody notices them. But I try to introduce a system by which, when things are good, you publish that too. You do not only demonstrate when things are bad. You demonstrate when they are good as well, so that we will go forward in this country. Some labour leaders feel that the politics of the trade union movement is one which you have also to deal with. So that labour leaders must act like politicians and remain in the good graces of the membership. They, too, are elected.

If this country is to go forward, the stability of the industrial relations climate is very important. That is the only way we can attract foreign investment into the country. Investors must be satisfied that your country is stable, and that the labour situation is such that they are not going to be pouring millions into the country and then it all goes down the drain where you have strikes and lockouts and all these things going on.

So I am appealing once more to the labour leaders of the country to think about country first, and see to it that we attract the foreign investors into Trinidad and Tobago by making meaningful their representation. I am not saying that there are not genuine cases where they have to get on the streets; I am in total agreement with that. It is bread-and-butter issues, yes. But when you have trivial matters—and the People's National Movement promised in its manifesto a review of the Industrial Relations Act, with a view to ensuring the expeditious resolution of trade disputes.

This is one of the things that are problematic, in that trade disputes remain a long time to be resolved. We are trying to adjust to that system by which Trinidad and Tobago will go forward. So my appeal today is that we keep this country stable so that we attract the foreign investor; we do not allow petty differences to stop us working every day of the week; we go productively forward, and this country will go from strength to strength.

**Mr. Raymond Palackdharrysingh (Caroni Central):** Madam Speaker, let me, like other Members of this House, extend my congratulations to you on your being elevated to the high office of Speaker. At the same time I welcome all new Members to this House. Some will discover later on that this is also part of the real world. Let me mention also the hon. Members of the United National Congress who made their first contributions in the House. One would recall, indeed would never forget, the contribution of the Member for Naparima. And he is going to deepen and intensify the struggle for justice and equity in that
constituency. One also will always remember the contribution of the hon. Member for Chaguanas. It was moving and most refreshing.

I offer congratulations also to the Member for Tabaquite on his calm, sober and lucid analysis in this his first contribution, particularly on the health system. And permit me to say how pleased we are with the performance of the Members for Fyzabad, Princes Town and, indeed, Siparia.

8.15 p.m.

Today is both a historical and historic day for me in this Parliament. It is historical in a sense because I am the first person to have represented the newly created constituency of Caroni Central. It is historic in the sense that it has gone to the United National Congress. I can well imagine how disappointed the Prime Minister felt when he heard the results of Caroni Central and, indeed, of all the constituencies in Caroni, because he said to me prior to the elections, that if there was one constituency in Caroni he was sure to win, it was going to be Caroni Central. I am sorry to have disappointed him; and I see that the hon. Member for Diego Martin West is worried that I am coming up farther north, but I assure him that the next time I make a quantitative jump, it will be also qualitative, straight into the East-West Corridor.

At the outset, let me state very clearly, some of the concerns that we all have as representatives in this body, but particularly with respect to my own constituency, Caroni Central. I think that both the Members for Princes Town and Siparia have done a wonderful job in bringing to the attention of the Government, the need for the provision of what is called basic amenities in constituencies. One could not imagine that the Government that is ranting and raving already, would have chosen to treat with scant courtesy, the housing problem in this country.

Today, when we look at this society, we see people homeless all around, everywhere, and in Caroni Central, where the PNM has substantial support—as a matter of fact, it placed its election headquarters in Enterprise; a place better known as the “Squatters” or “Datsunville”.

There are about 15,000 squatters in that area alone, and they do not have any hope of ordering their lives. For all the developmental programmes that we have heard the Government speak about in the Parliament over the last few days, it could not have been an oversight that a place like Enterprise was not singled out for at least some measure of priority treatment. It is the largest squatting community in the whole of Trinidad and Tobago. The longer the PNM
Government dilly-dallies in not addressing that situation, I assure them that their support base is going to be ruined considerably. They know it.

Also, it was quite revealing to me that some of the areas of Caroni Central, represented by PNM Governments for 30 years and then by the NAR for the last five years, did not have some of the other basics: electricity, telephones and markets. The Prime Minister was to visit the Chaguanas market, I think, three days ago, but he never turned up. So, what I am saying is that it is not a complex matter to really deal with basics, because it is on that basis that community life goes on. It is on the basis of having organized and comfortable communities that we are able to move the nation forward.

I want to briefly state these matters, especially so that government Ministers could take note, I will be making representation in another capacity very shortly, but I want to alert them to some of the problems that the people experience in these parts. I want to tell them that there is a serious flooding problem in the Caparo/Longdenville area. I recall that when I represented Naparima, there was also a serious flooding problem and no matter what studies were being done, when the hon. Member for St. Augustine was the Minister of Works, in a very short time he relieved the flooding problem, by taking appropriate action.

8.25 p.m.

If one looks at the geography of Caroni Central and at its demography one is going to say that we have in Caroni Central a constituency in which there is a middle class group. I have already mentioned the squatter area. There is a farming community in Carsen Field, then there is a somewhat rural community in the Preysal/Las Presa/Arena area. So there is a spectrum, and life is very uncomfortable because simple basic amenities are not there. I was appalled by the fact that the provision of water in that constituency was almost non-existent. Places like Siparia in Preysal, the Chickland area, the Sewdass Road area, the La Cuesa area, Carsen Field, though near to two significant reservoir in this country, the Arena reservoir and the Navet dam, these people struggle mercilessly for want of water. That is why I was extremely pleased to hear the Member for Siparia doing such an excellent analysis of the water system. It is because the population in Central has grown considerably and there was not a corresponding developmental programme to meet the basic needs of people.

You would be surprised to know the level of developmental funds allocated for enhancing the water facilities in that constituency. I want to give them notice because as you grow in the Parliament and as you grow in the country you
begin to know more and more what your rights are. I give the Government notice. It is not a threat, Madam Speaker, but I am simply letting them know that the people of Caroni Central are willing to take militant action if there is not a reasonable response by the Government. I will lead in that situation.

So we say, no matter what they say about new faces here, there is that struggle, that status quo that underlies all that is being done, and you will see when it comes to controlling the resources of this country where the real strength is. And we may not even complete that struggle on this side because a change of faces does not change a struggle. There must be the political will to do it.

Madam Speaker, when you listened to the budget you heard that there were three areas which it cared about, at least for the moment—sustainable growth of the economy, a significant and durable reduction of unemployment and the restoration of an adequate level of foreign exchange reserves.

We have only to look back to the past few years to realize that if provision is not made to bring about human development there is going to be convulsion. If you look at the pattern in this country you will see that the real pressure in this country comes right after the carnival season. It is after the carnival season people wake up to realize how serious existence becomes. But my party, led by the very inspirational Member for Couva North, has asked me to look at the education system of this country.

Madam Speaker, I want to quote from some documents, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and I want to use a few articles because I want to begin to put this whole question in a perspective that has gained some universal acceptance and, at the same time, there is the need of that recognition of the tenets of education to filter down, particularly in a multi-cultural society like Trinidad and Tobago. But before I do so I would simply want to say that when you look at the budget provision you would see that there developmental allocation is rather minuscule, you would see that over the years less and less money is being spent per capita on every child in this country. And you do not have to go to figures; you just have to look at what is happening around you. Already for the year in areas like Caroni Central and Chaguanas and possibly Couva North, schools are being shut down because the sanitary conditions and the dilapidated state of the physical structures are appalling. Madam Speaker, already you begin to see a denial of the rights of children when they cannot go to school because adequate provisions have not been made.
The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26 (1):

"1. Everyone has the right to education. Education should be free at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

2. Education shall be directed to the development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children."

Again, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, came into force on January 3, 1976 and states:

"The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic and religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace."

I make these points so that they would tie in later on as they show how defective our education system is.

On page 8 of the Express of January 10, 1982 there is an article title "New Approach to Education Needed", and the concern of the writer was that education was not meeting the needs of our society or helping our people to progress. It was also noted that there was not a proper concern for all that was happening in this society with respect to education.

Permit me to take a look at page 31 of the PNM manifesto.

"Education

(a) General Strategy
The PNM is very proud of its achievement in the field of education and it is convinced that its efforts in this area have contributed substantially to transforming Trinidad and Tobago from a backward colonial state to a modern thriving democracy.

For these reasons the PNM will:

—Stand committed to providing facilities that will guarantee free secondary education to all children of secondary school age."

What is free secondary education? Is it to remove the VAT from school books—a measure that we on this side have clamoured for as long as we were here—on the one hand, and on the other, raise the price of transportation, and take children from Central and send them to North; take children from South and send them to Central to school? And you call that free education? Something has to be wrong with that concept of free education. They have to undertake an indepth analysis and review of the Common Entrance Examination system.

This seems to be a recurring decimal because so many persons have spoken about it. There have been many discussions about it and yet there is the secrecy that is almost frightening with respect to how children are selected to be placed in various schools. That is far from satisfactory. I am waiting with bated breath to see what the review means because there are so many contradictions in the education system that it is almost impossible to correct from that point of view. I suggest that one of the first things they ought to do is to make freely available the information in respect of performance of students and marks attained so that people would have the opportunity to make an assessment. That has been by and large hidden from those who would like to make their own assessment.

We stand committed to the principle that no one should be denied access to university or other forms of tertiary education solely on the basis of inability to pay. What is being put in train? Am I hearing that the cess will be removed very shortly from university education? Let us know, because many of our sons and daughters are not moving to tertiary education and that cess is prohibitive. It is here in your manifesto. Are they lacking the political will already? I hear a groaning.

8.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker, I want to just focus on what the PNM says in their manifesto at page 31:
"A PNM Government will continue to build on the foundations in education we previously established. While the last Education Plan worked well, a comprehensive new plant will be developed after consultation with interested parties, including parents, teachers, and teachers' organisations, students, trade unions and business organisations. We will specially focus on:

— Re-examining school curricula to ensure that training satisfies the needs of a dynamic and evolving society
— Taking corrective measures to deal with the problems of reading and numeracy
— Ensuring the system at all levels is thoroughly humanised by re-defining the vital role of the arts, sport and co-curricular activities
— Fostering an increased focus on business education to cultivate a growing nucleus of entrepreneurs
— Expanding technical education with increased emphasis on practical training."

It is only fair at this point to wait a little to see what happens. They must be given a little breathing space. But it ought not to be very difficult for them, because they know the system, they claim that they have put it down. They claim that it is working well. That is what they claim. As I said before, I want to give them the benefit of the doubt, give them a little time. But I want to draw to your attention the fact that there is a new consciousness with some measure of militancy pervading the educational panorama.

In colonial times, schools were an important means of conversion and the missionaries were aided by the metropolitan status quo, the ruling class. We cannot escape the fact that Roman Catholic and Anglican missionaries christianized the Africans during slavery and onwards; the Presbyterians christianized the Indians. Many have spoken on the direct link between Christian schools and their conversion thrust, so it is not difficult to understand why some of those schools continue to operate in a hostile environment. The question: Can Trinidad and Tobago today and in the future, continue to be so prejudiced, given our multi-ethnic, multireligious and multiracial society, and our strong democratic principles?

Between 1952 and 1956, the Sanatan Dharma Maha Saba built 41 primary schools and this was made possible only by Act 41 of 1952, which gave the Hindus the right to construct their own schools. With the PNM administration in
1956, there was a virtual freeze on further expansion of Hindu schools. In 1985 the Maha Saba submitted proposals for 28 Hindu pre-schools, but instead, subsequently the NAR Government gave the Roman Catholic institution, Servol, the official mandate to set up pre-schools for the nation, and so Hindus and the nation are now forced to operate under a Roman Catholic institution.

Insensitivity and hegemony will be extended into the most formative years of the child. That means the formation of their appropriate cultural, religious education would be influenced. May I ask that caring Government, what is the budget allocation for pre-school education and on what basis is it given? Of course, as I look, there is a token sum, and if any has been given, it has really been pumped into the programme of Servol.

I am making this point because, you see, from now on, we have to treat this society as a multicultural society and people's values and views and spiritual beliefs must be recognized and in such a circumstance, there must be the provision at the earliest stage, to foster that educational development. We can no longer close our eyes and minds to this issue, because for too long administration after administration, for all its caring, followed closely on the patterns of the status quo that received more or less its ethos and character from our predecessors and colonial masters, and that has to change. It is only the political will to do it. But are they open enough, are they sensitive enough to start to think of what is necessary?

There is a book written for pre-schoolers, and here I am merely quoting one Indrani Rampersad of the *Trinidad Guardian* of Tuesday, April 30, 1991 on page 9, whose view is that the text begins with a sexist slant in a day and age when all progressive educators are being very careful about sexist and racist slants in books. The text begins with "a man is beautiful" and there is an overwhelming bias in the lessons to end with "Amen or address Jesus or God as Father".

Probably the same thing applies to the Parliament. I am not too sure that the prayers we hear sometimes are theologically sound from a multicultural point of view. God a father is not accepted by Moslems, and it has to be balanced by God a mother in the Hindu tradition. This situation is untenable and has to be addressed. Multiculturalism must now be an inherent part of the education system and the Government must now begin its work by revamping an archaic system and recognizing the law and spirit of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child.
Madam Speaker: Maybe I can bring to the attention of the hon. Member, that is why I have changed the prayer of this House. There is no longer Father; there is just “Almighty God” whom we all recognize. I think the hon. Members will recognize that.

Mr. Palackdharrysingh: I give way to your interpretation, Madam Speaker; I shall not prolong that discussion.

I refer to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child, 1959. The declaration states that:

Rights of children without distinction or discrimination on account of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or status, whether himself or of his family, that the child shall enjoy special protection and shall be given opportunities and facilities by law and by other means to enable him to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy, normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity; and that the child shall be given an education which would promote his general culture and enable him on a basis of equal opportunity to develop his abilities, his individual judgment and his sense of social responsibility and to become a useful member of the society; that the child shall be protected from practices which may foster racial, religious and any form of discrimination. He shall be brought up in the spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among people, peace and universal brotherhood and in full consciousness that his energy and talent should be devoted to the service of his fellow men."

Today, we cry out as we travel on the highways and the byways and see children who should be in school, on the hustle, selling some item to make a living. Nobody cares about children going to school any more. In the good old days there were school police who used to check to see if we went to school. But now, none of that any more, because we do not care about guiding the children, we do not care about their rights with respect to their development.

Nursery education in the 1986 Development Programme was allocated merely $37,213. In the Servol Pre-school Education Training Programme recurrent expenditure 1990, actual, $621,680; in the 1991 Revised Estimates $1,706,228; and in the 1992 Estimates, $1,068,078 and so we see what is happening.

Madam Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.
Mr. Palackdharrysingh: Thank you Madam Speaker. I feel a sense of frustration, because 30 minutes seem to be such a short time to get through what I want to say today.

So what I want to finally say about that programme is that teaching in a multicultural environment makes certain demands on teachers, parents, the curriculum, textbooks and Government. The ball is now in the Government's court to do something about it.

Special education: The Education Plan of 1985 to 1990 of Trinidad and Tobago estimates that 16.1 per cent of the nation's children and youth in the age group 3 to 16 years are afflicted by some form of disability. In order to adequately cater to the educational needs of this group, some 2,700 teachers distributed among our pre-primary, primary and secondary schools, 598 special education teachers and 85 assistants will be required. That is according to the plan. However, the estimated cost of having these teachers and assistants is TT $82 million TT over five years and overseas training per teacher for one year is more or less estimated to be TT $63,000.

The Ministry responded to this plan stating:

"It is clear that Trinidad and Tobago, while recognizing its responsibility to provide adequate opportunities for handicapped children, must proceed with caution and seek alternatives which are educationally and socially acceptable, but which are not as demanding on the public purse".

Page 12 of the Express, Monday, April 1, 1991:

"Education Changes Urged for Special Children":

"Dr. Rampaul said between 73,440 and 119,340 children between five and 11 plus had not been receiving an appropriate and relevant education. He pointed to the very high number of children with handicapping conditions who were not currently in educational institutions."

According to Dr. Rampaul, the figure in 1989 was 1,220. The Ministry of Education implemented all phases of that programme, and he said 1,098 teachers received training in that project over three years, and that at least 3,000 other teachers have been influenced by this project.
It is here that I take issue with Dr. Rampaul. He really does not know what is happening in the school system. Yes, some of our teachers were exposed, they were trained, but, you know what has happened basically? They were sent back to those primary schools and other schools and sent to work with principals who did not have an appreciation of the new-found talents, the newly acquired talents of those teachers, and those principals frustrated those teachers by sending them back to the regular classroom situation, denying them the opportunity to really creatively use their talents to help the handicapped.

It brings one to the point where one really has to ask for an indepth look into what obtains in our primary, secondary and other educational institutions, because a system where people are merely promoted on the basis of seniority is becoming untenable in our society today. There must be other considerations with respect to incentives for teachers being trained, and an opportunity for them to impart their training to their charges. That is not what has been happening today, and I dare say that very many would know—not really meaning to attack anyone—but very many of our school principals who have been promoted today have been promoted mainly on the basis of spending 20 or 25 years without a single refresher course in education.

That has to be addressed, and I am suggesting to the Government that they call in the teachers' organizations like TTUTA, and have a full and meaningful discussion with them. And they are going to also find out that other professional bodies with respect to education will not be averse to a situation where incentives would accrue to those who want to make a meaningful contribution to the education system. That has to be done fast.

Today, if you do not keep a close eye on your own children at school, and what they do at school, you will find that what you expected is not forthcoming. Again, we have a situation that is frightening. For all the grand claims made by that PNM Government, illiteracy. The *Trinidad Guardian* of Thursday, June 23, 1988, "Junior Sec. Shocker: Test shows 73 per cent have reading ability below Standard III". So what is it? Is it a mass production line where you send the kids with no qualitative follow-up and come here and claim that you have education in this country? Whom are we fooling?

"Of 4,043 students from eight junior secondary schools across the country tested in a reading ability exercise conducted by the Education Ministry, 2,946 or 73 per cent were found to be below their institutional level of Standard III. The report states that all the students are in need of remedial instruction."
Is that not frightening to you? Can you really turn away from the challenge that is facing you?

A society is only as great as the extent to which there is responsive action to creating, what you call, the emotional and spiritual conditions that are right for the development of human beings. With all the increase in GDP and all the balancing of budgets and whatnot, if you do not invest money in education and create a quality human being, then we would have wasted our efforts, because the education institutions that we have are the microcosm of the macrocosm and if it breaks down there, then we are going to find that the other institutions like the courts and the jails and elsewhere would have a torrid time in trying to really handle the matter of justice and its administration.

You see, the people who built those schools may have been well-intentioned, but certain other things were not put in place. Can you imagine that in some schools where religious instruction is not an option, there is hardly a humanizing influence among students? For all that we do and study, there must be a value circumference within which we must operate. When you have people who are trained at junior secondary schools and so on that do not have a programme in civics, that do not have a programme of religious education, that do not have a programme of human values, what do you expect?

We are bombarded every day by the telecommunications system that transmits a value system that is not really to the development of our own growth in our own cultural milieu. That is one of the problems we have here. Unless this Government starts humanizing our schools in a way that gives dignity and self-worth to students with a course of action for counselling parents also, we are only wasting time and we go on like a recurring decimal from year to year with the problems not being solved.

I submit that it is not only necessary to build buildings; it is necessary to put on the curriculum apart from the secular subjects—but the multicultural aspects must be intertwined and inform how man is going to respond to his environment and his neighbourhood. Unless that is done, I am afraid that we shall have scores and scores of delinquents being turned out by our schools. At times the indiscipline problem is so great that even teachers do not know how to cope with it.

On page 22 of the *Express* of Thursday, February 22, 1990, "85 to 90 per cent Failure Rate in Textbook Courses". Again, something is wrong. So, I am asking this Government early in its new term to pull together educators, people who are
versed in counselling, moral educators, and even some of our better known theologians and start linking their own belief system in a multicultural fashion that would inform even their secular approach to life. If we do not do it at this level, I am afraid that there will be a spiralling of deviants and waste of time and resources on some of our kids.

Again, if you look at what has happened, the Trinidad Guardian of Thursday, September 12, 1991, and you see the junior secondary school blamed for poor CXC results:

"Principals of the senior comprehensive schools cited the poor quality of students coming from the junior secondary level as one reason for disappointing results in the CXC examinations. One principal saw a need to liaise with the junior secondary schools saying children arrive at senior secondary schools unable to cope with the CXC syllabus".

9.15 p.m.

Of course, we cannot deny that we have had some good academic success in the senior comprehensive schools. But, by and large, the failure rate is too high and, since that is too high, there must be some method of having a link with the junior and secondary school. Very often, apart from the number of teachers missing from the classroom, because they are not appointed—a recent protest you might have seen, Madam Speaker, came from the Mayaro Composite School; teachers were not there—you would see that the course offered sometimes at the junior secondary school where children spend three years has completely no relationship to the course that they are going to follow in the senior secondary schools. And when they reach there they have actually got to complete a CXC programme in two years and compete with other students who have gone through other schools that took the programme, from day one, with their students. Something has to be wrong with a system like that.

I am saying that whole system has to be looked at, otherwise the Government will be tempted, as they have been doing, to shrink resources to the school system and as they are doing in some cases with the community colleges, moving it from within the ambit of Education and maybe placing it within the ambit of planning.

Madam Speaker, I recognize that there is so much to say today. I have not even looked at what is happening at the university, except to say that we on this side have never supported the idea of a cess with the students at UWI; we will
never support it because what it has done is to turn away a number of our brilliant students who cannot afford to pay that kind of fee.

I am suggesting to that caring Government that one of their first acts should be to remove the cess from university students and ease up their lives. If you look at the comments by Professor Richards and Mc Intyre, they are telling you, "look, what is happening is that we are not producing in sufficient numbers, of university graduates in terms of running our institutions." They say that in spite of the 4,000 that might have been enrolled, it is only about three per cent of the age group cohort that is really registered, when the other developing countries around the world are, more or less, registering about 20 per cent of their age group cohort. Education cannot be a luxury.

I agree, it was a plan by the last Government to really put education in the hands of an elite group, a select group, and create poor working conditions among the rest of the population so that some of their economic plans, like cheap labour and what not, to assist some of the multinational corporations and the EPZs. But that would not help us.

We are better off any day, having persons who are literate, educated, and skilful even though we may not be able to provide jobs immediately for them. It is easier to deal with these people in the community, rather than those who might be willing to better themselves through an education but are denied that opportunity.

There is a report from the University and a response by the students. Just for the record, I want to read what one professor has said. I quote from page 12 of the Trinidad Guardian of Friday, May 17, 1991:

"The University of the West Indies produces 2,600 graduates of which 1,600 migrate annually. We are facing a situation where we supply 1,000 graduates to meet an estimated demand of 6,000. We are therefore faced with an enormous problem and a problem further compounded by a very grave scarcity of resources which means that we have to try to do the best job we can and use the resources available to us in the most cost-effective manner possible."

He said that in no English speaking Caribbean country, other than Barbados, is more than five per cent of the population of tertiary age enrolled in a tertiary institution.
He called for every possible step to increase access to university level education so that we give the best possible shot to our young people as they confront the very formidable challenges of the 1990s and beyond.

He said that the regional private and public sector could absorb about 6,000 graduates annually but the difficulty the region was facing was the high level of migration of graduates to larger markets.

The students are well-aware of the migration problem and they have countered this argument by indicating that they are willing to sign whatever agreements there are that will compensate for their period of study.

I believe that this is allowed to remain as it is because we cannot find jobs for our people and, that it is then they move to foreign lands. Tell me who would like to leave such a beautiful country like this with a lovely climate to go into conditions that are alien and cold?

In the few remaining minutes I merely want to indicate what the UNC has proposed in its manifesto. This is important, and we are taking this extremely seriously. It is not as though you are confronted by a situation and the response is, "I am going to set up a Chair of ethnic studies at the university." I can imagine that. Where is the Prime Minister?

Hon. Member: He has gone home.

Mr. Palackdharrysingh: I quote from the UNC manifesto:

“Equality in education does not connote sameness and as far as possible, each child should be allowed to move at his or her own pace, pursue his or her own interests, and develop his or her personality to the fullest within the education system.

Multicultural education is critical in our plural society whereby all our peoples can learn to appreciate each other, thus breaking down the barriers of ignorance that currently exist about each other's way of life.

The multicultural approach will inform and be the underlying philosophy of the national education thrust of the UNC.

The UNC proposes the following:-

(1) The modification of the school curriculum to cater to and reflect the true lifestyle of the people;
(2) The introduction of a system of remuneration which will encourage teachers to upgrade their skills and qualifications;

(3) The introduction of a programme of Special Education;

(4) The standardization of textbooks for primary and secondary schools;

(9) The introduction of a school bus system."

Probably I ought to say a few words on that—

"(11) The encouraging of corporate business to provide nursery facilities for the children of employees;

(12) Extending support to private nursery schools and standardization of the curriculum of all nursery schools but which would remain sufficiently flexible to meet the special needs of communities;

(13) The provision of library facilities for larger towns with a mobile library service to cater for rural and outlying districts."

Much more could be said about technical and university education.

9.25 p.m.

I merely want to say that there are so many people in this country, who might have some time at home to do some studies and they cannot pursue them through our own university because we do not have courses designed where people can study by correspondence or by the media. With regard to study, those of us who have the time, have to take a course probably from London if we are interested in law, but right here in the Caribbean where our conditions and systems are different, we have to educate ourselves in institutions that are somewhat different from our own cultural milieu. It is a challenge, therefore, for the Government to now go back and do their homework. It is a challenge for them not to skimp on contributions to the educational system that will make a meaningful contribution to the quality of life of our people. They must go back and do something about the system and, of course, start putting a perspective on multiculturalism that will lay the basic philosophical approach in a society like ours, as we build upon our skills, technology and our demands for creating the manpower for our markets and so forth.

The education system of any society is more or less the cradle, the nucleus of that society. If it is treated well, we are going to create a society that we can be proud of. If we abuse it and neglect it and merely pay lip-service to it, then we
shall have failed posterity. Yes, some of us have to recognize that what we have today has been the fight of people gone by, but we must not rest on this laurel. There is much to be done. There is much scope for renewal in the education system and that renewal must start now at every level—not creating conflicts in the society but harmonizing the diverse and rich culture that we have to make it into a harmonious blend of a society that can stand proud anywhere in the world, in terms of what we produce.

Today, I am proud to present this view of the alternative government and it is a view that we shall pursue with vigour without faltering. We shall fight it at every corner because, once you touch the education system and begin to introduce change, you are really changing the status quo and many people in the status quo will not want it to change.

You have read about the controversy over the Concordat, you have read about the frustrations of the Common Entrance examination, you have seen the plight of those of our students at secondary level and the hopelessness of our students at the University. It is for us at this level with the political will, to begin to put these things in the framework that should start creating that new society—a society which all of us can be proud of, accepting our differences, appreciating others’ points of view and at the same time with an underlying harmony as the nation of Trinidad and Tobago, without any distinction or discrimination. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Motion made and question proposed, That the House do now adjourn to Friday, January 24, 1992 at 10.00 a.m. [Hon. K. Valley]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 9.30 p.m.