HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 18, 1996

The House met at 10:30 a.m.

PRAYERS

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House proceed with the continuation of the second reading of the Appropriation Bill, and thereafter we proceed with Motion No. 1 on the Order Paper.

Agreed to.

APPROPRIATION BILL

BUDGET

[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [December 12, 1996].

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed

Dr. Keith Rowley (Diego Martin West): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by apologizing to the staff. I have a problem with my voice. I hope it will be strong enough to be recorded by the recording staff.

I rise to make my intervention on this matter before the House and I would begin by making some observations; concerns which I have about the direction we are going with respect to public administration in Trinidad and Tobago.

I refer specifically to the brevity of the Minister of Finance’s report to the nation on his stewardship. While there are those in the community who believe that a budget presentation ought to be a thumbnail sketch—and the shorter the presentation, the more impressive the Minister—I want to record that I do not share that view. If there are persons who are too busy to listen to a Minister of Finance report to the country on how he managed or intends to manage $10, 000 billion, then those persons are free to go ahead and be too busy, but I am sure that they are in the minority, Mr. Speaker.
It is my view that the vast majority of persons in this country, for once every year get an insight into Government’s activity, into Government’s plans and Government’s programmes. They have the presentation of the Minister of Finance. It is their only discourse as to how the Government works and how public moneys are spent and on what. I think it is a disservice to a vast majority of people for a Minister of Finance to come to the Parliament and like a shot-gun wedding, rush through and seek consummation in five seconds and seek to tell us that he is going to change his style because he is bored with long budget speeches.

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you that I believe that while there are those who criticized the presentations of Dr. Williams in the past, and Ministers of Finance who went after him, it is my view that many persons were educated in this Parliament by those Ministers of Finance. [Desk thumping] The Government would do well and do a service to this country if we returned to having the Minister of Finance properly account to this country for how he spent the money, how his programmes worked in the year gone by, and how he intends to proceed. The last presentation of the Minister of Finance is nothing short of scandalous.

If I may plagiarise a quotation from my colleague from Diego Martin Central who would refer to this as a “bikini” presentation, by way of explaining—you know what a bikini is, Mr. Speaker? I am sure you know that it is really designed in such a way that what it conceals is vital, but what it exposes is interesting. That is not a good enough approach for a Minister of Finance. What is worse is when the bikini is badly cut, while the wearer might feel impressive on the beach, those who have to deal with it will be embarrassed. I am slightly embarrassed by the budget presentation of the Minister of Finance.

In a way, the budget presentation and its pretensions are symptomatic of the Government and its platitudes. It can be summed up in one word: hollow. If I had a second word: shallow. When the Government talks about a Government of National Unity, that is the hollowest sounding phrase in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, when the Minister of Finance claims to have done all that he said he has done and then is not borne out by facts, that too is hollow. When he seeks to explain in the way he sought to explain and give reasons for some of his measures they could only be described as shallow. I would like to take the opportunity to deal with the presentation of the 1997 Budget by looking at it in the context of the budget presentation of 1996. This budget of 1997 does not represent itself or stand in a vacuum.
Insofar as the Minister of Finance seeks to be brief, it reminds me of a story of an old gentleman who used to say his prayers every day. He would not leave his house without getting down on his knees and communicating with his Maker. He would go by his bedside and kneel and look up to the roof and he would say, “as usual, God”, and he moved on. That is supposed to summarize his communication. God will know what he means; he knows what he expects from God and he moves on from there.

If the Minister of Finance had taken that approach and had come to this Parliament and said, “as usual” and “I beg to move”, the country would have been in a better position. Because you see, many of the measures in the 1997 Budget which seek to change what existed this year, will do harm and hurt more people than they will do good for persons. Insofar as there are those on the other side who would get up and seek to take credit and pat themselves on the back for what happened during 1996, I would say, if that is so, then maybe we should have left it alone. Leave well alone.

I heard my Friend from St. Joseph thanking Almighty God for taking us through. I, too, thank Almighty God for taking us through. In spite of the present arrangements we did get through. But my Friend from St. Joseph, in responding to the contribution of the Opposition Leader, said that the Opposition Leader wandered all over the place and sought to introduce extraneous matters into the debate. I would not do that. I want to be specific to the Minister of Finance himself with his own words.

In 1996, in the first paragraph of his budget statement, the Minister of Finance bemoaned the fact that he was called upon to present a budget in eight weeks and he covered himself very accurately by saying that—and on page 2, he said: “It is one that, by and large, is forced upon us.”

So having complained about the eight-week timeframe to present the budget and having said it was forced upon him, what he was telling the country was that the budget was really prepared before the Government came into office; public servants had done the work and so forth, and “insofar as there is any trouble in here, in eight weeks, I could not have done my thing; what is there is really their thing.” Forced!

He did outline, of course, what he was aiming to do and he set his own targets, and it is against that background that I want to measure the Government’s performance to see whether the provisions for 1997 can keep us on track.
In the second page of the 1996 budget statement, the Minister had this to say:
“...this Government will pursue an economic policy that will encourage growth as well as development...”

That was one target. The next target was to maintain exchange rate stability.
“...develop a climate conducive to investment.”

We have to ask, how successful was the Government? If, in fact, the Government was successful, which of the Government’s actions served to encourage growth as well as development? Which actions maintained exchange rate stability, if exchange rate stability was maintained? Also, can the measures of 1997 continue to achieve those goals?

The Minister of Finance, in 1996, said that his objective would be to strengthen the country’s foreign reserves so that the country can pay for its imports and withstand external shocks which will reduce the pressure on the exchange rate and ensure its stability.

After setting that target, what happened in 1996 when we woke up one morning and we heard that all the indices were correct, foreign inflows were good, the macro-economics were sound, but the dollar was depreciating? If this was the target set by the Minister of Finance in his budget statement of 1996, and the reality is that today there are serious concerns about the dollar, the Minister of Finance owes it to the country to explain what had happened and to say more than he has said in the “bikini” budget statement of 1997, not just to gloss over it at 2,000 miles per hour, hoping that we do not notice what has happened against the target he had set.

The Minister of Finance said, in 1996, that the Government would address the intolerable poverty problem and improve the quality of life in Trinidad and Tobago. That was an ideal statement. But in 1997, how does the Government proceed to do that? In seeking to present a budget, out of the blue, the Minister of Finance decides to take bread out of the mouths of those persons who are least able to put a crumb in their mouths. I have not met one person who is in support of the Minister of Finance removing the provision for deeds of covenant, which will allow persons to make contributions to those persons in our society who are neediest.

So in one breath the Government talks about alleviating poverty, but those persons who are most in need and who depend even for a meal, a place to sleep or
for physical care, the Minister of Finance, in seeking to tinker with public administration and in seeking to extract moneys from those persons who give generously to charities, says he will remove that provision. I am saying that the two things do not match. The statements of ideals and the actions are not in sync.

I ask the Minister of Finance, on behalf of all those persons who will suffer as a result of that measure, to rethink that measure and when we come to finalize the budget arrangements, withdraw that provision. It is going to hurt too many people. We cannot afford to be so callous, especially when we are all aware that the vast majority of persons who are destitute, orphaned and uncared for in this country, are largely cared for by persons who rely on that kind of inflow to take care of these people. I ask the Minister of Finance to withdraw that provision.

Mr. Speaker, in the 1996 budget statement, the Minister of Finance set another target. He said:

“The impoverished among us are unable to access quality health and educational services.”

That was January, 1996. During the year 1996, the health services in Trinidad and Tobago have become the worst they have ever been in the history of this country. Having given that as the objective—and one knows that the persons who suffer most when services like public health deteriorate, are the poor—here is the Minister saying, “The impoverished among us are unable to access quality health and educational services”. But during the year we had all kinds of problems in the health service which did not contribute to any improvement in that sector.

I heard somebody on the other side making some derogatory statement. I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that right now there is a constituent who, during the period of turmoil in the hospital, had two tragedies. Firstly, a member of her family went to the hospital, laid there for days, uncared for and from a normal ailment which otherwise would have been attended to, the person died in the hospital. If that was not enough, this particular constituent of mine had an operation in the hospital and is today carrying around piece of a needle in her body and cannot have it removed even after it has been identified by X-ray, yet somebody on the other side has the temerity to make derogatory statements about my comment on the deterioration of the health service. They can say what they want, the bottom line is, the people of Trinidad and Tobago in 1996 witnessed a dramatic deterioration of the health service.
10.50 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Government does not do surgery, but it is responsible for the services provided in the health sector—in case you did not know. One of the targets set by the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism in 1996 on page 6, was empowerment of the economically and socially disadvantaged. So in one breath he was talking about empowering the economically and socially disadvantaged people, but in the other breath he is moving heaven and earth to starve those who rely on hand-outs or on charities, or on NGOs to look after them. He is prepared to treat them in the way the 1997 budget will treat with them, if he does not remove that provision of removal of deed of covenant.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance goes on to say, that if we are to resolve the problems of unemployment, crime and poverty, we must involve the entire population in the economic development process. I see that work, the people in Tokyo panyard they have now got their beer horn and their Play Whe machine. So, we could now buy and drink as much beers as we like, and gamble as much as we like, and we will then be involved in the entire economic development process.

On page 7 of the 1996 budget statement, is where the contradictions are greatest. There are four statements on page 7, Mr. Speaker, and I want to quote them for you:

"It is imperative also that we move with dispatch to increase the level of national savings in both the public and private sectors.

And most importantly stimulating the saving and investment effort.

Our fiscal strategy over the medium term calls for a policy...environment encourage investment and savings.

In order to encourage saving, investment ..."

So, four times on one page, the Minister identifies the objective of increasing national savings so as to bring about investment in the country with all the benefits that will follow from that. Mr. Speaker, who can argue with that? Who can argue with those objectives?

What do we see in the 1997 Budget? Having threatened credit unions last year, and when we accosted him about threatening to remove the provision for credit union savings incentives, he said: "No, I did not mean that, I just alerted them to be careful with me." Here comes the 1997 budget statement and what do we see? Just what was threatened last year, was implemented in the budget of 1997. Mr.
Speaker, I do not care what the Government tells me, the incentive for credit union savings, works. It encourages people to place some of their earnings in the credit union movement. The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism has removed it.

So, in one breath he is saying that he wants to encourage national saving, to bring about investment—and the credit union also gets involved in the investment in small business, home construction and repairs, employment creation; all of those benefits to be had—and the Minister of Finance, looking around for something to do, decides that he will put an end to that provision. If the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism persists with this decision, it would put an end to the credit union movement as we know it, and I ask him to rethink that measure.

As if that was not enough, the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism goes on and takes steps in the 1997 budget presentation to indicate very clearly, that he is going to damage the long-term savings programme of the country—pensions, Mr. Speaker, pensions. Every comment that has come from every intelligent person who is aware of the details of the pension system in this country said that this is a bad provision, it will have serious deleterious effects on the country. It will place people who are today earning, in a position where in their age of retirement, they might not be able to look after themselves, because the pension system is likely to collapse. There are warnings about persons seeking to put their pension moneys abroad because it will be more beneficial for them to do that, than to subsist under the arrangement as proposed by the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism.

When the Minister of Finance ties up mortgage interest with pension funds and limits that to $18,000, he is doing either/or, or both of two things. One, he is saying that citizens should not get involved in mortgages of any significant amount, or they should not get involved in pensions. Either way, Mr. Speaker, that will hurt the economy and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I was talking to a minister yesterday, and he made the comment that any person who has a mortgage of $400,000—$500,000, does not need any kind of relief. Mr. Speaker, how shortsighted can one get.

An individual or a couple, having taken a decision to build a home, the one thing that person or couple is doing, is taking a decision to put himself or themselves in debt. They go to the bank and they borrow let us say $500,000 to build the house; yes, they will own the home, but they will be responsible to pay the bank every month, and before they do that, the money they borrow, will be
spent on other people who will work for them to build that house. That is how employment is created.

If they work in the quarries to bring the gravel out to mix the concrete, you are paying for it in your mortgage. If they work as plumbers, labourers or painters on your site, whatever they do, you are paying for it. So when an individual takes a decision to go to the bank to take a mortgage and build a house, he or she is making a serious contribution to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. Any assistance that the state can give, to allow a person to make that decision ought to be encouraged, and the greatest assistance that the state gives is saying, okay, if you undertake that responsibility of making yourself personally liable for substantial sums of money to build a house, then the state will give you some tax relief on it. Why is the state now reneging on that?

The net result of reneging on that, Mr. Speaker, is to cause fewer and fewer persons to take the decision of going to the bank and incurring that liability to build a house. I have consulted with a number of persons who are in the field of construction and the field of economics, and I have been informed that for a home between $300,000 and $500,000 during the construction period, from beginning to end, approximately 80 to 100 persons can be employed for the year.

If this provision is kept and people begin to take decisions that, look, because of the lack of incentive, we will not go about taking mortgages as otherwise would have happened, try to imagine how many persons would be denied the opportunity for temporary employment in the construction and service sectors. This is being done by a Government that has in its possession, a Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism who stated that his objective is to reduce poverty and to bring about relief for those who require such action; but he is taking an action which will directly contradict that objective.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism did not have to do that. There are other ways of doing things. If the measures of 1996 worked as well as they claim, and we survived 1996—the law says that a budget must be brought every year—well if the last budget was that good, why do they have to change it to something that is bad? Is it because they want to say, "I am putting in new provisions?" When he changed some other provision, he gave the reason for the removal by saying that it has not been utilized. I do not know about that. I take his word for it, he is a man of honour. In the case of deed of covenant, he cannot say that. In the case of mortgage interest loan, he cannot say that. What then is the reason? The reason is that the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism knows
very well that all his pretense of taking credit for a fantastic performance in 1996, it is unlikely that in 1997 the Government will come into the kind of windfall that it came into in 1996 and, therefore, the Government is on the hunt for money. This budget is barely put together where the Government is really the ogre and tax collector, seeking to take as much as possible from those whom the Government believes have. That is why all the allowances have been removed, to expose earners to more taxes: mortgage interest is being suppressed, and pension is being threatened, so that those who earn money can be attacked by the taxman. The whole question of deed of covenant, rather than share it all away by giving it to those who really need it, that provision would be removed, and therefore, persons would be exposed to the taxman.

11.00 a.m.

The Government is on the hunt for money to meet its requirements for 1997. That is the long and short of it! Is that not true? That is the long and short of the whole story! The Government is looking for money! Why else? Even if the Government is doing that it will remove the provision where a person who is earning can say, "Okay, I am earning so I can put something into FEEL, Living Water or the Boy Scouts." The Government is saying, "No, no. You keep that in your hands until the tax man comes to get it".

The Government itself says in the 1997 Budget Statement that one of the problems of the social programme is that the Government's input is not reaching down to the people who really need it. No such charge can be made against the work of those NGOs who are dealing directly with those persons who need it. So, the most effective way of helping those persons in need, that is where the Government goes and removes that lifeline. I am appealing to the conscience of those on the other side, when we come to finalize this budget, please let us not do that. I do not want to be a part of any Parliament that does that. If the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism is so advised, he has been misadvised.

Mr. Speaker, the Government talks about its exchange rate policy. In the 1996 Budget Statement, on page 8, under "Monetary and Financial Policy", the Government talks about maintaining a competitive interest rate regime and exchange rate stability. Surprisingly, when the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism sought to report to us this year in two parts of his presentation, the most euphemistic terms were used to describe what is happening with interest rates.

In the Review of the Economy he talked about interest rates edging up. What nice words, just "edging up". Not that interest rates are becoming stifling, they are
just edging up. Somewhere else there is a very great presentation where he talks about intermediation. In talking about the monetary and financial policy he says:

"However, while this mechanism has been relatively effective in achieving the desired objectives, it also increased the cost of financial intermediation."

Brilliant, "financial intermediation". What that means, Mr. Speaker, is that they would be killing you with interest rates. So, whenever one gets one's statement from the bank, or if one is a small businessman with an overdraft, one's intermediation would have gone up. Do you understand, Mr. Speaker?

This is the kind of deceit and sleight-of-hand that one finds in this document. The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism could easily have said that interest rates have gone up and we do not like it, because we know what happens when interest rates go up. If interest rates are going up those who are borrowing money and creating employment through economic activity are feeling the squeeze and while the banks are reporting fantastic profits interest rates are going up.

There is a situation in the country which, to this day, has not been properly explained—everything is okay, but the currency is depreciating. There is a foreign exchange rate system, but the currency is depreciating and, at the same time, the reserved requirement is going up in the bank and intermediation is now on our tongue.

Interest rates, Mr. Speaker: When those who are using money, the business community in particular, complain to the Minister of Finance as to what is happening in the financial circles with respect to the current instability and interest rates, it has been reported—and I have seen no disclaimant—that the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism has advised them to open their own banks. This is new, Mr. Speaker.

If one complains to the Government that the job that it is supposed to be doing is not being properly done, the Government says, "Well then do it yourself". If you do not like what is happening in the banking system, well then, what; "Chamber of Commerce open your own bank". By extension, my constituent who does not like what is happening in the hospital, and is walking around with needles in his stomach, is to be told "Open your own hospital"; those who do not like what is happening with the Common Entrance and education system, should open their own school. That is the Government's philosophy.

Having been put there to do a job for which they are forever praising themselves, eternally patting themselves on the back while not delivering, the Government advises that if one does not like how it is doing the job, then one should do it for oneself.
Mr. Speaker, we are not going to accept that. The Government has to account for its performance. When we had this development where, overnight, we were surprised by the slide in the currency, we were first told that it was a psychological barrier which had us under psychological pressure. This 5.999999999. We could not sleep at nights so the Government decided to get out of the pressure and cross this psychological hurdle and get past $6 in order to take the pressure off its back. That was the Government's explanation insofar as it said anything.

When the currency slipped to $6.25 we were told that the Government was taking steps to bring it back to $6 and it announced all kinds of measures and it came back to $6.05 and it said, "You see, that was only temporary, man. What was all this “ole talk” about?"

Now that after they poured so much money down the hole and the hole is still there and getting bigger, listen to what the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism tells us in the 1997 Budget Statement when he comes to account to the country on the most serious part of his portfolio, the management of our exchange rate. I know for a fact, Mr. Speaker, that you did not hear this. He went across this so fast that nobody heard it. My former colleague never spoke so quickly in his life. This paragraph went largely unheard. It says:

"Mr. Speaker, with respect to the foreign exchange market, while it has been somewhat volatile over the past few months,..."

I must commend him, Mr. Speaker. His English and his metaphors are getting better with age. When he was in our Cabinet he was not like that. He is getting better. He says:

"...I believe that the market participants—sellers, buyers, banks and the general public—are now much more aware of how the flexible rate system is expected to function."

So all the shenanigans that could happen with the currency—the loss of confidence in the currency which is now on a semi-permanent skid, the depreciation, all of that—had one purpose behind it; so that banks, sellers, buyers and the public could understand how a flexible rate system works.

Having said that, he goes on further to say that we now can accept the currency where it is, and it will move up and down as we go along because the Government has now accepted the currency where it is at. No longer will CEOs from foreign companies be promising to manage our exchange rate for us by pumping in how many millions. No longer will Petrotrin and National Gas pump in
$15 million tomorrow and $10 million the next day. No longer will the Central Bank come in and pump in $10 million and the hole is still there. We are being told now that we have been exposed to the system; that is how it works and therefore we are to expect fluctuations up and down. That is the sum total of it. There is no mystery at all.

Mr. Speaker, the Government is very good at congratulating itself. I want to spend a few minutes demonstrating in a microcosmic way the gross incompetence and inefficiencies of this Government. I want to use the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to demonstrate that the Government really is a bunch of talkers and non-doers.

11.10 a.m.

We accused him of putting funny money into the budget of 1996, and he still has not accepted what funny money is. It could either be monopoly money, cockset paper, or random numbers which will never become legal tender, and that is what he did in 1996. In 1996, the Minister of Finance put in the budget $60 million from a Social Mitigation Programme which forms part of an agricultural sector loan. A figure of $60 million of Government receipts was put in the budget of 1996. We told him firstly, even if you manage to sign the loan and meet the conditionalities, only one third of that is going to be available in any one year, because that loan is paid down in tranches and therefore, it is wrong to put in the budget $60 million. Let me read for you, Mr. Speaker, page 12 of the budget of 1996, "... several measures will be implemented this year ... Formulation of a Social Mitigation Programme which will involve the disbursement of $60 million to farmers who have suffered from the adverse effects of structural changes in agriculture." We said, Mr. Minister of Finance, that is funny money. That money is not available; it is tied to the agricultural sector loan, for which I signed the policy document as Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources in August 1995.

This Government won the election in November, and what did the Government do? In January, the Minister of Finance was putting in funny money of $60 million in the receipts column of the budget. The loan was not signed until June. To date, I challenge anybody on that side to tell me if the Government took receipt of one ha'penny copper of this loan. Those of you on the other side: the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources get up and tell the people that one cent of this loan has come into the coffers of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the funny money; that is how he balanced the
budget last year. That is why we can say to him the budget had serious deficits, and during the year could not have flowed when it should have. The development programme could not proceed because the budget had 'funny money' like this: in this case $60 million of non-receipts. He could have gotten $20 million of it in the first tranche, but he did not get it, because my Friend from Princes Town, who is the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources was too busy trying to renegotiate the loan, because anything that they met before was not well done. He thought he could have done better. The loan was negotiated and one of the conditions of the loan was that the agricultural reform programme, the tariffication programme, would take place in a system of a reduction of tariff, 31 per cent over five years.

The Government had a different view. In the interim between that negotiation and coming into office, the World Trade Organization came into being and another option was available, which was 24 per cent over 10 years. The Government always took the position that our tariffication programme for the agricultural programme was detrimental to the sector. It sought under that Minister, to renegotiate the loan. Between November last year and June this year, he spent his time trying to renegotiate the loan. There is nothing wrong with that, but when he reported to the country, we were told that the loan was renegotiated. In fact, what happened, is that we now have a system in place where we have the tariff for over 10 years, as against five years. Nothing is further from the truth.

All that the InterAmerican Development Bank agreed to do, which they pointed out to the Government—is that if there were disastrous consequences as a result of the policy being pursued under this loan programme, there was a mechanism which allowed the Government, as any other, to produce a claw-back mechanism and protect its sector. The operation is now in place for two years, 1995 and 1996. I am not aware that there are any disastrous consequences in our agricultural sector, therefore the Government has not seen it fit to introduce any claw-back mechanism. In the meantime the loan was signed on June 11, and having not gotten one cent from the loan proceedings, the story gets more interesting.

One of the conditions of the loan is that the Government has to pay a credit fee, and this becomes payable six months after the loan is signed. The Government has to pay 0.75 per cent of the loan, six months after the loan is signed. It was signed in June. On December 11, this Government became liable for at least $2 million on a loan from which it has not drawn down one cent yet, and as the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources twiddles his thumbs, and as the Minister of Finance seeks to give us all kinds of funny stories and this fancy
story here, come June it will be liable for a further $2 million because the credit fee is a condition of the loan. I will tell you something, the one that is grumbling up there—I know what I am saying. On page 3 Chapter III it says that the borrower shall pay a credit fee of 0.75 per cent per annum on the undisbursed balance on financing, and interest shall begin to accrue 60 days after the contract was signed. It was signed on June 11, so 0.75 per cent is due on October 11.

He would not know that because he is too busy formulating policies for praedial larceny, which state that one should kill, cook and eat food-thieves. While Rio Claro farmers are complaining about praedial larceny, his advice to them is to kill, cook, and eat those who steal their food. In one breath he kills two birds with one stone. He gets rid of those who are committing praedial larceny and committing crimes. The Minister of National Security will be very happy about this. That is the new policy of this Government. Sitting there, after having signed the loan, incurring millions in expenses for the country, and doing nothing about it to ensure that we get the proceeds of the loan, he is happy to pay out money, but not get it back, yet telling me I do not know what I am talking about.

In other words, to get one cent of the loan from the first tranche, it will remain funny money until the Government meets the conditionalities, one of which is that it must demonstrate that Caroni has reduced its production costs during 1995—1996, in accordance with the requirements of the strategic plan, section 502. I can say, without fear of contradiction, that Caroni has done nothing in fiscal 1996 to reduce its costs and therefore, this is one conditionality which has not been met, among others. This is because the Members, like the one from Princes Town, decide to intervene in the programme having signed the loan, knowing the conditionalities, go down at the constituency level and obstruct the companies from proceeding with the reduction of staff, as it has agreed to do.

This year is here. Reduction of production costs: how was Caroni going to do that? It was going to remove from its operating sphere, two sections, Picton and Williamsville, down by that constituency. What does he say? No way, he is not doing that! So at constituency level the Government is not doing that, he and his colleagues. But the Minister of Finance in Port of Spain, blissfully unaware of this, writes into the budget money which we cannot touch. So until the Government meets the conditionalities, that $60 million is nowhere in sight and the Minister of Finance who wrote it in the budget last year, comes here this year, gives this very brief presentation and is exposed by the "bikini budget"—nothing about the Social Mitigation Programme of $60 million. One can understand why he had to be brief, and hurry through his presentation, because he dare not stand here and report on
Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member's speaking time has expired.

Motion made, That the speaking time of the hon. Member be extended by 30 minutes. [Mr. K. Valley]

Question put and agreed to.

11.20 am.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I thank hon. Members and hon. Ministers. One part of that loan was a package—technical assistance for the farming community for $12 million; and, two things had to happen. That money was meant to put in place a monitory unit which would have constantly monitored the agricultural sector to ensure that no external influences were adversely affecting it. Another part of the money was to put in a technical support system requiring technical staff to be hired. The Minister is very busy seeking to hand-pick people to put into this programme. The end result is, after one year of being in office, and after six months of signing the loan, no completion has been brought about with respect to establishing the monitory unit, or for putting the technical co-operation unit in place because the Minister is busy trying to put his friends and his family in position, interfering in the programmes, overturning interviews, calling in names and trying to handle it personally and while he is doing that, the country is paying millions of dollars in credit charges and not getting one cent of benefit from the loan that was signed in June. Mr. Speaker, that is negligence of the worst kind.

I ask the Minister of Finance to look into this matter very carefully and not to mislead the public about the social mitigation programmes for which there is no funding until this Government gets its act together.

Mr. Speaker, I take you to the Development Programme of 1997. The only original idea that the Minister has come up with because, if one looks on page 48, one will see 1995—0; 1996—0; 1997—$1 million provision. For what? To do a feasibility study on the establishment of rural markets. If the Minister wants to put a market in his constituency, let him do so but it must not cost taxpayers $1 million in feasibility studies. [Desk thumping] Do you understand now why he was fortunate to win his seat in Princes Town. It was because he could not get himself a job anywhere because of this type of thinking. Who is going to allow someone to spend money in this way? All over this country there are markets under the jurisdiction of the local government body. If the Princes Town Corporation, the
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[DR. ROWLEY]

Diego Martin Corporation, the Borough of Arima, the Tobago House of Assembly want markets, they have provisions for doing so. If it is we will require rural markets, we certainly do not need a one million-dollar study to determine anything about rural markets. This is the type of foolishness.

They have a habit of going around the country bad-mouthing the PNM and saying that the PNM does not care about agriculture, the PNM is racial and because agriculture is East Indian dominated, it does not do so and so. I was the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources for four years and I did not have one farmer in my constituency who was doing cane, rice or whatever.

In 1995, under Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, actual expenditure under the development programme—$79.79 million; that was a PNM allocation and that was consistent with the PNM. The 1996 estimates—$55.5 million. The estimate was $24 million less this year. What is worse, even after they reduced the estimate by $24 million, the revised estimate is $48 million. The PNM spent $79 million in development programme works and this Government allocated $38 million. Since they have the talent to feed the farmers with one dollar, why are they now seeking to fool us by allocating $90 million in 1997? When they looked at this and they realized how it runs counter to their statements, $48 million in 1996 as against $79 million in 1995, we now see in the provision, $90 million in 1997.

Dr. Mohammed: Would the hon. Member please give way? Would the hon. Member explain why the sector grew by 0.2 per cent in 1995 and it grew by 7 per cent in 1996?

Dr. K. Rowley: If it is the hon. Member’s intention to take credit for the growth in 1996, let me say something—when a cow goes to the bull in January, the calf is born in December. The growth in agriculture that we see in 1996 has nothing to do with the Minister. It has to do with what was in the pipeline in 1995 and the years before. Orange trees do not bear in the same year one plants them. Pigs do not make young piglets the same month. They give birth in November. What we see in 1997 is as a result of the programme in the sector that was in place before the Member saw the light here. We are in danger of losing that growth.

Mr. Speaker: It will be appreciated if the hon. Member will be permitted to continue his contribution in relative silence.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, what we have to be concerned about and what the farmers have to be concerned about is the deterioration to come. Under provisions to other services to the sector—1995 actual under the PNM budget—
$27 million; 1997—a $10 million reduction. Under the ADB which is the lending agency that gives all its support to the farming community—$27 million; 1997—$10 million. The year ending 1996—$12 million. Mr. Speaker, a reduction in the development programme—and the budget is replete with reductions. In 1996, under foreign and technical assistance, the Minister had an estimate of $8 million. They spent less than $1 million and, of course, you know what that meant.

The Minister of Finance told us in his presentation that he is not paying lip-service to the sector. What actually happened was quite different. I want to touch very briefly on two other matters; one is the question of the casinos.

11.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, in the budget of 1996, page 2, paragraph 1, the Minister of Finance says that all that the Government is going to do, “will be done in the context of dialogue, discussion, consultation, and hopefully, consensus.” While I am not casting any judgment on the casino programme, I simply want at this moment to ask him one question. Given the commitment he gave in 1996 and written in this document, whom did he consult? Whom did he dialogue with and does he have any consensus for this far-reaching action? That is all I wanted to ask the Minister of Finance. Having asked him that, I want to raise my concerns because where there are casinos in the world, one thing that they have if they are properly run, is proper regulation; proper gaming commissions, where people of integrity are put to oversee, because everybody is aware of how detrimental this could be and a gaming commission by any other name, but such an institution is a raison d'être for putting casinos anywhere in your community. The Minister has made no comment on that but my concern is that we do have some gambling in Trinidad and Tobago, and if one is to take what is going on now in the existing gambling arena and transpose that to something that could happen in a casino arena, then God help us in Trinidad and Tobago.

Let us take the Arima Race Club. What is happening with racing in Trinidad and Tobago today? An industry where there are about 1,500 people directly involved, with about another 2,000 people indirectly involved depending on it, there has been no racing now since November, and if you talk to anybody in the racing fraternity, you will find out what has happened. Those persons who have a desire to control racing, some of whom seek to try to run for office in the race club every single post that was available was not selected. What does the Government do? The Government takes such a person and puts that person in charge of the Betting Levy Board, and what happens? The Betting Levy Board chokes off funds
to the Race Club and what does the Minister do? The Race Club asks to meet with the Minister. He refuses and gives them an ultimatum. “Either you put an interim committee in place on my terms or you get ‘no’ from me.” That is the condition which prevails today, an interim operating committee and the Minister’s ultimatum, and do you know who heads the interim committee? The same individual who is head of the Betting Levy Board, who tried to run for a post throughout the racing fraternity and was never elected. If that kind of behaviour is brought to bear on a casino gaming commission, then God help us in Trinidad and Tobago. That is my concern.

If this Government which talks about poverty, employment creation, and using assets and so forth, could sit idly by and watch what is happening in racing today and the Minister could be allowed to do what he is doing now—select persons in the way that he has, give ultimatums the way he has done—if that is what is going to run casino gambling in Trinidad and Tobago, then we are in for a very rough ride and, Mr. Speaker, we have to beware. If the Government is serious about employment creation, it must move swiftly to bring to a head what is happening at the Race Club in Arima, and the Minister must get down from his high horse and meet those who are spending money on horses to create employment in Trinidad and Tobago. That is what is required of them. Do not come and tell me you want to create a bigger cake while you are hauling out the little cake we have. We already have that and we know what horse racing is. Let us try to save that, but you want to build another empire and I am saying that we cannot build another empire on that kind of behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about taking the Government at face value. Yesterday the Minister of Trade, from St. Joseph, got up and responded to concerns about the stability of the dollar. He pooh-poohed everything and told the country that the Trinidad and Tobago dollar is not a matter for concern. He went to Singapore and he went to some friend’s office which had 35 telephones and the money is going up and down. Well then, my advice to the Governor of the Central Bank and all the bank managers in this country is to get 34 more phones and the dollar will be saved. Because 35 phones is the solution. That was the Minister of Trade. If one is to take the comments of my friend from Nariva very seriously, who yesterday gave us a brilliant performance—like a little wooden toy—and concluded by saying that this country’s industrial climate has never been more stable, then this Government could not be serious.
Teachers are on the Promenade, policemen to go, doctors are on strike, nurses are grumbling, drug stores closed this morning, but he was here last night jumping up and down like a three-feet toy telling people that this country is in the most stable place it has ever been. So if this Government is to be taken seriously, it must stop talking foolishness because nobody has to be a member of any party to be concerned about the industrial climate here. Parents are now concerned about what is going to happen when school re-opens. They are concerned and they look to Government to deal with the situation. People are concerned about what the doctors are saying because nobody knows who is going to go there—friend, family or fellow citizen—and what they are going to meet. We are all concerned and we resent the Government telling us inane diatribe that nothing is wrong, because we can see that everything is wrong. [ Interruption ]

I have heard the voice of the Minister of Education. I simply want to tell him that I am not dealing with paradigms. I am simply concerned about the children who are the future of this country, and who today find themselves in a position of having absolutely no respect for a Minister of Education. If Government concerns itself with that, our children would be in better hands because we cannot tell our country that we are serious about education and yet put education in the hands of my friend from Tabaquite. That cannot be serious. I understand that the gentleman who appealed his sentence yesterday actually got a reprieve. [ Interruption ]

The Government has set a number of performance targets and while we may have some queries here and there with some of the targets they are largely laudible. My concern is that there is too great a divergence between the word and the deed and central to that deed is the Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance has to be the most candid person in any Government, because everything any other ministry has done would rely on the Minister of Finance—his policies: fiscal, monetary, and otherwise. So when the Government came and talked about a housing programme and sought to give us the impression in January of this year that it will expand and strengthen the 240 million-dollar accelerated construction programme, I wanted to hear from the Minister, or his colleagues what has happened to that.

What I do know is that the person who holds the portfolio of Minister of Housing and Settlements has no interest in this. He is more concerned about seeking to annex the Town and Country Planning Department and the Lands and Surveys Department, having declared housing an irrelevant ministry. And the next thing I am hearing is that he is bringing a Chinese contractor to build a road from
here to Timbuktu and bringing tourists to visit some sewerage plant in Trincity. I am not concerned about that. I want to hear from the Minister of Finance what happened to this housing programme he promised on page 14 of the budget of January, 1996. What happened to it? You understand why that budget was so brief, because they either failed to report, or deliberately chose not to report, the reason being that not one thing happened in the last programme. So when he came to praise himself—at page 12 of the budget he took a lot of credit when he said that several measures would be implemented this year: the distribution of 2,000 acres of land from Caroni (1975) Limited and at least 7,000 acres of state land to private farmers—they pounded their desks to mash up the Government’s property in Parliament. Did you hear them? Not one acre has been provided. Do you understand why the budget was so brief? He went on to say that he was going to inject $42 million in a capital programme for Caroni (1975) Limited this year and he also mentioned social mitigation programmes. There are people who are waiting for that programme.

11.40 a.m.

Dr. Mohammed: What did you do?

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I negotiated the loan as minister responsible for the portfolio, the loan that you cannot carry and manage. The work was done for the loan which is in the budget this year. All he had to do was to put pen to paper and stay out of it. As a result of that, nothing has been done.

The Government has nothing tangible to report except that the momentum which it met when it came into office is carrying us a bit further. Like a bicycle which has been pedalled by the PNM, the pedalling has stopped. We are coasting now, and sooner or later we would come to a halt and the rider would fall off if we do not get activity.

When he interrupted me to ask what happened to the agricultural programme and why there was 7 per cent increase in 1996, it was to give the impression that it was something that he and his colleagues did during the year that caused oranges to bear more in Caroni, and cows to produce more calves. That could not be real. They must tell us their programme. This year the budget is remarkably silent on any report. A minister of finance must report on performance of the budget of the past period; the programmes he talked about; the commitments he gave and the moneys he was supposed to receive but did not receive. He should not come and try to praise himself and say we said he had funny money, and he did not have any. In fact, he is the purveyor of funny money.
If all the measures in this budget are proceeded with it would have the effect of hurting a large number of persons. The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism is under no compulsion, threat or duress to introduce new measures. Insofar as the large number of new measures would hurt the economy and people, especially those who are least able to care for themselves, we beseech the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism to remove these measures which are destined to hurt the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Hon. Ralph Maraj): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to join this very important debate, as we seek to take our beloved country forward. May I immediately take the opportunity to congratulate my colleague, the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism, for his budget presentation which, even though it has been described as brief, was concise, powerful, rich in substance and for the future. I have no doubt, as I would prove shortly, that his budget presentation did reveal the very positive state of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, and the positive directions in which we are going. I think one thing which he has achieved with his two budget presentations thus far is that he has managed to entrench the economic resurgence of Trinidad and Tobago.

I usually enjoy the contribution of my friend, the Member for Diego Martin West. I find him very incisive and his contributions are very enjoyable. I must confess that this morning I am rather disappointed. He was not up to his usual standard. If I may describe his contribution this morning, I consider it to be lacking in objectivity, balance; it was a bit unfair and full of exaggeration. He really sought to give the impression that everything was wrong. He said that everything was wrong in Trinidad and Tobago. That cannot be true.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my dear friend giving way. I really did not say that. Do not say I said that.

Hon. R. Maraj: If he did not say that what he said amounts to that. His entire contribution was based on that perception and that intention to create a very bleak picture of Trinidad and Tobago. We on this side do not share that perception. I am sure if one were to take a sampling out in the national community, one would see that many citizens of Trinidad and Tobago have a very positive view of what we as the Government are doing and where we are taking this country. Up to last week, recent elections supported that, as my colleague for Tobago West has said.
Another thing that disappointed me about the Member for Diego Martin West was a change that seemed to have come over him after the recent elections in his party. I am speaking very objectively. Before the elections he was diplomatic and displayed certain leadership qualities. I must tell him that today, unfortunately, he descended to *ad hominem* attacks. He referred to the Member for Nariva as a three-feet toy and casted aspersions on his height. I never expected the Member for Diego Martin West to descend to that level.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I implore you to take it easy and allow the Member to make his contribution.

**Hon. R. Maraj:** I was saying that the Member for Diego Martin West must always remember that the future of the People’s National Movement is in his hands and he must continue to behave in a certain way, so that when destiny calls on him, he would be able to play the role. I expect that this warning I give to him would be heeded. [*Interruption*]

11.50 a.m.

He knows that the situation is not totally bleak. We began to see a bit of objectivity coming into his contribution when he spoke about the goals and objectives being largely laudable and so forth. Mr. Speaker, I will come back to that.

My friend focussed much of his contribution on the agricultural sector. My colleague from Princes Town has spoken extensively on the achievement of that sector. It is a pity he was not here last night to hear of the significant development where we had growth of 7 per cent, contributing $608.2 million to GDP as compared to $568.4 in 1995. Domestic agriculture in 1996 increased by 6.2 per cent, contributing $319.9 million to GDP, which is $301.1 million over 1995.

The Member is right to suggest that the increase was not dramatic; it was not theatrical; it was not *ad hoc*, it was incremental. It came over a period. [*Interruption*] Wait a minute! Let us get back to objectivity!

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, it cannot be done like this. We hope that Members will be heard in silence. If a Member wants to say something, please direct it through the Chair and it will be dealt with.

**Hon. R. Maraj:** Mr. Speaker, this Parliament did not happen five or 10 years ago. The democratic traditions that we enjoy have evolved, so that the growth in agriculture that would have taken place this year clearly has to do with what took
place in 1995, but the fact is that the growth took place under the watch of my hon. colleague from Princes Town. He was the man in charge.

If Members look at page 17 of the *Review of the Economy*, domestic agriculture is projected to maintain its 1.8 per cent contribution to total real GDP in 1996 and to record a rate of growth of 6.2 per cent following on negative growth rates of 10.6 per cent in 1994 and 0.2 per cent in 1995. [Interruption] Mainly responsible for the expected growth are increases in the production of rice—43.3 per cent; dairy, beef and other meat—9.9 per cent; vegetables and pulses and so forth. I speak no more, Mr. Speaker; that speaks for itself.

I come to a critical matter with respect to agriculture. [Interruption] My friend spoke about agriculture so I am responding to him. I am from an agricultural community. I find it very, very sad, and it is a statement on our politics; it is a statement on our society; it is a statement on our state of mind; it is a statement on our culture; it is a statement on our vision of the world, that in this day and age, as we approach the new millennium, after so many years of independence and so many billions of dollars having been spent in Trinidad and Tobago, that our agricultural sector can best be described as woefully primitive.

That is a terrible testament on the way we have developed Trinidad and Tobago, and if I speak with any passion on this matter it is because I am close to the heart of the matter. I represent the constituency of Naparima and my experience, since I have been engaged in the political process in that constituency, has been almost traumatic. It is traumatic when I see the primitive conditions under which the rural people live; when I see the state of the roads; when I see the lack of community facilities; when I see the lack of agricultural incentives; when I see the poverty; when I see the mosquito-ridden communities; when I see the floods. After all these years of independence, on both sides of the House, we must lament the fact that we do not have, for example, an agro-processing centre in this country which will absorb the primary products from our farms, add value to them and export them; that we do not yet have a culture, both local and foreign, of private capital involvement in agriculture. In this day and age, we are still thinking about Government doing this and that. And this is the radical reform that we need in the agricultural sector. It is on its way.

I will tell Members one thing about which I am convinced. If there is one political party which will develop the agricultural sector, it is the major party, by number of seats, in this coalition the UNC/NAR coalition. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? It is because these parties have their origins in the struggle of the rural
people for their place in the sun. If there is one political grouping which understands the plight and the need of the rural people to be brought into the mainstream, it is this Government. [Interruption] Does the Member wish to say something?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Minister has to seek assistance because of conversation that continues. Please, let us get on with the debate.

Hon. R. Maraj: Mr. Speaker, I am not saying that Members on the other side do not understand or do not know what to do. I was on that side and I am aware that there is concern, but the will, the commitment and the passion to do it is not there. We have come from people who are agricultural. They need that development. It is not the intention to focus on the agricultural sector or rural development merely to correct historical imbalances. We have gone past that. In our view, there is no way that Trinidad and Tobago can go forward unless those large tracts of countryside and the human and natural resources are brought into the mainstream of national development.

12.00 noon

The only way to have all the pistons of Trinidad and Tobago’s economic engine firing is to ensure that the rural areas are brought into the mainstream. This is what we would be doing, Mr. Speaker. When my friend from St. Augustine speaks passionately about the new network of highways, opening up the countryside—I am sure they share that view as well—it is to bring the ideal resources into the mainstream. We speak here about national development. We should all be concerned about it.

When one opens up the countryside one would have easy access, one would not only develop agriculture, one would have a kind of de-urbanization as well, where one would stop the urban drift and one might find a reverse where people would go to the countryside to live. There would be development of new townships. There would be the possibility of the development of eco-tourism for which Trinidad and Tobago—Oropouche, Naparima and so forth have so much potential. This is the direction in which this Government wants to take the agricultural sector and the rural areas. I thought I would focus a little on my friend’s contribution because he dealt so much with this agricultural sector. When my colleague from Princes Town talked about killing, cooking, eating and so forth, that was just a frivolous statement. [Interruption] That does not reflect, in any way, Government’s policy on agriculture or on crime.
Mr. Speaker, I come back to the point I made originally that my very good friend from Diego Martin West—he will always remain my friend—lacked objectivity. I think he deliberately tried to paint a bleak picture. He tried to give the impression that under the watch of the Ministry of Finance and Minister of Tourism of this Government, nothing has happened. That is not the truth, Mr. Speaker. What has really happened in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago as the facts and figures show? There has been growth of 3.1 per cent in the economy; there has been a drop in the unemployment levels—Nobody is denying the contribution that the previous administration would have made. I am in the business of objectivity. I am saying that there was growth in the economy, a drop in unemployment, and the lowest level of inflation in a very long time. These are things that are positive. These are things one has to look at. If one wants to present a balanced and objective view, one must look at the positives.

Mr. Speaker, there has been the continuation of the diversification of the economy. When one looks at contributions to GDP one would find the non-oil sector continuing to contribute more to the GDP. Interestingly enough, in addition to agriculture, there is the services sector, including tourism, making more of a contribution to the GDP, and that is very important if we want to develop those industries in Trinidad and Tobago which will generate employment on a sustainable basis. Those are the positive things that are happening. I am sure my friend, the Member for Tunapuna, would agree with me on that. They cannot deny that.

We cannot deny as well that there is significant investment into Trinidad and Tobago. In 1996 alone we already have US $4 billion committed, so investment flows continue. These are very positive things about Trinidad and Tobago. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs of this country, when I go abroad I know how very positively Trinidad and Tobago is viewed in the international community.

These are good things that have been happening in the economy. We are not saying that there is no poverty. We are not saying that we do not need to improve the educational system. We are not saying that agriculture is perfect or anything like that. However, we must also recognize that under the watch of this Government the growth has been entrenched! It continues!

Mr. Speaker, what direction is the economy taking? We are moving to the point of sustainable growth in the economy. We are moving this country to the point where the economy is diversified, as I said before. We are moving this
economy to the point where, in our view, and as stated by the IMF, we would be able to take unemployment figures to single digits before this first term of office of this UNC/NAR coalition is over. *[Desk thumping]* That is where we are going, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Member:** That is the same speech he made before. *[ Interruption ]*

**Hon. R. Maraj:** No, clearly, it is not the same speech, check the *Hansard.*

Mr. Speaker, another negative they are trying to paint—I think my friend from Diego Martin East is particularly guilty of this, and of course, the Member for San Fernando East; I noticed that my friend from Diego Martin West did not touch it at all and, to me, that is very instructive—is that the Public Sector Investment Programme performed woefully. That is not true! Of the total allocations that were made under the PSIP, 82-odd per cent was used. In terms of the central government’s activity under the PSIP, we utilized 91 per cent. How can one say that is not a creditable performance?

In what year, in the history of Trinidad and Tobago has the PSIP utilized all the funds that were allocated? According to my friend—and I am sure my friend from Oropouche would deal with it—it is very possible that the PSIP out-did its performance in 1995. *[ Interruption ]* I would go to the record where all the activities are outlined in: agriculture, energy, manufacturing, small business, environment, roads and bridges, education, training, transport, tourism. There it is, Mr. Speaker, the PSIP performed creditably and that is another positive thing. The point of the matter is, if the PSIP had not performed as creditably as it did, one would not have had the kind of growth. Government’s direct intervention in the economy ensured growth of the economy as well.

If one goes to the 1996 PSIP, Mr. Speaker, one would see where we are going. If we performed so well with the PSIP in 1996, there is no doubt that we are in a position to increase the allocation. Even if we do not utilize all the moneys that would have been allocated under the 1996 PSIP, we would have spent enough in terms of the development of the social, physical and economic infrastructure to ensure a continuation of growth and a continuation of the generation of employment. That is the goal.

**12.10 p.m.**

The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism has outlined all of it. Get another positive side of the picture with which they are refusing to deal. So that for my friend from Diego Martin West to describe the budget as hollow, shallow,
platitudinous and so forth, is really using words and indulging in hyperbole and exaggeration. This is not a “business as usual,” budget. This is a budget that has a plan and an action to achieve that plan.

My friend, the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism, has assured me that he is going to deal with all those matters such as savings and so forth, the bunching of the pension system and the mortgage interest and I have no doubt that when he deals with them, it would be quite illuminating.

We, in this Government, have demonstrated the trend in which we want to take the economy and the country. Through our management of the economy, through the two budget presentations we continue to see a critical role for the private sector; we are continuing to create the environment for them; we are encouraging the manufacturing sector in particular, and they are growing by leaps and bounds, as you know. If one looks at the figures, the trade balance that we now enjoy with Caricom countries has increased during the course of this year. So that they are growing.

Construction is going to receive a significant fillip in 1996 through the work of the Minister of Works and Transport, such as roads, schools, bridges, public buildings and so forth. We have no doubt that when public sector works get going, there would be the ripple effects through the economy and there would be private sector construction activities taking place and that would help to generate employment. So that when we say we want to take the employment figures to single digits by the end of our first term, we know what we are talking about.

With respect to tourism, I have no doubt, it will continue to grow—new airlines, more flights are coming into Trinidad and Tobago, such as the American Eagle which landed the other day; Condor is coming from Germany and a number of other airlines from Central and South America are thinking of coming—I do not want to name them at this time, but we are having discussions with them; the possibilities of hotel construction. That is what is happening.

One of the most positive things that I see for the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, is the market access which this administration is creating for products emanating out of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, when we came into office, one of the things that concerned me, was the fact that Caricom and Central America had not met for about two to three years because they had problems with the bananas and so forth and there was a bit of a souring of the relationship.
I mounted a personal initiative when I visited Costa Rica to speak to President Figueres and my colleague, the foreign Minister of Costa Rica, to ensure a revitalization of that process. It took us a few months to get it going but we eventually managed to have a Caricom/Central America meeting. For me, one of the best decisions that we, as part of Caricom, took in terms of our foreign economic policy for this year was to decide to negotiate a free agreement between the countries of Caricom and of Central America—significant complementaries in the economy; geographical proximity; the possibility of putting the transportation infrastructure into place and so forth; a market next door. Our own manufacturers said that they were happy to hear that because they could now enter that market of about $37 million. That is one of the things about which I am very happy.

Mr. Speaker, I went to Argentina earlier this year on an invitation from that government and had discussions with both President Menem and my colleague, Dr. Guido Detaya. Argentina has agreed to sponsor and support a Caricom/Mercursor Trade Arrangement. I met the Foreign Minister of Brazil at the United Nations and they have also agreed; the Foreign Minister of Uruguay would be visiting Trinidad and Tobago, he has offered to come to this country next year. Uruguay, as you know, is also part of the Mercursor which is that market of about 200,000,000 to 300,000,000 people on the southern cone of the South American continent.

Mr. Speaker, if we get into that kind of arrangement it would mean mega markets for products emanating out of Trinidad and Tobago. When there are those mega markets and we have access to these markets under favourable conditions, it means industrial expansion at home and the generation of employment on a long-term sustainable basis. So it is Caricom/Central America, Caricom/Mercursor.

Caricom also took the decision to negotiate a free trade agreement with the Dominican Republic using the bilateral [Interruption] Yes, it started under that administration and I have no problem with giving credit where credit is due. It was started there. When we came into office we took it to our first Heads of Government meeting and we had it approved, but it is a critical thing. We have been pushing for this agreement with the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, and Colombia.

The Mexican Government has agreed to enter into a bilateral free trade agreement with Trinidad and Tobago. This is a matter I discussed when I went to Mexico. I know there were previous discussions about it, but Prime Minister Basdeo Panday and the Mexican President met in Bolivia during the Rio Group Summit and sealed the deal. Discussions have already started. Market access,
integrating the economy of Trinidad and Tobago comprehensively into the hemispheric system. That is what we are doing. When that is done, do you know the very other positive side effect? The attractiveness of the country as a location for investment is augmented.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. Member give way? I know that he is on an excellent point, but I wonder whether he would tell us what effect bringing casinos into the environment would have on the initiative that he is pursuing?

12:20 p.m.

Hon. R. Maraj: Now you see, Mr. Speaker, it is what I talked about; objectivity and the political process. I may write a treatise on that one of these days. My friend from Diego Martin West says that I am on an excellent point, but in order to make it a bit blurred as to what is the point, he brings in the casino thing. The point I want to make is when there is market access of this size, the attractiveness of the country is increased as an area for investment, and not only energy sector investments, but investments of all kinds.

We are convinced that we are going to have a diversified portfolio of investment flow into Trinidad and Tobago. We are going to get into the agricultural sector as well. We are going to get into manufacturing, in services, in high-tech information technology. I want to let you know that is the strategy we are employing in this Government. That is where we are. We are now at the moment seeking to strengthen economic relations with Japan, Korea, the Far East and Europe, but because of distance, trade cannot be emphasized.

The point we are making is that if there is market access, and we integrate our economy into the hemisphere, the investment flows from these countries will come to Trinidad and Tobago, of course, not only because of the market access but because there is a politically stable system. We have a skilled workforce, natural resources, good infrastructure, and so forth. This is the model that we are developing in our foreign policy, Mr. Speaker. I must say that I am particularly pleased at the end of this year that we have advanced this process.

May I also say that I am particularly pleased as well with some of the work of our missions in encouraging investment flows. As I talk about investments, I will mention that just yesterday, my colleague, the Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister of Consumer Affairs and I had meetings with a company called INNERCOB from New York with which our New York Consulate had been talking for the past year to attract into Trinidad and Tobago direct investments in US dollars amounting to over $300 million, and it could be more than that.
We are talking about an ethanol plant, a glass plant, a paper manufacturing plant, a possible hotel. You may have seen some gentlemen walking across here yesterday. We are meeting them today again at 2 o’clock—my colleague and I—to finally make the push forward. Our missions are doing quite well. I have a long list of the work of our missions. I do not want to go into that. I just want to mention that as a highlight. [Desk thumping]

We have oriented our foreign policy in that direction. That is all I would say in response to my friend from Diego Martín West. I think I would have dealt with the majority of the things he said and I also chose this opportunity in responding to him to give my perspectives on the budget. You know, normally on an occasion like this, one is expected to give a report on one’s ministry. It is so well known how very well the Foreign Ministry of the country performed that I do not feel it is important for me to do this. [Desk thumping]

I talked about Costa Rica, about Mercosur, Mexico, Brazil and the bilaterals. I will need to mention as well, our visit to Venezuela with the Prime Minister and the wide ranging areas of co-operation that we have pursued and we are going to pursue. May I say that the incident that involved the fishermen is on its way to being resolved diplomatically. We are handling it and I will be making a statement on that in the not too distant future. The relationship between Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela is moving apace in energy, agriculture, hydro-electric power, fishing, and in dealing with the narcotics trade and so forth.

Brazil and Trinidad and Tobago have now set their bilateral agenda and I am going to be focussing on the northern part of Brazil in particular this year. Coming up, states of Monagas and others, which are close to Trinidad and Tobago, and visits at the highest level involved in that. We held discussions with the Canadian Government this year. We got the agreement to pursue co-operation in mutual legal assistance. Environmental protection, distance learning, all of those things are on the way.

I led a very successful delegation to Curacao this year, and that delegation served to really generate much economic activity between Trinidad and Tobago and the Netherlands Antilles in that the businessmen interacted and did business and we had a return visit from the Prime Minister of the Netherlands Antilles to Trinidad and Tobago. As a result, a lot of private sector activity is taking place. We represented Trinidad and Tobago very effectively. Caricom on the Rio group, and I used that platform for furthering our bilateral discussion at the highest level.
We ensured that we fulfilled our responsibilities to the Association of Caribbean States which is now placed in very elegant and modern headquarters, and may I say on the ACS as well, we had our first meeting in Havana and I do not want to be sounding my own trumpet. [Laughter]

Miss Nicholson: Sound your trumpet man; you must boast.

Hon. R. Maraj: I am by nature a very modest man, but I have discovered in politics that if you do not sound your trumpet, there are some people who will want to say certain things about you. Let me put this point down, Mr. Speaker. At that ACS meeting in Havana, I made a direct intervention early in the day, that in order to give the ACS raison d’être for it to fulfil its mandate to create an economic space in order to give it meaning within the whole hemispheric integration process, a free-trade area had to be established among the countries of the ACS.

Much discussion took place because there were Latin American countries, Mexico and Colombia, but at the end of the day, the Trinidad and Tobago view prevailed. [Desk thumping] Trinidad and Tobago and Cuba held discussions this year. We have set our bilateral agenda, trade investment protection and promotion agreement and so forth. Panama and Trinidad and Tobago held discussions this year. We have set our bilateral agenda.

We successfully carried out our duties as this country’s main thrust in Caricom and, as I said, you know the free-trade agreements that are to be signed. We had our legislative agenda in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We had a number of things that we did in the Parliament; five pieces of legislation. We appointed new honorary consuls all over and, very significantly, Mr. Speaker, we have more and more new embassies opening in Trinidad and Tobago. The Argentinians are going to be here. The Cubans are here. The Pakistanis want to be here. The Ecuadorians want to come. A number of other countries want to be here. The dream that I articulated two years ago, that Trinidad and Tobago would become a diplomatic centre of the region, is in fact becoming a reality. [Desk thumping.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting is suspended until 2.00 p.m.

12:30 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

2:05 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Hon. R. Maraj: Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to speak for much longer. When we broke for lunch I had really come to the end of the synopsis of the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the year 1996. But during the break I was advised
by a number of my colleagues that there was one thing which I mentioned only in passing and, in their view, I needed to elaborate a bit on, and that is the fishing agreement between Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela and the absence of it. There is no fishing agreement between Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela at the moment, Mr. Speaker, and that has a history which dates back to April 1995, when the fishing agreement was in operation for that year, and I was then the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the last administration. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Venezuela and myself met in Macuro, which is an island not very far from Trinidad belonging to Venezuela.

We had a very historic meeting in my view, Mr. Speaker, because at that meeting we charted the bilateral course for Trinidad and Tobago, and we took the decision then that one of the things we would do was negotiate a new fishing agreement between Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela within 60 days. The Venezuelan government was no longer prepared to roll over the old fishing agreement of 1985, which we had been rolling over for about five years for reasons which are very well known. We took that decision in April, and in May I was removed as the Minister of Foreign Affairs and replaced by my good friend the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. Mr. Speaker events followed about which you all know and I returned to the Ministry in mid-November to find that really nothing much had happened with respect to negotiating the fishing agreement, except that a seminar which was supposed to have been held to determine the fish stocks between the two countries was held six months late, to put it that way.

Now I cast no aspersions on my very good friend, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. He was one of the leading lights really in the last administration and he had the Ministry of Public Administration; he had the Ministry of Information and then he was given the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I have no doubt that his workload was very heavy and it may have caused slippage. I really cast no aspersion. The matter did not proceed as we had planned, and when I came into the ministry I then had to take back up the slack and I immediately got in touch with my colleague from Venezuela. We apprised the new Cabinet of the ramifications of the fishing agreement and so forth—the new negotiations—and by the time we had done all that we were into the end of the year and the fishing negotiations took place in February, 1996.

Thereafter—as you know, fishing agreements are difficult things—people took original positions, extreme positions and so forth, and we went back to each
other’s capital; we looked for more information and did more research and were prepared to resume the negotiations, Mr. Speaker, when this incident of the shooting in the Gulf of Paria took place.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members the speaking time of the Minister of Foreign Affairs has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar]

Hon. R. Maraj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleagues on both sides of the House. As I was saying, we were prepared to go when this incident took place and the Venezuelan government also indicated that one of their chief negotiators was out of the country and was not then able to resume.

The situation as it stands at present, Mr. Speaker, is that the mixed commission between Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela has met on this particular incident. It has met on two occasions and on both occasions we have not been able to have a meeting of minds. Both countries retained their original positions. In fact, they met only last week in Caracas and were unable to come to a meeting of minds on this matter. As you know, Trinidad and Tobago’s position is that the incident took place in Trinidad and Tobago waters and we want a certain course of action taken.

I met with the Foreign Minister in Cuba at the ACS meeting and we have decided upon a course of action which is that we would isolate this incident, and involve a third party at the multilateral level, preferably at the OAS. We would continue to negotiate our fishing agreement early in the New Year as well as pursue all the other bilateral activities between our countries. So that the Trinidad and Tobago/Venezuelan relations are really moving apace in spite of that incident which took place.

I just want to clear that up, Mr. Speaker, so that people would understand where we are with respect to that matter, and to call for objectivity with respect to analyzing the budget to see where we have done things right. When we see all the positive indicators that are in place, this will quickly summarize the growth in the economy, the drop in unemployment, the slow rate of inflation, the flow of investments and the diversification of the economy. All those things are positive and moving in the right direction.
I made the point, as well, that it is not true to accuse the Government of being tardy or lax. With respect to the PSIP, when one looks at it, especially at the level of central government, there has been 92 per cent implementation and it is expected that even though we may not be able to achieve 100 per cent in the new year, there is no doubt we will be able to increase our capacity to implement. The Prime Minister of the country has made it very clear to his Government, Mr. Speaker, that this year is delivery year for this UNC/NAR coalition.


Hon. R. Maraj: Sorry, 1997 is delivery year for this UNC/NAR coalition as a result of which I have no doubt, and I am convinced, and I am aware that all our delivery ministries, the relevant line ministries have developed and improved their absorptive capacities. There will be a lot of action in 1997. There is no doubt about that, but controlled enough not to fuel the inflation that the Leader of the Opposition talked about. It is going to be managed activity in 1997, Mr. Speaker, because whilst we at the macro-economic level will ensure that there is private sector activity and flow of investments and so forth, we also feel that at the central government level, in particular, there is the need for capital investment, capital upgrade, improvement of the social, economic and physical infrastructure and that will be acting in consonance with the private sector activity to fuel growth, to generate employment and to ensure that the very poverty levels that we have been talking about in Trinidad and Tobago are, in fact, reduced.

We are of the view—and I am sure most people are—that whilst you tackle poverty with the safety net which you would want to put in place, the way to ensure and distribute justice in your economy, the way to ensure that all the people are able to participate in your economy, is to generate long-term sustainable jobs on a sustainable basis and the two budgets of the hon. Minister of Finance are geared towards those objectives.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Gordon Draper (Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West): Mr. Speaker, as I rise to make my contribution here this afternoon, I share with many of my colleagues, who have already spoken, the concerns about the lack of a very clear articulation about a vision coming out of this budget to mobilize the people of Trinidad and Tobago.
Mr. Speaker, it is clear, that if we are to move into the next century, we need to move with a sense of purpose; we need to move with a sense of togetherness; we need to move with clarity about what we as a people and we as a country want to achieve. I would have hoped, therefore, that both the budget statement itself and the contribution of the hon. Ministers and Members opposite would have provided us with this sense of vision.

In fairness, I would say, Mr. Speaker, that the budget does, on page 1, talk about a total quality nation. Let me say that as a concept, as a phrase, it is laudable; it is one with which we can associate. What is unfortunate, however, Mr. Speaker, is that we have not yet been treated with an articulation of precisely what this means; nor have we been treated in the contributions of the ministers, so far, with an understanding of how this translates into their own programmes and activities.

I hoped that the hon. Minister of Finance would have perhaps said a bit more to us about what was in his mind or his Government’s mind when he talked about a total quality nation. You see, they are words, but words mean different things to different people, and we need to be clear about what those words mean to him. We have some very clear evidence, to which I will return, that words do mean different things to different people. The Minister of Labour and Co-operatives told us that we have a stable industrial relations climate. Now that is what stability means to him. But it does not mean the same thing to me, Mr. Speaker. It may well be, that because he is part of an unstable coalition he has some lack of clarity about the concept of stability. But that is an issue to which I will return later.

Coming back to that conception, the total quality nation, I would have hoped that the hon. Minister of Education, in his contribution, would have linked the priorities and the programmes in his ministry to a total quality nation. While he spoke to us about some programmes and activities in construction and some curriculum development activities, I did not get a clear link between those programmes and that concept that was put out by the Minister of Finance.

I would have hoped, for instance, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry would have spoken to us about what the total quality nation means in the context of our manufacturing and service sectors. When one looks at the movement of countries with which we have to compete across the world, many of them are articulating similar visions and many of them are talking about how they will move their country into the knowledge-based industries of the future. The
Minister of Trade and Industry did not provide us with an elaboration of that in the context of this total quality nation.

Mr. Speaker, I would have hoped, that the Minister of Public Utilities, when he spoke to us, would have talked about the various institutions and public utilities under his charge and how transformation in those utilities would have contributed to that total quality nation. While he made passing reference to some, he provided us with no clear indication of how the programmes in his ministry would impact on this total quality nation.

I would have hoped, Mr. Speaker, that while he did not, or has not yet made a contribution here, that somewhere between the budget, the Medium Term Framework and the new public administration policy document, we would have gotten a notion of how public administration links in with a total quality nation.

Over the last day and a night we are no clearer about what this Government means when it talks about a total quality nation. To talk about a vision without being able to clearly articulate it and link it back into the individual programming is not to give the people hope and insight to where they are going. That is one of my concerns.

Instead, Mr. Speaker, we have a budget which has achieved at least six objectives, and, interestingly, all of them serving to mobilize different sections of the national community. We have a budget that has angered the pharmacists; annoyed the religious community; attacked the lower and middle classes; frustrated the credit union movement and antagonized the labour movement. So, these six things are what the budget has done, Mr. Speaker; all of them totally lacking; all of them in no way contributing to this notion of a total quality nation. I would come to the pension plan and what that does to the insurance companies and poor people later.

While these things, to me, have jumped out fairly clearly, there are some other things in the budget and in statements around which send some rather chilling messages to which I wish to return.

My friend and colleague, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, made passing reference yesterday to Malaysia, 20/20. I just want to put what I have just said in terms of the total quality nation, within the context of one who will be a major competitor of ours in the international market place. That country, too, talks about a vision of quality, and about transformation. Against that background we find that when they talk quality, they are now, for instance, moving to ensure that
every ministry and department in their public service achieves ISO 9,000 certification over the next five years. We are not seeing the clarity of what that vision means and translates into.

Their vision allows them to speak very clearly about what they call Malaysia incorporated and the level of corporation between private and public sectors. I am not seeing that clarity in the statements coming out here. Their vision and their sense of a quality nation allows them to articulate very clearly an information policy and an information technology policy for their country which, among other things, will provide assistance and measures of all sorts for people getting into that industry for the importation of appropriate technology, so that they can in fact truly harness that new technology and move on to the knowledge-based industries of the future.

I am saying, these are the things which come out of their vision. This is a country on a growth path; this is a country with which we will have to compete. I am saying, Mr. Speaker, that, as I listened to the budget, as I listened to the Ministers opposite, I did not get any sense of what we need to do and what this Government will do in leading us to compete with countries like Malaysia in the next millennium. And that is my concern.

Mr. Speaker, there are some things which are written, some of them hidden, that I would wish to lift and seek to get some clarification on and some questions answered. The first of these has to do with the Government’s intention with regard to retrenchment in the public service. It is clear to me, as I look at the documentation, that this Government is beginning to aim its guns at the public service and the size of the public service. But it is not new. In the previous budget, we had the Minister of Finance; we had the Prime Minister himself being concerned about the size of public expenditure that goes into the public service. More recently, the Minister of Planning and Development raised questions about the size of the public service. I ask: Is 1997, in terms of delivery, going to be delivery of a smaller public service?

There are some interesting statements. I will quote a paragraph here on page 5 of the budget statement:

“We will restructure Government’s expenditure to direct a larger share of resources to more urgent priority areas. This will entail a concerted effort to reduce the share in expenditure of wages and salaries and debt service payments.”
It makes an interesting, very fuzzy statement immediately after that which says:

“However, reducing such expenditures must be viewed in context of the current negotiations on wages and salaries in the public service...”

2.25 p.m.

You see, Mr. Speaker, we really had no clear explanation of what this kind of hodgepodge statement really means. Is it that there is going to be an attempt to settle negotiations with public servants and then argue that this has further increased the take of public servants out of national revenue and, therefore, justifies a significant cut? Is this what we are saying, Mr. Speaker?

But then, when one looks at the provisions made for personnel emoluments in the budget statement, it does not suggest that this Government understands that it is in the midst of negotiation with a major public service union, and perhaps about to enter into similar negotiations with another. We have no sense of that, nor have we heard anything over the last few hours which has given comfort in this regard, Mr. Speaker. We are left, therefore, to assume—[Cross talk]

Mr. Speaker: Now Members, please, allow the Member to continue his contribution. You are throwing things off course. Please!

Mr. G. Draper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am at the point where I am saying that as we look at the statement there seems a signal that this Government is about to deal with the size of the public service, notwithstanding the caveat here about negotiations and putting that in some kind of context. We have heard nothing which either suggests that there is an appreciation of the industrial relations situation—they think it is stable, Mr. Speaker—nothing which suggests, therefore, an appreciation of the urgency of that but we are getting a statement which suggests increased concerns with the size of the public service.

I want, Mr. Speaker, to put some other things on the table with regard to some of the statements made within recent times. In a paper laid before this House sometime ago called *Towards a New Public Administration—A Political Agenda for the Public Service of Trinidad and Tobago*, on page 8 of that document there are the following statements, and I shall quote from paragraphs 24 and 25. It talks about the importance of the future growth and prosperity of Trinidad and Tobago which depends on the link between a modernized and a highly efficient public service and then—here is the statement, Mr. Speaker:
“This desired future, however, continues to appear threatened by the high level of expenditure within and on the public service, without a concomitant high return of value for moneys expended.”

Paragraph 25, states:

“The future also appears bleak in the face of continuing concerns regarding the size of a public service in terms of persons employed therein and the scope of the public service in terms of the functions it performs and the services it delivers.”

Their statement, Mr. Speaker—October of this year—is a clear indication that the future appears bleak with regard to the public service. It goes on, in this same document, on page 15, paragraph 58:

“The Public Service knows its strengths and will concentrate its efforts on activities that should be undertaken by Government.”

This is a clear statement, Mr. Speaker, in my view, of a commitment on the part of this Government to contract out; to down size; to change the nature, structure and size of the public service. In fact, Mr. Speaker, it is stated here, and the relevant Ministers who spoke have given us absolutely no indication of what this means with regard to their portfolio.

You see, Mr. Speaker, the Government of which I was a part introduced voluntary separation programmes in parts in the public service, we negotiated it with unions, we cleared up front that on the basis of direction of those individual institutions or utilities, we talked through what that size would be. There are things in these documents which are put in one-sentence forms and no elaboration has been given.

The Minister of Public Utilities has spoken, Mr. Speaker. In his Medium Term Policy Framework he talks about the possibility of turning over the Government Printery to workers. The Government Printery, Mr. Speaker. He talks about that in the context of that printery being competitive in this environment. I ask, Mr. Speaker, are we serious when we argue that the state of machinery, equipment, technology in that printery is going to permit that place to be competitive in this environment? Now, if it is that the Minister intended to do things to correct that, to bring it up to some standard to allow it to be divested, he had his opportunity yesterday to say that, Mr. Speaker. And my point is, he was definitely silent on that issue. He was silent on that issue! [Desk thumping] There was the opportunity.
We on this side have had to go through the path of looking very closely at utilities and determining what the size of those utilities ought to be, and we have had to make some decisions, as a government, in terms of reduction. My point, Mr. Speaker, is that we have had an opportunity here for the Minister to elaborate on this and to talk about what it means in the context of these statements.

The Minister of Public Utilities also has in the *Medium Term Policy Framework*, a programme designed to restructure the post office. Now, that is a programme which was started in our administration, where the initial discussion with the World Bank took place while we were in office, where the initial discussions of our options took place and we, therefore, are aware that some of the issues have to do with the size of the post office. I am saying, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Public Utilities had his opportunity yesterday to articulate that and to talk about what are the implications of transforming the post office for employment, for operation, and so forth. He was definitely silent on that issue yesterday, Mr. Speaker, and that is my concern. [Desk thumping]

This policy statement, Mr. Speaker, on page 25, paragraph 73, talks about rationalization. It says:

“Therefore this policy objective will target the rationalization process in the core public service.”

So we are now moving away from the public utilities, we are now moving away from state enterprises, we are now targeting the core public service. It is here, paragraph 73 of this document.

“...the core public service which will be streamlined. Elimination of duplication, better co-ordination...”

Paragraph 74 re-enforces that, Mr. Speaker, by talking about rationalization and restructuring, once again, of the core public service.

Mr. Speaker, if this is the policy agenda, then one would expect that in a debate of this nature which allows Ministers to elaborate and articulate implementation of policy, we would have had some clarity about these things. And we had no such clarity.

Mr. Speaker, we are also aware that one of the implications of the highways loan agreement that was signed by this Government this year involves a planned programme of phasing out some 5,000 jobs in the daily-paid sector of the public service over the next few years. We have heard nothing about that. If this is where
we are going, then let us talk about it; let Ministers come here and say that these are the implications of policy statements, the implications of agreements, and so forth.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am saying that one of the issues which jumps at me as I look at these documents laid before us is the reality that the Government seems now on a clear course of dealing with the size of the public service and we need to be aware of that and the likely implications and consequences of it for our society, and for the total quality nation that they espouse. We need to be aware of that, Mr. Speaker.

2.35 p.m.

When we look at one of the very vexed issues today, it has to do with industrial relations in the teaching service. The Minister of Education, in his comments to us, sought to treat with that rather lightly and dismissed it by saying that they paid increments to the teachers to the tune, I think he said, of $25 million; that they paid bond payments to teachers in 1996—bond payments which, incidentally, were negotiated by the PNM government with TTUTA. He was silent on the elements currently surrounding the negotiations between TTUTA and the Government, and there are some interesting issues around that. You see, while, in a sense, much of what has come out relating to those negotiations have had to do with salary levels—and that clearly is a critical issue—we also need to appreciate that inside the TTUTA proposals are some elements which relate very closely to the White Paper on education.

The Minister of Education assured us that his Government has accepted this White Paper. When one looks at this, the proposals and the details in this White Paper speak about a number of areas of action. It speaks about the delivery system, curriculum, that kind of thing; it speaks about some of the physical infrastructure, but it also speaks about some human resource management issues. It speaks, for instance, about what we are going to do to improve the professionalism of our teaching stock because it is not only a Bachelor of Education which the Minister speaks about which is important—and that is important and that programme needs to go forward—but TTUTA itself has articulated a need, for instance, for sabbaticals for teachers; a need to develop a career path within the teaching profession which would allow good teachers to be rewarded while remaining as teachers, rather than being promoted outside into the administrative stream. TTUTA has talked, for instance, about books and book grants and access to knowledge.
I hear whispers from the Minister of Education who had his chance yesterday to say all that he was going to do. He said nothing. I did not stop him from saying nothing. He had nothing to say then, he has nothing to say now and it would be better if he said it. [Desk thumping] You see, Mr. Speaker, the context in which the negotiations are going on in 1996 is one in which TTUTA was integrally involved in the development of this White Paper, and therefore the completion and acceptance of this document was an important forerunner to settling any negotiation.

More than that, TTUTA also worked very closely with our government in putting in place a new classification system for teachers; in putting in place a new performance appraisal system for teachers and there was the acceptance that those two critical elements of activity—the classification and the performance appraisal system—were also critical inputs to settling the negotiations. Part of the negotiations in this new era of total quality has to do, for instance, with rewards for performance. That means that one has to have a structure for evaluating performance.

It has to do as well, as we go into the new millennium, with clarifying levels within the teaching fraternity. We operate with a classification system in our public service which is 30 years old, which is why we had embarked on that as one of the necessary prerequisites for settling any negotiation. That is why in November, 1995, a year ago, the teaching community, among all the public servants, had reached furthest down the line in completing work relating to its new classification, which is why it flowed easily into negotiations and settlement. One has to understand that total picture.

If, therefore, we come here to talk about education without being able to put it in that context, we would not be able to understand the plight, the concerns and the anguish of the teaching fraternity. We are not, on that basis, going to be able to develop at the level of our school system, the necessary human resources for this total quality nation unless we understand those things.

Mr. Speaker, embedded in this document is, in fact, provision—it is there under the Personnel Department—for, hopefully, completing the classification exercise in 1997. It is interesting, however, that when one looks at the priorities in this framework, it does not get translated here. One asks, therefore, are we putting some provision into our estimates, not articulating it clearly in our priorities and therefore not committed to completing it?
All I am saying, given the importance of that in the context of the education system, indeed in the context of the public service of our country, one would have hoped that a clearer statement on that would have come out in the budget documents. Therefore my appeal to one of the Members opposite who would speak, is to give us some notion of the Government’s commitment in that regard.

One of the other issues which TTUTA has been concerned about has to do, again, with a proposal accepted in here, not only by us but by this Government, about moving from a Teaching Service Commission to an Education Service Commission. If we are to talk about that—and the Minister made some passing reference to managing the education system—then we would have to talk about how we put all these human resources under one umbrella which would be able to monitor, plan for, and so forth.

It is in here. This document, their Public Administration Policy, is silent on that issue. The Minister of Education said nothing about that issue. The Medium Term Policy Framework, although it talks about strengthening the human resource units in the ministry, nothing is stated about that issue. My question is: if it is such an inherent part of this process of transforming education for the total quality nation, then clearly we ought to have some articulation about it. There has been silence on that issue, Mr. Speaker, and I just ask for some answers where that is concerned.

The Minister of Education, perhaps, could have talked to us about what it takes in terms of skill development, in terms of curriculum development for teachers. What does it take to move from where we are to this total quality nation that comes in as a one-liner in the budget? We did not get that. I am suggesting that embedded in here are elements to help us move in that direction, but we do not have any notion about whether this Government is truly committed to moving in that direction.

I would give you one other issue, Mr. Speaker. One of the programmes which we implemented on a pilot basis in the Ministry of Education was the Employee Assistance Programme, which I am aware, had an extremely rocky passage during 1996. This programme was initiated by and with the involvement of the union and it was beginning to see significant results in terms of dealing with teacher-behaviour, with stress levels of teachers and so forth, critical elements in improving the productivity and efficiency of our teachers.

It comes in as a one-line item in the budget, noting that there is provision for the consultant, but we see no clear indication about whether the Government is truly committed to it. The reason I say that is because this document, the policy
document, is silent on that issue, and, clearly, it is one of the things which we need to move in, now that we have gone through that pilot project in education, to the wider public service. We have to. But they are silent on that issue.

You see, the exacerbation of the industrial relations situation in the Ministry of Education gets worse.

2.45 p.m.

I now have information from TTUTA, Mr. Speaker, that there has been a long-standing agreement between TTUTA and the CPO, relating to the grant of scholarships to members of TTUTA to the Cipriani Labour College. I now have some information to suggest that, after those scholarship winners have been determined, this Government seems to be about preventing those persons from accessing the scholarships. It is said, Mr. Speaker, that we do not have instability in our industrial relations climate.

Not only are we refusing to deal with a wider issue that TTUTA has on our table for negotiations, but we are now seeking to push little elements which can only worsen the situation. And I ask, are we really serious about it? Do we understand how these things link one with the other?

Mr. Speaker, let me just go back for a moment to that classification system that I talked about. Because you see, there is a link between completing that and being able to clearly articulate a wage and salary policy and programme for the public service. If on the one hand, the Government, as it is saying, is concerned about the size of emoluments, but, on the other hand, is also articulating a concern about the skill levels within the public service—clearly, Mr. Speaker, we need to be able to treat with the kinds of people we need to bring into the public service and what we must pay them.

You see, one of the issues raised in last year's budget, and it has come up again this year, about implementation of projects, has to do with skill levels in projects management and public implementation within the public service. But part of the difficulty is that the people who we have trained in the public service are now scattered in varying other posts, because we did not articulate clearly a line, a career path for these people. If we understand the importance then of going back to our classification, it will also allow us to treat with that next issue, as far as the Government is concerned we need to understand the linkages.

One would have hoped, Mr. Speaker, that one would have seen some of these emerge. I would also have hoped that as we listened to some of the speakers and
the comments which were made, that we would have got some clearer notion about things, for instance, like where we are with regard to the performance appraisal system and an introduction of that system in the public service.

We do not have a clear notion of that, but again it is critical, because if we are going to talk about a total quality nation, then we have to set quality related standards, and therefore we have to have a new system. Therefore, we need to have articulated what that new system is going to be. But we heard none of that.

As we looked at this document we saw a recognition and, in a sense, a commitment, to build on some of the work started, in fact started even before the PNM administration. Some of the work which we are doing in terms of public service and public service reform. This document, for instance, talks about the commitment of the Government to things like, human resource management units—it is important—things which began to be implemented in our term of office, which they are now saying they are going to complete, and we laud them for that. At the same time, we need to appreciate how that motion links with some other activities.

For instance, what is going to be the relationship between those units and the CPO's office? What is going to be the relationship between those units and the Public Service Commission? This document is silent on those things, and we need to have some notion of where the Government is going as far as those things are concerned. We need to have some notion. This document talks, for instance, about the importance of things like management development for a range of people in the public service. Again, programmes which began some time ago and which truly need to be developed, continued, but we have spoken in this document, Mr. Speaker, as though they are new.

We do need periodic review. We do need periodic revision. My problem, is again, as we listened to the contributions of ministers, we got no link between what was stated in here, the directions that they propose to take, and that notion of the total quality nation. I think we need to recognize the Government's side for this, that while they make side comments about what happened, or did not happen, this document is replete with recognition of the work done by the PNM administration in the reform area.

Even to recognize, and it is stated right here, that Trinidad and Tobago had become and been seen, as one of the leaders in reform work in the region. They will acknowledge that fact, but we need to build on this and they need to articulate what building on that means, and I am saying we have not seen that. We have also
Mr. Speaker, some interesting debates are now going on relating to changes in terms of financial regulations and accountability. Is it that the Government is committed to reform in that area as well? Because also in here, there are notions about increased authority and autonomy for managers. How is that getting translated in the financial area? We are not even clear how it is getting out in the articulated human resource area. My concern is the need for clarity and articulation in that area.

In the area of procurement—an issue that we had addressed and one which very often impinges on the performance of things like our projects—we need to be clear about what we are doing in that regard, and I am saying that this framework and none of the statements of ministers, or the budget itself, speaks to that issue. What are we doing with that? The ministers needed to speak to us in these terms and we have not seen that.

Mr. Speaker, I will just move on to some of the other, in my view, interesting issues and statements relating to the budget. It is interesting that when we look at the Medium Term Policy Framework on page 45, for instance, we see that the Ministry of Works and Transport had put as one of its priorities for this year, the introduction of the anniversary date system for licensing new vehicles. It is interesting, Mr. Speaker. Because on the one hand, we have one Minister of Government putting into a document—which I assume has Cabinet sanction, it is a Government document—what they are doing in 1997, that is, introducing the anniversary date system for licensing vehicles, and we come here and hear that licences gone.

One wonders what is the level of communication taking place inside there. One wonders, because you see over these days we may not have completed, perused all of the fine print and little one liners in this document. How many more things like that will confront us as we go into 1997? One minister and ministry going down the road doing one thing; one minister and ministry going down the road doing a completely different thing. We have found this, Mr. Speaker.

2.55 p.m.

I want to return to two issues which have already been touched, but I think important enough for us to return to, because I really believe we need to return to them. One has to do with the provision relating to the ceiling of 80,000 with
regard to personal income tax. Even as the Minister of Trade and Industry spoke to us about the kudos coming to them from reports by the Chamber of Commerce and so forth, we are also seeing significant statements coming to us and in the media about the effect which that measure would have on pension plans, insurance companies and the solvency of some companies, and of course, the effect that that measure would have on the ability of people to sustain themselves after retirement.

The financial and insurance communities are extremely concerned about the implication of that measure. [Interruption] As my colleague is now pointing out to me, in the Daily Express of Wednesday, December 18, 1996, "Arneaud hits 'anti-saving' move", a comment from one of the leading lights in the private sector about the implications of that budget. [Interruption] He is a former president of the Chamber, the Member knows that, does he not?

Mr. Speaker, the issue I am on to here is that at this stage given the concerns coming from these sectors in our community and the concerns which clearly we must have for the implications for the little people who would have started putting money into a pension plan for their retirement, who may now find themselves unable to continue; who may now find themselves unable to deal with life after they have worked on behalf of all these people. We once again make a plea for a reconsideration of that ceiling which has been put and which, therefore, will treat in a negative way with the pension plans and pension arrangements in this country. We need to treat with it. [Desk thumping]

I also want to return to another issue and it again has to do with one of the measures in the budget. It has to do with the treatment of credit unions and the credit relating to savings in credit unions. The Minister of Labour and Co-operatives stood in this Chamber yesterday and talked about the importance of the co-operative sector. The credit union is part of that co-operative sector. I acknowledged as he spoke, that there is a need for serious restructuring among many of our country's credit unions and mechanisms need to be put in place to treat with the transformation. Government cannot, on the one hand, say that and move in that direction and, on the other, take a measure in the budget which is going to have the effect of destroying the credit union movement. The Government cannot do that. [Desk thumping]

The persons being targeted are the small people. There are members of credit unions who rely on the credit union for personal investment for their savings. I am making this as a second plea. The first had to do with the ceiling relating to
pensions and the second has to do with a plea to revisit issues relating to the tax credit for savings in the credit union.

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

*Motion made,* That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Dr. K. Rowley*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. G. Draper:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I do not propose to use all of those 30 minutes, but I thank hon. Members for the extension.

I was on the point relating to the credit union movement. I was saying that, on the one hand, we are talking very admirably about the need to assist this sector in putting its house in order, in putting systems in place and we laud that, but we cannot, on the one hand, do that and, on the other, begin to destroy that movement by removing the incentives that people have for going to that movement. That movement has, over the years, played a significant role in assisting many people in their own day-to-day development in investments for appliances, housing and cars. In other words, it is a sector of our community which has been a critical one, coming out of community-based organizations, committed as we are as a country and a people, to working and helping each other. Here we have a movement which has stood the test of time, notwithstanding some of the deficiencies which we admit need to be corrected, and which clearly has a significant role to play in the further development of this country.

When, therefore, the Government talks about our total quality nation I would need to ask where is the co-operative movement really in that? If it is as articulated by the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives that he and his Government see it as having a critical role, then let us demonstrate that commitment in tangible terms and let us not seek to kill it at this stage.

Mr. Speaker, my concerns are that we have not had clear enough articulation of a vision as part of this Government and as they talk about a total quality nation we would like to see some evidence of what that means. We would certainly like to hear how individual ministers see that playing out in terms of their own programmes and projects.

My concern, and the concern on this side, is that we have not yet heard a clear enough articulation of those individual programmes to that statement about a total quality nation. I imagine there is still time for that, but that is my fundamental question as I look at this budget.
I also have a fundamental question relating to clarity about the Government’s intention with regard to the size of the public service. There are statements in here which lead me and others to be concerned about the direction we are likely to go. Clarification is what we now desire most; clarification with regard to transformation, what that really means and how the Government is to take its policy paper and truly put it into force. These are the things one would expect to come out in a budget debate and one hopes that we can still live with that expectation.

Mr. Speaker, my best wishes to you and your family for the season.

Thank you very much.

The Minister of Housing and Settlements (Hon. John Humphrey): Mr. Speaker, I start by congratulating all my colleagues who have so far contributed to this debate, in particular, the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism who has laid the groundwork to enable this country to launch like a rocket in French Guiana. [Laughter]

I do not, however, want to offer the slightest congratulation to any Member on that side who has spoken so far. Not a single Member on that side has done an analysis of the budget, yet they all want to criticize it. [Desk thumping] All we have had, so far, from that side, all the way up to 4.30 this morning, are personal insults and a set of noise making and desk thumping when they talk nonsense and waste Parliament's time generally.

3.05 p.m.

I am not in a position to analyze the budget because I am no expert. However, I am sensible enough to rely on those who are in such a position, and the firm of Ernst and Young, I believe, is in a position to analyze the budget and has done so, and just a couple days ago published the document "Focus on Trinidad and Tobago's 1997 Budget." [Interruption]

Every single one of the Members who spoke on that side—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I ask you please could we hear the Member uninterruptedly. It is extremely difficult for the Hansard reporters to pick up all these things, and they are in duty bound to report everything that is said in the House. I ask you, please, as a good hearing was given to the earlier speaker, I ask you to give a similar hearing to this one.

Hon. J. Humphrey: Yes, Mr. Speaker, every one of them has criticized this budget, condemning it for putting pressure on little people. When I look at Ernst
and Young and, of course, this was presented in the budget speech, so they merely repeated it. Let us look at page 14, the rates of tax: from 0 to $50,000 chargeable income, the rate is 28 per cent; over $50,000, the rate is 35 per cent. Let us look at the new measures that have been introduced and how they will impact on different income groups. On page 19, effect on employed individuals with an annual salary of $30,000, in 1996, their tax would have been $4,531, and in the new budget for 1997, the tax is $3,163, a saving of $1,368, for that year, and that is at the level of $30,000 income. The following page 20, annual salary $60,000, 1996, tax $7,597 1997 tax, $6,739, a saving of $858. Now we get to the level of some of us on this side, where the 1996 tax liability is $27,197 for $120,000 annual income, and this year it is $25,779, a decreased take home pay. Sorry, I am giving you the wrong column, that is the liability. The net taxes payable in 1996, $25,172; in 1997, $25,779, $607 more. So it is progressive, but now the income of some on that side: individual annual salary $240,000, net taxes payable in 1996, $60,872; $67,779 a decreased take home pay of $6,907, and that is why they are against the budget. These are progressive measures, where the little people get the benefits.

It has been said, Mr. Speaker, that the increase in the gasoline tax is going to put pressure on little people. I got accurate figures from a very senior executive member of the Neal and Massy Group of Companies, who indicated to me, that with a Nissan Sentra 1.6 litre Sedan the cost of fuel including the annual licence of $215, would have been $5742.20, running 20,000 kilometres for that year. In 1997, there would be a difference of $20 for the entire year.

**Mr. Manning:** That cannot be so.

**Hon. J. Humphrey:** If he drove 40,000 kilometres, the cost would be $11,269.40, with the licence of $215 a year, but with the new taxes, at 40,000 kilometres a year he would pay an increase of $305.40 for the year. This tells us volumes, that people who have small, reasonably sized cars are not being penalized by this measure. Quite obviously, those who can afford the very large expensive cars, as some of the Members of the Front Bench on that side, will have to pay more, and that is why they do not like the budget. This budget is not for them, it is for the little people of Trinidad and Tobago. From the individual who was going to service the cows of the country, and produce a set of calves, the former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources whose contribution was insulting from beginning to end, he was critical of the Member for St. Augustine on several counts—

**Mr. Hart:** Where is the people in Sou Sou Lands’ money?
Hon. J. Humphrey: I want to focus my contribution on his criticism of the Member for St. Augustine. [Interruption] He spoke of some Chinese company with which we were entering into business relations, to build some road to Timbuktu, to quote him.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members must remember that we cannot continue like this and, at this stage, I suggest that if anybody wants to say anything, it should be done as is suggested in the Standing Orders, and say it through me, because there just is too much of a running conversation with the Member as he is speaking. You may not agree with what he is saying, but please do him the courtesy of listening to him. It is just not right.

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, why are these missiles put on our desk? Because if I am permitted to use them I would not need you to defend me.

3.15 p.m.

I come back to this road of Timbuktu. Very recently, at an extraordinary annual general meeting of the Trinidad and Tobago Contractors Association—in fact, I am advised it was the biggest turn out they ever had of their membership—they unanimously decided to purchase 40 per cent of their equity in a new company that was encouraged by the company and which was formed on the basis of a Cabinet decision. The company is called National East-West Company Limited (NEWCO). One of the partners in that company took 40 per cent of the equity. It is a company from the People’s Republic of China called the China State Construction Engineering Corporation. I have their publication dated October, 1991, so that this is very updated, but I have more up-to-date information which I will relate to later on. I now refer to sections of the document.

Firstly, for the production and business operation at home the enterprises and institutions under this company, (China State Construction Engineering Corporation), of survey and design, construction, goods and materials supplied and marketing have so far produced the output value totalling 18.7 billion (rmb)—which is the Chinese currency—for the Building Contract and Labour Service Corporation abroad. The China State Engineering Corporation, with the realization of total contract value of US $3.75 billion, has been among the 250 largest contracting companies in the world in six successive years, since 1991. The latest information is that they are one of the 12 biggest in the world, and they have taken 40 per cent of the equity of a company that is mandated to deliver a highways network system of dams and reservoirs and any other infrastructure facility required by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the Chinese company to build some road to Timbuktu.
The former Government could not build a single highway when it had charge of the oil boom—not a single foot of highway while it had billions of dollars in the coffers. Now the other nonsense which the Member for Diego Martin West was saying—

**Mr. Manning:** I thank the hon. Member for giving way. I merely wish to ask him if he could be kind enough to tell us as former Minister of Works and Transport, when the Uriah Butler Highway was dualled; when the Claude Noel Highway was constructed; when the Churchill Roosevelt Highway was upgraded; when the Mucurapo Foreshore Highway was constructed; when the Rienzi Kirton Highway, San Fernando was constructed.

**Hon. J. Humphrey:** Not during the oil boom.

**Mr. Manning:** Do you see what I mean?

**Hon. J. Humphrey:** The PNM Government collected $60 billion and could not build a foot of highway.

Mr. Speaker, the critics on that side have said that the Ministry of Housing and Settlements has no record of building any houses, so I asked for an update. It was very difficult to get it. I asked for the record of housing deliveries performance of the PNM regime under the Member for San Fernando East from 1991—1995. I was able to get it in their manifesto but even in preparing their manifesto, they demonstrated a level of incompetence because they could not get the facts straight. In their manifesto they boasted that when they demitted office between 1991—1995, they produced in that four-year period a total of 315 housing units including single family houses and apartments. That averaged 80 houses per year, but in all honesty these figures were wrong, but these are the figures they have in their manifesto.

The true figures have just come to me from the National Housing Authority and the Project Execution Unit of the ministry. In the four-year period they actually produced a total of 697 units. During the course of this year, we have completed and handed over 434 units in one year but we have started during the course of this year at 1,490 housing units. [Desk thumping] I think that takes care of the “moon” and whatever else they talked about. It is a pity the “moon” did not rise for some of them. The “sun” rises for all of us today, thank God!

They complained that we have no policy. It is quite true that it took a few months for the board of directors and the management that I inherited from my predecessor. I did not ask for a single resignation. I met with all of the board
members and the top management and we shared the vision of this Government of one love and national unity. I was able to win all of them over to sharing that vision and getting onto the road of delivery for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Do you know that some members of the board who are still there with us contested in the PNM party for office? They lost, which means I want them more than ever because they were defeated by the Member for San Fernando East—two of them. I have not gone in there and used partisan politics and race. I inherited the institution exactly as I found it. Today, that institution can publish its strategic plan dated November, 1996. It is a plan for 1997—2000. I just want to quote some of the highlights of the plan so that they will understand where we are headed. I am going to keep the best for last. It is going to be the best for “Lasse” and it is going to be the best for last and it is going to be the last of “Lasse”.

3.25 p.m.

This document was designed and compiled by the management of the National Housing Authority under the direction of the board. It reflects the meeting that we held where we shared the vision; they all agreed to it and they are all committed to it. I have demonstrated in the Ministry of Housing and Settlements that in fact, national unity can be realized in a very real way. So let us hear what the policy says and I quote:

“Tackling The Shelter Challenge—Policy Framework

(1) Ensure that poverty should not preclude access to shelter.

Government policy holds that adequate, appropriate shelter is a fundamental human right and the State is a provider/facilitator of last resort when open market operations are unable to meet this need. Fairness, in the context of NHA operations, will require the Authority to first help those with the greatest need.

(2) Prevent slippage of families/persons from the ‘IN NEED’ and ‘URGENT’ categories into the ‘DESPERATE’ category.

Stopping the cycle in which families in difficult situations deteriorate into desperation is a priority. To prevent the housing challenge from becoming a crisis, it is necessary to offer an appropriate range of shelter solutions to meet the needs of persons of different incomes.
(3) Provide shelter and land solutions which people can improve incrementally.

   Socially, fostering self-reliance builds dignity, a spirit of independence and a sense of worth and self-confidence. Economically, self-help programmes are more cost-effective, encourages more consistent growth in the housing sector with lower inflationary tendencies. Ultimately, helping people to get started and to help themselves is a more socially and economically sustainable strategy.

(4) Channel appropriately the self-help initiatives that squatters demonstrate.”

Recognizing that squatters have demonstrated an ability to help themselves without the support of the State and the finances of the taxpayers.

“(5) Promote home ownership as opposed to rental.

   A Survey of Living Conditions by the Social Sectors Unit of the Ministry of Planning and Development, found that 75.9 per cent of the households were living in dwellings they owned. The propensity to own rather than rent appears to be true across all sectors of the society. People would appear to be willing to temporarily sacrifice quality of accommodation in order to own their own property, (i.e. giving up a rental apartment to move to a core house which they can own and enhance).”

Encouraging home ownership is consistent with the Government’s thinking as it promotes the socially desirable outcome of encouraging citizens to have a tangible stake in their country. This is a major factor in promoting social stability.

“(6) Encourage the opening up of the country to housing.”

   This is where NEWCO comes in. The building of the highways, the reservoirs and the dams, the opening up of the country that is sitting idle to the use and the enjoyment of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, especially the little people of Trinidad and Tobago.

“(7) Structure charges dependent on what people can afford to pay.

(8) Ensure transparency of operations.

(9) Introduce mechanisms to measure and encourage efficiency and productivity.

(10) Optimize resources by providing the most cost effective solutions.
(11) Link the NHA’s policies to those of other government agencies.”

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West was also critical of something that I have said, that with the NHA we do not really need a Minister of Housing; we need a Minister of Settlements. The NHA if properly organized, properly managed, properly directed, could satisfy the needs of the group in the society that cannot satisfy its own needs. We need a Minister however, to ensure that the NHA is honest and straight and does not deviate from clear policy lines. I think that the NHA today has such a Minister, but I do not know what this Parliament and the country is going to say about the documents that I am now going to present.

Mr. Speaker, when I first became Minister in November 1995, one of the very earliest things that I did was to request of the Permanent Secretary, an investigation into the commitments that were made by the ministry and the National Housing Authority to people, in terms of distributing whatever shelter existed, and I swore to honour whatever commitments had been made; the future policies would be changed in that we would not follow the line that was established by my predecessor. That was on November 8, 1995. That must have been a day or so after, because here it is, the whole history of it, on December 6, and it goes on. Now what was I asking for? I was asking to be given a list of people who qualified for existing accommodation, that either was available to be delivered or had been committed in the recent past.

One particular project had in fact been delivered. It was delivered on the eve of the election before anything was really put in place to enable proper delivery, so I asked who were the people who qualified for the accommodation of 48 apartments at a place called Ramdial Mahabir Lands, which by the way, had been started by the NAR Government. I had been a minister for a while and the Member for Tobago West was Minister until the end of the term, so it was started during our administration.

Mr. Speaker, we had great difficulty in getting data. I do not want to read every single note in the folio, but what I would like to do is go to the final reply from the Executive Director of the National Housing Authority. Remember, it was started in November, 1995. I finally got the reply on November 1, 1996. It is addressed to the Permanent Secretary; let me quote:
“Dear Sir,

Ramdial Mahabir Phase 1—Beneficiary Selection

I refer to your letter of similar caption dated August 28th, 1996.

Regarding the matters raised, I wish to advise that there is no written record nor correspondence pertaining to any NHA list on any of the Authority’s files. It would appear that this information was transmitted informally to the Ministry of Housing and Settlements.

The transmittal of item (b) was also informally done by way of the then Minister’s office, in October 1995. In this instance an undated list of approved beneficiaries was sent to the NHA by the Minister of Housing and Settlements.

Finally, please see copies of the relevant letters of offer as appended.”

Now Mr. Speaker, this is PNM’s policy on national housing that I am now going to present to Parliament. I am not going to name the beneficiary, but this letter was written. First of all a letter went out on October 19, 1995, indicating that this person had qualified. This is signed by the Executive Director of the NHA. In January 1996, while I was in office, this commitment went from the NHA to the applicant. Let me just quote it:

“The National Housing Authority is pleased to inform you that you have been allocated a two-bedroom Unit...at Ramdial Mahabir Lands, Laventille. The Unit is being offered to you under the following terms and conditions.

1. The Purchase Price of the unit is $85,529.58 which shall constitute the mortgage principal and is repayable in equal monthly installments of $473.47.”

They have given interest at 5 per cent concessionary and given 28 years to repay, but at a selling price of $85,529; the cost price is $273,000.

Mr. Speaker, I think we should put to rest the PNM’s policy for delivering housing to the poor because if we continue in that way, the taxpayers of this country would be broke in no time or a few PNM activists would have beautiful shelters while the rest of the nation is left to catch. This is a clear indication of how things were done under the Manning regime and I am told—I cannot prove this part of it—that the final list went to the then Prime Minister for approval. That is what I am told, no record is kept. So I am glad the former minister and Member
Dr. Vincent Lasse (Point Fortin): Mr. Speaker, in making my contribution to the debate on the Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ending December 31, 1997, let me congratulate the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism for presenting his budget on time. I must state from the outset that I am in total agreement with Members on this side, that certain aspects of the budget cannot find support from us. The sentiments echoed by the majority of the national community are similar to ours. The Minister may have tried, but unfortunately, his efforts fall short of expectation.

I also wish to put on record my disgust and disappointment at the manner in which the Leader of Government Business, the Attorney General, abused his authority, not only on the Members on this side, but also on the Members of the other side and the staff of Parliament. To see the manner in which he exercised authority was disgraceful. We were here from 10.00 a.m. until 4.15 a.m. the next morning. All this was done for the Member for Couva South to have his own way. Because of this, I believe that there should be some training in protocol for persons who find themselves in certain positions of authority and who normally would abuse that situation. I beg your indulgence in this regard because my grandmother once said to me, a leopard never changes its spots. The Leader of Government Business should realize that humility is a virtue, while arrogance, spite or vindictiveness is a curse.

As I make my contribution to this debate I am reminded of a comment in one of our daily newspapers, where it was stated that the Government should give ample and adequate time for a budget debate. Any deviation from this is undemocratic.
Members on both sides of this House, especially the Government’s side have an obligation to let the national community know what is happening. We have been put here by the electorate and we must account for our stewardship. The Leader of Government Business must be reminded of this because there is a saying that if one forgets where one comes from, one can never know where one is going.

I expected a very high level of debate but, in the first instance, when the Member for St. Joseph who was not here at the commencement of the debate, began like a bull in a china shop and started attacking and hurling insults at Members on this side—this in my view—you, Mr. Speaker, made the point—does not augur well for the debate. The Member for St. Joseph has a very good vocabulary. If it is used properly he would be able to add some status to the debate, but being sarcastic does not in any way help his image in Parliament, nor help us as Members of Parliament.

Let me briefly allude to the comments made by the Member for Naparima, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. We once campaigned together, and while we were campaigning in the Cedros area where he was born, he promised the people of Cedros, that for the first time in history they would have double barrel representation. I am saddened today because in his contribution he forgot to mention the fishing agreement, and only after lunch when he was reminded by someone he came back here and tried to make amends.

I wrote to the Minister as early as July, 1996 after meeting the fishermen of his village Gallos, in Cedros. At present, they are very annoyed with him because they believed, as the Minister responsible for negotiating the fishing agreement which the people of Cedros depend on for their livelihood, they felt a son of the soil should do more. It is now one year and there is not any fishing agreement in place and the people of Cedros cannot go out to sea, or if they do, they do so at their own risk.

I would like to remind my dear friend from my constituency that he should please try to ensure that the fishing agreement would be ready in time for January/February 1997.

3.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I now return to the part of the debate which I would spend the majority of my time dealing with, and I see the Minister of Housing and Settlements is moving around. I was a bit confused at his contribution because he came here with a couple slips of paper, which I would like to see, but said nothing.
He made certain accusations concerning my stewardship at the ministry, but he should remember that when he took office he was the first Minister who praised me for having done a wonderful job. I feel he is a bit confused, as he is from time to time. Successive PNM Governments have a laid-down policy for the allocation of units to persons, and the vast majority of houses constructed under the Ministry of Housing and Settlements for low-income persons are allocated by a large subsidy.

Mr. Assam: Where are the records? Why are they not available?

Dr. V. Lasse: As the former Minister of Housing and Settlements, I was more or less involved in policy and that is why the Minister—[Interruption] Mr. Speaker, I was saying that as the Minister I dealt with policy. In the ministry there was a very efficient staff and there still is and, therefore, the day-to-day running of the ministry and things like allocation of units were done through the director of the NHA. That is how it operated. I have no problems. The Member for St. Augustine spoke about mortgages, and there is also a policy for that; he is there now and he can see it. However, I do not know if he was insinuating—and I hope he was not—any impropriety on my behalf because one of the things on which I pride myself is to be very straight at all times. I have a distinguished record of 30 years as a foreign service officer and when I retired, I came into politics, and after winning, I became the former Minister of Housing and Settlements and—except for the Member for St. Augustine—I am sure there are still high praises for me at the ministry.

The Member mentioned the fact that he did not move anyone. When I was in charge of the ministry, I myself did not move anyone. The board remained for its entire duration and at the end of that, a new board was selected and there were persons on the previous board who remained. That is why when he got there he found competent persons and there was no need to move them, and I thank him for that. That is how one ought to operate, because, to me, government is continuous and the civil servants who are the backbone of the ministry and the ones who do the work should continue to do their work in peace. I thank you, as a Minister, for allowing them to continue to do their work.

Mr. Humphrey: Tell me how you made the allocations.

Mr. Partap: Explain how it was done, that is what we want.

Dr. V. Lasse: Again, as I recalled what happened—this Minister appears to be incompetent because if he had made a request on November 8, 1995 and received it on December 8, 1996, can one consider anything said by him to be serious?
Mr. Speaker, I move into my contribution to the budget debate which, of course, will be housing. I now refer to page 11 of the *Sunday Express* of December 15, 1996. While I was trying to understand the philosophy of the budget it was summed up as follows:

“What we get next are announcements of hopes for investment and diversification in tourism... In all this total quality stupidity, Mr. K. does not even come close to discerning the ironies that surround him.”

One could conclude that this budget was prepared with certain big business entities in mind and, from it, we would see the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Tourism anticipated criticism of the 1997 Budget and again in an article on page 12 of the *Sunday Express* dated December 15, 1996, it says:

“NO DOUBT in anticipation of the criticism to come, Finance Minister Brian Kuei Tung wound up his terse and relatively brief (one hour, ten minutes flat) 1997 Budget Speech last Thursday by declaring: 'It's not humanly possible for any government to be all things to all people all the time.'”

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister, the Minister Extraordinaire and all the other Members on the Government’s side thumped the tables loudly in approval to the words, “any Government could be all things to all people all the time.”

How times have changed! When those hon. Members were on the Opposition Benches they insisted that the Government must be all things to all the people all the time.

3.55 p.m.

This UNC/NAR coalition government which came into power by offering to the people all things at all times; this Government which has vowed to solve crime, provide homes, regularize squatters; this Government which has promised to do all things for all people, must stop making excuses.

The Government should have solved crime, which they said in the 1996 budget they would do. They should have constructed houses for the homeless and regularized squatters, as they promised—at least they should have put in place the modalities for achieving this. I submit that no amount of public relations can satisfy persons with empty stomachs and soothe persons who are homeless and landless.
In their contributions so far, Members on the other side kept referring to what the PNM did not do. This was, of course, when the PNM was in office. Today, the UNC/NAR Government is in office and the tables have turned. It is their duty to give an account of their stewardship. In his 1996 presentation, the Minister of Finance promised to fast track an accelerated housing programme which was put in place by the PNM government, and promised to allocate $240 million to do that. One year has passed and I ask: Where are the results?

The Builders’ Society supported a position put forward by the Minister of Housing and Settlements, Mr. John Humphrey, who said that he intended to construct some 10,000 housing units over the next 10 years. I can recall that prior to going out of office, the PNM government had put in place a strategy to construct 5,000 housing units each year for the next 10 years. Had the Minister of Housing and Settlements followed that programme, as he said he would, we would have seen the construction of at least 2,000—3,000 housing units. Alas, he is now saying that he intends to construct 10,000 housing units per year.

As I perused the housing documents, I looked in vain for the provision for constructing 10,000 housing units. Further to this, on page 25 of the Public Sector Investment Programme, 1997 it has been stated that the National Housing Authority will mount a programme of $25.23 million in investments in 1997. The Minister went on to state that the flats and townhouses sub-programme will continue with the construction of 112 apartments at Almond Drive, Morvant, estimated at $15 million. [Interruption] It was $20 million and the Minister brought it down to $15 million.

Mr. Speaker, herein lies the deceit, deception and vindictiveness of this Government. When the Minister assumed office, the past government had already done the infrastructure work, and the sod-turning ceremony for the construction of these 112 apartments had already taken place. The years 1995 and 1996 went and he comes now to tell us that, in 1997, he would construct the same 112 units which should have been constructed. This is dishonesty. The Minister now recognizes that it is necessary to construct 10,000 housing units each year. [Interruption] Mr. Speaker, I have grown accustomed to some of the jokers on the other side. I can deal with that, that is why I have not asked for protection. I will just ignore him.

I now refer to an article which appeared in the Daily Express on May 10, 1996. This is also relevant to the Minister’s acknowledgment that 10,000 housing units are needed for the next 10 years. The article, among other things, stated that:
“Humphrey rules out high-rise housing.

Housing and Settlements Minister, John Humphrey, yesterday ruled out high-rise apartments as a solution to this country’s housing problem.”

It went on to state that:

“...the Minister unveiled plans to ‘spread horizontally’ to provide shelter units at the rate of 10,000 a year for the next 10 years.”

The newspaper reported that the Minister placed the entire plan in the context of his well-known sou-sou lands concept and said that he would be bringing legislation soon to deal with the situation. He went on to state that due to this concept and the legislation he brings, he would make land affordable to every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. These are lofty ideas indeed.

4.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister is fully aware that the sou-sou lands concept was a dismal failure, and many people today are looking for those who had foisted that idea upon them.

In the article dated May 10, 1996:

“...Mr. Humphrey’s ‘land for all plan’ was quickly challenged by a housing expert, Dr. Asad Mohammed who declared that it was based on an outdated 1970s concept...

Mohammed recalled a similar policy had been attempted by the former NAR regime in the 1980s.”

He ended by stating:

“You don’t plan the programme and then try to involve the community.”

He is saying that if the hon. Minister of Housing and Settlements has such a beautiful idea he should first take it to the community and then try to work it out. Do not plan it and then bring it to the community.

The Minister of Housing and Settlements always has, as they call it, pie-in-the-sky ideas, however when it comes to the practical application of these plans the Minister normally realizes that these things cannot be done. I must ask again: Where in the budget is the allocation for the 10,000 pie-in-the-sky units he intends to build every year?
I submit that if there is a weak minister, if there is a minister who is not showing interest in his ministry, if there is a minister who is trying to take the ministry of the Member for Oropouche, and who is trying to be involved in the construction of highways, while being the Minister of Housing—he was not persuasive enough to convince the Minister of Finance to put provisions in the budget for the 10,000 housing units he intends to build.

On page 8 of the budget the Minister of Finance said:

“...in the housing sector, Government will focus on providing shelter to lower income families. The primary areas of operation will include squatter regularization and infrastructure upgrade of squatter communities; development and distribution of serviced lots, core houses and full houses; technical assistance towards shelter construction; and apartment refurbishment and replacement.”

Mr. Speaker, these words have been in successive budgets. If one peruses, as the Minister of Housing and Settlements was doing earlier with the PNM’s manifesto he can lift these identical words from it. I repeat, Mr. Speaker, having read this, no provision has been made for 10,000 housing units to be constructed in 1997.

Mr. Speaker, I dare say it is a dream of the Minister of Housing and Settlements. We shall have more of the dreams of the Minister of Housing and Settlements when I deal with the question of squatting—shades of Rip Van Wrinkle.

I am convinced that the Minister of Finance did not take into account the dreams of the Minister of Housing and Settlements, because they were only dreams, he may have been still sleeping as he was throughout the course of last night.

Let me refer to yet another article. In the *Sunday Guardian* dated November 11, 1995, on page 4, the Member for St. Augustine, now Minister of Housing and Settlements was quoted as follows:

“Humphrey the MP for St. Augustine, dismissed the need for a Ministry of Housing. He said, ‘I don’t see the need for a Ministry of Housing, I see the need for a Ministry of Construction. To me housing should be managed by individuals who want to build their own homes and by the private enterprise, not by the state’.”

Mr. Speaker, I have great difficulty with this because I believe that the state has an obligation to assist the low-income persons in our communities by providing houses which are affordable. [Desk thumping] The Member for St.
Augustine said that even before he was named Minister of Housing and Settlements. I believe that this may have been a ploy, because having once been fired as a Minister of Housing he may not have wanted to be named in that portfolio, so he said there was no need for a Ministry of Housing and there is a need for a ministry of construction. I think he is approaching that. He seems to be moving away from housing into construction.

4.15 p.m.

What signal then would the UNC/NAR Government be sending to the community? An individual who said he does not want to be the Minister of Housing has accepted the portfolio of the Minister of Housing and Settlements. When one reviews his performance in 1996 one can come to the conclusion that he really should not have been the Minister of Housing and Settlements. I repeat. The Minister of Housing and Settlements inherited the Ministry with top-class civil servants; well-trained, well-qualified, knowledgeable and efficient people. All that was needed was for him to carry out the programme that he met. When I took office there were certain things that had been in-train by my colleague, the Member for Tobago West. Mr. Speaker, we continued with the IDB assisted programme because there were certain aspects of the programme that needed modernizing, and we did so.

For example, one of the setbacks of the programme was that persons had to pay the entire cost of the land upfront before they could have their deeds. We decided that there should be an intermediary position whereby, a person may pay as much as $3,000 instead of $25,000 and be given the lease and then that person can access the loan. This is what I did, Mr. Speaker. That programme started moving well. It was left there, it worked under the NAR, it continued under the PNM and I was hoping that it would have continued under the UNC/NAR administration.

Mr. Speaker, when the Minister went to the Ministry of Housing and Settlements he decided to bring in all types of advisers—I do not intend to call any names but I would refer to another article to the Editor of the Sunday Guardian of December 15, 1996. It states:

“I read recently in one of the weekly newspapers that Mr. (X) (of ITL fame), in his new position as consultant to the Ministry of Housing, stated that one of his three major projects at the Ministry is to assess the housing needs of the Ministry’s employees, since he considers it ironical that employees who are responsible for seeing about the housing needs of the nation may themselves be homeless.”
I am sure the employees of the Ministry of Finance must be looking at their Minister with much expectation since we all know that most civil servants are in dire financial straits.”

Mr. Speaker, I have heard of many more consultants that he has brought in and that is the task he has given him.

The article went on:

“I hope we get a proper explanation from the Minister of Housing on this one because if there was ever a ridiculous idea this one takes the cake.”

Mr. Speaker, permit me to turn to the question of squatting: I read on page 26 of the Public Sector Investment Programme, 1997, the following:

“Provision is also made for the establishment of a Squatter Containment Unit to address the growing incidence of squatting on the island.”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your speaking time has expired.

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

Dr. V. Lasse: Mr. Speaker, I was speaking of a Containment Unit which was put in place during my term of office as Minister of Housing and Settlements. Mr. Speaker, you and other Members should recall that on Friday, July 27, 1996, the Member came to this House and decided that he would disband the Squatter Containment Unit. He went on to accuse me of putting this unit in place to employ the youths of Point Fortin. I protested at that point in time because the unit was made up of persons from North, South, East, and West—Port of Spain, Couva, and San Fernando, so I could not see how I could employ youths from Point Fortin to work in Port of Spain. What is interesting is that the Minister then disbanded that unit and, today, we read in the budget where he is now going to institute a Squatter Containment Unit. It is the same unit.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you something about that unit. That unit was comprised of young persons who were interviewed, who were sent on courses and who were given instructions as to how to carry out their duty. At no point in time were the members of that unit instructed to demolish any unit. The members of that unit were mandated to go into the field wherever they see a new structure going up; they would put a notice on the structure; they would invite the persons who are erecting these structures to come to the NHA and hold discussions. At that point in time, NHA assessed the situation of those persons and where possible, one can now
direct that person to an area where there may be an excess lot. That is what was being done. They went out and assessed and came back in; and with that assessment we were able to ascertain the drift in the squatting population in Trinidad and Tobago. For the first time we were able to record how many persons were squatting, where they were squatting, and to give some type of guidance to these persons who were seeking homes.

4:25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy because the day when the Member came to this House he was becoming irrational and frantic; he was actually losing his senses; he was allowing his emotions to run away with his will, and today I am happy that he has seen the light, and wisdom to put back in place that Squatter Containment Unit which has saved this Government a lot of money, because every time a squatter occupies a parcel of land, the squatter may be sitting on about $25,000—30,000. That is how we saw it, Mr. Speaker.

I mentioned that during the life of the Squatter Containment Unit valuable work had been done, and I must ask, Mr. Speaker: What has this Minister of Housing and Settlements done for squatting so far? The answer is zero. Many promises, but nothing concrete. Let me turn to some of the concrete things that have been done vis-à-vis squatting and housing and settlements.

I now refer here to the IDB-funded Squatter Settlement Regularization Programme, and on page 10 of the Public Sector Investment Programme 1997, paragraph 41 states:

“The allocation of $38.6 million to the IDB funded Settlement and Squatter Regularisation Programme was increased to $47.63 million during the mid-term review of the PSIP to facilitate the shelter construction component of the programme”.

And paragraph 42 states:

“Infrastructure works on five squatter sites yielding a total of 1,236 lots were completed at Maturita Triangle, Bamboo Settlement No. 2, Blitz Village, New City Valencia and Zone 8, Arima.”

It went on to state that works continued, but I want to point out that there seemed to have been some duplication here, because when I refer to my contribution in the last budget some of the things that are now being claimed to have been done, had already been done.
Mr. Speaker, I mentioned achievements for 1994 and plans for 1995. As of November 30, 1994 the Project Execution Unit brought several projects to the stage of practical completion. These projects are Bon Air West, Couva North Phase I, Harmony Hall, Debe Phase II, La Paille, Union Hall, Malabar Phase IV and Calder Hall in Tobago.

4.30 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

5.00 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Dr. V. Lasse: Mr. Speaker, before we took the tea break, I was questioning what the Minister of Housing and Settlements has done for squatting so far. This took me to the Public Sector Investment Programme. I was then outlining that there may have been some misunderstanding, because certain areas which had been completed were mentioned as now being completed. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I went back to my budget contribution in 1996, and I stated that concerning my achievements for 1994 and plans for 1995, under Sites and Services, as of November 30, 1994, the Project Execution Unit brought several projects to the stage of practical completion. These projects are Bon Air West, Couva North, Phase I; Harmony Hall, Debe, Phase II; La Paille, Union Hall, Malabar Phase IV, and Calder Hall, Tobago.

The yield from these projects is 3,762 residential lots, and occupation of these sites commenced in 1994. As of October 31, 1994, 2,031 beneficiaries selected lots and 1,673 have executed lot sale agreements, and 408 deeds of title were issued. Also, Mr. Speaker, mention was made under the Squatter Regularization Sector of the IDB Programme. Under the Project Execution Unit, development works had commenced on the following seven sites: Bamboo Settlement, No. 3; Maturita Triangle, Arima; New City, Valencia; Zone 8, Arima; Warden Road, Point Fortin; Blitz Village, Pleasantville and Malick Phase I, Morvant. Practical completion had been at Bamboo Settlement No. 3, Maturita Triangle and New City, Valencia. The yield from these sites is 709 lots and the four mentioned above amounted to 1,808 lots on completion of the infrastructural development. So, Mr. Speaker, these had already been completed prior to the new Government coming into office and, therefore, I thought I should bring this information to this honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, I would now turn to the Minister’s work vis-à-vis the squatter regularization. Prior to demitting office the PNM government had put in place a revised draft of Act No. 20, 1986, a draft on the whole question of squatter regularization. But, Mr. Speaker, this draft was subsequently amended by the
Minister of Housing and Settlements. I now refer to the *Daily Express* of Wednesday, June 5, 1996, which carried an article entitled:

“Bill aims to give housing security.

A bill aimed at giving all citizens security of tenure was introduced by Housing Minister, John Humphrey, in the House of Representatives, yesterday.”

That was June 4. Mr. Speaker, I ask, what has happened to this bill so far? Has it gone up? Has it gone down? Or has it disappeared from the Order Paper? The Minister should be pleased to tell us exactly what happened with that bill because much weather had been made when he presented it.

Mr. Speaker, this is what the article said about this bill which was intended to hoodwink the people of Trinidad and Tobago:

“‘Today is a red letter day in the history of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. Today we are having the first reading of the Bill, the passage of which would enable all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to enjoy security of tenure of their family homes, Humphrey said to a desk thumping.

A smiling Minister of Housing went on, ‘under the Bill squatters would obtain a certificate of comfort, on application on the prescribed form to the NHA, which is the agency having management of the scheme under the Ministry of Housing.’”

Mr. Speaker, this Bill which he had introduced with much fanfare went on to promise everything under the sky for squatters. Following this, the *Newsday* of Friday, May 10, carried another article which stated: "The Humphrey Plan—Land cheap, cheap. Twenty five cents per square foot.” Yet in another article on the same bill in the *Mirror* of Sunday, May 26, 1996—and this one takes the cake, Mr. Speaker. The article is entitled “Limited leases for squatters—John Humphrey.” But this is very interesting and I must quote:

“John Humphrey, Minister of Housing and Settlements confessed to Members of the Senate that if he had a choice he would have become a Senator.”

But where is the bill? Where is this bill that we are speaking about now? And midway, the article states: “Humphrey assured Members of the Senate that squatters’ homes will not be demolished in an inhumane way.”
Mr. Speaker, I am making this point, because many persons were deceived. Much weather was made about the bill and here is a copy of it. According to the Explanatory Note, the bill would make provision with respect to state lands to regulate squatters and the tenure, thereof, of certain tenants. But, Mr. Speaker, prior to this bill, the PNM had put in place an Act which sought to provide:

1. security of tenure for squatters by transfer of title at twenty-five cents a square foot, and a dollar lease per year.
2. regularization of existing squatters’ settlements through proper demarcation of lot boundaries and upgrading of basic infrastructure.

But, Mr. Speaker, this bill which was brought by the Minister of Housing was a very complex, confusing one and it gave way to a lot of uncertainty and, of course, chaos.

5.10 p.m.

One of the tenets of the bill, Mr. Speaker, would have allowed every squatter to obtain a certificate of comfort. Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, 5,000 or 50,000 squatters getting a certificate of comfort? This is what this bill was requesting—an “Act to secure certain squatters from ejectment from state lands and, in certain areas, to provide for their acquisition and also acquisition by tenants of leaseholds for their dwelling houses and for matters incidental thereto.”

Mr. Speaker, since May this bill was placed on the Order Paper and every week we came to Parliament it kept going lower and lower and lower. Eventually, this bill, which was to give comfort to squatters, is no longer in existence, but there are those out there, the squatting community, from the pronouncement of the Minister, who are waiting to be regularized; they are waiting for their letters of comfort and I wonder when the Minister would address this.

You see, Mr. Speaker, I spoke earlier of dreams and dreamers and the Minister of Housing and Settlements. An editorial in the *Trinidad Guardian* dated June 13, 1996, captioned “Humphrey’s dream,” sums it up:

“John Humphrey’s dream of providing affordable shelter for all citizens, including the large community of squatters, is one that becomes his genuine interest in the development of the country. His hope as the new Minister of Housing and Settlements is to deliver some 116,000 housing units, thereby establishing what he calls ‘a house owning democracy’ in Trinidad and Tobago.”
I must repeat that, Mr. Speaker: When he delivers these 116,000 housing units, thereby establishing what he calls a house owning democracy in Trinidad and Tobago, I hope one day the Minister would find the time to explain that philosophy to us.

However, Mr. Speaker, from his performance during the year 1996 and the fact that he was unable to influence the Minister of Finance to provide more money for the housing units he intends to construct, it is my firm conviction that the Minister of Housing and Settlemens will remain a beautiful dreamer.

It is now necessary for me to turn to the solutions and hope that the Minister, during 1997, will follow up on the solutions being offered from this side of the House. What are the solutions, as we see it, Mr. Speaker? The Government may wish to say that it has only been in office for one year. That in itself—and of course we understand that—should not relieve the Government of its responsibilities.

Now to the solutions:

1. When the PNM came to office in 1991, it took on board the proposals of the NAR Government which were deemed good and we built on them. The IDB-assisted programme started by the NAR was a good case. This was built upon by the PNM. We did not stop any of the projects.

2. The UNC/NAR should continue the accelerated housing programme, but the budget did not address this adequately.

3. The UNC/NAR should continue the $30 million housing programme under the NHA. Houses have already been constructed under this programme. There were about 275 houses already constructed, and as I travel from north to south, I see about 25/26 of these houses in Charlieville waiting to be occupied.

4. The UNC/NAR should continue the squatter regularization programme started by the NAR and continued by the PNM.

These are some concrete solutions, I believe, to the housing and settlements problems of Trinidad and Tobago and I trust that the Minister would use his judgment in carrying out some of these projects, which are well on the way.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to address some concerns of the constituency of Point Fortin. I first turn to a situation which arose in Point Fortin when the Member for Caroni East, who spoke earlier in the debate, insulted the Hindu community in Cedros by stating that the community had a “Soharry leaf” mentality.
Mr. Speaker, I shall quote from the *Trinidad Guardian* of Thursday, November 26, 1996. The article is entitled: “Minister hits ‘Soharry leaf’ mentality in Cedros”. Cedros, Mr. Speaker, is an integral part of the constituency of Point Fortin and because of this I register a serious objection to the arrogance displayed by the Member for Caroni East.

**Mr. Singh:** Read it.

**Dr. V. Lasse:** I will read it. Take time.

“Minister of Public Utilities, Ganga Singh, has criticized the residents of Cedros for their ‘Soharry leaf’ mentality. It is as if you are still in the protest mode. You have not shifted gear. It is as if you feel you still have a sense of entitlement…”

That is what he told the people.

"‘It is as if you have the ‘Soharry leaf’ mentality. Spread your leaf and everything will come’, Minister Singh told residents of Cedros at the Cedros Anglican School on Saturday."

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, your time has expired but I would allow you to continue. You had 20 minutes when we came back. I am going to allow you to finish your train of thought; but all I want to say to you is that you had 20 minutes after we came back, it is now 5.20 p.m. You started at 3.55 p.m., you got an extension at 4.20 p.m.; between 4.20—4.30 p.m. you had 10 minutes there, and now 20 minutes more. All you could have gotten was a 30-minute extension. So I am not being unfair to you. Please, continue that thought.

**Dr. V. Lasse:** Mr. Speaker, I made the point about the ‘Soharry leaf’ mentality and I believe that the Minister—[Interruption] I am not speaking to toys.

Mr. Speaker, I made the point about the ‘Soharry leaf’ mentality.

The other point I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, is that the people of Point Fortin are very much concerned about the LNG plant being placed in Point Fortin, which we welcome. However, we are hoping that the company would see it fit to carry out most of the training in Point Fortin.
Mr. Speaker, on the issue of the road improvement tax, I make the point that the people of Point Fortin have not been able to receive any benefits from the road improvement tax.

Mr. Speaker, before I close, may I avail myself of this opportunity to wish you, and through you, the Members of Parliament, a very merry Christmas and a bright and prosperous new year.

I thank you very much.

5:20 p.m.

The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Pamela Nicholson): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure and pride that I rise to make my contribution to the second budget presentation of the UNC/NAR coalition Government of Trinidad and Tobago. I must congratulate my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance, for this presentation of a budget which successfully meets the urgent needs of our people in Trinidad and Tobago; a budget which opens up some untapped resources of employment and job creation.

If we were to listen carefully to the budget presentation, and if we read our supporting documents which provided the background to the budget, we would know that this is the first budget over the last 10 years which concentrated on the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). This programme of capital projects investment has been significantly increased in 1997. It is through—I am not entertaining this behaviour. Mr. Speaker, may I have some protection, please. I am being disturbed.

Mr. Speaker: Now, Members are entitled to protection. You see, there are some Members who are more sensitive than others. [Laughter] Hon. Members, you will appreciate the role of the Speaker is to appreciate who is more sensitive than others. [Laughter] I kindly ask that you conform with the rules and allow the Member to make her contribution without distraction.

Hon. P. Nicholson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is through this programme that additional jobs will be found and identified. We in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, for the first time in many years, have finally been provided with a meaningful platform for youth empowerment and for elevating sports and sports-related activities to their rightful place in the developmental process.

Mr. Speaker, this UNC/NAR Government, for 1996 and 1997 and beyond has used and will continue to use sport as a developmental tool for youth. We will
provide our young people with the skills and talents to impact on their communities and on the nation through the projects and programmes designed for and by them to ensure their place in a stable society; a stable society that has been provided by the two Tobago representatives and their relationship with the UNC Parliament. [Desk thumping.]

The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs has, in 1996 and will continue to carry out in 1997, its mission which is:

“To increase the level of participation, as well as the quality of training in sport and physical education to the citizenry and to provide social education for young people between the ages of 15 and 25 years.”

Mr. Speaker, it is internationally accepted that youths are among the most vulnerable groups in the society. A recent study carried out by the United Nations International Labour Organization indicated that 30 per cent of the world’s labour force which is over 820 million, are either unemployed or working for less than a subsistence wage.

My point is that youths are grossly over-represented in these groups. I am mindful of the socio-economic problems associated with youths, and my ministry has developed projects which, among other things, will expose youths to human resource development, youth policy development, and empowerment. One project is called the District Youth Micro-Enterprise Project, and the other, innovative project is the Super Five Community Sport Development Programme.

I will now focus on my ministry’s achievements for youth development in juxtaposition to the plans of the coming year. Take cognizance of the plethora of issues surrounding youth development, it is necessary to view the ministry’s thrust within a contextual framework. Firstly, the ministry recognizes and understands that an investment made in the youth of the nation is indeed an investment in our country’s future in healthier living, self-fulfilment, and nation-building. I remind the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West that this is also important for a total quality nation.

This is what causes the development; this is what will make us comparable to Malaysia, Singapore and the other countries.

5.30 p.m.

Secondly, with the current state of the economy where problems are threatening the quality of life of our young people, my ministry continues to play a
supportive and proactive role to improve their situation. To this end, the Youth Development Programme of my ministry focuses on measures which give to our young people:

1. The opportunities and means to enhance and expand their experiences;
2. The support mechanisms to cope with social situations.

This, by extension, will augment the provision of a service for those who experience social problems such as unemployment, crime, drug abuse, unplanned teenage parenthood and sexually transmitted diseases.

It is in the spirit of commitment to our young people that my Government has refused to remain helpless and totally at the mercy of forces seemingly beyond its control. In particular, my ministry fosters an enabling environment to meet the challenges which threaten the growth and development of the nation’s young people. Further, my ministry is also charged with the responsibility of being the umbrella agency for the co-ordination of youth development in Trinidad and Tobago.

This paradigm shift is our philosophical outlook for youth development which represents a radical departure from the entrenched behaviours of the past and also provides a vehicle for growth and development on a sustainable path. Never in the history of our country has there been so much involvement in the planning process for youth development by such a wide cross-section of the society. Indeed, the work of my ministry is already showing results and will increasingly bear fruit over time.

It is within this context that I would share my ministry’s 1996 achievements and future plans for youth development in Trinidad and Tobago. But let me stress that in our complexed and dynamic global economy, it is important to recognize where we are and build on this foundation as we take a progressive approach towards the 21st Century.

Youth empowerment remains our number one goal. Undoubtedly, empowerment of our young people would enable them to exert control over their lives. It offers them choices and opportunities that will also facilitate their active participation in decision-making and ultimately in their own development.

I would now like to pay some attention to the District Youth Micro Enterprise Project. This project is a programme of community-based youth micro enterprise projects throughout Trinidad and Tobago, undertaken through a shared partnership
involving the community, the private sector, the NGOs and other governmental agencies. This project is a comprehensive programme that is designed primarily to help young people between the ages of 18 and 30 years to develop their entrepreneurial skills and to provide access to the resources which will facilitate the development process.

I recently launched the pilot phase of this project on October 15, 1996 at the Hasely Crawford Stadium. This phase caters for the establishment of at least 70 youth micro enterprises. Fifteen of these are targeted for Tobago, with maximum loans of $10,000 per individual or group. Fund Aid has been charged with the responsibility for managing the loan portfolio of this project. Notwithstanding that, one of the main long-term objectives of the project is to reduce the level of youth unemployment. I cannot over-emphasize the significance of this programme in playing a pivotal role in increasing youth empowerment and reducing the incidence of anti-social behaviour. In fact, this project accentuates in no uncertain terms the ministry’s thrust in sensitizing young people on the long-standing socio-economic benefits of embarking on a mission of job-creation through employment.

The response to the programme has been very gratifying, as over 600 youths have demonstrated their zeal, creativity and urge to be independent and enterprising in shaping their future. In this regard, I have to advise that the sum of $2 million of the 1997 budgetary allocation has been earmarked for the implementation of the full-scale programme throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

It is expected that in excess of 3,000 micro enterprises will be established, based on co-ordinated and informed efforts which are directed towards improving socio-economic conditions of, and opportunities for, young people. Undoubtedly, this project will enable our young people to be part of the critical mass which contributes to the growth and development of the national economy.

My personal commitment and that of my ministry to youth empowerment is unquestionable. In demonstration of this commitment, we hosted the first of two national seminars on opportunities in the tourism and hospitality sector. The first two-day seminar was held at Rovannel’s Resort in Tobago, in collaboration with the Tobago House of Assembly and TIDCO. Approximately 260 young persons participated in the workshops. In an effort to inculcate a new mind-set of self-determination and self-reliance, the primary objective of the programme is to create an awareness and ignite the interest in the multiplicity of sustainable business opportunities available in the tourism industry.
It is important to note, although the tourism industry has greater potential in Tobago, the next national seminar will be held in Trinidad in mid-January, 1997. The objective is to engender complementarity and cross-fertilization of the human resource capacity among the entire youth population. The new dispensation with regard to the impact assessment of our education programme has been accorded high priority. Here we are talking about an out-of-school education programme.

In particular, since the job market has been traditionally inundated with as many as 25,000 school leavers annually who are faced with a barrage of unrealistic expectations and inappropriate training and skills, thereby finding it difficult to integrate easily into the adult world, this phenomenon is of much concern to my ministry. The time has come for the out-of-school education programme to demonstrate emphatically its intrinsic merit. This programme provides training through social education, ranging from pure leisure time activities to specific skills, such as crafts, drama, personal development, citizenship, entrepreneurship and remedial education.

Classes are being held throughout the country in eight of the nine administrative districts, and also in five youth centres in Trinidad. A special programme for 120 unemployed youths in the Port of Spain area, is being conducted at the St. Paul Street Multipurpose Facility.

5.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, let me make a clear and emphatic statement which strikes at the core of the ministry's philosophy of youth development. The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs will remain committed by dint of hard work to pursue clear and unequivocal strategies, which will nurture a new generation on the values of self-reliance and initiative.

Of significance therefore, is the fact that there is an ongoing evaluation of the OSEP programme in 1996, which will continue in 1997. The objective behind this prescribed modus operandi, Mr. Speaker, is to exorcise the ghost of despair that threatens the rich potential of our young people, in being able to contribute to the transformation of the development process in this country.

Mr. Speaker, our Youth Leadership Initiative Programme is another positive step towards rebuilding our country from the ground up, and I would have liked the Member for Port of Spain North to be seated here for him to understand what we are doing to develop the country's economy, so that a total quality nation will evolve. We must start from the ground up.
In a spirit of participation, co-operation, and sustainability, this programme gives facial expression to the new spirit of youth empowerment, which more than anything else, will result in the fundamental changes that we seek in youth development. Phase I of the programme was conducted in August 1996, in which 78 young persons throughout Trinidad and Tobago participated. To understand the far-reaching effects of this programme, it is important to note that the information elicited from these participants is being used to develop community-based leadership programmes for the future.

By and large, we believe that such an approach to youth development would be of inestimable value. We seek to undertake a practical formula that is predicated on strengthening the skills of our young people. I am confident that this project will seize this historic moment and take our youths further along the road to positive development.

Mr. Speaker, since our nation is poised to assume a new and active role in the international scheme, this programme provides a crucial fillip that will continue in 1997 and beyond, in order to prepare our young people for the development process. Let me at this point, highlight what the youth leadership initiative programme broadly aims at:

1. Enhancing youth, NGOs and the quality of partnership between the state, the private sector, and the voluntary sector.
2. Providing a core of suitably trained voluntary workers who can work with the ministry in its delivery of projects and programmes to young people.

Mr. Speaker, another area that we addressed was recreational vacation camps. During the year, three vacation camps were conducted in two districts, namely, St. Patrick East and Victoria West. A total of 242 young persons participated in a programme which was geared towards the productive use of leisure time. In particular, this project targets unsupervised young people who are faced with unstructured free time over the long August vacation. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, to meet the challenge of the new information order, the operation of recreational vacation camps serves as a powerful and effective means in curbing young people's vulnerability to engage in criminal and other dysfunctional activities.

Further, it is important to inform this honourable House that this project is yet another clear demonstration of youth empowerment in practice. These recreational vacation camps were organized and managed by the very youth leaders who were
exposed to appropriate training which falls under the broad umbrella of the aforementioned youth leadership training programme. I am proud to announce that for the first time this project was conducted as a business enterprise. Moreover, the programme focussed on the development of skills in the following areas: recreation management, peer counselling, team building, and creative arts.

This initiative undertaken has etched out a modality which will not only continue to focus on facilitating our youth leaders in developing their capacity and resources, but will also provide the foundation for utilizing this project as an avenue for job creation.

Model CARICOM Heads of Government Conference: Mr Speaker, indeed my ministry is delighted to report that it has continued with this programme. We sought to fan the flames of regionalism through its supportive role in the model Caricom Heads of Government Conference. The purpose of this conference was two-fold:

1. To sensitize youths in the communities to the concept of Caribbean community and the meaning of Caribbean integration.

2. To promote respect and understanding of the peoples of the Caribbean.

The Model Caribbean Conference, Mr. Speaker, attracted the participation of 20 youth organizations from all districts throughout Trinidad and Tobago. In keeping with the integrated approach towards youth development, participants were assisted with their preparations by the Institute of International Relations and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Registration of Youth Organizations: To complete and update a register of youth groups and organizations in the country, all youth organizations were requested to register with the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. Mr. Speaker, it was very alarming that a ministry called “Youth Affairs” did not have a registry with the names of all the groups in the country which the youth officers relate to and so forth. So that was made a necessity, thereby developing a functional and well-designed data base.

To develop a more comprehensive register of youth affairs, registration will continue in 1997. Mr. Speaker, to transcend the realm of a mere academic orientation, this exercise has served to enhance the ministry's knowledge of its clientele, networking capabilities, and ability to determine the functional levels of community-based organizations.
Since this ministry recognizes the critical importance of its human resource pool to national development, it is not surprising that this exercise also lends itself beautifully to prioritizing human resource at this pivotal level. In addition, a support programme will be developed to assist these organizations to deal with issues in their communities in relation to drugs, AIDS, and the marginalization of the young.

5.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the establishment of a task force was another area that we addressed. History has taught us the painful lesson that no government, however well meaning, can ever hope to satisfy all the needs and provide all the wherewithal for youth development. It is within this context, therefore, that a task force was established to review the role and function of the ministry in relation to its impact on national development.

The task force has been meeting regularly in plenary and sub-committees where attention is focussed on strategic plans and programmes, youth and development, sport administration, training and youth policy development. The task force held a national youth forum at City Hall, Port of Spain in November, 1996 for young people from schools and youth organizations. One hundred youths actively participated in the workshops and discussions on presentations delivered by their peers. The theme of the forum was "Issues affecting youth in search of solutions". The task force will be submitting its interim report during the first quarter of 1997.

New programmes and projects: Mr. Speaker, let me assure my hon. colleagues that the new programmes and projects which will be undertaken in 1997 are the very embodiment of a new proactive and integrated approach towards sustainable youth development. These programmes and projects which will be geared towards addressing specific issues relating to youth and health, poverty and gender will include:

1. Youth and sport multi-purpose facilities;
2. AIDS and the young person.
3. Young men at risk.
4. Save the youth in marginalized communities.
5. A review of a prototype design for youth centres.
(6) Reviewing the role, function and composition of boards of management in the ministry.

(6) Refurbishing and rebuilding youth centres.

We received something like $1.5 million for a youth centre in the Laventille area this year, and we have to congratulate the Minister of Finance for responding in such a positive way. [Desk thumping] To summarize the vision of my ministry I underscore the commitment of our strategic plan as enshrined in the theme to rally around the youths.

Mr. Speaker and hon. colleagues, I have shared with you some of our achievements and plans for youth development. On this, the occasion of the second budget of my Government, let me stress that we have much to be thankful for. However, the real challenge before us is to pursue programmes that are forward looking and dynamic in their thrust to expand the socio-economic frontiers of our young people. Indeed, I am confident that in the near future my ministry shall be remembered with considerable pride for the manner in which we tackled and surmounted our current problems in youth development in Trinidad and Tobago.

I now turn to sport and physical activity and to my ministry’s achievements in this area over the past year. I must stress that the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs is a proactive ministry. Actually, we have spent every cent that was given to us.

Mr. Speaker, one of the problems that my colleagues must understand is that I am not in charge of the cricket association or the football association, but every support that they needed they got it from the ministry. Whether they won or not I always sent my congratulations and encouragement.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure you will agree with me and my colleagues on this side that the year 1996 has been a fantastic one for sport under the governance of the UNC/NAR. When I assumed office one year ago I announced at this forum my plans to:

(1) pursue aggressive and dynamic programmes using sport to minimize the effect of dysfunctional behaviour among our young population.

(2) make sport and physical activity programmes more accessible to our people; to suburban communities and to the rural communities. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Order please.
Hon. P. Nicholson: I continue:

(3) introduce a systematic and institutional approach for the development of sport from the community to the national level.

Mr. Speaker, having made this commitment, I wish to share with the honourable House some of the startling statistics on youths which have informed my choices of programmes and strategies.

The statistics on youth for the year 1995 identify that there were approximately 220,000 youths in the age group 15—25 in Trinidad and Tobago. Take note that 95 per cent of criminal activities in Trinidad and Tobago in 1995 involved youth in the age group 15—25. During the same year 674 violent crimes were committed by youths in the age group 15—25. Further, we noted that 35.9 per cent of boys and 56.5 per cent of girls leaving schools were unemployed. Add to this the fact that 4 to 5 per cent of students are at risk through regular use of alcohol and cocaine. Also note that all of this was accompanied by a significant decrease in physical activities pattern among our young people.

Mr. Speaker, this information revealed to me and to my staff that we need to take immediate decisive and positive actions to address this crisis. Further, we sought to be consistent with the international contemporary views on sport. Sport today is not merely about winning medals, reaching the finals—hon. Member for Diego Martin East—of world tournaments or achieving individual excellence. Indeed, the International Olympic Committee, the World Health Organization, the Commonwealth Youth Development Programme and the United Nations have all hailed the value of sport as a social phenomenon, as a preventative mechanism for crime, drug abuse and other anti-social behaviour patterns, and as a powerful medium to promote and maintain good health.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in the context of Trinidad and Tobago, you will agree that sport can play an important role in rekindling community spirit, national pride, and national consciousness, the kind that we experienced during the last Olympic games through the performance of Mr. Ato Boldon. Today, I am pleased to report on the achievement and the progress we have made during the past year, as well as to give an insight into our plans for 1997.

Mr. Speaker, let me hasten to add that I do not believe that my programmes alone will be the panacea for this situation, nor will we be able to see any significant progress overnight. I am encouraged by the fact that we have started.
Like the American astronauts’ first landing on the moon, we consider this a giant step for the youth of our nation.

Sport infrastructure: In the area of sporting infrastructure, we completed construction of the National Hockey Centre on September 22, 1996 to host the Ninth Women's World Cup preliminaries. This facility is equipped with a main pavilion, bleachers, change rooms, toilet facilities, special accommodation for the physically challenged, and flood lighting for night games. An additional $4.3 million was spent by this administration to ensure that this facility meets the highest international standard. The NAR/UNC Government should be applauded.

We completed and formally opened the regional multi-purpose sport facility at Irwin Park Siparia. This facility is equipped with a pavilion, office accommodation and flood lighting.

There was construction of a new administration building with change rooms and toilet facilities at the Sangre Grande swimming pool. This modernized the operations resulting in increased levels of participation.

Work is continuing on the construction of the indoor arenas at Tacarigua, Pleasantville, and Point Fortin. I am pleased to add that the indoor arenas at Point Fortin and Tacarigua, will be formally opened in the next few weeks.

On October 29, 1996, the hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Basdeo Panday, turned the sod to commence work on the Chaguanas indoor arena, at Saith Park. This project has a construction period of nine months. Not since my involvement in the completion, and opening of the St. Paul Street multipurpose facility in 1989, during the NAR administration, has any government achieved so much infrastructural development for sport in this country. This is a demonstration of the level of commitment of this Government to bring sport and physical recreation onto the front burner of our national development efforts.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: What about the swimming pools?

Hon. P. Nicholson: Our own indoor arenas are being equipped with modern equipment and fixtures and timber sprung floors.

Mr. Imbert: Whose idea was it?

Hon. P. Nicholson: Ours. This type of floor offers advantages over other surfaces, by reducing the orthopaedic problems and injuries associated with concrete floors. What does this mean for the athletes? It means longer playing life, greater satisfaction, improved performance, and fewer injuries. This floor is
manufactured by the reputable Robins International, which was responsible for providing similar surfaces for indoor games at the recently concluded Olympic games in Atlanta. I just do not want to waste any time today, because I can devastate these people who gave a gas company some indoor arenas to build, and for the year I have been at their throats, probably, every month, and they cannot complete them. Using politics for their own purposes, 'Prime Minister running Sports ministry', not giving them a chance to do their work, the Manning Government.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Why Panday doing you that?

Hon. P. Nicholson: These additions to our physical plant will serve as a focal point for increasing levels of participation and improving performance standards and very importantly, give a boost to our sport tourism thrust, since athletes from North America and Europe can travel to Trinidad and Tobago to conduct their winter programmes and use these facilities that are of international standard.

I will now deal with special events. There were many special events which contributed to making 1996 a memorable year for sport. Internationally, the Centennial Olympic Games were held in the city of Atlanta, in which we fielded a small, but powerful, team. Most of our team members achieved their personal best, and two bronze medals were added to the country's medal count. For this, we are very proud of Mr. Ato Boldon whose electrifying performances held the nation, and much of the international athletic fraternity spellbound. It was an honour and a privilege for me to personally witness our performances in the 26th Olympiad, and to hold our flag high, especially during Ato's performances.

Some negative comments, as we are having here this evening, have been made by Members on the other side, concerning our sporting activities and achievements this year. May I, with your permission, Sir, direct the attention of those Cassandras, to the history-making events in sport in 1996.

The hosting of international tournaments is an area of special significance. In 1996, the Badminton, Basketball, Football, Trinidad and Tobago Special Olympics and the Trinidad and Tobago's Women's Hockey Associations hosted international tournaments which had a major impact on the national sporting community, and the nation as a whole. Twelve other national sporting associations represented Trinidad and Tobago abroad with some measure of success. The National Women's World Cup Hockey Tournament, attracted 11 countries drawn from the various continents of the world. At the opening ceremony of this tournament, it was a pleasure for me to hear the representative of the world body
for hockey say that this facility ranks among the best in the world, and it is because of the NAR/UNC Government. I am aware of the impact of this event, and I saw several of my colleagues on both sides of the House enjoying the games at the centre. The basketball, the football, special olympics, swimming and badminton championships were successfully held to appreciative crowds. I cannot overstate the importance of our national associations in hosting such tournaments, as there are tremendous benefits to be derived. Some of these benefits are:

1. To the hotel and tourism industry in terms of board, lodging transportation and related services.
2. The physical education it provides for young people.
3. The entertainment it provides for the general population, and a fostering of a sense of national pride and unity.

6.10 p.m.

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

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Dr. H. Rafeeq]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. P. Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, in 1996, the UNC/NAR Government of which I am pleased to be a part, contributed $1.3 million to assist national sporting organizations with local and regional events. This represented an increase of 25 per cent over the allocations for 1995. A survey of the national sporting organizations on the ministry’s performance in 1996 indicated a high level of satisfaction. This is the work we did with them.

The Body Building Association: The president of the federation stated that the performance of the ministry was a tremendous one.

Mr. Alloy Lequay stated that the performance of the ministry went very well for the year.

The president of the Windball Cricket Association—"Great performance”.

The secretary of the martial arts stated that in respect of the other disciplines the ministry has improved and that there had been more action and involvement in sports.

Tennis: Ms. Glenda Morean, president of the association sent warm congratulations to the Minister, commending her and the ministry on their energetic and committed approach.
The secretary of the Association of Track and Field commended the ministry—
“a fine job.”

Secretary of the Football Association commended the ministry on the
wonderful programme inducted—that is, the Super Five Programme.

I could just go on and on. They never saw it before. The words “better than
ever before” were used with amazing regularity. We all know this and Mr. Hart
also knows this. He would always tell me, “Pam, I never saw that before.”

Twenty years ago in 1976, our son of the soil, Mr. Hasely Crawford, became a
national hero when he won the country’s first and only gold medal to date, at the
22nd Olympiad in Canada. This Government has shown due recognition and
appreciation to Mr. Crawford by offering him a house in an upscale residential
neighbourhood, a tribute to the glory of his blistering track performance at the
games. For posterity this Government has renamed the National Stadium in his
honour. This is yet another demonstration of the level of support and recognition
that a UNC/NAR Government is willing to accord to its heroes.

No sporting programme is likely to succeed if the necessary avenues for
training are not in place. That is why, in 1996, the ministry’s staff continued its
focus on international networking, through attendance at international conferences,
meetings and sporting events in Canada, Switzerland, the United Kingdom,
Australia, Cuba and the United States of America. In addition, our coaches and
sport officers benefited from a number of training courses both locally and abroad.
As a result of meetings with the Ministry of Sport of Cuba, my ministry will
collaborate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to formulate with Cuba a bilateral
agreement in sport. This agreement will place emphasis on the following areas—

1. The use of Cuban experts to conduct a diagnostic survey of the strengths
and weaknesses of the sport systems and structures in Trinidad and
Tobago, and provide recommendations that will assist in the formulation
of our national sports policy.

2. To engage Cuban coaches and experts in the areas of volleyball, basketball,
track and field and boxing, to assist in the training of our coaches and the
development of our athletes.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago never had this before. In 1997, in
collaboration with the Ministry of Sport of Cuba, the Commonwealth Development
Sport Programme, the United Kingdom Sports Council and the Australian Sports
Commission and a task force comprising local experts, my ministry will present to
this honourable House the first national sports policy for Trinidad and Tobago.
Mr. Speaker, my ministry has conducted several programmes designed to meet the needs of the national community in sport and physical recreation. In 1996, the level of participation in these programmes reached an all-time high of 40,000, which is a 25 per cent increase over that of 1995.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to list some of the other programmes the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs has been bringing into the communities across Trinidad and Tobago. Our most visible programme this year has been the Super Five Community Sport Programme which was introduced on a pilot basis. A total of 3,500 young persons, male and female, from 51 communities completed the programme which comprised of:

(a) skill training in track and field, netball, football, basketball and cricket;
(b) psycho-social development;
(c) vocational training;
(d) literacy and numeracy enhancement.

This Super Five Programme has been acclaimed by the Commonwealth Sport Development Programme as one of the most innovative programmes for young people, one which can be used as a model for Caribbean and Commonwealth countries.

Mr. Speaker, I have already received my invitation after the Director of Sports went to Canada and presented the model at a Commonwealth programme which was held there. Immediately, they have sent for the documents. Trinidad and Tobago should be commended for this brilliant work that the UNC/NAR sporting ministry is doing in this country.

This community-based programme provided another opportunity, a second chance to the unemployed and vulnerable youth. It will give them another hope. The youth involved in this programme will continue to benefit from the expertise of YTEPP and the National Development Skills Programme and the psychological services. These institutions will focus on skills-training, peer counselling, supervisory management and other support services.

The effect of this programme on employment is two-fold, direct and indirect. One hundred and fifty community coaches were employed during the pilot project so we created employment there. Of course, one is fully aware of the indirect forms of employment in these ventures.
6.20 p.m.

Indirect employment opportunities arise from the demands for transportation, ground maintenance, vending and other services associated with these projects. The national foundation upon which one builds determines the strength of the final structure. Sport is no different. We have sought, therefore, through our Sport Training and Enhancement Programme, to lay the appropriate and necessary base. In 1996, therefore, 8,000 youngsters between the ages of 8 and 14 years from 72 communities—urban, suburban and rural—throughout the country participated in these personal development sport orientation and talent identification programmes referred to as STEP. Further, Mr. Speaker, through an intensified swimming programme which attracted 28,000 participants in 1996, my ministry continues to provide opportunities for the development of the aquatic skills of our children, youths and adults.

You will agree, Mr. Speaker, that this aspect of our delivery further widens the range and the attractiveness of our programmes and equips our people to exploit vast opportunities that exist for water-based activities. In 1997, two additional community swimming pools will be constructed; one at Yoland Pompey Recreation Ground in Princess Town and one at Irwin Park Recreation Ground in Siparia. Right now, one is being constructed at La Horquetta. [Interruption] It is being constructed. The swimming pools at Couva and Diego Martin will be upgraded and modernized. All of this is in pursuit of the goal of increasing access to learn to swim, water recreation and the level of competence in aquatic skills.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that earlier in my contribution, I referred to a paradigm shift which suggests that sport is being taken to the people. We are going back to the communities. A few weeks ago, my ministry, working in partnership with the management of the Trincity Mall, finalized arrangements which will result in the launch of our first Mall Ball Programme at the end of January 1997. You will also recall the saying that if Mohammed will not go to the mountain, then the mountain will go to Mohammed. This is the case with my ministry’s Mall Ball Programme which will take our activities to the youths who frequent the malls.

Mr. Speaker, two other programmes which were high-profiled in 1996 were the National Youth Sports Festival and the Annual Residential Sports School. The National Youth Sports Festival attracted over 1,200 young people, 15 to 20 years old at the Queen’s Park Savannah to take part in a wide variety of mini games. This programme serves to sow the seeds for the formation of groups which
identify with communities. It also provides an opportunity for them to display skills acquired from districts and schools’ programmes.

Mr. Speaker, we in the ministry have begun to play sport on a sound footing. Our journey has just begun and we have been encouraged this year, because it was $8 million from the PSIP and then we went back later in the year and we were able to convince our Cabinet and the Minister of Finance, and we got an additional $14.2 million for meeting the development programme needs of our sporting fraternity. You never saw that in Trinidad and Tobago.

One of the important projects to be completed early in the new year from this allocation is a new mundo track at a cost of $5 million. The former administration paid and continue to pay lip-service to sport. They talked about it on the campaign trail; they wrote about it in their manifesto but provided petty cash for the development of sport. In fact, I read recently where the Member for Arouca North continued to joke and play games with sport. Sport is a serious scientific business. The Leader of the Opposition made reference to the promotion of sport as an industry. I pity him as he does not fully recognize that there are some basic ingredients which are necessary for the success of this industry. He does not recognize that sport will one day be one of our major industries as a result of a deliberate, clear, and finely tuned approach. Strategies which are being pursued are similar and will be the kinds of strategies which are being pursued by the UNC/NAR administration. [Interuption] The hon. gentleman may wish to note a departure from his preferred strategy of building from the top, down to building from the bottom, up.

In order to ensure the realization of this great expectation, sport as an industry, among other things, my ministry has—

1. developed a strategic plan, 1997—2003;
2. placed emphasis on developing sport in the community;
3. promoted programmes for the training of coaches and sport administrators;
4. continued to ensure the strategic establishment of modern facilities and the upgrading of existing facilities.

Our future plans include:

1. The formulation of a national sport policy which will establish the framework for the future of sport, inclusive of the national sport management commission and the establishment of a national sport academy.
(2) The conduct of a national fitness survey to be followed by active live-in programmes that will seriously impact on improving the lifestyles of every citizen—the young, the not so young, the physically and mentally challenged.

In 1997, Mr. Speaker, our budgetary allocation of $51 million, of which $22 million is for the development programme, will allow us to fully launch this year’s pilot projects on a larger scale and to make further investments in the physical plan inclusive of the indoor arena for Tobago and also the indoor arena for Maloney. We also propose in 1997, to undertake the following:

(1) Develop selected regional and subregional grounds to facilitate Super Five and other mass participation programmes at Rio Claro Recreation Ground, Cannan/Bon Accord Recreation Ground, and Baratara Recreation Ground.

(2) Construct hard-surface courts in selected communities such as—and this will be done with the Tobago House of Assembly—Moriah/Mason Hall and Parlatuvier in Tobago; River Estate and Basilon Street Recreation Ground, Laventille.

(3) Develop turf pitches in selected areas such as Oropouche, Roxborough Tobago; Tacarigua Recreation Ground and Shell Recreation Ground, Rio Claro and Yolanda Pompey Recreation Ground, Princes Town to facilitate mass participation and improve the standard of performance.

(4) Construct a national tennis centre at Tacarigua to assist in the development of the game; $1.5 was given to us.

(5) Develop a central headquarters for national sporting organizations to improve the administration of sport for which we have allocated $1.8 million.

For decades the leading sporting organizations have been crying out for this. It took the NAR/UNC Government to bring that into fruition.

6.30 p.m.

We have also decided to reassess guidelines for granting subventions to national sporting organizations. No government is able to provide for all the sporting needs of a country, whether small or large, developing or developed. I wish to place on the records of Hansard, the ministry’s appreciation for the support given to sport by the private sector, as well as the thousands of persons who provided voluntary services to the sporting fraternity.
Increasing the level of participation as well as the quality of training in sport and physical activity to the citizenry, and providing social education to young people between the ages of 15—25 years, is no easy task. I take this opportunity to make a further appeal to the corporate sector, voluntary organizations, leaders in communities and non-governmental organizations to continue to work with us in the pursuit of these goals. The ministry continues to be proactive and forward thinking in all its activities, so that our 21st century people would be more active, healthier and be living testimony to the term “national unity”.

In closing, I remind this honourable House that there are different kinds of governments. There are governments that watch things happen; governments that wonder what happened and governments that make things happen. I invite those on the other side to watch and wonder while the UNC/NAR Government makes things happen. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, I wish you and all the Members present and their families a happy and holy Christmas, and a new year full of hope, goodwill and progress.

Thank you.

Mr. Edward Hart (Tunapuna): Mr. Speaker, I consider it a special privilege to be able to make a contribution to the debate on the budget for 1997. However, first of all I commend the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro for his maiden speech in this House. Heartiest congratulations to him after the 13 months he sat languishing on that seat. I hope now that he has broken the ice we would hear more from him.

On a sad note, on behalf of my colleagues and I, I extend heartfelt condolences to the bereaved relatives of Mr. David Radix, the former president of the Men’s Hockey Association. He suffered a stroke about two days ago and died at the comparatively young age of 48 years. I understand that he would be buried tomorrow.

I would do a three-part presentation dealing with youth, sports and then my constituency. To me the budget is more than figures crunching and giving some idea as to revenues anticipated and expenditure proposed. It needs to clearly establish the priorities for the period and the benefits likely to accrue as a result of the methods adopted. The people in the country must be fairly satisfied that the measures announced would result in relief from some difficulties and problems, and provide a stepping stone for the enhancement of the quality of life for the people of this nation.

Today life has become difficult in the nation. Prices are rising, utility rates are increasing and the cost of living is going through the roof while there is retrenchment,
and the threat of retrenchment providing insecurity and instability in the work
place. There is an escalation of poverty; there are greater levels of illiteracy and
increased crime. There is a growing number of vagrants, street children and
increasing homelessness. Crime is at its highest level and there is growing despair
and hopelessness, especially among our youths. Youth accounts for 17.5 per cent
of the present population and totals in excess of 214,000. By 2015, if the Lord
saves us from this devious UNC/NAR Government, the youth population would
average between 16.4 per cent to 18.7 per cent.

Young people are in panic over the unemployment situation and there is
seemingly no end in sight to this situation as the budget has said very little in terms
of sustainable employment. As you are well aware, when the youths have no jobs
and nothing constructive in sport and culture to fire their imagination and
enthusiasm, there is a spirit of restlessness and unease which cannot be a healthy
omen to the stability of this nation.

Having listened to two budget presentations from this coalition Government, it
is obvious that sport and youth affairs do not constitute any major concern of the
present Government. Youth is a very significant sector in the development of
Trinidad and Tobago. A former Prime Minister, Mr. George Chambers, recognized
that in 1981, when he excised Youth Affairs from the Community Development
Division. Mr. Chambers’ initiative was taken further by Mr. Patrick Manning,
when in 1993, he removed YTEPP, the youth camps and trade centres from the
portfolio of the Minister of Youth Affairs. Mr. Manning’s view was that Youth
Affairs was not equipped to handle those functions. How right he has been proven
to be. The then Minister of Youth Affairs was mandated to look at the youth
service in Trinidad and Tobago with the following terms of reference: to report on
the present global youth situation; to review the available provision for youth at
the national, regional and international levels, and to make recommendations for
innovative programmes.

That report was presented in 1994. The district youth project was identified as
an innovative programme. There were two pilots, one in Sea Lots and the other in
Felicity. They were not completed when governments changed hands.

You may also recall that in 1995, Trinidad and Tobago hosted a Commonwealth
Youth Ministers Meeting. At that youth meeting several important youth matters
and issues were discussed. Among them was the importance of the development of
youth policies. About 52 countries took part and only seven had policies for youth
and sport. Among them were India, Jamaica and Guyana.
6.40 p.m.

The Commonwealth Youth Ministers recognized the importance of the youth sector and they agreed that youth policies are essential if governments are to adequately address the present problems and concerns that are facing young women and men in the society. Together with the necessary structures and resource commitments, they provide the impetus for the development of youth as individuals and contributors to national progress.

Mr. Speaker, in the last budget presentation I listened as the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs made her contribution in which she stated that sport and youth are essential elements in the promotion of human progress and national development, touching every facet of the population. Sport and physical activity are positive alternatives to anti-social behaviour. Before the PNM demitted office—and I know the Member for St. Joseph has a problem with the word “demitted”—it had begun the process for the development of a youth policy. A youth survey was commissioned through the institute of social and economic research and there was an offer of technical assistance from the Commonwealth Youth Programme.

Mr. Speaker, may I ask the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs where is that youth policy? Does the Minister intend to continue putting programmes before a policy? I have here a clipping from the Trinidad Guardian of January 18, 1996 and there is the charming Minister’s face here and she says that the last government butchered the sports ministry. What she said here in essence is that they were going to have the task force and a policy for youth and one for sport. I am asking from January—we are now in December and Christmas is around the corner. Is the Minister taking a whole year? When are we going to get the youth policy? She returns today and is saying the same thing, rehearsing what she had said in January. Where is the policy? [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, this Minister has a way of playing with figures and juggling them and I will speak later on about sport and the Super Five of which she spoke. She said in the first year of this programme that 24,000 youths will be involved and there will be an annual growth rate of 10 per cent. This afternoon she told us that the programme had 3,500. Look at the disparity! Just figures, statistics, pulling wool over people’s eyes.

Youth is serious business and we cannot afford to play with the youths. [Desk thumping] A previous minister in the said Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs
waited until there was an insurrection in this House and when a gun barrel was placed to her head by a young man, she said she then recognized that youths need some sort of recognition and consideration. We cannot take youths and use them as a political football. We must be accurate because everything that is said here is going down in Hansard. I have it recorded here.

**Mr. Singh:** What did you do when you were in government?

**Mr. E. Hart:** What did I do? I will take some time off later and let you know.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise this honourable House that young men and women form a special group with special needs which must be addressed through specific, well targeted policies and programmes. Not just programmes for drugs and crime—that is all right, but one must think about the holistic, moral and spiritual development. *[Desk thumping]* Young persons have a unique contribution to make to the national development due to their energy, enthusiasm, resilience and ability to inject a fresh perspective on issues. They can also be instrumental in bringing a better balance of cultural, economic, humanistic and social values to this society. To achieve this potential, young women and men need a supportive and informative environment to move successfully from the dependence of childhood to the autonomy of adulthood. Because they have less life experience and significantly lower access to information resources and power than older persons, young men and women are vulnerable to neglect, abuse and exploitation. Mr. Speaker, our young men and women are at risk in terms of their major socio-economic challenges in the country; unemployment, low income, housing problems, substance abuse and poor health. We now ask ourselves what is the situation today after approximately one year and another budget debate. Very little, if anything was accomplished.

Someone recently likened the operations of this administration to crazy ants which we all know make swift movements but accomplish nothing.

**Mr. Maharaj:** He is a PNM Senator.

**Mr. E. Hart:** The problem with crazy ants is that they have no plans, no vision and they end up with nothing to show. Mr. Speaker, I must mention here that had it not been for some good work done by the NGOs, many more physically challenged youths would have been in homes wasting their lives away.

A national youth policy specifically recognizes the invaluable contribution that the young men and women of Trinidad and Tobago can make to the country’s development. It provides a vehicle for Government to clearly enunciate its commitment
for meeting the specific needs of young persons through a statement of vision, objectives, priorities, strategies and programmes which will ensure that youth can participate meaningfully in the nation’s advancement.

Mr. Speaker, there was talk in the last budget of the revival of the National Youth Council. Has it been revived, or have there been any efforts in 1996 to revive it? I am speaking to the Member for Tobago West, through you, Mr. Speaker. Instead of reading the newspaper the Minister should listen because I am asking some pertinent questions here, and I will need some answers. [Laughter and desk thumping] The Minister always shows this arrogance when anyone is speaking, she has the papers high up and does not listen to anyone. We paid attention to what she was saying. What about the youth and drug activities, and the Youth Resource and Information Centre? The situation speaks for itself. How many youths have used the centre and what resources are available? In fact, is this centre functioning? Do the young people visit the centre? How many per day, per week, per month for the year? Five, ten, fifteen? She must tell us.

Mr. Speaker, other sectors as health, education and agriculture have policies. Why has this Government not seized on the groundwork done by the previous government and developed this youth policy? When the hon. Member was the Minister of Housing and Settlements and the Government changed and the Member for Point Fortin was the Minister of Housing and Settlements, every Friday she had the complaint about clearing track for agouti to run and as soon as tea time came she would leave to catch a plane. She never remained to hear what we were doing.

6.50 p.m.

Sport is something foreign to this Minister. [Interruption] No, I am not crazy. Apparently, when those Members contested the general election, much attention was not paid to the slate at that time. When the slate ended up 17/17 and both Members decided, after much badgering, to join with the UNC—although their constituents do not like that—and they ended up in government, the Prime Minister then had to form a Cabinet and his problem was who to give what.

The Member for Oropouche, the Minister of Finance-in-waiting, was bypassed and my friend was given the Ministry of Finance. He again looked around. He took my good friend, who was working feverishly in the dental lab, and put him as the Minister of Education, and so forth. I can go on and on. He had to take a journalist and put him as the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives, now he is making a lot of postcards. Then he took another young promising doctor, who is
not interested in politics, to represent Barataria /San Juan. He is more interested in making private parts.

What is ironical is that, being a sports person, I wanted to know who the Prime Minister would put as the Minister of Sport because to most of the people here sport is foreign. Well, it emerged that for the swearing-in ceremony I saw no one and then the Member came late, through the back door. No one knew when she was sworn in; we just know she is the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. I gave her some time to adjust because she was catapulted into the position of Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, but the Member comes here with a lot of statistics over and over and we have the feeling that nothing is happening with the young people out there. What is the plan? We must have a policy if we are to go anywhere. I repeat the request: we want the policies. How long will it take?

Another significant area of youth development is that of research of youth issues and problems. We want the officers to go out there and do some research. The problems of the youths in Carenage might be far different from what the youths in Toco or Mayaro might experience. The young people want them to come to them. The Member alluded to it when she spoke about Mohammed going to the mountain. Go to them! Do not stay at City Hall on your high horse and call people! Try to find out the problems of the young people!

There are a number of well-intentioned workers and organizations which seek to offer assistance but because they do not have the appropriate information to inform their programme, much of their effort goes to waste. Mr. Speaker, the youth policy gives direction to youth development. I wonder if the Minister, when she went into that ministry, was given a report like this. This report is on a visit to elite sports schools in Great Britain, Germany and the United States of America by a joint team of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and the National Gas Company, the same gas company which the Minister just tried to decry. This company has been very helpful to the ministry.

The person who went on this visit is the same gentleman, a hero who deserves the honour, Mr. Hasely Crawford and Mr. Rolingston Agard. What did the Minister do with the document? Did she throw it in the wastepaper basket to reinvent the wheel? Right here in the ministry there are offers of help from the British Sports Council and the Federal Institute of Germany and the Minister fiddled around for a whole year and would not arrive at a policy. [Desk thumping]

We need to build a proper youth service in Trinidad and Tobago. We need to follow the direction began in 1993 and stop making youth a political football.
Nowhere in the budget presentation was mention made of strategies and programmes to give opportunity to youths to develop their own priorities. Listen to what they have to say and you can be guided by that! Do not force things on them! Mall Ball and all that nonsense sounds nice.

When we continue in the condemned way of thinking and planning for our young people; when we continue to take away the trust and confidence of our young people, we are on dangerous grounds. The only consequence of this, Mr. Speaker, is greater marginalization and alienation of our young men and women from the mainstream of society. Youth development is defined as giving youth equitable access to resources and participation in decision-making. Its aim is to create opportunity for youth to escape poverty and to participate in shaping this country’s development. In the words of a song writer: “When will they ever learn?” The youth situation is chaotic.

As I move around the country I meet and speak with many young men and women without a hope under this present wicked and misleading Government. I have my little youth group, which I started 30 years ago. I have over 220 youths. Every Saturday and Sunday I deal with them. We must listen to them. We must listen to the cries of the young people.

I do not want to be uncharitable to the hon. Minister. I was telling the Member for Arouca North that I wished it were a man I had to deal with. Mr. Speaker, it was so embarrassing that while the Minister was reading through her notes—I do not want to say it. Well the Minister told me that she was the commander and that her lieutenant was here. Her lieutenant was here reading word for word like he was afraid she might make a mistake or not read it properly. That is not nice. It might annoy you, but the truth offends.

No, not you! The Members at the back. They do not like us to talk. We must say nothing. PNM must die. They must throw the ashes in the sea. There must be no PNM, only the UNC/NAR. I keep telling you that I do not know how you found yourself on that side. You really feel that you are welcomed over there. I keep warning you. We sat for three years and 10 months side by side taking tea. I am attracted to you. I have always told you that.

Mr. Speaker: May I suggest to the Member for Tunapuna that when he gets to the stage where he is talking about being attracted to the Member, he should start to speak to her through me.
Mr. E. Hart: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

Youth development is defined as giving youth equitable access to resources and participation in decision-making. The hon. Minister of Finance indicated that the unemployment figure is 15 per cent of the labour force. I would like the hon. Minister to know that the poverty which now exists takes no comfort in those figures. It grieves my heart to know that the youth situation is so chaotic. Youth groups both in number and membership are dwindling. Youths have no voice in this country. The National Youth Council has ceased to function and no effort is made to revive it.

Last year we were told by the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs that there were 23,000 youths to every youth officer. I now ask the Minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, has that figure suddenly changed? What has happened? Where are these youth officers? Last year in the ministry there were 13 youth officers to service all these people. Has the staff been increased? Can any of the Members of Parliament here tell me who the youth officers are? Do they interface with the youths in their area? Do they speak to the hon. Minister? Do they tell her about the programmes they have initiated which sound so nice, DYP and so forth? [Members reply in the negative] Who are they?

7.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Government needs to set the direction because this country’s future depends on the manner in which the youth human resource is managed. This Government needs to do more for our young people than offer palliatives. For all of 1996 we seldom heard of any initiatives taken for youths by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs until two months ago when there was this District Youth Micro-Enterprise Pilot Project.

The Minister met the DYP Programme and it was changed around to the Micro-Enterprise Pilot Project. Mr. Speaker, I have no problem with that but I want to know how many youths have received their loans. How did they go about selecting these youths? What were the criteria used? These are things we like to know. We are representing people. There are youths in our constituencies; it must not be a secret between the Minister and the Permanent Secretary. Tell us, we want to know.

I would also like to know if the technical staff in the Division of Youth Affairs has been increased. Have the youths altered for the better in 1996? I am sure that we have a consensus on this matter, not only in Parliament but throughout this country.
Mr. Speaker, I reiterate that the budget is indeed an important exercise and must take into consideration the implications of measures proposed for the quality of life for the people. We hear much talk about total quality nation. Yes, that is sounding all right. But what are we doing to bring about this total quality nation when there is rank discrimination in the distribution of jobs and so forth?

Is this Government willing to sell its soul? We have a headline here about the casino gambling. I did not really want to touch on it but the letters keep coming to me, I am getting phone calls being a man on the street. I therefore think I should say something especially as I am concerned with the youths. I was surprised that the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs—she did not come outright and say it, but apparently she is supporting casino gambling.

Casino gambling has as its associate, drugs, crime, money laundering and deterioration of moral and spiritual values. She must remember that she is the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. Is this Government willing to sell the soul of the nation for a mess of pottage? I am convinced that this nation does not have to introduce casino gambling in this beautiful country of ours.

My other concern, Mr. Speaker, is that the subventions given to these youth groups are very secretive. What are the subventions given to the youth organizations like the YMCA, YWCA, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, NYC, President’s Award Scheme? Can one full-time worker, one field officer with the barest necessity office space really help them? We are really joking about our young people, Mr. Speaker. The capital stock of youth is precious and nothing is too precious for our young people. Let us develop human resources of that segment of the population and make their contribution to the national development of this wonderful nation of Trinidad and Tobago.

I now turn my attention to sport. What is the state of sport in Trinidad and Tobago, and in particular, that of sport administration? What is being done for the young people in the nation who are unemployed and need to be involved in sport and other activities to bring about some measure of fulfillment in their lives? In fact, during the last debate the hon. Minister outlined the situation of youth in these words:

“Youths,...are especially vulnerable to societal economic crisis and volatility, high unemployment, distress, social conditions, poor health, limited educational opportunities, poverty and crime. Young people now face complex problems and reversals.”
And she continued.

“...that the problem is exacerbated by inadequacy of human resources for youth development.”

From my observations there has been much propaganda on the Super Five programme rather than the ministry concentrating on programmes for:

(a) schools;
(b) national sporting organizations;
(c) other communities.

The Super Five Programme is probably a glorified baby-sitter programme as it caters for dropouts in the particular age groups and others who are not usually attached to clubs.

When one examines the situation one would find that many of the participants attend sessions just to take a sweat because they have nothing else to do. Are they genuinely interested in the development of the relative skills being taught? In addition, are the coaches equipped with the necessary skills to move their participants so that they become better members of the community, or rather, not involved in anti-social patterns?

Being a practising coach myself—while I am not belittling the quality of some of those coaches—I am convinced that sufficient thought and investigation did not go into their selection. I visited many of these programmes. There were programmes conducted in front of my eyes and I observed what was going on because it was something new and I wanted to give it a chance to catch on.

Mr. Speaker, the former government of which I was proud to be a member, met and continued a sport education programme, because it was well aware that there were a number of inadequate coaches in the country. [Interruption] In answer to the Member for Caroni East who asked what I did, I worked for 10 years at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs as a Games Coach, I am qualified in both disciplines; football and cricket. While there, I worked with Mr. Everard “Gally” Cummings as the football coach and Mr. Bernard Julian, Mr. Theo Cuffy and Mr. Larry Gomes.

After I left, I believe Mr. Cummings went on loan to the World Cup “On the Road to France” which left the ministry without a football coach. Mr. Theo Cuffy went on to greener pastures—probably he was disenchanted. He is in the Cayman
Islands. I do not think they renewed Mr. Larry Gomes’s contract but he has gone off to Canada which leaves the ministry with Mr. Bernard Julian alone. [Interruption] Yes, it is frustration. How could you take a coach like Bernard Julian and send him to work with the School for the Dumb—I am not crying down these people, but one wants special people to coach these people. They cannot treat someone with his wealth of experience like that. He is a good demonstrator, he has good language. Bernard is a top coach. [Interruption] If one does not have good coaches then one does not have any ministry. This is what the ministry is about. Why not see it fit to increase the staff? [Interruption] Mr. Speaker, I will sit if the Minister is willing to get up and name the coaches in the ministry. Is she willing to put the names on record? [Interruption]

7.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, if this coalition Government has the wisdom to appreciate the significance of preparing coaches to run programmes efficiently and effectively, the situation as it is now, where large sums are spent with little beneficial results, would not have prevailed.

In 1973, we got 179 level 1 coaches, and I had hoped that after I left the ministry there would have been a multiplying effect so there could be continued quality coaches spread throughout the length and breadth of this country. Incorrect coaching is better than no coaching at all.

Mr. Speaker, long ago, if one were experiencing domestic disputes one could have sent one’s children to speak to the policeman, the priest, or the principal in the respective areas. The coach is a very important person in the community and must be well equipped to see about these youths. It is a serious business. One can spend money; increase allocations; build facilities; and lay false claims to them, but if we do not get this coaching affair right, we would be in trouble.

As one who encourages the development of sport, especially coaching, may I advise the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs that in the new year there should be continuation of the Sports Education Programme which was initiated by Members on this side. She can take the advice and if she does not want to, well, what else can I do? I am always willing to assist her. I am open to give any sort of advice and help that the Minister needs, I will be there for her.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister might again take the credit by saying it is the first time that this programme has been established. After all, it is the norm for the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs to exclaim—she is laying false claims. She has
started everything in the said ministry—we did not do anything. She stood up there—it is on *Hansard* record—and told me that I did not do anything. The Minister met the same officers when she assumed office. They were in the ministry with me; they did not do anything because the political leader emasculated the Ministry of Housing and Settlements. There were no human resources to take the programme forward and it was put elsewhere, and the Member is annoyed with that. Let it be top heavy—leave YTEPP there; leave the Hospitality Training Institute; leave the Youth Camp; leave the trade centre; leave everything for your lord and master, as the Minister of Housing and Settlements said to me a while ago. She is the commander of all these areas, yet she does not have her soldiers to see about them. It does not make sense. *[Laughter]* A commander without any soldiers.

Mr. Speaker, let the hon. Minister continue to blow her own trumpet, because nobody is there to blow it for her. They do not care about her. *[Laughter]* As a matter of fact, she has stated that in the first year in the Super Five Programme there has been annual growth, but that is just talk. Could the hon. Minister tell us how many youths attended the programme and how many had a 75 per cent attendance record? They are not interested in sport. *[Interruption]* I am talking about the attendance record. Mr. Speaker, we have been here all morning, but the Minister does not want to hear me, because sport is foreign to most of them.

I ask the hon. Minister, if there was an evaluation, what were the findings? There are things we would like to know. Mr. Speaker, let us have a close review of the division of physical education and sport for the year under review. There is a limited amount of physical education in sport. The duties they have to perform is to disseminate information in different counties, to set up programmes according to their needs and to supervise the coaches.

Sad but true, the youths in the Mayaro area are starved for programmes to improve the prowess in different sporting disciplines. I know that because I was there last week and also I worked for three years in the Mayaro/Rio Claro area in every primary, secondary and senior comprehensive school. The nucleus of the Mayaro First Division football team was under my charge in the primary schools. I am not one to be boastful like the Minister, but at times one has to say what one did. What did the Minister do? Since I left there, they have never seen a government coach in that area.

I visited Toco/Manzanilla for three years where the “backdoor minister,” the “propaganda man” Sadiq Baksh wants to lay his bucket down. Also, I worked
there for three years. There is where I met Mervyn Dillon. Malcolm Marshall is speaking in glowing terms of Mervyn Dillon now and I am proud of that. It is there I met Jason Austin. He started off in the Toco/Manzanilla area. I am asking the Member for Caroni East: What did he do? Mr. Speaker, I want to know if the Minister is aware of the situation.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Miss P. Nicholson]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. E. Hart: Mr. Speaker, it is time for the hon. Minister to face reality and wake up because we cannot play with the youths of this country. She should be cognizant of the fact that there are many young men and women out there who are willing and thirsty for knowledge in sport. We on this side were endeavoring to satisfy that thirst. We achieved success and the momentum was gained in several rural areas where the coaches conducted programmes. I have had the privilege and experience of working in Mayaro, Rio Claro and Cedros. I used to journey from Tacarigua to Cedros to coach the youths on Wednesdays before the comprehensive school was built there. At that time there were no schools there and the youths journeyed from Point Fortin to come for the sessions on afternoons and then I journeyed home.

With respect to Las Cuevas and La Fillette, Mr. Speaker, after we had completed these sessions—sometimes the youths did not have a ball because of the cost of equipment and so forth, I tried to finance them. If one cannot get a ball and one is conducting the Super Five—and it is over now, then what is the next move? There must be some continuity. Repetition is the name of the game for us. How will they continue when there is an escalation in the cost of sporting equipment?

Mr. Speaker, through you, could the hon. Minister tell us what is the position with respect to residential sports school? I heard no mention made of that. This is the sports group. Every year, we received the cream of the crop from all over the country and they were being brought into one centre and they were exposed to disciplines and I have not heard anything about residential sports school. If it has come to a halt, that would be a tragedy because so many national players have emerged out of the residential sports school. If one could get one’s act together and have it continued, we would be very happy. Would the residential sports school be a part of the 1997 programme? If not, then why not?
This coalition Government, and particularly the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, has castigated the previous administration for doing nothing. This is certainly untrue and I want her to desist. She says it at every function; she says it in the streets and, as one knows, perception is something else. People might not want to believe that we did not do anything. It is untrue. Do not be afraid of the others, they cannot do you anything because they need you. Mr. Speaker, please tell her to say the things that are true. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, during her one-year tenure of office, she enumerated among her achievements, the National Hockey Centre at Tacarigua and the construction of four indoor sports halls. For the records, I am informing this honourable House that it was the previous administration, the PNM, that was totally responsible for turning the sod and implementing the construction of that centre. Put it on the record straight! When the Minister assumed office, it was about 75 per cent completed. Every morning I am there—because it is right on my turf—looking for jobs for the people. Every day I am on the hockey centre monitoring with Mr. Chance and so forth, and now the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs is claiming that I did not do anything. The Minister came to the opening. I saw her. I was playing with the band but the Minister did not recognize me while she was coming in and the Government does not care anything about steelband so she did not even wave to the boys—Neal and Massy All Stars. [Interruption]

The Minister Extraordinaire drove up with his car lights flashing and bodyguards and so forth. The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs addressed the crowd and no mention was made about what we did. That is unfair. The Minister must be fair. We came into office and met YTEPP going on and we acknowledged that programme because we saw it had potential. We did not stop it, we continued with it and changed it around. We are not like the Minister of Planning and Development—everything is to be shelved and reviewed to fool people, and then say that they are giving us the National Library Complex—stopping everything. Say the truth. Put it on the records!

7.20 p.m.

Yes, you see even that, Madam Minister through you. Sorry, Mr. Speaker I have to go through you.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to make the point here, Madam Minister, that although we are politicians we must try to be honest with the sports people. Sports people are forthright and upright people. We must be honest in dealing with them.
We are talking about the National Hockey Centre. My information is that in 1994 the then Government made a commitment to the Women’s Hockey Association to provide a facility for the World Cup that would meet all international requirements in 1994. We promised them that. Two weeks before the tournament the ministry informed the association that they would not complete the work. They refused to build the required technical and reserved player areas. They refused to provide the necessary warm up area. You could refute it if you want.

I am saying they refused to allow the association to use the adjacent in-door sports hall; even after they led the association to believe that this would be done, and even after the NCC agreed. This latter situation meant that the necessary space for the tournament director, official rest areas and doping centre was not available and had to be rented by the association. The association at this late stage also had to spend over $80,000 building the necessary facilities, since the tournament could not be hosted without these.

Madam Minister let us not get into that, I am telling you. This is serious business. If you could stand here tonight and lay claims for this national hockey facility as though we had nothing to do with it—[Interruption].

You were not taking notes while I was speaking. But I just want to recap a little to help you. There is a need for a policy that is communicated to the public and not a secret which only the ministry knows.

There is need for a National Sports Council, so that better sporting expertise can be utilized and the decisions for sports not only be undertaken by the ministry. Open it up. There are people out there with ideas. Although you have the Super Five Programme they do not have properly qualified personnel to run the programme. Take a look at that, visit the programmes. Consequently, the grounding that these athletes are receiving is inadequate. A better idea would be to institute proper physical education programme in all schools and to ensure that the teachers are properly trained.

It is all well and good to know that you are putting calypso on the curriculum in the schools, but we need a physical education programme. Look at Jamaica! It is not that they are more talented than we are. Pound for pound we have as much raw talent as any country in the world. And as I talk about raw talent, it was evident that the boy, Stafford, from Cumana, went to Japan and beat the world. Japan had dominated it for 34 years—he won. And the ministry was silent; they did not say anything.
You have to honour him the same way you honoured Dwight Yorke. We are glad for that, all of us honoured Dwight and had a reception for him. Have a reception for the boy, a little underprivileged boy left Cumana and went to Japan, and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs did nothing about that. That is unbelievable, Madam Minister, and then we talk about total quality life and national unity. Do not discriminate, call him to the ministry. When you went to see the football game, I watched you all, because some of the fellows over there found trouble to find the Stadium when Trinidad played in the Shell Cup.

I was watching Madam Minister in the VIP Box being served drinks and so forth. She was urging the team to “kick the ball.” At the end we won. She went out there with the Prime Minister. She went up on the podium. The way the Prime Minister hugged up Latapy, you will figure he was a father who met a son whom he had not seen for 50 years, he would not release the boy at all; rocking him. You remember that? [Interruption] No, no I am not wicked. I am going to tell you why.

Look at this headline. This is Tuesday, December 17, 1996, “TT Football in fiasco.” And it goes on to say: “Intrigue, infighting, indiscipline on Road to France...” When we have these things taking place, remember these people are coming to you all for grants, and taxpayers’ money is going to these people to ensure that things go all right. If things are going wrong you have to get in, you cannot have a hands-off approach and say, “It is for the National Sporting Organization, we have nothing to do with that.” You have to get involved and find out what is happening. This thing about “we got the wooden spoon in hockey” and that is all right and you do not call them and find out what is happening. We are out of the football; things are in chaos, kicking out coaches, bringing in coaches, playing musical chairs with the coaches; we have to look at all of that. Get in to that.

My time is running out.

Hon. Member: Go ahead. You have 20 minutes.

Mr. E. Hart: I now turn my attention to the beautiful multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural constituency of Tunapuna, which is very well known to you, Mr. Speaker, of which I am extremely proud to be the representative.

Mr. Speaker, during my first term of office when I sat on the other side I was successful in getting several projects on stream; some were completed satisfactorily, some were not completed and others did not even get off the ground. So when we demitted office I immediately entered into dialogue with some ministers and parliamentary secretaries, who are presently in Government, temporarily I should
add, in an effort to work towards the continuation of these projects which eventually will redound to the benefit of all Tunapunians and others. However, Mr. Speaker, sad to say, despite writing to these honourable gentlemen officially, and requesting them to visit my constituency, none has showed up after one year.

You see they are powerful now. Which one of them could stand and say that I wrote to them and they visited. Who visited? You visited, Mr. Minister of Education, without telling me anything. That was very unethical. You visited and you invited me and I came. I am talking about my invitation to people. You came to the Social Welfare reception, I was there at the head table with you and we treated you well as the Minister.

I am talking about people I wrote, and I have the evidence, letters saying that they are coming. Christmas is going to reach before they come to the constituency. Yet they are coming to the constituency surreptitiously, and working underneath to undermine the Member of Parliament in an effort to win the seat. That is not right.

The Member for Chaguanas said that if in an effort to get on top you cut down people, you would not stay on top for long. Well, that is the same thing. You want to win the seat, all right, but do not do that. This started and led up to the general election when they sent my good friend from Naparima, who was the co-ordinator to co-ordinate all the marginal seats. He held the meeting in El Dorado North and then the chairman of the UNC started walking. They are talking about the PNM being dead. But the Chairman of the UNC started walking in St. Michael Road telling people that he is the candidate and the people said “we do not want you here, move from here.”

So when they heard that they decided to look for a super candidate to put up against Eddie Hart, a heavy weight, and they had all their strategies led by my friend from Naparima in an effort to move me. Then they had an early Santa Claus in Mr. Dymally. I used to see him around, and he came with a big bag of money from the United States. So they spent $1.3 million in an effort to win the Tunapuna seat. A lot of money was spent there because they wanted to win the seat. Well it is now history that we retained the seat. But I am representing everybody: PNM, UNC, NJAC whoever it is, so give me the respect I deserve until such time.

I understand this PR Minister, this backdoor Minister, who went to St. Barbs and lit a deya, then went to Wallerfield with the clean-up campaign, then he went to the Beetham. I quote from a newspaper of Sunday, December 8, 1996: “Brown Christmas on the Beetham.” They are showing you this drain that they are cleaning
up. So the people in the Beetham instead of having a white Christmas, they are going to experience a brown Christmas. I feel sorry for them; I am saddened for them. With me any colour Christmas would do, it is all right with me. But I am studying these people in the Beetham, we must not play games with them.

Go to Wallerfield now where they had all the big clean-up, all the bushes are there still. So the Member comes to Tunapuna because he was thinking whether to fight politics in Toco/Manzanilla or the Tunapuna seat. But Baron sang it in concert, “Fools rush in where wise men fear to tread”. If he wants to come and fight the seat let him come, but treat me right, Mr. Speaker. “Marginalization in the URP, Tunapuna, Social Development statistics—9.7 per cent poverty”. High statistics Tunapuna/Piarco area, yet you put four URP jobs. How is that going to satisfy the people when the people depend on these jobs?

Now yesterday in the newspapers PR again: “58,000 benefited from the URP”. But who are the 58,000, friends and family? All kinds of corrupt practices are going on.

If you have a PNM face or you support PNM you are not getting one day for the year.

The talk is, nothing for Eddie Hart, nothing for Martin Joseph. That is the talk in the office. Get rid of them. Put the Jamaat in charge. That has been happening before the election. But you know, nobody can intimidate me. It is wrong. It is wrong. We cannot get anything done there in the constituency.

7.30 p.m.

I thank the people of Tunapuna for holding out for the year with no sort of violence. In other words, they are taking the pressure. When the political leader spoke about it here, they said he is trying to incite things and what not. Somebody was killed. But they are still not paying attention to what is going on. They are still going on in this surreptitious kind of way. You understand? But that is not right. I am the Member of Parliament for the area. If I write you and ask you to come, do not be arrogant because you feel that you are cast in concrete over there for life. It is not so. It is not so at all.

You see, power is something else. He who appreciates power, knows how best to use it. “Fellas” feel that they are so powerful. You understand? [Interruption] You just making a lot of noise. I cannot really take you on now. I am talking about my constitutency. And time is running out on me.
Mr. Speaker, the URP was a tragedy. It was a farce, with all the training and so forth.

I want to talk about the Caura Hospital. The Minister and I usually have dialogue on that and I understand right now there are AIDS patients, substance abuse patients and, I believe they are thinking in terms of bringing in tuberculosis patients. So I do not know how this AIDS is working with tuberculosis and with drug abuse. I do not know how you all are working it out. But whatever it is, we are interested in what is happening there.

As regards the courts, I give up hope. We wanted the courts at Cane Farm paved. We wanted the courts at the junior secondary school—you talk about sport, give the little children a nice hard-surface court. We wanted the courts at the St. Mary’s Children Home, which is near and dear to me, paved—you know why. They produce national players. The national captain came from the St. Mary’s Children Home. Since 1967 the courts have not been paved. I am asking the Minister to come and see it.

Down at La Mango they stopped the project. La Mango is a little area where there is nowhere to play. We started the court. It is 85 per cent complete. For two forthnights they started the work and they have stopped. I went on all the jobs; the four projects last Friday, I think it was. “No materials,” is the cry. For 21 days people have been standing there doing nothing; taking loads and pretending to be cleaning up, and they are getting paid. And this man—big flash, “URP is a success” and all this sort of thing. You see I am on the streets so I know what is happening. Mr. Speaker, you are familiar with the area. Just going up past Hawkins Bridge. For 21 forthnights they have been working on a pavement and the pavement has reached as far as from here to Fyzabad. For 21 forthnights! [Interruption] They laugh at that. This is serious business I am talking about.

Mr. Speaker, the Tunapuna Administrative Complex—I know they are going to lay fake claims again and say their thing—has reached so far that “Mr. Red Light” could not stop it. So it is going on. But I am not satisfied that there are enough “Tunapunians” working on it. “Mr. Red Light” could not stop the complex. He stopped those in Arima, but he could not stop that one.

**Hon. Member:** Who is “Mr. Red Light”?

**Mr. E. Hart:** The Minister of Planning and Development. There is a steelband in Tunapuna known as the Exodus Steel Orchestra, one of the top bands in this country, and they need the parcel of land. I ask the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to try to expedite it for them please, if we are really serious
about steelband. You know people are talking there, but I have evidence that people here do not really care about steelband. [Interruption] You cannot do everything and I am just like the Member for Point Fortin. I am not in any mood to talk to you now. I am asking the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. You realize I have not asked you anything? Have you not realized that? What we are saying is that there are two steelbands without a home, Nocturn Fascinators and New World Symphony. Pan is the national instrument and we care about steelband. I keep asking the Minister to see if he could work out things for these people. But I know. I have glaring evidence. I spoke about it in the House twice and nobody replied.

Pan Beam Steel Orchestra in Couva North. They broke down the pan tent to build a gas station and up to now it is only bushes. How could you say you care about steelband in one breath and you are going with PR by Tokyo and trying on a Carib jersey with camera around your neck? People like this camera thing. The Minister himself went to visit one farmer and he gave somebody his tie. Why does he not give the Member for St. Augustine a tie if he has so many? If he has tie to give away—only public relations. They built a little pavement, the Minister of Works and Transport cutting ribbon to open a pavement. What nonsense is that? Get on with the work. Too much public relations and gimmick. They have nothing to do.

So we want some attention paid to the steelbands in the constituency. We are looking forward to that. The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre played a little part. He is not here right now, I am sorry, but we are getting some progress with the market. That market is well known to the Attorney General for years. He could not touch the vendors; he would take them to court, and then the corporation had to pay them money. For years these vendors have been encouraged in lawlessness all on the pavement and so on. So we have now gotten a relief. This is the same Attorney General, the Member for Couva South. But we got rid of that and the place is now starting to look good, so, you will see the changing face of Tunapuna now.

All I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is that despite everything I am going to work, and work against all odds in the constituency of Tunapuna. For the people of Tunapuna, I will continue to try to be a good representative. In the Scriptures, in the Good Book, it says in 1 Corinthians, Chap. 15:58, that one must be “steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” That is what it says, and we will continue to do that.

Those who are wishing the death knell of the PNM, I want to let them know that they should have been down at Balisier House last night to see the lovely
dinner we had. PNM is alive and kicking. They tried to jump on the bandwagon with the leadership issue to see if they could pull us apart. They could never pull us apart. The PNM is going to be strong. And according to Brook Benton, “it is just a matter of time when we will be back to where we rightfully belong.”

Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to wish you, your family—you know we have a nice close relationship, we live right—and all my other colleagues in this honourable House, a happy and holy Christmas and a bright and prosperous New Year.

I thank you very much.

Mr. Valley: I understand that they have other speakers. They have other speakers here, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The normal thing is that anybody who wants to speak simply indicates by standing, that he intends to speak. There is no way in which I would deny anybody that opportunity. I was looking on this side and then I looked on that side and I saw no indication of anybody wanting to speak. Do not worry, do not panic, we are here until morning—there is no problem.

It has been known in this House that Speakers have closed the debate—I will find it in Hansard—when one side did not in fact get up. That is not what I am about to do, I assure you. However, it is necessary for Members to get up to indicate that they are interested in speaking.

Mr. Valley: Is the Leader of Government Business saying that he has no more speakers to put into this debate?

7.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: You know that you cannot ask that. If one wants to work something out with the other side, one could go behind the Chair and work that out. That is the normal thing. But one does not read that into the record. [Interruption] The last speaker we had was the Member for—[Interruption] [Off the record]

Mr. Hedwige Bereaux (La Brea): Mr. Speaker, I would like to depart from the tradition which has been followed so far, in the first instance, and to wish you, Mr. Speaker, and all other Members of this honourable House, your families, the members of staff, the staff of the various ministries which have contributed to the preparation of the budget statement and to this budget debate, a happy Christmas and a bright and prosperous New Year. The reason for that, Mr. Speaker, is I
believe that after I look into this budget statement and I read it I am going to be so upset, I might forget to do it. So I thought I would do it in advance.

Before I get into my contribution—I see the Member for St. Joseph leaving. In his contribution yesterday he indicated that former Senator and PNM candidate for Scarborough/Signal Hill, Orville London, came crawling back into the House of Assembly as a councillor.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Orville London is a citizen of this country of whom we all could be proud. He is a sportsman, an educator, and a man whom I know, both the people of Trinidad and of Tobago hold in high regard, as was evinced by the statement made by Dr. Mc Kenzie on the night when he suffered defeat in the election. And, more importantly, Mr. Speaker, more persons in that electoral district indicated their support for him, but the rules are the rules, and according to the rules he was ruled out lost. And we make no complaint about that.

But I want to deprecate, in the most serious terms, the kind of behaviour—and since Mr. London is not here, I want to put on the records of this honourable House. I believe that those persons who know Mr. London would be most upset about the statement because he is really not the kind of person to whom one should make that suggestion. And I want to say too that he did not crawl or try to get back. It is we, recognizing his talents and the contributions which he could make, who tried to get him back, and he condescended to do it.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for St. Joseph, a man whom I have known for a very long time and who—I am not going to call him any names—sought to convince this House of wide and popular support for the budget by reading comments allegedly made by the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Commerce and reported in the budget analysis of a reputable firm of chartered accountants. And for the records, Mr. Speaker, I would like to refer, if only briefly, to today's Express newspaper: “Arneaud hits ‘anti-saving’ move”. Mr. Speaker, Michael Arneaud is the President of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce. I quote:

“The imposition of an $18,000 cap on tax deductions for mortgages, pensions and annuities was strongly criticized yesterday by the business sector.

Participants at the panel discussion on the impact of the 1997 Budget organised by the Chamber of Industry and Commerce saw the new tax system as a deterrent to domestic savings.”
I am going to deal with other things, but I just want to go through since the hon. Minister and Member for St. Joseph and also, I think, the Member for St. Augustine sought to identify comments.

Coopers and Lybrand, also a firm of Accountants:

"Budget will not deal with problems
Chartered Accountants, Coopers & Lybrand, has expressed disappointment with the 1997 budget, stating that while there were no new taxes and no surprises 'we can take no comfort that this budget will enhance confidence or do anything to assist in the problems facing the country'".

The newspaper is the Trinidad Guardian of the 14th.

Mr. Speaker, the Newsday:

"NGOs hit by new measures.
While there were no new taxes or no surprises we also can take no comfort that this budget will enhance..."

It is the same commentator, so I am not going to point it out.

7:50 p.m.

“Price Waterhouse: Budget failed to address $ issue.” This is a reputable firm of international accountants. One of the big eight, I think. I am not an accountant, so please, if I make an error in respect of the big numbers, please tell me, but I know that Price Waterhouse warns taxpayers to beware of the 1997 budget, saying that some measures laid by Finance Minister, Brian Kuei Tung in his Thursday budget presentation will have a lasting and significant impact on all taxpayers.

“Cane farmers hit Budget.
The Trinidad Islandwide Canefarmers Association (TICFA) yesterday said it was alarmed that the 1997 Budget failed to address even remotely any issue in the agricultural sector.”

So we see, notwithstanding the comments of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, the canefarmers think differently:

“ACAWU concerned about casinos.
The Aviation Communications and Allied Workers Union (ACAWU) views the 1997 Budget as a continuation of the Structural Adjustment Measures...”

They are concerned about the casinos.
“TTMA concerned about budget.

The Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers’ Association (TTMA) said that while it was pleasing to hear that Minister Kuei Tung’s references to a ‘total quality nation’ which will be exemplified by a service oriented public sector, it was concerned about the motor vehicle tax regime on used vehicles which will penalize older cars and described this as encouraging other people’s rubbish as these cars could increase pollution.”

Now, Mr. Speaker, I just sought to make these few references in order to debunk and remove from the minds or to rebut the statement made by the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry and Member for St. Joseph. You know he speaks very loudly and sometimes some people believe that a high decibel is a sign that one is speaking about something that is very correct and important, and since it was reported in the newspaper, I thought I would correct it.

“Fishermen slam gas price hike.

Finance Minister, Brian Kuei Tung, came under heavy fire when fishermen in Central Trinidad gathered to discuss the effects of gas price increases on their livelihood.”

Comments:

“Nobody cares about the fishermen. They do not bother about the fishermen, the fisherman’s welfare. Fishermen also have wives and children.”

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Senator and Minister of Finance began his 1997 budget presentation in his now familiar self-confident, and to some extent noticeably arrogant style. He “ramajayed” like a young picoplat in a “Cootbulling Contest” about the perceived though illusory achievements of the Government, pouring scorn on those of us on this side who had identified the deficiencies in the 1996 budget speech. I quote:

“All though it was widely accepted and received with compliments from all sectors of the population, there were those on the other side who were saying that this administration would not last a month. Then a month had passed, they said it would not last three months, then six months. Then, they shut up.”

He also made reference to funny money and other things, but he quoted several economic indicators, for example, the growth rate, fiscal surplus. How much is it. $500 million plus? And net reserves to try to convince the population and this honourable House that the country was set on a growth path which would transform Trinidad and Tobago into a total quality nation.
Indeed, he waxed so warm at times that he became, if I am to continue with the feathered expression, “the true old male”, that is the aged picoplat. On several occasions, he abandoned the collective “we” in exchange for “I” and even at one time, he said “my Government”. Then, I detected a fleeting but distinct frown on the face of the Member for Couva North, at the mention of the word “my” before the word “government.”

Well, I am not seeing the hon. Prime Minister here today and I wonder about him. He left. I hope he is well. Whereas I will commiserate with the hon. Prime Minister with regard to what he may discern as the verbalizing of the hijack of the UNC/NAR Government by some who did not face the polls, I have told him I can only remind him of the old adage, “He who pays the piper, calls the tune.” By the time the hon. Minister got to the culmination of what was a mercifully short budget presentation his bravado had all but evaporated. I want to quote:

“In concluding this presentation, I would simply wish to say that it is not humanly possible for any government to be all things to all people at all times. We will only be deluding ourselves, and understandably so, that the myriad of problems facing the country did not happen overnight.”

He came down to earth. He was hooting for sympathy like the owl. The harbinger of evil. The evil that has taken material form in this 1997 budget. When I looked at him—I am not attacking him—while listening to the budget, I beheld in him the personification of a vulture ready to pounce on the carcass of the population, beleaguered and buffeted by a year of rapacious and draconian maladministration of this Government. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker: Members, the sitting is suspended for 45 minutes for dinner.

8.00 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

8.45 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Mr. Speaker, just before we took the break, I was showing some comparisons with the way in which the hon. Minister behaved when presenting different portions of his budget speech. I was speaking also about the nature of the administration of this Government during the past year. Indeed, one can safely say that this budget statement is a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde budget. On the one hand, the high-sounding phrases and laudable objectives contrasted directly with the stark reality of the harsh fiscal measures. No wonder in what may well be belated shame or an ill-disguised guile, the budget statement and fiscal measures were put in separate documents, one orally presented and the other circulated only to a limited number of persons, including the Members of Parliament.
How else can one explain the actions of the Minister of Finance who states at page 4 of his budget presentation:

“We intend to bring back the old time days, when people enjoyed the comfort of their homes and were able to walk the streets without fear or anxiety. We have to once more engage a sense of community and establish family values.”

He said that in the early part of his budget statement and yet in the fiscal measures a personal credit of $600, he removes; spouse credit of $600, he removes; further credit for pensioners—I think this budget is very hard on the pensioners. Maybe the Minister or the Government has something on for pensioners, although there are some areas in which they did show some concern for pensioners. A further credit of $600 for pensioners; child credit of $100, removed; marginal relief of $1,200 less 12 per cent of the chargeable income in excess of $20,000, removed.

He also curtails the ability of the taxpayer to enjoy relief in respect of mortgage interest payments; interest on loans for the purpose of financing the construction. I can well understand his comment about walking the streets because I can foresee that many homeowners would not be able to pay their mortgages and as a result, will have their homes sold by the banks and trust companies. Indeed, in short order they will have no homes, the comfort of which to enjoy.

You see, Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company was one institution which, because of the tax benefit granted to persons—companies included—investing in its debenture, was able to lend money to lower and middle income persons at rates of interest substantially lower than the banks and trust companies. That company was jointly owned at one time by the NIB and by the state. The state stopped funding it and the source of funds which it received through debentures to which were attached certain tax benefits, by the Minister’s action in the 1996 budget those benefits were removed. That action has desiccated that source of mortgage funds. Now when we add this one provision from 1996, he has hit the home owner, as it were, with a quadruple whammy. He has reduced substantially, as I said before, the question of the interest deductions.

I know a number of other speakers have dealt with this matter but I just want to put another twist to it in respect of the pension funds and annuities. When a government comes into power, it usually gets the population to vote for it on the basis of its manifesto. The UNC had a manifesto, 1995 and I now read from page 11, “Savings and Investment”, which states:

“A critical factor in the development of any country is the amount saved by its population and the manner in which those savings are invested. In the case
of Trinidad and Tobago, the domestic savings ratio has been consistently low hovering between 12%—16% in normal times whereas a domestic savings ratio necessary to stimulate an adequate level of investment and growth would be in the order of twice the above ratio.

A UNC Government will employ appropriate incentives through fiscal, monetary and other policies to induce a high level of savings. The removal of disincentives to savings, a regime of competitive interest rates...”

I am sure that was what the UNC party wanted when it went into government. I say so because the person who was touted to be the Minister of Finance in a UNC Government all during the campaign and who is now the Minister of Planning and Development, the hon. Member for Oropouche, quite recently, in addressing the South Trinidad Chamber of Industry and Commerce, had this to say:

“The critical issue is, you cannot have investment without savings.
If you don’t save it yourself, then you have to get it from somewhere else.

So that if you want to develop, if you want to have indigenously promoted development, you’ve got to find the wherewithal from your own resources.
If you don’t, and investments come from overseas, then there’s a cost to it.”

8.55 p.m.

You see, therein lies the problem we find. This statement, was reported in a paper that I do not normally read, but when I read it I expected something like that would come from the Member for Oropouche, because it is nothing new. He has been saying this for as long as I have heard him speak, whether on public platforms, in lectures, or in this honourable House. So I am not surprised.

Here is a contradiction to some extent, between what appears in the UNC Manifesto, and what is said by the Minister of Planning and Development, and the incentives that come out of the budget, or the actions that take place in the budget. And that, more than anything else Mr. Speaker, is what I believe has a number of people in this country upset with this budget. It is not so much what is done, it is that one gets conflicting views; one gets a statement going one direction, and actions which appear to be not in the same mode, not in the same vein. Not in the same policy as the statements that have been made. And I think that is something.

This is the Government of the day, and if we are to get the investment and to move to development—I know the Minister has said one must walk the talk—one's policy, and one's actions must correspond. That is the point I am making. Mr.
Speaker, that too has to do with the question of credit union shares. A number of persons have spoken on that, and I do not want to deal too much with it, but I had correspondence from the Co-operative Credit Union League. I want to look at it, since I am dealing with the question of housing.

The Co-operative Credit Union League lent as follows:

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Housing</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Small Business</th>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>$40.3M</td>
<td>$24.3M</td>
<td>$9.3M</td>
<td>$ 5M</td>
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<td>$83.2M</td>
<td>$44.4M</td>
<td>$18.7M</td>
<td>$15.2M</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>$99.1M</td>
<td>$35.5M</td>
<td>$14.9M</td>
<td>$17.2M</td>
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And they go on to say:

"Indeed the tax credit system has been effective in channelling funds from the high income earners towards the empowerment of these marginalized members of our society."

Mr. Speaker, the credit union league: I know the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central will put it in, as he says and I urge that he does; it does not fit in with any area of my contribution. They have asked, instead of the basket stopping at $18,000, that it be increased to $24,000, and, that credit union shares, plus the question of deeds of covenants for charities, be also included in that basket.

Mr. Speaker, I want also to deal with annuities and pensions. I know too, that other Members of Parliament, other Members on this side, have pinpointed those matters, but there is a subtle area here. We are in the situation in this country where we have a new group because of the voluntary retirement situation which exists in the country. There are a number of able pensioners walking around. People at age 52 are already pensioners. But there is an element of danger there, in that most private pensions have a 10-year guarantee period. So one may find, Mr Speaker, that a man who is 52 years may have a wife aged about 47. Fifty-two to 47 years is not that young, it is about what it works out, and one finds he is already a pensioner. In 10 years' time, when he is 62 years old, given the pressures of modern life and, all other things being equal, it is quite likely that he may die at that age. A wife who is unemployed, who would then be 57, has no means, there is no pension. While he lives his pension continues, but if he dies after the 10-year period, there is no pension.
Usually persons like that tend to take out annuities in the system as it is today, but it is going to change by this budget, such a person would have taken out an annuity because he would still be earning from his other profession, notwithstanding the fact that he was drawing a pension, and that annuity would provide a pension, another guaranteed pension at age 62; a pension from which his wife and family could benefit. More important than that, Mr. Speaker, that money, the pension fund money and the credit union money, are sources of long-term funds usually used for mortgage, and we know that construction itself is in fact, the area of activity that has the largest number of persons.

So Mr. Speaker, I think that this area of the budget is definitely counterproductive, and from what I have read, I could look at a number of comments being made, but I am not going to read from those comments. I am certain that the Minister or his staff would have looked at that. I am saying that a Government that does that—and I am not going to make reference to what else they did take out—as I said, I want to keep this contribution a very serious contribution. I am extremely concerned about what is happening and the action and feeling outside about this budget. I want to use what little influence I may have, to try to convince the hon. Minister and Members opposite, to make some slight changes.

9.05 p.m.

This Minister, and the Government, have the effrontery to claim that they put people first, that they are concerned about the community and have a desire to re-establish family values.

Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt whatsoever of the malicious intent and totally unsavory moral and social conscience—notice that I do not say character; I would not do that—of this Government in general and this Minister in particular. All my misgivings were removed by the budget statement and the following lines in particular, on page 12 of the budget statement where the Minister states:

"...we are targeting the higher end markets of Europe and North America in order to attract tourists who no longer regard casinos as an exotic facility of the past, but as an amenity."

He goes on:

"...I propose to introduce regulations to permit casino type gaming by amending the Betting and Gambling Act. We are also in the process of developing the appropriate legal and administrative framework to address the possibility of money laundering and other undesirable activities."
Mr. Speaker, I am not one of those persons who take a seriously holy view about gambling. In my youth I used to play cards. I do not do it any more because I believe I can better spend my time doing something else. So, I am not going to deal with it on a moral or religious ground at all, but there are people in the society who feel that way and there is a substantial lobby. Today the Archbishop is urging the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism to rethink the issue of casinos. He has expressed hope that the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism, Brian Kuei Tung, will reconsider the decision to enact legislation for the establishment of casinos in Trinidad and Tobago announced in the 1997 Budget. I also have a statement from the Caribbean Muslim Standard also speaking about that, "No mandate for bringing casinos here".

Mr. Speaker, I want to look at it. Some of the claims have been made that there are Play Whe and Lotto and also illegal casino-type gambling. I take objection to the question of illegal casino-type gambling in this country. That is not correct. I would like to deal with this properly.

Those private members' clubs that have various wheels, roulettes and what not, and they gamble, are under the Clubs Act and have strict rules. They are members' clubs, they have strict rules as to the persons who can get in. One has to be a member, they know members' names and they are checked out and so forth. On about two or three occasions I wilfully tried to get in to test them out. I do not know what goes on inside, but I am certain that one cannot just walk off the streets and go in to gamble. I know that the newspapers have said that it is a $60-million business, and the state should get its share of the tax.

I agree that the state should get its share of the tax and to the extent that I have certain misgivings as to the taxes that have been put and those that have not been put, I have looked at page 5 of the Fiscal Measures 1997 and I saw: regular Poker Table—$2,000 per annum; Stud Poker Table—$15,000 per annum; Roulette Table—$10,000 per annum; Sip San Table—$15,000 per annum, and so forth.

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

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes.

[Mrs. Robinson-Regis]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Mr. Speaker, I thank hon. Members for extending my speaking time.
As I was saying, I am in agreement that the tax must be different, but there are the other effects that one would have. I notice also that there is no tax for what we call the "one-arm bandit" or the "slot machine". I see there is an area of any other device. Am I to understand that the "one-arm bandit" will not be taxed as any other device and, therefore, one would only pay $500 for that? I leave that. [Interruption] That is a slot machine.

Mr. Robinson: What does it do?

Mr. H. Bereaux: I would like to accommodate the hon. Member for Tobago East. I want to contend though, that these clubs are vastly different. Under legislation governing the clubs there are records of members and some care is taken to determine the character of the individuals who become members. What type of check can one have on a casino where the patrons are all from far flung areas? The Minister has cited as justification the fact that there is casino gambling in The Bahamas, Aruba, Antigua and Venezuela. The Minister promises that appropriate legal and administrative framework will be developed to address the possibility of money-laundering and other undesirable activities.

I suggest that we need to hear a more comprehensive statement as to what is intended. Will there be any restrictions on persons who operate and work in these casinos? What system of check will there be to ensure the exclusion of persons with undesirable characters? Will nationals—and this is important—and persons doing business in Trinidad and Tobago be permitted to gamble in these casinos?

9.15 p.m.

Will the foreign owners of the casinos, be allowed to repatriate their profits? And this Mr. Speaker, is an important point: We know that one of the big haemorrhages of our foreign exchange, is the drug trade. I am saying here, I have the experience of having lived and worked in a country that had casino gambling since in the 1960's, and I speak of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, and when it was first introduced nationals were able to gamble, and there were all sorts of family dislocations, and there was, notwithstanding, an exchange control provision in the country, a siphoning and a haemorrhaging of foreign exchange, that you would not believe. As a result, today, even now, Bahamians cannot gamble, and if you are involved in business in the Bahamas—and I have a very small apartment there, when I go, I too cannot gamble, because of that. [Interruption] Yes, I lived there, I do not pretend to be born only when I came into Parliament. We have to think about this.
The casino business has a voracious appetite for cash. It is known that there are unsavoury characters who get involved in it. If one seeks the film Casinos, or one gets the Falachi Papers, one will know about that. The Government is the government, but I am advising them not to do it. If they decide to do it, I would like to see that a proper gaming board is in place, so that the character of the persons on it is above reproach. More importantly, we have to make sure, that there are proper inspectors and a number of things to ensure that one does not have problems in there. I am saying, do not have it. I am having a problem, I observe that Mr. Hamza Rafeeq, the Member for Caroni Central; Dr. Fuad Khan, the Member for San Juan/Barataria; Dr. Reeza Mohammed, the Member for Princes Town, I ask them: What have they to say and are they going to support this measure in the budget, having regard to the Koranic injunction, in respect of gambling? These very gentlemen supported drinking, having groceries opened and selling liquor on Sundays, and quickie marriages. We have now reached the stage where, and I want to quote, 2:219 of the Quoran:

"They ask thee concerning intoxicants and gambling. Say: 'In them are great sin and some benefit for men but the sin is greater than the benefit.'

'O you who believe! Intoxicants and gambling, (dedication of) stones and (divination by) arrows are an abomination of Satan's handiwork; eschew such abomination, that you may prosper'.

Satan's plan is (but) to incite enmity and hatred between you, with intoxicants and gambling and hinder you from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer: will you not then abstain."

Mr. Speaker, I just quoted the Quoran, and the gentlemen will deal with it.

**Mr. Assam:** Do not introduce religious prejudice in the House. Get off that man!

**Mr. H. Bereaux:** Mr. Speaker, you notice I was behaving very nicely to everybody, I need your protection. I have not said anything about race here, and the Member is not only disturbing me, but imputing improper motives. I have said nothing about race.

**Mr. Assam:** You started to bring in race. You stirred me up. He stirred me up.

**Mr. Speaker:** You have been doing quite well, and have not really been antagonizing anybody, as you are quite capable of doing. I applaud you for the way in which you have been maintaining your cool. I urge the Member for St. Joseph, not to draw the Member out.
Mr. H. Bereaux: One commentator on this budget termed it, "total quality stupidity". Another lamented that the only policy framework within which it could fit would be that set by the multi-lateral lending agencies. Initially, I sought to be more kind to the hon. Minister, however, when I examined the provisions in respect of the competition policy and monopolies, as it relates to pharmacies, I had to concede that the Minister appeared to be deciding on budgetary actions, for whatever reasons, and then seeking to find policy positions to support them. He was using policy statements in much the same way as a drunk uses a lamp-post; for support, and not for illumination.

The provision states and I quote:

"A case in point is pharmacies. Section 31 of the Pharmacy Board Act, creates a partial monopoly in favour of pharmacies with respect to the sale of non-prescription drugs.

The Act already permits shops two miles away from a pharmacy in a rural district, to sell nonprescription drugs without the supervision of a pharmacist, and there is no reason why this should not be extended more generally, as applies in other jurisdiction".

This statement gives the impression that once a shop is situated two miles or more from a pharmacy, *ipso facto*, it can sell any non-prescription drugs without the supervision of a pharmacist. That is not correct, and to buttress the statement, I shall now quote section 31 of the Pharmacy Board Act which states as follows:

"Upon the written recommendation of any Medical Officer of Health of a rural district, the Council may, upon payment of an annual fee of fifteen dollars, grant to a shopkeeper in respect of any specified shop which is situated two miles or more from a pharmacy, a licence to sell the drugs listed or described in the Second Schedule, in package form if packaged by a pharmacist and bearing his signature and the date when so packaged".

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Who says that? Are you quoting the Act?

Mr. H. Bereaux: Yes, this is section 31 of the Act. So implying that a shop two miles away from a pharmacy can sell over-the-counter drugs, just like that without the supervision of a pharmacist, is incorrect. The law says differently. I have been hearing talk from some of the supermarket lobbyists, and they were giving the impression that they could sell any type of over-the-counter drugs. The Second Schedule is very limited, where it talks about Epsom Salts, Glauber Salts,
Senna Pods, and some other things, and then some very strange other things, gripe water, simple eye lotions, and so forth. It is not anything like the 67 drugs that they are speaking about.

9.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, all drugs, over-the-counter or otherwise, are inherently dangerous if taken without the proper supervision and advice—Panadol or whatever. I will give an example. If a pregnant woman takes milk of magnesia as a laxative, it could affect her pregnancy. I have read this in journals. If the Member wants to know from what source I got this, I will give him.

For example, pharmacists intervention in the use of prescription drugs. A consumer purchasing a bottle of 100 mg aspirin on a regular basis—

On intervention it is learnt that the tablets are taken to prevent heart attacks. Prolonged use of aspirin without medical advice can lead to bleeding problems, ulcers, stomach pain and other problems.

There is need for the supervision of a pharmacist in order to assist in the over-the-counter drugs therapy. Today, more and more persons are on self-medication and, as a result of that, they are taking a number of these over-the-counter-drugs. When one says that this is being done in other countries, particularly, in some of the developed countries, I am saying, in a number of those large supermarkets that one sees abroad, there are pharmacists nearby. Even so, unless the Minister intends to widen the schedule and also to remove the provision in respect of the signing, certifying and dating by the pharmacist—we are in a very closed area. Is the Government going to leave out the recommendation of the Medical Officer of Health? The reason for that is, he will inspect the premises and determine whether it is the proper place to store drugs. Some drugs can be stored in different environment. One needs a cool place for certain drugs.

One has to be careful about who supply these drugs. The pharmacist performs as a professional. There are many generic drugs which one can buy from druggists and which are six months away from their expiry dates. We have to be careful.

When this measure is put in place—and notwithstanding the fact that the measure may appear to be good from the standpoint of saving some dollars—I do not believe that it will save dollars because many of these drugs are themselves already controlled. Even if the measures save some dollars we have to be careful that we do not lean to saving drugs and destroying lives.
Moreover, certain over-the-counter drugs are not static. They are over the counter today and they go back on prescription the next day. A simple drug like paracetamol—and in some countries some people feel one should have that as a prescription drug for reasons which the doctor who is not a “doctor” will be able to tell the Minister.

Mr. Speaker, we have to be really careful. I know there is a need to liberalize this economy but the key is, we have to do it in a way that we do not endanger our citizens.

Dr. Rafeeq: Taking into consideration the arguments that the Member has advanced, does the Member have any objection to supermarkets selling condoms?

Mr. H. Bereaux: The hon. Minister of Health is a medical practitioner. He has not yet spoken in this honourable House, and I also know that he formally imported drugs as a pharmacist. We are talking about a serious matter here. Maybe, he should speak after me—I have just teased him; I am only a lawyer—and make some points in this important debate because we are speaking of the lives of people of this country.

The Pharmacy Board Act states that:

“‘Board’ means the Pharmacy Board of Trinidad and Tobago established by the Pharmacy Board Act, Chap. 29:52. This Board is charged with regulating pharmacies and the practice of pharmacists.”

I have seen several letters written by the Pharmacy Board objecting to this particular piece of legislation.

I wonder if the Minister has spoken with the Pharmacy Board in conjunction with the Minister of Health and has taken their advice?

I know the Pharmacy Board has spoken about the economic element; that over-the-counter drugs is their base item. Those economic arguments are important and, as we have said, they contribute to keeping the price of prescription drugs at a certain level. That is not all. I am extremely concerned since the law was put in this way—and it is not that there cannot be changes in the law, but the impression created by the statement by the Minister—and I am not imputing any improper motives to the Member—was that it was merely a monopoly. It was no monopoly at all! To some extent the supervision of the pharmacist was extended even to the shop two miles away because he was required, by signing the package, to take some responsibility for what was in the package. This is a measure which we must look at.
I am sorry that my time has expired but I think I would have left some food for thought and maybe, the Minister who obstructed me would speak after.

I thank you.

**Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis (Arouca South):** Mr. Speaker, before the Member for Caroni Central leaves, maybe my colleague, the Member for La Brea, did not want to answer the question that was posed.

An overdose of paracetamol is or may be likely to kill, but I do not think that an overdose of condoms would kill anybody. Maybe, the Minister could bear that in mind—I trust no one on that side would swallow one.

I begin my contribution by lamenting the fact that the budget of the hon. Minister of Finance and his Government is devoid of any articulation of a national vision, a national plan, national goals or indeed, of a national direction. I feel that the budget is symptomatic of the malaise which has beset this Government and indicative of its inability to govern Trinidad and Tobago.

**9.35 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, the question must be asked about the purpose of a budget, and when I say this I mean any budget. Every housewife knows that a budget is a plan of action for the effective utilization of a specific sum of money or an estimate or plan of expenditure in relation to income. Every housewife knows that this expenditure in relation to income is over a specific period of time and it must be clear to the housewife or the person making that budget, that there must be some element of prioritization. She must ask herself: Do I prioritize food over frolic? Do I put health concerns over entertainment? Do I put education of my children over foreign travel?

We on this side are searching for some clue as to how the minds on the other side work because it is clear that no thought or concern was put into the preparation of this budget. It is said that brevity is the soul of wit but on this occasion, with regard to this budget and the brevity of the budget statement, it was patently clear that the brevity was the herald of the witless and the careless.

Mr. Speaker, they are not taking their job seriously. They tried to ram everything into a little untidy package and I am asking the question, why not unscramble the package and separate those things which may in fact, be for the good of the country of Trinidad and Tobago. It is clear that there are very few things in that untidy package, which has been brought before us that would be of
any good to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. What is even more painful, is that as we approach a new millennium, we are uncertain of the Government’s focus and we are uncertain of where they want to see Trinidad and Tobago in the year 2000.

Mr. Speaker, dealing with them, we get the impression that the year 2000 will creep up on us and we would be blissfully unaware and probably suddenly realize that we should send to buy two starlights and wish each other a happy new year, because they have no vision for taking this country into the 21st Century.

My major concerns as they relate to this budget are the issues of law and order and issues that relate to women. On page 16 of the hon. Minister’s budget statement, he talks about law and order; he devotes three paragraphs to law and order. The second of those three paragraphs is dedicated to the plan for the introduction of traffic wardens. What is interesting, is that the Government seems to place more emphasis on having these wardens deal with motorists who park illegally, break traffic lights and traffic signals and errant maxi-taxi drivers, than dealing with what has become an almost horrendous situation on the roads of Trinidad and Tobago, where there is carnage almost on a daily basis. There is no talk of a highway patrol or mechanisms to reduce that carnage.

We heard about joint patrols when this Government came into office, but we are no longer hearing about those joint patrols. We also heard about highway patrols and similarly, we are not hearing anything about these highway patrols even though we are hearing almost daily, about persons being killed on the roads of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the third paragraph under the rubric “Law and Order,” lists some pieces of legislation that the Minister of Finance states were invaluable in what he termed “infamous trials that were recently concluded”. I would like to submit that the pieces of legislation that he has outlined were not in any way relevant to the so-called “infamous trials that were recently concluded”. It is interesting that the Minister of Finance has talked about legislation as being important to those particular trials because in his 1996 budget statement, under the rubric “Crime”, he says and I quote:

“What is most alarming as well is that the system of dealing with criminals appears to be ineffective and although more and more laws have been passed, individual liberty has been infringed upon and disorder is rampant.”

It is almost as though in the Minister’s 1996 budget statement, he was predicting what would happen in that year:
“Although more and more laws have been passed, individual liberty has been infringed upon and disorder is rampant.”

That is the situation in which we find ourselves.

9.45 p.m.

Laws have been passed but they have done absolutely nothing to assist in the fight against crime. You would recall that crime was the major plank on which this Government came to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The Government has boasted over and over that it is winning the battle against crime. While it continues to mislead the country with its wild and unashamed claims, the statistics show otherwise.

I take the opportunity to make a comparison in terms of criminal statistics, or the statistics on crime between the years 1995 and 1996. The statistics up to November 30 are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>1996</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Murders</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break-ins</td>
<td>5,517</td>
<td>5,779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robberies</td>
<td>3,323</td>
<td>3,492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larcenies</td>
<td>2,364</td>
<td>2,805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dangerous Drugs</td>
<td>915</td>
<td>1,007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have not listed all the criminal activities. As my colleague has rightly stated there has been increase in sexual cases, kidnappings and attempted kidnappings. The only thing the Minister of Finance could come to us and talk about under the heading “Law and Order” is traffic warden. This must be an indictment on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

We on this side are not in any way attempting to politicize the issue of crime. As I said before, crime was the main plank on which this Government campaigned in the last general elections. It said, “if you do the crime, you do the time.” The Government also said that it would give 100 cars and that would solve the crime. We have always maintained that proper mechanisms and management of the police service is part of the key to solving the issue of dealing with crime and crime detection.
I raise crime detection because recently the hon. Prime Minister indicated that when a murder is committed, within three days the police catches the perpetrators. He is no longer saying that they can stop the crime, but that the rate of detection is extremely high. I would refer to statistics again to indicate how this Government consistently attempts to fool the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

If we examine the statistics for the month of November, 1996 there were nine murders and the alleged perpetrators for two murders have been arrested. There were 38 woundings and 16 detected; 604 break-ins and only 51 were detected; 320 robberies and only 50 were detected. Whilst the Government makes wild claims, boasts and continues to pay back its financiers, crime continues to increase unabated. Cherokee or no Cherokee, Motorola or no Motorola, we maintain that what is needed is proper management of the Police Service of Trinidad and Tobago. We cannot and should not allow this Government to fool the population and make people feel that crime is under control. That is the furthest thing from the truth. The budget statement of the Minister of Finance should have devoted more time to indicating what his Government intends to do about the rampant crime in the country.

I would go back to the issue of the statement of the Minister when he said that the successful conclusion of several infamous trials was primarily due to a number of new laws which were introduced. He then went on to list them. As a matter of fact, the ability of the prosecution in one of those cases to tender the deposition of a dead witness was not brought about by any law which was passed by this administration, but by an Act of 1994 which was passed during the last PNM administration. Additionally, the Minister of Finance also lists the Administration of Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, the Coroners Act and the Supreme Court of Judicature Act. None of those pieces of legislation had any bearing on those so-called infamous trials. In fact, the only item of legislation, the Jury Act which the Minister of Finance listed, had some bearing on those trials. I am sure that you would recall that the implementation of that particular piece of legislation hampered the commencement of the trial more than it assisted.

As a matter of fact, some of the issues that were raised in this House came to reality when attempts were made to implement the provisions of the Jury Act.

9.55 p.m.

The Member for Couva South could say whatever he wants, but facts are facts and I am quite sure—[Interruption] Which case have you ever honestly won? Which one?
I would like to make the statement that having the Member for Couva South as the Attorney General of this country is an indictment on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, on this occasion I will take the asides because those on that side live in fear of the Member for Couva South and they will continue to do so, but Mr. Speaker—“one day, one day” we on this side do not fear him.

Not only does the issue of law and order, and the handling of crime of this administration reek with dishonesty and deception as does the entire budget, but I must talk about its so-called fight against drugs. The Government, in its continuing effort to politicize crime, has done nothing more than avert attention from other critical issues which exist in Trinidad and Tobago.

In the Daily Express newspaper dated Thursday, December 5, 1996, there is a heading "Govt’s progress in drug war" and it shows a chronological listing of cocaine and marijuana seized, their street value, number of persons arrested and the like. No names were given but there were details, so if anyone wanted to check, they could, in fact, do so and find whether the information was accurate or not. The truth is that very little, if anything, has been done by this administration in the fight against drugs, and even though they protest loudly and claim to be strong in their fight against drugs, they are doing absolutely nothing.

Mr. Assam: Take care you bite your tongue.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: If you have not already bitten your tongue, then I would not bite mine. All they are doing is pretending to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the article of Thursday, December 5, 1996 lists a series of dates and times when cocaine was seized, persons arrested, and the like and then it gives a total.

"Total Cocaine Seized: 132 kilos
Total Persons Arrested: 31
Street Value: $55.5 million."

Then it talks about marijuana.

"Total Marijuana Seized: 200 lbs
Total Arrests: Nil
Total Street Value: $600,000."
Mr. Speaker, the police have indicated that they know nothing about these arrests so I do not know whether the Member for Couva South or the Member for Couva North, or even the Member for Tobago East have been working overtime and effecting these arrests that are being talked about.

What is worse, Mr. Speaker, is that in the Trinidad Guardian of Sunday, September 29, 1996 there is a heading which says “Eleven Million Ganja haul in Maracas Hills” and the article goes on to say that two persons were arrested and $11 million worth of marijuana was confiscated. Mr. Speaker, the Government’s progress report says that the total amount of marijuana seized was 200 lbs; this report says close to 1,000 lbs of cured marijuana were seized. The Government’s report says that the total arrest was nil, this report says two were arrested. The Government’s report says the total street value was $600,000, this report says $11 million was the total street value. The Government’s report is reported in the Daily Express of Thursday December 5, and—[Interruption] If you are an example of some of the reporters, well then I have to make a judgment.

On Thursday, December 5—[Interruption] The Daily Express of Thursday, December 5, covers the period December 14, 1995 to October 10, 1996 and this article came out on September 29, 1996 within the period covered by the chronological data of the Government’s report.

10.05 p.m.

What is the truth about the so-called fight against drugs? Is there any fight against drugs being carried on in Trinidad and Tobago by this administration? Who misled the Trinidad Guardian to get them to print this information which is in total contradiction to the information in the Government’s so-called progress report? Mr. Speaker, it is extremely strange that whilst we get this so-called packaged information from the Government, we get contradictory reports in the newspaper. That is only one of the reasons why the people of Trinidad and Tobago have lost confidence in the Government which exists in Trinidad and Tobago at this time. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order!

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, the UNC had one candidate. I think he is the leader of the UNC in Tobago, Mogril Polson. I think he received five votes.

Our country is, at a time when crime is on the upsurge, saddled with a silent Minister of National Security and an Attorney General whose real forte is public relations. If we take even a short look at some of the postures of the Attorney
General of Trinidad and Tobago, we will see why I say that his *forte* is public relations.

In the *Daily Express* of October 26, 1996, we saw the headline, “AG proposes drug free zones.” I am asking the question: Where has this been developed in the budget? When will it come on stream? I am asking the Attorney General or anyone on that side who may know about these drug free zones to enlighten us. We would like to know more.

In the *Daily Express* of October 28, 1996, there is the headline, “Ramesh: Government to reform criminal justice system.” I am asking the question: Where is the comprehensive package of legislation that effects this reform of the criminal justice system? We know of the existence of the Gurley Report, but we are not sure that it is being implemented. Whilst we were in office, the Member for Couva South had a penchant for asking us to implement the measures proposed in that report because he was of the view that they would assist in the reform of the criminal justice system. If he is reforming the criminal justice system, we, over this past year, have not seen any genuine attempts being made to do this.

In the *Daily Express* of November 12, 1996, we see the headline, “Respect for law key to sound economy.” Mr. Speaker, the continued lawlessness and corruption that pervades our country have now led in no small measure to our economy going in the direction in which it is. I can tell you that it is not a sound economy, and the budget which is before us now will be doing nothing to engender faith, confidence, trust or hope for this economy of Trinidad and Tobago. We are extremely concerned.

Mr. Speaker, whilst the hon. Attorney General continues to “gallery”, the dark spectre of criminal activity continues to envelop Trinidad and Tobago and this coalition government seems curiously powerless, in the face of swelling corruption, rampant nepotism and lawlessness that reflects the inability of this coalition to govern. Their inability to govern, together with the mounting pain of a social and industrial crisis, may signal a new era in Trinidad and Tobago’s history as we continue to be besieged by an out-of-control war amongst drug traffickers. I ask the Government to talk less and do more. [ Interruption]

**Mr. Speaker:** Notwithstanding the hour, there is absolutely no excuse for Members to be carrying on in that fashion while another Member is speaking. I do not think it is right. Think about it!
Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Another area of the budget, as I indicated before, that is of concern to me, is the issue of food prices. In the budget for 1996, we heard the hon. Minister of Finance indicate that VAT would be taken off items like salt, smoked herring, curry, yeast, sardines, cheese and pasta. We know the list of items. We were told that prices would come down and we were not only told that by the Minister of Finance but also by the Supermarkets’ Association of Trinidad and Tobago. Before I go into that I am sure you would recall, Mr. Speaker, the full page advertisements that came out from the Supermarkets’ Association, at least, congratulating the Government on a budget of that nature. I think, today, there is an article in one of the newspapers—it is not a full page advertisement, it is a very small article, again, by the Supermarkets’ Association, and again, congratulating the Minister of Finance. [Interuption] I am sorry you did not use them when you had the opportunity to speak.

10.15 p.m.

Mr. Assam: I did not want to embarrass you.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: I am not easily embarrassed, Mr. Speaker.

It is interesting, the use of language by the Member for St. Joseph, who claims to be, as he would put it, “a farward” thinking man and a man of culture. Very recently, we hosted a conference of Commonwealth Ministers of Women’s Affairs, where one of the issues was domestic violence, and yet, when the Member for St. Joseph gets a little upset—apparently I am getting him a little upset—his first instinct is to kick. [Interuption] [Laughter] I am looking at the issue very metaphorically—I am seeing us in a house, so I am thinking, domestic. I am hearing the word, kick, so I am thinking, violence. I am seeing a man who is benefiting from the provision to keep alimony and I can come to only one conclusion—domestic violence. [Interuption]

Mr. Speaker, maybe I should just go on to the statistics that I have here.

Mr. Assam: I have no alimony to pay.

Mr. Speaker: May I once more appeal to hon. Members to try to act in conformity with the Standing Orders.

The hon. Member’s speaking time has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.
Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and hon. Members.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Joseph is my representative, so once he does not threaten me again, I would also thank him for his kind indulgences. [Interruption] I learnt that at Bishop Anstey High School.

As I was saying, the promise was that food prices would be kept down, and furthermore, the hon. Prime Minister promised to keep a hawk’s eye on food prices. We all know that hawks have a tendency to soar and as do hawks in terms of soaring, food prices over the period December 1995 to December of this year have risen by alarming proportions.

The Member for St. Joseph in his contribution during this debate indicated, by brands, that certain items had not increased. The reason I specified by brands is that it is clear that one may be able to pick some brands out of a number of brands that will show that there is no increase. However, if one goes by products one would see a different story.

Mr. Assam: Mr. Speaker, could the Member give way?

When I quoted from the report done by the professionals who served the Member when she was Minister of Consumer Affairs—unless the Member now wants to say that they are no longer professionals because they are now serving me and that she does not accept the report—I quoted several brands of the same product: butter, different brands; powdered milk, different brands; sardines, different brands; corned beef, different brands— [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Assam: Mr. Speaker, I would say no more but these are the same people who served the Member, this is the report here and it was done by professionals, and as I said, I quoted various brands of products.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, again, a Member of the Government is giving false impressions. I have never implied that I did not believe those professionals who serve in the Ministry of Consumer Affairs. I have never said anything that would cast aspersions on the professionals who serve the Minister of Consumer Affairs and who served me, very ably, when I was Minister of Consumer Affairs. All I am saying is that the Minister quoted brands that did not go up and if the Minister had quoted products he would have come to this House with a somewhat different picture.
Mr. Speaker, one of the budget documents tabled by the Minister of Finance showed very clearly that food prices had increased by over 10 per cent. That is stated in the *Review of the Economy*. If the Member for St. Joseph had not just come from his over $220,000 trip to Singapore and jumped into the debate without checking the documents that were laid by the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism, then he would not be trying to give the wrong impression at this time. I am trusting that at some point he will let us in this House, and the national community know the benefit of that particular sojourn that he had in Singapore. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I have no reason to be jealous of the Member for St. Joseph or any other person.

There were significant increases in flour, rice, soap, prepared fruit and milk drinks, evaporated milk, other types of liquid milk, various types of pasta, salt, yeast and bread. Curry was not increased. There were several increases in various food items. I note that the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism is silent on the issue of increases in food prices. I note, with interest, that the Supermarkets Association of Trinidad and Tobago has indicated that food prices would not increase. Mr. Speaker, they have said that with a caveat—they have said prices would not increase due to the increase of three cents on diesel. If food prices increase it would not be because of the three cents on diesel.

My colleague has given me the document that the Member for St. Joseph did not read. It is the *Review of the Economy 1996*. At page 20, under the rubric ‘Prices’, it says:

“Providing the major impetus to the general price increase were food prices which increased by 10.1 per cent, induced mainly by the higher prices of flour, rice, dairy products, chicken and seasonal food crops.

Relatedly, prices in the Meals Out category grew by 6.1 per cent. In both cases, price increases were influenced by the higher prices of imported foods and/or inputs, reflecting the reduction/removal of subsidies.”

Mr. Speaker, in this instance when I say “we” I speak for the Members on this side of the House; I speak for the women of Trinidad and Tobago and particularly the women of the People’s National Movement. Prices increased over the last year and there is nothing in the budget which tells me that prices would not continue to increase. That is an awesome situation for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.
I am really concerned for the people of Trinidad and Tobago; concerned because the Government of Trinidad and Tobago indicated that it would be a Government that would insist on and practise widespread consultation. A group of women in Trinidad and Tobago held a women’s platform where they have discussed what they would like to see in the budget of Trinidad and Tobago. Some of the issues that they were concerned about were: the settling of the industrial problems relating to the teachers—we have heard absolutely nothing about that; food prices—we have heard absolutely nothing about that; the upsurge in crime—we have heard absolutely nothing or very little about that. To compound the situation as it relates to crime, we have heard that this administration is intent on introducing casino gambling into Trinidad and Tobago; casino gambling with its attendant brothers of money laundering, drug abuse, prostitution and all types of criminal activity.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side join with the women of Trinidad and Tobago in voicing that particular concern and the other concerns that they have voiced. If this Government has said that it would adhere to a policy of widespread consultation, why then, does it seem as though only one group or sector of the community is being listened to by the Government? Why is it that the Supermarkets Association of Trinidad and Tobago appears to have a stronger lobby than, say, the women of Trinidad and Tobago?

There is a concern that there may be some family relationship between officials of the Supermarkets Association and financiers of this particular administration. If that is the case, this administration cannot continue to run the country according to favouritism and nepotism. If they are truly for wider consultation and listening and implementing policies which would redound to the benefit of all the people, then they must practise what they preach.

10.35 p.m.

I am also concerned about the sale of over-the-counter drugs, but I would not go into details because the Member for La Brea handled that issue quite adequately, but I will point out that the women of Trinidad and Tobago are also concerned about that intention to sell over-the-counter drugs through supermarkets.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of education, apart from the issue concerning the teachers, I am pleased that this administration has decided to re-institute the building of the national library. I am concerned however, that if they did not understand the concept when they decided to stop the project, that perhaps they
still do not understand the concept of a national library. A national library, Mr. Speaker, is not just a place for books, it is a repository of knowledge; it is a place where people of Trinidad and Tobago can go to be enlightened. It is where our heritage documents will be housed. But it is clear that the mentality of the persons who form the Government is not in keeping with the kind of vision that is needed to build a true national library.

The reason I am saying that, is that even though they have said that they will build the national library, their intention is to build the library and also build enough space for businesses. The two concepts do not gel. You cannot have a national library where a fast food outlet and a car rental firm are also going to be housed. Mr. Speaker, the national library, as any national library in any capital city of the world, must be a place that is revered.

Mr. Speaker, my sensibilities are being assaulted, and I cannot believe that a group of people who now form the Government still do not understand the concept of this library that they are now intending to build. They are clearly Philistines.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, if we cannot be self-regulatory, it may be necessary to suspend the sitting and I am sure that one would not like to have that at this hour. It would be very unfortunate. I think that we should think about it; it just does not make sense.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, I am sure if they had recognized the importance of a national library, or indeed any other library, that mere recognition or the ability to use a library may have saved some of them on that side from mispronouncing several words that they have a penchant for doing. Mr. Speaker, again I am requesting that they rethink the whole concept of a city center.

I think it was the Member for Oropouche who said that the growth of Port of Spain needs to be halted or contained. They do not even understand the concept of a capital city, but I am trusting that they will not bring our country further into the depths of despair.

The budget needed, as far as we are concerned, to deal more comprehensively with the issue of how this Government intends to deal with the upsurge in crime. The budget needed to deal more comprehensively with issues which concern the women of Trinidad and Tobago. The budget needed to deal more comprehensively with ensuring that the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and not just the friends and relations of the Members of the Government, are taken care of during the year
1997. This Government must not take the country for granted, as it seeks to implement, with each passing day, what is appearing to be a personal and not a country agenda.

Mr. Speaker, they spoke of a crime plan and they spoke of the intention to effect that crime plan with expediency. The crime plan was outlined in the newspapers of Trinidad and Tobago as a 12-point crime plan, and yet to date, we do not know if even point one of that 12-point plan has been implemented. We have heard nothing about that crime plan. One dollar has been allocated for the committee on that crime plan. If I am not mistaken, the Prime Minister said it would take a mere $5 million to implement the 12-point plan; $1.00 has been allocated.

Mr. Speaker, they must desist from fooling the people of Trinidad and Tobago and I feel certain that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are no longer fooled by this Government. I am pleading with those on that side who make up the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, to get down to the business of governing Trinidad and Tobago equitably or is it “e q u i t a b l y?” I appeal to them to put an immediate end to alienation, nepotism, demoralisation and discrimination, and even more than all those pleas that I have made, I appeal to them to put an end to pauperization of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

10.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I will end my contribution with that appeal. But, as the Members on both sides of the House have said, I wish you, if it is at all possible, Mr. Speaker, a very happy Christmas—and I repeat—if it is at all possible, a very happy Christmas, a very holy and God-filled Christmas, Mr. Speaker, and a bright New Year.

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I think the records of this House must reflect that the Opposition, the PNM, from the evidence that is available and in respect of the action and inaction of the Opposition in Government, does not have the moral authority to pass any judgment that this Government has not done or is not doing anything to fight the drug trade or crime.

Mr. Speaker, the last government closed its eyes to the drug trade. It closed its eyes to money laundering and it facilitated the drug trade. Under the last administration the drug trade flourished with the full knowledge of the government. Any government that wants to fight the drug trade and crime, must look at the police service which is the institution responsible for investigating
Any government who is serious and having that commitment would also look at the prosecuting department, the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and see that reforms occur in order to enable them to prosecute persons who are arrested for crime and drugs. And any government which is serious about dealing with the drug trade and crime would also look at the judicial system, because that is the system which will have to judge the persons who are prosecuted.

Mr. Speaker, under the last administration, the Government deliberately frustrated the police service. As a matter of fact, it made sure that the police service was not able to deal with the drug trade and deal with crime. And how did it do that? It started a war with the police service. What else did it do? It refused to give the police service the necessary resources to fight crime and to fight the drug trade. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, the police service did not have the technology, the equipment and the resources to fight crime and that administration under the prime ministership of the Member for San Fernando East, knew that and he deliberately did not assist.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, the records would reflect that the persons who were arrested for extradition after this administration took office were friendly with or were known to the Member of San Fernando East and Members of the PNM. There were requests for the extradition of a person who was living in Trinidad and Tobago, and he was not touched at all.

Mr. Speaker, how could it be an objective assessment when the hon. Member for Arouca South can get up and say that what was mentioned by the hon. Minister of Finance was not accurate. It was the hon. Member for Naparima, who, this morning said that whatever we do we must try to be objective. And if one is objective one would see that this administration took immediate steps, on getting into office, to improve the police service, to give it the necessary resources to ensure that they knew there was a political will and commitment to deal with the drug trade and crime.

This administration took legislative steps to ensure that the criminal justice system was strengthened so that the innocent would be acquitted but the guilty would be convicted. Mr. Speaker, it does not take an experienced lawyer to know, it does take an Einstein to know, that if one is charged for a crime and there are loopholes in the law which would allow a person to get off, if there are publications in
the newspaper about that individual, that an administration would have to take steps to ensure that the individual does not get away because of pretrial publicity. A government would have to take steps to ensure that the necessary reforms are done in one breath so that there is due process of law, but in the other breath that the person if guilty, will be convicted.

Mr. Speaker, the records will reflect that the amendment to the Jury Act permitted, as a result of the decision of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in a particular case, there would be an avenue for jurors to determine, in any case, in Trinidad and Tobago, that pretrial publicity would affect the fair trial of a person. It is in that context that if certain reforms are not done in Trinidad and Tobago what could have occurred, and what would have been able to continue to have occurred, that is pretrial publicity, would have been able to frustrate criminal trials in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, one does not have to be an Einstein to know that if criminals know that the justice system is weak and that a trial can last very long or there is no machinery to ensure that the trial continues, because the juror can get ill and the trial can be frustrated, that steps could be taken to frustrate that trial. Is it not a fact, an established fact in Trinidad and Tobago that the Government recently strengthened the criminal justice system in order to redress the imbalance which has been existing in the criminal justice system in Trinidad and Tobago?

10.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago at the opening of the courts recently, indicated that there was in effect a speeding up of the judicial system. The records of this Parliament would reflect that this administration provided legislative sanction for an increase in the number of judges, both in the Court of Appeal and in the High Court. If you do not have a proper judicial system to deal with persons who are charged for crime, then obviously you would not be dealing with crime. So what this administration did was to ensure that the police service—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Would the Member give way?

Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, just on a point of clarification. The argument that I put forward was that those particular pieces of legislation, contrary to what the Minister of Finance said, did not in any way affect the so-called infamous trials except, as I argued, the Jury (Amdt.) Act. That was the argument, Mr. Speaker.
Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Well, Mr. Speaker, I could now understand, with the greatest respect to the hon. Member for Arouca South, if she can hear these explanations and she still cannot understand, I do apologize if she cannot understand.

Mr. Speaker, if a criminal justice system was strengthened in order to ensure that pretrial publicity does not frustrate a trial; if a criminal justice system was strengthened to ensure that a trial could not be aborted by a strategy that it would be long and that a jury would not be available, and that if two jurors got ill the trial could be aborted; if a criminal justice system could be strengthened to ensure that even if somebody burnt the deposition, which is the evidence taken in the Magistrate's Court, even if it is lost or destroyed and there is no original, that a copy could be used in order to ensure that the evidence can be obtained and can be considered by a jury; if those are not matters that will affect a criminal trial, well then I could understand. I do apologize for the hon. Member. I know it is very difficult at times to understand these things, but I would have expected that she would have understood it since, at least, she spent some time with Mr. Osbourne Charles, who is a lawyer involved with the criminal law, well known to the PNM, so I would have thought that she would have known something about it.

Mr. Speaker, the other matter which I—

Mr. Hinds: Would the Member give way?

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry. I think I really want to get on, at this time, with my contribution. I am very sorry, I want to get on with my contribution.

Mr. Hinds: I just want to ask a question.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: I am sure the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central can—

Mr. Speaker, quite recently some police officers who were involved in effecting certain arrests made a statement to appropriate authorities to the effect that they were feeling free to arrest people in Trinidad and Tobago where there is evidence against them for drugs and drug trafficking because they know that this administration has a political commitment to deal with drugs and crime, but the last administration did not have it.

As a matter of fact [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please!
Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, it is well known in some areas of the fight against drugs that sometimes there are actions by administration to protect people by arresting them and ensuring that they are not convicted. The fact of the matter is that you must not only arrest people, but if they are guilty you must ensure that they are tried and convicted.

Mr. Speaker, the United States Secretary of State came to Trinidad and Tobago early when this administration took office, and quite early the State Department recognized that this administration was serious about fighting the drug trade. This administration entered into three important treaties to fight the drug trade. Those treaties have assisted Trinidad and Tobago in putting together machinery and institutions to deal with the drug trade.

As a matter of fact, in a short while there would be around Trinidad and Tobago a radar system which is second to none in the Caribbean; a radar system which would be able to deal effectively with detecting maritime drugs. It is as a result of this administration’s commitment to deal with the drug trade, with the assistance of the United States Government, this administration would be able to do that.

Mr. Speaker, the State Department made a public statement; the Drug Enforcement Agency of the United States of America made a public statement; only up to two days ago another public statement was made. I quote:

“Trinidad and Tobago has taken the lead in the fight against drugs and it is a government which has a commitment to deal with the drug trade.”

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, this administration, made a public release stating exactly how many arrests were made, how many pounds of cocaine were seized, and if the Opposition believes that information is not correct, there is machinery to challenge it. That statement was made as a statement of the Government which has been accepted and relied upon and, therefore, any attempt to water down or undermine the Government’s attempt to deal with the drug trade by making these comments in the House would not do the state any good. It is very significant that the last administration closed its eyes to a notorious person occupying over 100 acres of state lands; closed its eyes to the person who took the then Prime Minister’s car; closed its eyes to the person occupying over 100 acres of land; allowed the person to build on the land, occupy the land, and then they have the guts to talk about the seriousness of the United States’ interest in Trinidad and Tobago.
What happened, Mr. Speaker, they were afraid. They were dealing with their friends. They were dealing with the Lall Beharrys and the Beharrys. They were dealing with their friends. [Interruption]

11:05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I am afraid at this stage I will not permit it and I will now indicate that if you cannot co-operate, we just cannot have a Member making a contribution which should be heard and with every two words that he says, he is being bombarded from the other side with rejoinders. It is not the way that we are supposed to operate and adults do not behave like that. I know that you know better. If the object is to silence him, then that is not the way we play the game. Please.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, they were afraid to act. They knew that they got political contributions so they could not act. That is why the PNM could not have dealt with the money laundering laws. As a matter of fact, the PNM passed the money laundering law in order to try to satisfy the international community, but it took no steps, none whatsoever, to implement it.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, when this administration took office, it realized that no institution was put in place to implement this law. There was a proposal which came to this Parliament, legislation was passed and an institution was supposed to be set up, but the Government did not provide any resources for that institution in order to get information for persons who were involved in the drug trade who were, in effect, dealing with property and to check their land transactions, company transactions, money transactions. The PNM did everything to frustrate those operations. What was the reason, Mr. Speaker? They did not want the implementation of the money laundering law.

It is this administration which has decided to take steps to ensure that these institutions work. As a matter of fact, with the co-operation of the United States Government, and with the British Government—the British Government sent a team to Trinidad and Tobago and they have looked at the situation and they have given a report and as a result of that report, they are going to provide to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago experts to come and work with our people, for a period of time, to show them how to get information on money laundering in order to prosecute money launderers.

The United States Government has also agreed to send their experts to work with our people in order to show them, with respect to inland revenue, company
registry, land registry transactions, political party or otherwise, contributions or otherwise, how money laundering can be detected. In a short space of time, for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago, the courts will be able to be approached to enforce money laundering laws which have been passed by the last administration and have been on the statute books for years and not implemented. How could they talk about the drug trade and talk about crime?

They say casino gambling would facilitate money laundering. Well, I remember that the Member for San Fernando East, when he was the Prime Minister, said money laundering, business activity, all kinds of activity—he was an expert then in money laundering, at least in pronouncing the principles and the facts about money laundering—can be achieved through banks, insurance companies, all sorts of businesses.

Because insurance companies can facilitate money laundering, are we saying close down insurance companies? Because banks can facilitate money laundering, are we to say close down banks? If businesses can facilitate money laundering, should we close down the businesses? The weakest argument against the casino gambling would be to say it facilitates money laundering, but he likes to headline. He knows the kind of society in respect of some of the friends he has. He wants the headline, “Casino gambling would facilitate money laundering.” I would say that the Member for San Fernando East, as Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, and his government did not have any commitment whatsoever to implement the drug laws and money laundering laws in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I am very surprised that the hon. Member for Arouca South read an article about drug-free zones and did not seem to understand it. What we are saying is that at the present time in Trinidad and Tobago, there is legislation to prosecute persons who are found with drugs—trafficking in drugs, or in possession of drugs—within a certain radius of a school, within 100 metres of a school. Obviously, the purpose of that is to try to protect, as far as possible, the children and to make penalties heavier when one is dealing with contaminating children.

The Attorney General mentioned that his ministry was considering extending the zone so that there will be a much wider area, so that people would know that if they are found there trafficking in cocaine, that they would face stiffer penalties. That is the trend, when one looks at other countries one sees that is what is done to fight crime and the drug trade.
Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Arouca South has asked to be given some idea of the legislation. I did not think that a Minister of Finance would have to put in his budget speech, all the pieces of legislation that his Cabinet would agree to for the whole year, and that the Attorney General would have to provide a list of all those pieces of legislation; but I can give her an idea of some of the things that we are considering.

The Dangerous Drugs Act is being looked at in order to see where we can make the most serious offences, possession of dangerous drugs within the drug-free zone, possession for the purpose of trafficking, trafficking by mail, cultivating, gathering, or producing opium poppy, and offences relating to the proceeds of drug trafficking, to make those offences indictable offences only. We are looking to see whether we can do that. Other countries have done that, and the purpose of that, obviously, is to send a signal that we are very serious about that. There will be very heavy penalties for those matters and we want to increase the penalties for drug offences. We want to prescribe minimum mandatory sentences which will be increased prison terms and increased payment of fines. We want to, in effect, reform the existing Act in order to ensure that the procedure which now exists can be expedited.

As a matter of fact, the Ministry of the Attorney General is looking at a Plea Agreement Bill which has been drafted and which in effect attempts to expedite trials within the criminal justice system by enabling the prosecutor and the defendant to engage in plea discussions aimed at arriving, where possible, at a course of action concerning the outcome of the prosecution.

This is in an attempt, not only to expedite the criminal process, but it is recognized that plea arrangements have been used and can be a very important weapon for the police to get information about criminal activity and for persons who give that information to sometimes give evidence on behalf of the state. As a matter of fact, one would have seen that in Trinidad and Tobago recently, for the first time in respect of a criminal trial, certain action was done in order to strengthen the criminal justice system. We are trying to introduce legislation which will not only speed up the criminal justice system, but also ensure that information can be obtained by having such matters.

11.15 p.m.

As a matter of fact, we are not only thinking of prosecution, we are also thinking of rehabilitation. We are thinking of changing the whole concept of punishment. There is a Community Service Bill which is a major step towards reform of the
penal system and the Bill provides for the performance of community service by persons 16 years and over who would otherwise have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment. It would be supervised community service. So what would happen is that the prisoners would work outside the prison walls supervised, obviously, by state officers, return to the prison, and in some cases later down the line, would be able to be supervised outside without returning to the prison. The whole purpose of that is for the prisoners to work and to pay back for some of the evil which they have committed.

The criminal justice system also must be strengthened. If one is dealing with the crime and the drug trade, one has to deal with corruption in the system. There cannot be a system which is corrupt. There were complaints about the Justice of the Peace system and the last administration did nothing about it. This administration has set up a public enquiry. There is also a bill being drafted in order to ensure that the appointments and duties of the Justices of the Peace will be regulated and they would be scrutinized.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to DNA testing, draft legislation is in place to determine whether DNA should not be made available in Trinidad and Tobago. As you know, that is a means of identifying persons and it helps tremendously in the prosecution of matters.

I have a list here of over 100 pieces of legislation which we would propose in 1997. I do not know if we would complete 100, but I do not propose to read all of this. I think what will have to happen is at the appropriate time the Opposition would be consulted on some of these pieces of legislation. As they would know, legislation goes through different stages. As a matter of fact, the policy has to be decided. They can be draft bills; they can be out for public comment; then they can be draft legislation.

I do not think that they should become very anxious because they had not been anxious in the last year. We have brought legislation here; they have opposed them; they have made all sorts of statements about them, but in the final analysis, it is not they who would be their judges—the people of Trinidad and Tobago would judge them. One would see by the election that we had after the last general election, the people of Trinidad and Tobago have judged them.

They lost the local government election and also the Tobago House of Assembly election. I feel very sorry for the Opposition. They are broken; they have no leader; they are divided. I feel sorry for the hon. Member for Arouca South. I think she should be on this side. I think what has happened is that she has been
swayed by too much emotion and I would ask her not to allow her emotions to
colour her judgment. She must look at things very objectively. I am sure if she
looks at things very objectively, when she goes home in the night, when she looks
at herself in the mirror, she would see that this Government has done much more
than the PNM has ever done in Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kenneth Valley (Diego Martin Central): Mr. Speaker, before I start my
contribution, I want to congratulate you on your patience with Members of this
House. I want to commiserate with you also, but I want, most of all, to thank you
for the patience that you have demonstrated over the last two days. [Desk thumping] I
know it has been rather trying, and on behalf of Members on this side, I want to
apologize for our indiscretions from time to time.

You would know, Mr. Speaker, that in debates of this type, emotions run high
from time to time, especially when there is a government that in such an important
debate, would want to take us to 4.15 on one morning and we would go past
midnight tonight. I know you are the Chairman of the Standing Orders Committee
so I am making a plea that, especially with the budget debate, we need to put a
time limit. There are the public officials; there is the parliamentary staff and so
forth, and we have to take these things into consideration.

Generally, I know we would normally have allotted four days for the budget
debate. This was not done. Last year it was not done, nor this year. I am asking the
Standing Orders Committee to really look at that and see whether we need to set a
time limit for such an important debate. We are discussing the people’s business
but the people would have to rely on the media to hear what is happening with
their business. So I ask you, as Chairman, to look at that. Again, I thank you for
your patience. I thank the representatives of the media who are here at this hour.

I want to make a few quick comments with respect to the last speaker. The
first one has to do with the point my colleague made. I am no lawyer. I saw an
article from Dana Seetahal who is a lawyer and I read and understood that article.
The point being made in that article is that the recent amendment to the Indictable
Offences (Preliminary Enquiry) Act really did not assist in that matter, that in fact,
the legislation which assisted the court in that matter is legislation dating back to
1950. The revised Indictable Offences Ordinance provided in section 40 for the
reading of witness depositions at trial provided certain conditions are satisfied.
The point this lawyer is making is that it is that provision in the 1950 Act, which assisted the court, not the amendment moved by my Friend, the Leader of Government Business and Member for Couva South. So that I wanted to make that point.

I would say one other thing. The Member was making the point that the last government allowed this and that. I want to make the point that the one serious drug conviction we have had in Trinidad and Tobago to date, the person was arrested under our watch. [Desk thumping] More than that, the key witness in that case was in a safe house. One would remember efforts on the part of the former government to ensure that that person remained alive and that persons associated with that matter had to be flown out of the country to give them a safe house outside of the country.

Lo and behold, the new Government came into office on November 7, 1995 and some time later [Interruption] We were able to keep the key witness in a safe house.

Hon. Member: The minute the Member became the Attorney General, the man died.

11.25 p.m.

Mr. K. Valley: There was one Attorney General, Clint Huggins remained alive; second Attorney General, he remained alive; we put a third Attorney General, poor fellow, he gone through.

Mr. Maharaj: The man was convicted, you know.

Mr. K. Valley: Thank God for that, because we had an excellent judge, and I congratulate that judge.

I want to make the other point, Mr. Speaker, that I am glad that the radar system is now coming. But I just want to put on the record, that the agreements which the present Government signed, were negotiated with the Americans by the last government. And that radar system has been on the cards for at least two years.

Thirdly, I note, and I commend the Attorney General, for the efforts that his department is making with respect to the strengthening of the criminal justice system. I want him to know however—and really, I am speaking to the Government now—that that is after the fact. If we really want to reduce crime in Trinidad and Tobago, more concentration should be placed on prevention.
My colleague, the Member for Tunapuna, cried out today for the young people, and I am saying that I hope the Minister with responsibility for sport and youth affairs, would take into consideration that contribution, because we must provide healthy alternatives to our young people.

When we heard today that there is an absence of coaches and so forth in the system—while I can say that I know who the Community Development Officer is in my constituency, I do not know who is the person from the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs that is supposed to be servicing my constituency, my area. So there is a gap. I am not criticising anybody, but I am saying as we move forward, let us understand that prevention is what is important.

This budget debate is coming to a close, and as the last speaker on this side, and the person with responsibility for managing the affairs of this side in the House, I want to congratulate all my colleagues for their contributions. Quite frankly, I was extremely impressed by the contribution of all my colleagues.

I want to review quickly some of the arguments put forward by this side. The first one, of course, relates to the Minister's claim, that since he had this $523 million in surplus, that the claim of the Opposition last year, that there was funny money, really cockset paper money, is really null and void. I want to go back to the Minister's closing contribution of the last budget.

With respect to Value Added Tax, you would remember, Mr. Speaker, that we said the budget had a hole of some $750 million. I mean, it was not the first time that a Minister of Finance came to the Parliament with figures which did not add up. I am sure the Member for Tobago East is well aware of that, I mean he was known for that in 1987 and 1988, but we thought that had gone. You would remember immediately after he did that in 1988—it was the first time a Prime Minister shuffled himself—he relieved himself of the portfolio of finance, passing that on to Minister Wilson, and we thought that no longer would we see a Minister of Finance coming to the Parliament with gaps in his budget. I do not know why the Ministers of Finance believe they can fool people. However, we made the claim, and we told him quite clearly that his VAT was overstated. He told us no, more than anything else we plan to get some assistance from the IMF to ensure that there is greater compliance with the Value Added Tax, as the ministry is quite aware that there are medium term—well I think that should be medium-sized—organizations, that try to avoid value added tax.

Up above he was making the point that it was not only realistic, but easily achievable. Mr. Speaker, if you were to go through the revenue statement, at page
10, you would see that there is a VAT shortfall of $348 million. Easily achievable!
Budgeting for 1.6, achieved about 1.3, 1.2-plus.

With respect to oil revenues, Mr. Speaker, again we got a song and dance, that we were mistaking oil income for oil revenues and so forth, and he pulled figures from here, there, and everywhere. We told him, "friend, you have to be mad to think that you could have collected $2.1 billion in oil revenues based on an oil price of US $17.50." We knew that he had fudged the figures, but there was an unintended consequence of that fudging, because by doing that, unwittingly, the Minister sent a message to the oil people that he was assuming a $7.00 US/TT conversion rate. Because that would have been the only way, that given the US dollar income that could have been projected via oil income royalties, withholding tax and so forth, which would have been about US $305 million, the only way he could have gotten to $2,107 was by using an exchange rate of almost $7.00.

So that he ought not to be surprised—well he would be, because poor fellow, he does not know, he feels he can fool people. Given that, when those boys did their calculation, and if you know that large businesses take signal from the government, whatever you do, one has to be extremely careful. Because they sit there and they say well, if the Minister of Finance is assuming that figure, what should we do? So they were not converting their US dollar, they were holding it. If the Minister of Finance expects the rate to go to $7.00, why should I be converting my US dollar at $6.00? He ought not to be surprised, but that is when you try to fudge figures.

So that now, after getting almost $1 billion in windfall income, after cutting his expenditure by $400 million, he ends up with a surplus of $523 million, when he expected a surplus of $284. Let us do some addition. If you expect $284 million, and then you get $1 billion, and you cut your expenditure by $400 million, then your surplus should be $1,684 million, that is what it ought to be. If you have merely $523 million, then you know something is wrong. It is easy to see what is wrong, Mr. Speaker, very easy.

As I said before, value added tax, page 8 on the revenue estimate, a shortfall of $348 million. Import duties, on page 17, $121.4 million shortfall. Repayment of past lendings, page 45, $111.5 million. Profits from non-financial enterprises, page 19, shortfall $101 million. Capital revenue, inclusive of extraordinary items, pages 50 and 55, shortfall of $435.5 million.

Total shortfall, $1,117.4 million. So that when one deducts that from what he should have had, $1,684 million, one would end up with $567 million. There
would have been some other small shortfalls in other areas so he ends up with $523 million. He comes to the House shouting and boasting that he did not have funny money but he has some funny money here in this budget too. So just be warned.

11.35 p.m.

Unless God smiles on us again in 1997, and we can get some windfall oil revenues, we could be in some trouble. The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism is expecting $82 million more in tax income from other companies, although there is that mechanism. I do not know what he is doing with respect to corporation tax from which he could expect an increase in taxation. He has brought in the concept of group taxation which should have the effect, other things being equal, of reducing the tax liability of these companies, but he is expecting $82 million more; on VAT he is expecting $230 million more; excise duties, $40 million; import duties $70 million. There is a reduction in the rates coming down to the CET. Is he telling us that he expects a higher level of imports? It cannot be in the energy sector because to the extent that the import is for capital equipment, they would eventually get a refund.

There is $160 million increase expectation on interest income to the Government; an increase of about $136 million; repayment of loans to public enterprises. Perhaps the Minister knows what he is doing. I am saying that in the face of it, without further explanation—let me just say that the total of these figures is $718 million. Remember he is expecting a surplus based on these assumptions of $1,099 million—in other words, $1099.9 million. Even if there is a shortfall of 50 per cent of the $718 million one sees what would happen.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER in the Chair]

More than that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the budget includes a capital revenue figure of $672 million, which I understand is from the planned sale of the methanol company. Now, my understanding is that the transaction, first of all, should go through before the end of the month if it is going through at all. I do not know why it is in the 1997 estimates. Again, if for any reason—and we know when one is dealing with such a negotiation, there can be a slip between cup and lip.

Dr. Rowley: They are selling the assets?

Mr. K. Valley: Yes. The plan is to sell the remaining 69 per cent shareholding that we have in methanol. The plan is to sell that. That is the first thing I wanted to deal with rather quickly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is so nice to see you in the Chair.
Secondly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to deal with this whole concept of savings and investment. One would remember—and the point has been made by speakers before me—that the budget contains disincentives to savings. My colleague had cause to quote the UNC manifesto in which the writers of the manifesto—the true UNC—stated that in fact they would be providing fiscal incentives to increase the level of savings in the domestic economy.

Dr. Rowley: The true UNC?

Mr. K. Valley: The true UNC; people like the Member for Oropouche, but one knows they found that he was not good enough to be Minister of Finance the second time around. More than that, I think that if somebody buys a company that person has the right to appoint the chairman, CEOs and so forth. [Interruption] Not me and that. So that if one buys a government then one must get the treasury. So that is part of the cost.

The thing is, first of all, if there is not really an appreciation for the economics of the situation but merely a bookkeeping approach, one understands why there can be this type of approach. Comments have been made already with respect to the disincentive implied in the removal or the reduction in the provision with respect to pension and annuities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want just to look at the Supervisor of Insurance Report, 1995. In this report one gets an idea concerning the long-term funds available via pension plans and insured plans—plans owned by life insurance companies—and self-administered plans. For example, the assets of self-administered plans as at the end of 1994 were some $3.3 billion. In terms of the insured plans, there was a further $1.1 billion.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are the funds which are used to buy government bonds—long-term bonds, 20-year bonds and so forth. These are the funds that are used to provide mortgage loans to individuals. Of course, I am not talking here about the individual annuities, which today account for a sizeable proportion of the sales of insurance companies. As the Minister, a former managing director of an insurance company, would know—a very good friend of mine, but then I thought he was a different person—if, therefore, one is reducing the incentives for savings, obviously what one is doing is undermining the long-term foundation of the economy. That is what one is doing. In effect, one is arresting the growth in the economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one would remember last year there was the removal of the Unit Trust tax credit. There was the removal of the tax credit for government
bonds; the removal of the dividend gross-up provision which assisted pension companies with respect to the income earnings. One can simply look at the effect in the medium term plan.

In Table I here one sees what is happening with national savings, investment and so forth. Remember in the budget speech the Minister made a song and dance of the importance of savings and investment. He wanted to encourage savings and investment. In 1995, the investment to GDP ratio was 16.5 per cent, but in 1996 that went down to 15.4 per cent. One sees that slide already. When one looks at the ratio of national savings as a percentage of GDP, in 1995 it was 20.2 per cent; in 1996 it is 15.4 per cent. The level of savings as a percentage of GDP declined by some 5 per cent in a one-year period, 1995—1996.

Private sector, savings GDP ratio, declined from 14.9 per cent actually in 1995 to 9.4 per cent in 1996. So that here you have some key variables with respect to savings and investment in our economy and the decline in one year. Rather than taking steps and providing incentives to get the rate up we have taken steps in this budget to lower it even further.

11.45 p.m.

Insurance companies at present must invest a minimum of 80 per cent of their statutory fund asset in the domestic or Caricom markets, and up to 20 per cent to be invested externally. In the Minister's budget speech, there is the provision to include in the Second Schedule, investments in mutual funds approved in any OECD country. My assumption is that, all that one is doing by that provision is allowing an insurance company to invest within that 20 per cent guideline, its funds into such a mutual fund. In other words, there is no relaxation of that 80 per cent rule at this time, and I hope that the Minister would confirm that this interpretation is correct. If it is that we are also relaxing that 80 per cent guideline and telling insurance companies that they are free, no longer do they have to invest 80 per cent of their statutory fund asset in Trinidad and Tobago or Caricom, one sees quite clearly what additional effect that would have on investment in our country. All of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, must be taken within the context of the new measure that the Minister proposed in his budget, that is, the introduction of casinos in Trinidad and Tobago.

There is an old saying that bad money drives out good money. If we have been fighting for some time, if we have been restructuring our economy, and positioning ourselves to be the business and financial capital of the Caribbean and the gateway
to Latin America, to be the manufacturing base in this part of the world, in other words, as an attractive place for legitimate business in the non-oil sector, one sees clearly the contradiction, if we now want to bring casinos, with all that that implies, in the economy. One cannot position a country in two ways; it is either this or that. If one were the Bahamas and tourist-oriented, then one can have the casinos, but if one wants to build a strong business and financial centre, a manufacturing base, if one wants to do legitimate business, then people must feel comfortable. They must know when they come to Trinidad, they are coming towards a location free from the problems associated with a location where there might be the casinos and so forth.

A young reporter wrote a little article in the *Newsday* this morning, that I found rather interesting. I will just quote the last two paragraphs:

"And it's almost a cliché now but the bright casino lights really would attract the worse social vices—cocaine use and drug money laundering, prostitution, (which is legal in the Las Vegas State of Nevada) and general corruption. Casinos would fuel an unhealthy mysticism, social callousness and reactive resentment, crime, drugs, prostitution (and Aids) and other social ills. Let us draw the line at the existing gambling games. We are better off without casinos!".

That is what it is.

There is talk that you have Play Whe and Lotto, and I think one understands. Some people would say that we ought not to have any gambling, but one knows in the society, there are those who would like to take a chance. There are some of us who believe that Play Whe and Lotto should not be there, but it is there already; but to take that next step to casinos, that is a big step, because of what we want to do with our economy. This has nothing to do with morals now. Perhaps the Minister will tell me that they will have the best regulations against money laundering, and my answer will simply be the investor who is looking at different locations would not take the risk. For example, it is like having a free-trade zone. One would have it, because when one meets an investor in Singapore, or Hong Kong, because he knows what a free-trade zone is, what it connotes and he asks: Do you have a free-trade zone, and you say "yes", and he gives you an "x". If you tell him "no" we do not have a free-trade zone, but we have legislation that will give you the same thing, it gets too long and he does not listen. Similarly, as long as you have the casinos in that environment, then it is going to reduce the attraction of the location for investment. If at the same time that we are reducing
incentives for domestic savings, we are also putting in the environment, ingredients that will compromise our ability to attract foreign investment, what are we doing to our economy?

Starting with the Government before the PNM, and continuing with our Government, we fought to get the economy back on track. Since 1983, our economy has been in decline, and we fought. Two governments lost power trying to get this economy right, and it started to react in late 1993, 1994, 1995. It is now clear that the economy is on a sustainable growth path. My colleague was making the point this morning,"leave well enough alone". Your budget, Mr. Minister of Finance, will have the effect of arresting the effect of growth momentum in our economy. That is the underlying theme running through the budget provisions. I am asking that the situation be reconsidered.

11.55 p.m.

We do not want casinos. We want a reinstatement or, perhaps, even an improved provision for savings and investment in our economy. To complete this section on savings. One, the credit union: Most Members would have received this letter from the Co-operative Credit Union League. I want to put the whole letter into the records, with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am convinced that this case is logically argued.:

"The Co-operative Credit Union League of Trinidad and Tobago Limited, the national organization of credit unions in Trinidad and Tobago, is seeking your support on behalf of its three hundred thousand members.

We refer, honourable representative, to the measures taken by the Minister of Finance in his 1997 Budget to discontinue tax credits on credit union savings.

Our analysis shows that this move will initially reduce savings in credit unions by twenty per cent!

Such an impact, will certainly restrict the effectiveness of credit unions in maintaining the social stability of this nation.

During this period of structural adjustment, credit unions have been able to ease the suffering of many of its members by providing loans in critical areas
such as housing, education, health and income generation. The table below underscores our contribution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>HOUSING</th>
<th>EDUCATION</th>
<th>HEALTH</th>
<th>SMALL BUSINESS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>$40.3M</td>
<td>$24.3M</td>
<td>$9.3M</td>
<td>$5M</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>$83.2M</td>
<td>$44.4M</td>
<td>$18.7M</td>
<td>$15.2M</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>$99.1M</td>
<td>$35.5M</td>
<td>$14.9M</td>
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Indeed, the tax credit system has been effective in channelling funds from the high income earners towards the empowerment of these marginalized members of our society. No other mechanism does this!"

I think that is an important point to note: That, in fact, the tax credit is attractive to certain persons and the concept of intimidation is well known; through that process funds can be made available to persons in need, who may not be able to access these funds otherwise. I continue

“In the absence of such a system, there is no guarantee that any domestic savings will be invested towards the economic and social well-being of our lesser privileged citizens.

We humbly and respectfully submit, that the tax credit system for both credit union shares and individual deeds of covenant be continued until a better system to alleviate poverty and suffering is developed.

Consequently, we seek your support for:

1. the increasing of the additional tax deductible allowance from $18,000 to $24,000 and the inclusion of purchase of credit union shares ($2,500) and the individual deeds of covenant in this band.

2. In addition, we are seeking your support in changing the legislation which prevents credit unions from being more effective mobilizers of savings.”

Of course, on this point, the Minister has at the ministry a report which was completed in early 1995 on the credit union movement. That report recommended the amendment of the legislation to liberalize the credit unions in their lending. At present, they are restricted to the 12 per cent per year.

“At present, the law restricts the rate of return which credit unions can offer on their shares. If the tax credits on credit union shares are removed and
the law remains, credit unions would be at a most disadvantaged position in the financial marketplace.

The present situation brought about by the 1997 Budget threatens to seriously undermine a movement which for fifty (50) years, has contributed to the growth and development of this great nation.

We urge you honourable Member of Parliament to put forward a position in the Parliament which will ensure the continued survival and success of this noble movement of so many thrifty and self-reliant citizens.”

There is one issue, that is, the mortgage interest deduction. In my opinion, the issue with respect to the credit union movement was not dealt with adequately.

The Minister, in his contribution last year, argued that he would have been reducing the deduction for mortgage interest from $24,000 to $20,000 because his research indicated that only 44,000 persons used this deduction and that the average deduction was $18,000 so that at $20,000, he argued they were still $2,000 higher.

Obviously, if the average is $18,000, it means one would expect that one would have as many above as under. The weighted average, he claims, suggested that there were only 11,000 persons claiming a deduction in excess of $20,000 at that time. The fact is now that the limit is $18,000 one has to remember that, firstly, $18,000 is not for mortgage interest alone and, secondly, that mortgage interest deduction assists the individual after tax income considerably. There are a number of persons who, because of the salary qualification ratio, would not now qualify for a mortgage because of this change. There are the public servants who have not had a salary increase since 1983 and who this Government in its previous incarnation pauperized as it were, first, by the removal of the COLA and then the cut in their salaries. What happened with the Workers’ Bank was a direct consequence of the actions of that Government. The Workers’ Bank, as the main mortgage lender to the public servants, suffered tremendously when that Government, first of all, removed the COLA and then cut the people’s salary. They just could not pay their mortgages and had to make all types of arrangements. Now, when they felt they were coming out of it, here is the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism coming to do the same thing all over again. Then they ask for a chance, playing lotto with people’s lives.

After working hard to get this economy on an upswing we have the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism arresting the economy and putting things in place
which will then threaten our financial system. If public servants would be put in a position again where they would be defaulting on their mortgage commitments, given the increase in prices, then you are threatening the system. It is going to come back to haunt you.

12.05 a.m.

First Citizens Bank is still the main mortgage holder and you are the 100-per cent shareholder of First Citizens Bank, so that either you are going to ensure that this is corrected or you are going to face it in a year or two when FCB finds itself in trouble once more. It was not magic that FCB found itself in trouble. The previous incarnation of your Government caused that—almost a billion dollars in First Citizens Bank—but if people do not understand what they are doing, then you have that type of thing. Take care. That is all I am going to say. Take care. You really do not want to do that. Believe me, you do not want to do that.

Now, I want to make just two other points. Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have?

**Mr. Speaker:** In fact, your time has just expired. Would you perhaps prefer to continue after supper?

**Mr. K. Valley:** Yes.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the sitting is now suspended for half an hour for supper.

**12.07 a.m.:** Sitting suspended.

**12.35 a.m.:** Sitting resumed.

**Mr. K. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, when we took the break I was just finishing my comment on the savings and investment factor. I was about to make a point with respect to this matter. If we were to look at the Medium Term Policy Framework, on page 19, the tourism initiative is outlined. One would see an absence of reference to casinos. If we go further to page 34 on the policy agenda, there is no mention of any casinos for 1997. If we were to go further on page 44, there is no mention with respect to tourism. It is not in their manifesto.
It appears like a “vaps” in the Minister’s budget statement. We would say that has to be policy on the hoof because some time after this document was prepared, the Minister perhaps in writing his budget speech thought about casinos and included it in the budget statement. It is not here. In other words, the point I am making is that it is not a policy position which was thought through. If it were, it would have been an initiative in 1997. Perhaps, they should spend 1997 considering that proposal and if at the end of the day he believes it is worthwhile, he could put it in the *Medium Term Policy Framework*. I go further on that issue to say that this measure can encourage all types of negatives.

At the same time, the Minister is legalizing the used car industry. I have a document on the used car industry which was done by officials of the Ministry of Trade and Industry. The report is dated 1994. This report deals with the development of the new motor vehicle industry and used car market. Paragraph 58 states:

“It is apparent that the local underworld has infiltrated the industry. Major car assemblers have alleged that the importation of used parts and shells have been financed through money laundering activities. The net of corruption involves garage operators, security guards, customs, licensing officials, insurance companies and the police. The recent arrest of ten licensing officers bear testimony to this fact.

Most of the officials involved are under paid by underworld standards particularly the security guards whose average salary is $4.00 per hour. Security guards provide parking passes to bandits. Garage operators analyze the security systems in cars which are left in their facilities and these are often targeted for the black market as soon as they are repaired.

Licensing officers provide registration, data, and approve transfers of stolen cars. Insurance companies extract huge premiums from customers, deduct massive sums from final payments when a car is stolen and often ‘recover’ the stolen car from bandits, which is resold.

Police officers are paid to ensure that cars are stripped in safe surroundings. Customs officers allow shells and other parts to slip into the country. In fact ‘car thief’ is a highly paid professional activity in Trinidad and Tobago.

The stolen car ring is highly organized. The cars stolen in South are stripped in North Trinidad and *vice versa*. Cars are stolen, stored at various secret locations until late night time. . .”
With respect to the used car market this is not a new thing. The used car market is attractive to public servants because of their current financial situation. The former Minister of Trade and Industry had set up a committee to look at this issue. We went to Cabinet and after consideration, Cabinet thought that instead of going this way, they should reduce the duty on certain categories of new vehicles to bring them into the reach of the small man, because of the problems associated with the used car market.

The Government seems to be doing a number of things which could affect the economy at this time and this is one of them. One has to look at the orientation of the Government. I was just telling my colleagues a while ago that one gets the sense as though the Government is immoral. If it is not Sunday shopping, it is the shotgun marriage, casinos or the used car market. The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism is saying that if one is supporting someone else, the contract would be given to the UNC supporter. I do not know how the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism got involved in this tendering procedure in the first place. It is not a liberalized thing. There are certain concepts which one expects a government to follow. Somehow one senses that is not happening.

Mr. Speaker, I would make a quick point on the currency. You would recall that sometime in October I sought your approval to raise the matter under “Urgent Public Business”, and when it did not qualify I moved a motion on the adjournment which was debated about three weeks after it was filed. At that time I had asked the Minister what he would put in place to ensure that the situation does not recur. In his response, the Minister gave me a song and dance, and he said—Mr. Speaker you would recall:

“I really thought that the recent events would have made this totally irrelevant, particularly because I am sure you have been vindicated in your ruling that this was not a matter of urgent, national, or of any kind of importance. Therefore I was hoping to impress upon the Member for Diego Martin Central that we could have dispensed with this, if he would withdraw his Motion.”

12.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister encouraged the state companies to put money in and I remember the first occasion when they did so the currency moved back to $6.06 and he thought everything was fine and dandy, but within a two-week period it increased again to $6.24 and he got the companies to put money in again and it
decreased a bit but then it increased to $6.24. They put money in again and it moved and now he is throwing his hands in the air saying that the market understands how it works. As my colleague says, if one is floating, one is floating, and not sinking. What has now happened is that there is an acceptance of the $6.24 rate and in the budget statement there is one little paragraph with respect to the management of the foreign exchange market. With all that has happened in this budget, the rate is not going to remain at $6.24, it is going to go further south unless the Minister would take some advice. First of all, he should correct the problems that these measures would cause. That is what has to be done. In other words, do not pursue the measures outlined in the budget with respect to annuity, pension, credit union, and prescription drugs. [Interuption] It will, I am saying it will. You do not have to believe me, you just have to wait for three months. I am just telling you as I see it, you do not have to believe me, all you have to do is wait until after carnival.

The Minister in his budget speech has removed certain tax credits. In settling the obligation to the public servants, they have been given bonds which have a tax credit attached to them which increases, given the period of maturity. I am asking the Minister—because it is not stated in the budget statement—to confirm whether the interpretation is correct that the tax credit which is attached to the bonds would remain.

Secondly, the mortgage deduction as it stands right now talks about an $18,000 overall deduction and I am using a single case. Is that a total cap, or is it a cap per individual? For instance, if a husband and wife are both employed, does it mean that each is entitled to an $18,000 deduction, or is the cap $18,000?

**Hon. Member:** Per taxpayer.

**Mr. K. Valley:** When the mortgage interest deduction was $20,000 that amount was a cap on the interest deduction, if you are saying now it is per individual rather than per house—[Interuption] Are you saying now that it can be split? [Cross talk] No, no, understand what I am saying. Does it mean that I have $36,000 if I am paying? Let us assume that my mortgage interest is $36,000 can I claim $18,000 and my wife $18,000?

**Hon. Member:** Yes.

**Mr. K. Valley:** That is on Hansard, great. I hope you talked to Mr. Kong about that. No problem, that is a change from the current situation where the cap is $20,000 on the property.
Mr. Speaker, we heard the Minister of Trade and Industry yesterday morning. He took his 75 minutes and in his contribution he spent no more than five minutes on matters relating to his ministry. He made two points with respect to his ministry; one, was a comment in respect to the entertainment industry, and one in respect to enterprise zones. If one looks at his contribution, the hon. Minister mentioned that the Industrial Policy was laid in the Parliament and I thank him for laying my document in the Parliament. [Laughter]

Mr. Assam: Mr. Speaker, I should really make this known. When I told the Member for Diego Martin Central that I was bringing an industrial policy to the Parliament he said it was the most nonsensical thing to do because industrial policies are totally irrelevant to any economic system. Those were his words and he is now telling me that I laid his industrial policy document. I went on to tell him that most countries in the world have an industrial policy, and he said that is all nonsense yet this morning he is telling me that he had an industrial policy. Something is wrong.

Mr. K. Valley: No. He is not giving you the end of the conversation. That industrial policy was there when we came in and we took it to the Industry Services Committee and changed the name because we said that industrial policies do not work for most of us, but there is a strategic approach. It is the same document. I looked at it and it is the same one, the strategic approach. [Interruption] You do not even know what you have. What you have is not an industrial policy. An industrial policy talks about government doing certain things, it not only deals with the environment, but of taking up the leadership role, taking up industries and so forth. What you have is a strategic approach to the management of the economy which you changed and put industrial approach on the cover. You do not even know what you have. A strategic plan for the ministry is quite different from a strategic approach to economic management.

Mr. Speaker: The Member has gone 15 minutes over the 30 minutes.

Mr. Maharaj: So everything he has said is null and void. [Laughter]

Mr. K. Valley: I would say, Mr. Speaker, that for me, it is a regret of significance that the Minister said nothing concerning the achievement of his ministry during 1996, and he gave us no information on how he plans to approach the policies outlined in his medium-term plan for 1997. Thanks to the Minister of Foreign Affairs who at least gave us some insight concerning the orientation of the Government with respect to trade and industry.
12.55 a.m.

If you look, first of all, at the policy agenda in the Medium-Term Policy Framework 1996—1998, there are some things which the Minister was supposed to accomplish in 1996. When the Minister came here to participate in the budget debate, one expected that he would give us some indication concerning his objectives for the year. Did he meet them or not? If he did not meet them, what were the constraints?

Under “Trade Policy”, it states “facilitate growth in exports, promote free trade; liberalize trade within CARICOM.” [Interruption] The Member had 75 minutes to tell us and he did not. Operationalize the Anti-Dumping Unit; amend the Standards Act and the Food and Drug Act; establish a Competition Policy Framework; adopt a CARICOM Harmonized Fiscal Incentive Regime. He also planned to finalize an industrial policy for Trinidad and Tobago and I have given it a tick because that is the only one we know. [Interruption] The Member does not even know what he has. He probably has not even read the document.

Mr. Speaker, for 1997, the Minister is supposed to continue trade liberalization policies with respect to the removal of non-tariff barriers within Caricom. I am saying to the hon. Minister, when he comes to this House for a budget debate, he should tell the Parliament and the national community what he has achieved in terms of the objectives he has set. [Interruption] It is called accountability.

Having said all of that, and given that the economy now seems positioned for sustainable growth, what ought to be the correct role of Government in the economy? In my opening statement I made the point that while the Attorney General seems to be doing his part after the fact, that his efforts were not sufficient before the fact in dealing with crime. If we are to look at the figures, we see clearly, in terms of the statistics, an economy that is in a sustainable growth phase as long as this Government does not arrest the growth.

In terms of the unemployment rate, one sees that since 1993 it has been going down. It was 19.8 per cent in 1993; 18.4 per cent in 1994; 17.2 per cent in 1995 and 15.1 in 1996. In terms of inflation, one sees the same trend. In terms of inflation, in 1993, it was 10.8 per cent; in 1994, 8.8 per cent; in 1995, it was 5.3 per cent and, in 1996, approximately 3 per cent. Again the trend is in the right direction. Foreign exchange earnings are following the same trend. There is economic growth in the non-oil sector and that is very important.

We know that we can do little with respect to the oil sector, but in terms of the non-oil sector one sees the same thing. In 1993, 0.5 per cent growth; in 1994, 1.9
per cent; in 1995, 3.0 per cent; in 1996, 3.4 per cent. So we see again that it is going in the right direction. For the current account balance one sees the same trend, an overall balance. The point is that we have put in place the macro-economic policies that would put us on to sustainable growth as long as we do not arrest this growth. That is why this budget is dangerous.

We need now for the Government to change its focus to the real problem areas—the key areas. The core functions of Government are health, education and poverty. These are the issues. I think we have to realize that, for example, with respect to the teachers’ issue. We look at the budget and there is no provision whatsoever, even though one is negotiating for a new collective bargaining agreement, for an increase. Even for the offer the Government is presently making, it should make some allowance because we have to remember that teachers, like the rest of the public servants, have not had an increase since 1983. They are in fact hurting. The Government has to understand that and it also has to understand that the human resource is our key resource at this time. It must understand that we must concentrate more on crime prevention.

I have a bug bear because I see a gap in our education system between age 13, the child who is not placed after taking his Common Entrance Examination and age 16 when the child can go on to trade school. Today, someone was talking about an apprenticeship programme for persons aged 14. I suggest that the age should be 13 years because we have to cater for that young person who is not placed after failing his Common Entrance Examination.

However, we need more than that. We need to consider a programme to deal with these young people. Admit the point that the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs must come up with programmes to deal with our young people. We need managers to make sure that the ship of state remains on course with respect to the economy; that we need our hitters now in these social ministries to get things right. We have the economy right, let us get that right. Let us stay away from the casinos and so forth. We have a bright future here in Trinidad and Tobago. Let us try to get that right and we will move into the 21st Century without fear.

I thank you most sincerely, Mr. Speaker. I wish you and your family the best for the season. I do wish my colleagues on both sides of the House, the same—a bright and prosperous New Year!
Mr. Speaker, from the reaction I am getting from the other side, I can see that my timing is so right. I do not intend to detain this Parliament very long. In fact, I would not speak if there was not the need to clear up one or two things which have been said in the course of this debate. There is so very little to respond to from the other side that as I sat here quietly for two days, I could have identified three or four issues which were regurgitated *ad nauseam* by every contributor on the other side.

If they had decided that one or two persons could speak on their behalf, this debate would have ended long ago and we would have all gone home, but here we have to sit and listen to the same points made differently, competing with each other for time on the parliamentary agenda.

**1.05 a.m.**

The last contributor, my friend from Diego Martin Central, first of all went into the area of crime and crime prevention, but the record of his Government on this issue does not bear any scrutiny. However, we are not going to be lectured on crime prevention by Members on that side. We know what the issues are. They could not even provide vehicles for the police service to patrol the streets in an attempt to prevent crime, but they want to come and lecture to us here about crime prevention.

We know we have to strengthen the criminal justice system, as has been done. We know we must have a youth policy. We know we have to reduce the unemployment rate, particularly among the young people. We know we have to provide more sporting facilities for them. We know we have to strengthen our community organizations and so forth. We do not need a useless, failed PNM regime to tell us that.

We clearly understand that crime is not a simple issue. In order to deal with crime one needs a multifaceted approach and that is what this Government has been putting together. This is why serious crimes in Trinidad and Tobago have been on the decline. People in Trinidad and Tobago feel a greater sense of security now than they did a year ago under the PNM regime.

He went on to display his accounting expertise for us and he got into a very convoluted exercise. However, I am no clearer as to what his figures are or what he was trying to do with respect to the figures on revenues and savings and investment which he was quoting.
I did make the point that one ought to give incentives to savings in order to have a pool of savings and to have more investments, but that is only one part of the story. [ Interruption ] Mr. Speaker, apparently there is more than one Parliament here. [ Laughter ] [ Interruption ]

Mr. Speaker, the issue of savings and investment is very important and the point I made all along is that we need direct incentives for savings, but that is only one part of the coin. The other part which the Minister of Finance is attempting to address, is that savings is also a function of income. Therefore, if one makes more disposable income available to people this also gives them a fillip to save. Therefore, there are two aspects to it, those on direct incentives to savings and making more disposable income available in the pockets of people.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the used car industry. It is very clear to me that the PNM are motivated by the new car dealers’ lobby in order to come up with a report and all the so-called findings to indicate that the used car business is a bad business to get into. Mr. Speaker, do you know how the Japanese motor car industry started? They started a rudiments of a used car business through the importation of used cars being disassembled and reassembled, and look where the Japanese car industry is today. We have decided to put controls in place with respect to roadworthiness, the licensing division, the licensing of garages. If all these things are done then the used car industry has the advantage of creating employment; of lowering the cost of vehicles to the average man, especially to the lower income groups in Trinidad and Tobago and that is the experience we have had over the last year.

There are many used cars on the road because it has become affordable to the middle and lower income individuals where the new car was not affordable to him. We make no apologies for facilitating the used car industry, but, at the same time, we are putting controls on the cars which are imported and on dealers and garages.

Let me just make a few points, first of all, on the PSIP which was commented on by both the Members for San Fernando East and Diego Martin East. Their argument was that the PSIP is too high in 1997. While the Member is saying the PSIP is too high he wants to add a significant drainage provision to the PSIP. I wonder what that would make the PSIP. Would it make it more ambitious or less ambitious? He speaks from both sides of his mouth. The Member for Diego Martin East is a man who could be on both sides of the argument at one time.

The reason the PSIP has gone this high in 1997 is because many of the programmes such as the Agricultural Sector Reform Programme; the Basic Education
Project; the Health Sector Reform Programme and the Highways Rehabilitation Programme which the then Government initiated were pending when we came into office. Those programmes were initiated but no final decisions had been made and with the mandate that was given to us we had to review them. Having reviewed and amended them we will go with them in 1997.

Are the Opposition Members saying that if they had come into power in 1996 they would not have gone with a PSIP with $1.7 billion to accommodate agriculture, education, health, housing and all the ongoing loans which were initiated? They contradict themselves at every turn. Are they saying that if they had gotten the loans that they were on the verge of negotiating in 1996 they would not have gone with it, that they would not have made any provisions to proceed with them?

There is only one significant item which we have included, for a very good reason, and that is a National Airport Complex. There is no gainsaying that it needs an up-to-date modern airport in Trinidad and Tobago. If one wants to promote tourism in this country, to have Trinidad and Tobago as a centre of diplomatic activity or to make Trinidad and Tobago a hub of financial activity in the Caribbean, there must be an up-to-date airport. Therefore, the Government has decided that it would put the airport project into the PSIP, as a matter of priority, to get it started in 1997.

I am told that there are provisions to fast-track that project and once everything goes according to plan we should have a completed airport complex here in two and a half years. Mr. Speaker, there would be a new airport in Trinidad and Tobago to take us into the 21st Century.

If we take away that $300 million from the PSIP, you get a PSIP that incorporates all the necessary things that have to be done. This is a regime that left us with infrastructure so dilapidated that it had to be addressed as a matter of priority.

1.15 a.m.

With respect to our roadways, water supply situation, health sector, education sector—all these sectors to which the Member for Diego Martin Central said we should pay attention—we are paying attention to these in 1997. This is why the Public Sector Investment Programme has reached that level.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, we are addressing some other matters such as the overpass at the Uriah Butler Highway and Churchill Roosevelt Highway intersections, and a number of new roads in 1997. We are doing a number of things which will
not only get the construction sector going, but will also provide the physical and economic infrastructure to allow the growth momentum to continue into the ensuing years. I do not want to go into detail, but I want to let the House know the record of the PNM with respect to expenditure on capital projects.

In 1987—actual capital expenditure, excluding expenditure by state enterprises and statutory bodies—the NAR Government spent $1.39 billion out of a total expenditure of $6.83 billion on capital expenditure. That is 20 per cent of the total. In 1988, it went down to $725 million or 12 per cent; in 1989, it went down further; 1990 was a difficult year, but in 1991 the capital expenditure spent by the central government went up to $809 million, which was again 12 per cent of the total expenditure. That was the bulk of the PSIP.

When the PNM came into office in 1992 the amount was reduced to $511 million; in 1993 it was reduced further to $487 million. While the capital expenditure component fell, the total expenditure rose. In 1994 it was put at $506 million and in 1995, an election year, it rose to $714 million. But, of course that did not help at the end of 1995. That is how they are out of office.

In 1996, a new government was able to send central government expenditure up to a level of almost $800 million. More important, was their implementation rate. From January—June 1995, the last year they were in office, the implementation rate for the first six months was 29 per cent. From January—June 1996 our implementation was 35 per cent. A new Government having to stabilize itself and review a number of things, and yet we were able to achieve an implementation rate of 35 per cent.

The Member for San Fernando East, after he had lost the election in 1995, was saying that they were paying so much attention to government, they were not paying any attention to the party. If a government could only achieve an implementation rate of 29 per cent for the first six months of 1995, I want to know what the then Prime Minister and his Ministers were doing in government? Do you know that he went around the country crying crocodile tears and so forth?

Mr. Speaker, if one looks at the PSIP for 1997 it would appear a bit lopsided, in the sense that provisions have been made for a very significant portion of that to be spent on physical and economic infrastructure, as against social infrastructure. The reason is that we have to pay particular attention to our roadways and water supply system, to building airports, to our drainage system and rebuilding roads and so forth. Once we get those out of the way, then we would be in a position to
bring our social infrastructure expenditure more in line with our physical infrastructure expenditure. I just wanted to make that point in terms of explanation, because I did not hear anybody on the other side really make that analysis of the PSIP for 1997.

In the construction sector unemployment went down in 1996 according to the *Review of the Economy*. I cannot see how a sector could suffer when employment in that sector was increasing in 1996.

I would like to spend some more time on the National Library Complex because it has been raised time and time again in Members’ contributions. We had to defer the National Library Complex; and let me say that we had not only a right to defer decisions on this project, but also a duty to review, when we were elected to this House. Having done so, we then stated our position.

What bothers me about the other side is that they are not concerned about the library as a functional institution, they are concerned with how the library would look—how it will be part of the city centre. The Member for San Fernando East said that it would compromise the city centre; if we do not build a library—or a different kind of library from what was envisaged—it would compromise the city centre. It is not what goes on inside the library; it is a place for storage of information and dissemination of information. Mr. Speaker, I have been to libraries all over the world; I have been to a number of university libraries in the United Kingdom and in North America. It is not how the library looks from the outside; it is the type of facilities that are being made available for use internally by the public that is important.

We met a design which had a gross floor area of 180,000 square feet which would have cost the Government $131 million. Construction, $70 million; furniture, fittings and equipment, $30 million; fees, $14 million; and VAT, $17 million—a total of $131 million. That figure did not include the cost of stocking the library. That cost was approximately $50 million. So that to build the library and stock it would have cost $181 million.

1.25 a.m.

To maintain the library on a monthly basis would have cost $5 million and the personnel cost and goods and services to operate the service would have cost an additional $15 million. So we would have had $20 million in operating costs, $181 million to build and furnish the library. When we looked at where the funding was going to come from: $14 million was to come from the annual budget development
programme and $85 million from a Fincor financial facility, making a total of $99 million. Nobody had any idea where the rest of the $62 million was going to come from, but they were going to build something looking nice. They could only provide $99 million of the funding and they had no clue where the other $62 million would come from and absolutely no idea how they were going to meet the operating costs of this building.

What the general public does not know is that the design of this building was that the first and second floors were going to have the full floor area covered, and as the building went up the floor space narrowed. So that when you reached the fifth or sixth floor there was a minimum of the floor area covered by floor space. When one considers the prime location and the floor space area that was wasted, it was an absolute waste of space in the middle of Port of Spain.

We said that, as a Government with a new outlook on things, we could not go with that design. So we have gone for a redesign of the building, that is going to get us 240,000 square feet of floor space which would cost us $127,650; so we are getting more floor space for less money.

By negotiation with the library people, it was realized that they did not really need 180,000 square feet, but 120,000 square feet. The rest of the floor space area we were going to rent out—not to Royal Castle—as office space, either to the Government or to places like the United Nations and other places with offices scattered all over Port of Spain. So that there would have been a rental income to pay for the cost of running the facilities. This is how we do business on this side.

Secondly, we are going through both methods, the build/operate/lease and transfer method, where in fact the up front financing comes from outside Government, and what one has to meet are just semi-annual lease payments over a long period of time, whether one wants to have it for 15 or 20 years. So that you do not have to find the money up front in order to make this building available. They were not going through the lease method.

So, Mr. Speaker, I thought I would explain that to the House although it has taken some time. Whether that is explained to the country at large, of course, depends on the media, and I do not know how much faith I have in the media to explain the thinking behind the redesign and redirection of the National Library Project; and the reduced cost and increased space we are going to get, and the new financing method.

So that all this nonsense that was spouted here, for the last two days, about the National Library and people not knowing the value of education and the use of a
library and so forth was all hot air. We know what we are doing. We have been given a mandate by the people, we are doing it with the greatest efficiency, and in the most cost-effective manner for the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. This is the UNC/NAR Government and the people will decide.

Let me also deal briefly with the criticism that if there is a big PSIP it is going to fuel inflation. Mr. Speaker, the budget has acknowledged that the inflation rate is likely to go up from three to four per cent in 1997. You cannot have your cake and eat it. If you want expenditure on development, it is going to have some impact on your rate of inflation. That is known. The problem is, that in order to moderate the effect on inflation, you have to deal with the various bottlenecks and shortages that are likely to come up.

We are addressing two significant areas, one of which is the availability of skills. We regard the Skills Development Programme as part of a human resource development programme. What we are going to do—because we must have a dynamic effective vision—is to look at the structure and trends in the economy and the employment prospects; and then look at the structure, characteristics and capabilities of the labour force. Having done these analyses then, of course, we would know specifically the kinds of training programmes we need to deal with the issues at hand.

What I am doing at this point in time, in my own Ministry, is rationalizing the existing training programmes in the various ministries and agencies of the Government, getting all these together, and looking at where we need to expand these areas. We are focussing on a system of technical/vocational education and training, and we are analyzing the inadequacies of the existing system; we want to remedy the weaknesses in the basic skills.

The new initiatives that we have in mind will be to introduce technology into education in primary and secondary schools, to introduce new agricultural programmes with a technology base, get into language training, career information and guidance counselling; and look at the human and social development aspects of the school curriculum. So that we intend to integrate the work of the secondary schools in the technical area—the technical institutes, institutes of higher learning and the universities and so forth.

They spoke about the National Skills Development Programme, Mr. Speaker. We acknowledge that programme ought to be continued, but we feel it is too narrow in scope, and this Government is going to expand that within a wider
programme of skills development. So that next year will be a year of project implementation and delivery.

We are strengthening our project implementation resources, not only in the Ministry of Planning and Development, but also in all the ministries of Government and in the line ministries. We are proceeding on that basis because we understand where we need to place emphasis.

I want to make a brief comment with respect to technology. We have been in consultation with the University of the West Indies and they have come up with a five-year strategic plan for UWI to focus on science and technology graduate programmes and to expand the graduate enrollment.

I am about to have discussions on the opening of an office of technology transfer, and technology business incubation centre, and this is an initiative by the University of the West Indies. Through this initiative we are going to strengthen our technology capability and get technology transferred into the world of business activity.

1.35 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I am also looking into the question of a programme for rural and urban enterprise development and to integrate that programme, have a balance between urban and rural development. As the Member for Naparima has pointed out this morning, there has been an historical neglect of the rural areas and we want to diversify production and increase income earning from new crops, livestock and so forth; have a land utilization programme; conservation and rehabilitation programmes and so forth.

You will be hearing much more about these programmes in 1997, Mr. Speaker, as we put our strategies in place to put Trinidad and Tobago on that sustainable development path. All these are matters which would be addressed. What they could not do in 34 years, they are complaining that we should have done it in one year. Rome was not built in a day, give us a chance and, indeed, Trinidad and Tobago will become the leading country, not only of the Caribbean, but among the many developing countries in the world and in the Commonwealth. Under a UNC/NAR Government, Trinidad and Tobago will become a country of which the citizens will be proud to be nationals.
This is the vision we have for this country, to build a unified Trinidad and Tobago, a Trinidad and Tobago in which everyone feels wanted and needed and there is opportunity for all.

Mr. Speaker, I wish you, a merry Christmas, and a very bright and prosperous New Year, as I wish all the Members of the House, and I know that 1997 will be the year for the UNC/NAR Government.

Thank you very much.

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by congratulating all Members on both sides. It has been, to my mind, a very lively debate. I can still recall some of the contributions that have been made by Members of the other side. But I choose, Mr. Speaker, with your permission, to single out one or two contributions which I thought were a little more outstanding than others. As my colleague, the Member for Oropouche, has said, we could easily have been spared much time if the other side, did not choose each Member to speak for the full length of time, plus more; saying the same things; repeating the same criticisms; reading the same newspaper articles; voicing the same criticisms of measures, or making the same pleas to retain certain measures for the same group of persons.

I recall, Mr. Speaker, particularly, the contribution made by my friend of very long standing, the Member for Tunapuna. I assure you, Mr. Speaker, that I, as a Member of the Government of National Unity, can give the Member the assurance that his impassioned plea for the plight and welfare of his constituency has not fallen on deaf years and that I will undertake to assist him in any way to ensure that this Government serves all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I could also recall and single out the contribution made by my former colleague and friend, the Member for Diego Martin Central, who started off a very sober contribution, I must admit, but who, unfortunately, got lost and sounded very helter skelter. He reminded me, clearly, that he is still a dinosaur living in the dark ages and who is not prepared to entertain any kind of change because he is stuck in old-world economics and he does not know how to come out of that.

Mr. Speaker, all of us—technocrats, members of the staff of Parliament—could have been spared all of this. The Opposition could have agreed for one or two Members to have said the same thing, and we would have got the message understood what they were saying, and we would not have been bored with the repeated statements. In spite of that, some of them did take the opportunity to
raise some issues which had already been addressed and dealt with adequately, in my view, by my colleagues on this side. Therefore, I will choose to be mercifully brief and to address some of the financial issues that have been raised on the other side, almost as a chorus, or, in anticipation of Carnival, like a road march.

I could possibly deal with these issues under four separate subject headings. In one case, they talked about the lack of vision that is being articulated in this budget. In another case, I can deal with the effects that the motor licences and the increase in gas would have. A third case is the question of casinos and, finally, I choose to deal with the tax simplification exercise that this budget addresses.

Mr. Speaker, we said that our vision is of a total quality nation. We see us as achieving this, using four particular planks that have been addressed in this budget which I thought were clearly articulated when I made the budget statement.

In the first place, we see ourselves as having a very liberalized economic environment and, within that, to achieve certain medium-term economic factors which address the question of a low inflation rate and a stable exchange rate. We want to ensure economic growth from year to year and, more importantly, to address the serious unemployment problem that this administration inherited at the beginning of its term.

The second part that I thought our vision strategizes was the question of public sector reform. Two areas have been used to illustrate this: firstly, the fact that—as I alluded to earlier on—we chose to simplify the tax system and, secondly, we chose to do away with what we consider to be a frustration of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in having motor vehicle licences renewed from year to year. That, Mr. Speaker, merely indicates one example of how we expect to bring about reform.

Mr. Speaker, there is no way that you could ever provide an administrative system that will cater for all the motor vehicles that have to be licensed on January 1. So that, in essence, for you to provide an administrative framework that will allow the $300,000 or $400,000—I am not going to get into an argument as to how many, because I really do not have the number at hand. That number of motor-car licences cannot be issued on January 1, but yet the law requires that. What we intend to do is to look long and hard at that system and to come up with our own approach to it.

The third part in which we felt that the budget clearly articulated a clear vision was the fact that we focussed very heavily on the Public Sector Investment Programme.
My colleague, the Member for Oropouche, has already dealt with that matter but I want to remind this honourable House that in previous years, the amount of money that had been allocated to the development programme was a mere 2—3 per cent of the GDP. We felt that this was inadequate and that for a change we should begin to replace the capital stock that had been depleted over the years because of an economy that had undergone a number of very serious problems which, within recent times, had been addressed. We felt that for the year 1997 we could allocate a substantial increase, but nowhere near our desired objective, of almost to 10—12 per cent of GDP for our capital budget. So that we felt for this year, 1997, we could allocate a very substantial increase, but nowhere near our desired objective, Mr. Speaker, of getting close to 10—12 per cent of GDP for our capital budget. Instead, the $1.7 billion represents about 5—6 per cent of our GDP—a mere beginning, as I said in my budget statement.

1.45 a.m.

The final plank that we saw in terms of our vision was the way we will diversify the economy and wean it away from oil and petrochemicals. Hence we looked at our entire tourism product, as well as the approach that we would take to develop agriculture and which the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has already developed.

So clearly, Mr. Speaker, in summary, we saw four clear planks that will allow us to create our vision of a total quality nation. How the other side could not have seen this vision merely indicates what they were looking for and the quality of the contributions that they have made. They have been emotional, alarmist, populist in terms of their criticisms, and merely repeated the kinds of criticisms that were levelled at us based upon the measures that were taken by this particular budget and which were not original. They read into the Hansard the Credit Union League’s letter. One person talked about pensions from Bacon, Woodrow and De Souza. Nothing original, Mr. Speaker, merely the documents that had been submitted and publicized and which were used as a measure. One could only assume that they either were bankrupt of ideas or they really did not do a proper analysis of this budget.

In terms of the actual measures, Mr. Speaker, I have already alluded to the fact that the situation with respect to motorcar licence fees really was creating an administrative burden for the Licensing Office, but more importantly, was creating a great deal of frustration and inconvenience to the motoring public of Trinidad and Tobago. We felt, initially, that the way to go would have been to stream it
over the whole year, so we thought about the question of anniversary dates. But it still did not address some of the lumps that would be created nor did it address, Mr. Speaker, the fact that there were still a number of unlicensed vehicles on the roads. So what the ministry sought to do was to see if we can equate the amount that we can collect from an increase in gas with the amount of licence fees that we will forego.

But in addition to all of that, Mr. Speaker, we also recognized that a large number of people use diesel, in particular maxi-taxi drivers, as well as other goods vehicles, and we tried our best to relate it to the road improvement programme approach which was done by the previous administration and in addition to that to even subsidize it a little more.

Mr. Speaker, it is not the intent of this Government to increase the cost of living. On the contrary, we are committed to ensuring that inflation is contained as far as possible. This Government is prepared to take any tough measure that is necessary for us to go forward in achieving our own vision and our goals and objectives.

If there are some people who say that there is no benefit from the removal of the motor vehicle licences but there is an increase in cost because there is a bit of increase over the old price of gas, then we really cannot deal with an absence of logic. I cannot understand how, on the one hand—and I think the Minister of Housing and Settlements took pains to illustrate some of the examples—if we are not required to pay something that there is no saving, but when there is a slight increase there is an increase but not a corresponding saving. Does that mean that the saving is input in one pocket but the pay out is coming out of another pocket? It does not make sense to me, Mr. Speaker. And I assume that this measure which was intended to bring advantages to all of the people—the motoring public, and so on—would see an opportunity for people to be rational, to not use emotional reasons, and to hope that there is no increase brought about, or no increase transferred to other people, whether they are travellers in taxis or whether they are consumers, because it was intended that this particular measure be actually subsidized.

**Mr. Imbert:** Anyone who travels a lot does not benefit.

**Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** But, in essence, that is a fair and equitable approach because the question of a motor vehicle licence fee was meant to tell you that you are now licensed to use the roads of Trinidad and Tobago. If one person uses the
road more often than another, surely in terms of fairness, he should pay a little more than the one who is using the road much less. But then fairness and equitability—[Interrupt] He may pay more, but then again, Mr. Speaker—and this is something I want to keep referring to—as a government we have taken a conscious decision to keep empowering people. We are telling you that you are now in a position to decide how much of a licence fee you have because you can decide how often you want to use the roads. And, therefore, in essence, we are empowering you and giving you more discretion. But that is something that is alien to the thinking over on that side. What they had preferred to do, Mr. Speaker—and I know I am going to be jumping over a little bit of myself—is to use high tax rates, give a number of allowances and credits, so they can tell you precisely how to spend your money. They take it from you and they spend it for you. We are going away from that system. That is the kind of archaic thinking that still pervades on the other side—[Interrupt] Yes, it is up to him, and he needs to choose ways and means of being efficient in terms of fuel so that he can decide—[Interrupt] Exactly!

The other area that I want to talk a bit about, Mr. Speaker, is the question of casinos. Now I heard the arguments raised about casinos, without understanding that casinos are not going to bring the kinds of things that have been alluded to on the other side. We heard about money laundering and prostitution. I would like to give one shining example which I think might have escaped many of us.

Several years ago, Aruba had serious economic problems when the major refineries there shut down and created all kinds of economic hardships. All of us are aware of this. When the Aruban Government took stock of themselves, they realized that their strengths lay in sun, sand and sea. So what did they do? They developed a strategic approach over the years that will bring their people economic prosperity. They decided to sell their sun, sand and sea as best as they can.

I remember quite distinctly the arguments that we had when we brought, what Members on that side allude to as "shot gun" marriages—ignorance of the tourism product and market, that is what you show; you demonstrate your ignorance of understanding the tourism business. But then I know that on that side you had people who pretended to be businessmen; who divested assets without understanding what they were doing; who pretended they were business people without understanding the concepts of business. And what happened?

Marketing in itself has several aspects and we merely said at that time that the bridal market is a completely new emerging market, it is a niche market. I said that
the measure was not intended for "quickie" marriages or "quickie" divorces; it was not intended for "shot gun" marriages. We went through all of that already, Mr. Speaker, people are now beginning to understand that this Government is not immoral, amoral or otherwise; it is merely seeking to do the things that are necessary to promote Trinidad and Tobago, and to promote the goods and services that this country has to offer.

1:55 a.m.

Mr. Valley: If the Minister wants to make the point about Aruba, he must understand what Aruba is doing is positioning itself as a tourist destination. In Trinidad and Tobago, if it is correct that we are positioning ourselves as a business and financial centre, that is a different orientation.

Hon. B. Kuei Tung: Mr. Speaker, that is part and parcel of their problem. They have what is commonly regarded as tunnel vision. The Member of Parliament for Diego Martin Central sees things with only one goggle. He sees it as either or. We are saying that we want to diversify the economy in several aspects, but instead, what I am hearing is that we are either this or that.

Anybody who wants to widen their horizon will seek sectors and seek to build the sectors from which they have strengths. One builds upon the strengths that one has and try to market one’s self in every respect. We could be into some aspects of business and financing, to some aspects of tourism, some aspects of agriculture, and that is how we have to diversify the economy that will bring everyone into the mainstream.

If one wants to be a business and financial sector, one is going to leave the people out in Cedros deliberately, because that is the way one wants to broach it. How are the people in Cedros going to be part of the business and financing? They cannot be, so that they have to find a diversified economy whereby all the sectors can be built upon. The previous administration talked about tourism, but they were limited in scope.

They were tied because of their own excess baggage that they have brought along. They had years of saying that they did not want tourism so they were unable to change that and therefore could not make the hard decision to go into tourism because they have already been telling people, “We do not want tourism.” So the day they want tourism, no one is going to believe them. Part of the problem is they do not appreciate the whole tourism product that is needed.
Trinidad and Tobago is not a natural destination. We do not have natural sun, sand and sea, except perhaps in Tobago. So, one has to try to create niche markets, to find areas where one can identify the kind of market that one wants for one’s self. In the budget presentation, I said clearly that we want to go up-market, particularly for Tobago. Now, I know that casinos are a hard decision and I know that we have to address the concerns that have been raised by all Members, as well as the concerns that have been addressed by the Church and everybody else.

We have to say—I remember the contribution made by the Member for Diego Martin West, that he hopes that there is a gaming commission and so forth—we will ensure that when we bring the legislation here, that all of these concerns will be taken into consideration and that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are given another alternative in terms of another part of the product that we have. Giving people a choice, I think the people have to come to grips with the fact that the Trinidad and Tobago today is not the PNM that the people knew thirty years ago.

It is a country that is intelligent. It is a population that is knowledgeable, especially in world affairs. They see what is going on throughout the whole world. We cannot keep telling people that we will decide what choice to give them. Give the people the choice and let them decide for themselves. One has to pursue policies and visions that will help optimize the opportunities that one has for both islands and they are quite different. One cannot market Tobago to the mass tourists. If the mass tourism comes in hordes and droves down to Tobago they are going to destroy the fragile infrastructure it has. Trinidad, however, is a completely different culture. We are merely trying to indicate that casinos, in a regulated and controlled manner, could be part of our tourism product. That is what we are signalling, Mr. Speaker.

Finally, I want to talk a bit about the question with respect to the syndication of the tax system. Our tax system of the old days started off where we had a high tax rate and high allowances. Now, we cannot bring the high tax rates down and bring the high allowances up. If we maintain those, we will totally erode the tax base and therefore what we had to do—provided that we are committed to a lowering of the tax rates—was to start addressing these allowances one by one.

Mr. Speaker, it has not been easy for any Minister of Finance to bring a budget in January and bring another in December. What I chose to do at the beginning of the year was to signal the kind of system that we are going towards. We are going to a simplified tax system and we are going towards one that requires lower tax rates and I thought everyone bought into that. I thought the people on the other side
understood what we were trying to achieve and therefore we could not retain some of these allowances.

In the first budget, we started to signal what we were going to do, we started to indicate the areas to which we were going, and I spent a great deal of time addressing the simplified tax system, so that by the time I came around to the second budget, I would be in a position to address them. What this means is that the huge set of allowances and deductions and credits that were in the system had to make way for a simplified system.

Obviously, again we had to make a tough decision. It was not easy, but we are not going to make a paradigm shift if we do not have the courage to do it. If we do not have the perseverance, and are not flexible enough and do not have the skilled management to do it. The credit people are saying, "Keep credit unions. Suppose we could agree to that. The mortgage people say keep mortgages; and the insurance people say keep pensions, and this one say that; deeds of covenant and so forth. Then we are right back to another cluttered system and the whole objective of seeking a simplified tax system will never be achieved.

We need to have the courage and the conviction. Once we make that decision, we have to be able to see it throughout. If not, we will never achieve a paradigm shift. It has to be a transitional arrangement. We have to find a way, because the tax rates are not going to come down drastically, and we have to take it into consideration, particularly given our revenue and expenditure situation. If our revenue and expenditure situation has allowed it, I would have loved to have been able to remove all of the deductions and lower tax rates at the same time. We are not going to get there in one fell swoop.

We have to put in transitional arrangements so that we can reach where we want to go in a logical, orderly fashion. That, Member for Diego Martin Central, is going to show us how we are going to get there because, believe you me, there is every evidence in 1996, for argument sake. We have seen, for argument sake, where one insurance company has sold $150 million in API. Never in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, and we are talking about saving. We have to give people more discretionary income. That is the basis under which it starts. Try to give people more discretionary income. It is easy when one has more discretionary income. One has to put aside for one’s self.

Understand that even if people are forced to save, if their circumstances do not permit it, they will not save regardless of the incentives that are given them. They have to have the wherewithal to take advantage of the incentives, and decide that
these incentives, as long as we lower the tax rates, are becoming less and less of an incentive. When the tax rates were 45 per cent at the margin, yes, it was an incentive. When you get down to 28 and 25 and 20 per cent, how much of an incentive is it going to be? None. Very little.

Therefore, you have to put aside the old for the new and I know change does not come easy. I know that we are prepared to resist change. I know that.

2.05 a.m.

I hope that when the other side throws these emotional arguments—when I said I had to retain maintenance and alimony, there was a big laugh. But there is a reason for that. I am anticipating the breakdown of the Member for Diego Martin East’s marriage. And do not be surprised, I might be the man behind it. [Laughter]

So you see, if you do not do it, you are going to end up in a situation where the same income becomes taxed twice, because if you do not allow it as a deduction in the hands of the payer and you tax the recipient as well, then the amount of money is being taxed twice. It had to be retained because the principle, as Mr. Valley knows, is that you should only tax income once, basically, and, therefore, the maintenance and alimony had to be retained because of the system.

As the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism, I want to go on record as saying that we are committed to the credit union movement. We are committed to assisting them. I want them to be aware that they must see this measure, not as an attack on them, but as an approach to simplifying the tax system and for them to understand that this Government is going to do everything that is necessary, including bringing the amendments to the Credit Union Act, including bringing the required legislation. Only recently, I signed an agreement where we got grants; where we had to commit counterpart funds and where the credit union movement itself has put somebody to ensure that the complete revamping of the credit union movement takes place.

I know they feel that my timing is wrong and that they could have done with one more year, but one more year of cluttering the tax system would put us too far from our desired and stated goals and objectives. Therefore, I am committed to assisting the credit union movement and ensuring that it becomes not just viable but it adopts proper business-like practices and procedures. That is what I am committed to and that is what I am going to ensure, in terms of the way we work with the credit union movement.
I want to make a small point with respect to mortgages. I think I have cleared the air somewhat with respect to the simplified tax system. But I want to share some of the information which was given to me with respect to mortgage interest, because many emotional and alarmist arguments had been used to increase the mortgage allowance that we have given.

Again, what we have chosen to do is to pitch at a figure of $18,000 to give each taxpayer an opportunity to empower himself as to how he decides to use that allowance. There are four areas which had been addressed. I did interest on construction of a house; the interest on a mortgage; pensions and annuities; the national insurance, or a combination of all four. That is what we attempted to do. We put the discretion in the hands of the taxpayer to maximize his own circumstances.

Just for the sake of understanding this, there are 36,475 taxpayers who claim mortgages and this represents a little under 12 per cent of the 300,000-odd taxpayers. They claim a total of $296 million, giving an average of $8,114.36. With respect to annuity and pension, again, there are 65,000 persons or a little under 22 per cent of the total taxpayers who claim a total of $213 million, giving an average of $3,275 for annuity and pension claim. If I should add the $3,275 to the $8,114, it means that, on average, the claim for $11,389 totals the average of the mortgage and the average of the pension. But we have given a generous allowance of $18,000 or 70 per cent above the average, and that is for each taxpayer, so I do not understand how one could complain about the simplification of the tax system when the numbers support the measures that we are taking.

The one other area I want to address with respect to the simplified tax system is the question of deeds of covenant. I sympathize very much with the NGOs, but I use the same argument as to why we cannot agree to achieving a particular objective if we start to compromise those objectives by compromising the integrity of the measures that we chose. Therefore, whilst there are less than 3 per cent of the taxpayers who claim deeds of covenant and whilst the average deed of covenant is about $3,500, which gives a figure of a little under $30 million as committed—and I say, committed, Mr. Speaker, because—[Interruption] For one NGO it is plenty, but there are 384 charitable organizations that are registered with the Board of Inland Revenue. So 384 organizations collect a little under $30 million, of which at a high marginal rate of 35 per cent, it means that Government contributes $10 million and the taxpayer contributes $20 million.

Hon. Member: Leave it nuh! Put it back.
Hon. B. Kuei Tung: He would like that, because at the end of the year he would say I did not have the ability to achieve the stated objectives.

So, Mr. Speaker, what I propose to do, having reconsidered it, is not to put it back, but to commit a further $10 million to the Minister of Social Development so he could pass it on to the same NGOs. [Desk thumping] That is a commitment I am giving because we are prepared to urge taxpayers to buy into our plans of having a simplified tax system which is going to redound to their own benefit, and to continue to at least pay the net amount of tax, so that we could at least preserve the financial assistance that NGOs get, both from the taxpayer and from the Government. That kind of measure, while it is not perfect, will ensure the financial support of all NGOs who rely upon deeds of covenant. And it is not that much, as I said.

Worse than that, the auditors in the Board of Inland Revenue unfortunately have picked up practices that have crept in with respect to how these things were being done, whereby certain organizations—which obviously I would prefer to keep unnamed—have been selling deeds of covenant, and everyone knows that. So that in one case, we are ensuring that these practices do not continue. [Interruption] Do you think charities are infallible? That is what you all think on that side. I said certain organizations; I never said they were charities.

So what we seek to do here, again, is to simplify the tax system and to relieve the Board of Inland Revenue’s personnel from having to do detailed audits of all these hosts of allowances, deductions and credits and to focus instead on compliance. It is that kind of measure which we hope will bring about a simplified tax administration system which would redound to the benefit of the Government as well as the taxpayer.

There were a couple other sundry points that were raised, some of which I will deal with. On the question of the public sector employee tax credit, I had prepared a statement in anticipation of this. I had noted that I had proposed to further amend the tax regime with respect to individual income tax and that a basic deductible allowance of $20,000 would replace a number of deductions, allowances and tax credits. But on a point of clarification, I would like to indicate that the tax credits granted to public sector employees in respect of bonds which are issued to settle arrears of salary and COLA, remain intact.

2.15 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, it was never intended that these tax credits should be removed. The legislation under which these tax credits were granted—the Public Sector
(Arrears of Emoluments) Act 1995—has not been repealed or otherwise amended by the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order (No. 2) 1996.

Mr. Speaker, much heavy weather was made about the amount of provision I made for public sector wage negotiations; I heard it time and time again being raised. Again, it indicates the lack of understanding of negotiations on that side. Surely, no one really expects that I will state in clear terms where I plan to arrive at if I am still negotiating, that is Mr. Valley's style. He clearly telegraphs where he is coming from to where he is going, and then ends up making a bad move. Am I right, Sir?

Mr. Valley: You are wrong.

[Cross talk.]

Hon. B. Kuei Tung: Clearly, Mr. Speaker, no reasonable thinking person expects me to telegraph where I am going to arrive at in the budget, because we are still under negotiations. We are committed that wherever we end up, we will ensure that we find the required resources to meet that debt. Clearly, I am not going to be able to state I have a provision of "X" dollars, because then it will compromise the negotiations that take place between the CPO and the union. [Interrupt]

Mr. Speaker, one other point I want to make. Again, heavy weather was made about the question of sale of over-the-counter drugs in supermarkets. I think the action that was taken by the druggists today clearly demonstrates and vindicates us for the action we want to take. Here you have a group of people who feel that whenever they have become peeved or piqued, they can shut down and hold the whole consuming public to ransom. Clearly, they feel that they can exercise the muscle of their monopoly when they choose to do so. So obviously, it has to be addressed. It must be addressed, and the only way you can ensure that people like that will not hold the public to ransom in future, is to ensure that their monopoly is dismantled and disbanded. [Desk thumping]

I agree with the Member, we are talking about the health of the people, and already we have, if you want to call it, a model that we can develop whereby we are going to have the same regimen of regulations to ensure that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are protected. So it is going to be made available to them, but made available to them under the conditions that we are satisfied with. So your concerns will be addressed, Member for La Brea.

I believe I have addressed all of the concerns that were raised—
Dr. Rowley: I thank the Minister for giving way, Mr. Speaker. I just want to enquire if the Minister has any clarification for me on the status of the agricultural sector loan which formed a big part of the presentation in January 1996. I have not heard it in the opening presentation, and I raised it in my contribution, and I want to know if the Government is still interested in pursuing that loan, and where it is positioned in the present expectation of funds.

Hon. B. Kuei Tung: Mr. Speaker, I thought the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources had addressed it, but the question of the agricultural sector loan is precisely as the Member has said. We felt that the terms and conditionalities of those loans were going to jeopardize certain sectors of the agricultural industry—it is not abandoned—and therefore we are attempting to bring it in a way where it will minimize the effects of the reduced tariffs which are coming down too fast, on the agricultural sectors. At this time, it is still under consideration, but it is certainly not abandoned.

Dr. Rowley: I am even more confused. We signed the loan in June and we are paying a commitment fee. Am I to understand that we are holding that in abeyance, and we are still negotiating?

Hon. B. Kuei Tung: We signed the loan—you said you signed the loan in June. We signed the loan.

Dr. Rowley: So what are you negotiating?

Hon. B. Kuei Tung: You mean having signed the loan we cannot negotiate any more? [Laughter]. There are conditionalities, you have to negotiate each conditionality as it is met.

Dr. Rowley: No!

Hon. B. Kuei Tung: I am advised that we have already drawn down the loan.

So, Mr. Speaker, I believe, as I have said, I have addressed all of these matters. I believe what is left for me as the last speaker this morning, in the spirit of the season, is to wish you and your family, the families and Members of this honourable House, a very happy and holy compliments of the season, a bright, healthy, and prosperous 1997.

Question put.
The House divided: Ayes 18 Noes 15

AYES
Maharaj, Hon. R. L.
Persad-Bissessar, Hon. K.
Robinson, Hon. A.N.R.
Humphrey, Hon. J.
Sudama, Hon. T.
Maraj, Hon. R.
Nicholson, Hon. P.
Rafeeq, Dr. The Hon. H.
Assam, Hon. M.
Khan, Dr. F.
Singh, Hon. G.
Nanan, Dr. The Hon. A.
Partap, Hon. H.
Mohammed, Dr. The Hon. R.
Singh, Hon. D.
Ramsaran, Hon. M.
Sharma, C.
Ali, R.

NOES
Valley, K.
Rowley, Dr. K.
Draper, G.
Imbert, C.
Lasse, Dr. V.
Narine, J.
Hart, E.
Robinson-Regis, Mrs C.
James, Mrs. E.
Griffith, Dr. R.
Bereaux, H.
Joseph, M.
Boynes, R.
Hinds, F.
Williams, E.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Mr. Speaker: The House shall now go into Finance Committee and I wish to advise that the House would need to be cleared of all strangers.

Bill and Estimates committed to Finance Committee.

2.35 a.m.

Bill considered in Finance Committee.

House resumed.

Bill reported, without amendments.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the third time.

The House divided: Ayes 18 Noes 16

AYES
Maharaj, Hon. R. L.
Persad-Bissessar, Hon. K.
Robinson, Hon. A.N.R.
Humphrey, Hon. J.
Sudama, Hon. T.
Maraj, Hon. R.
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  Wednesday, December 18, 1996

Nicholson, Hon. P.
Rafeeq, Dr. The Hon. H.
Assam, Hon. M.
Singh, Hon. G.
Khan, Dr. F
Nanan, Dr. The Hon. A.
Partap, Hon. H.
Mohammed, Dr. The Hon. R.
Singh, D.
Ramsaran, Hon. M.
Sharma, C.
Ali, R.
NOES
Valley, K.
Rowley, Dr. K.
Draper, G.
Imbert, C.
Lasse, Dr. V.
Robinson-Regis, Mrs. C.
Narine, J.
Hart, E.
James, Mrs. E.
Griffith, Dr. R.
Bereaux, H.
Joseph, M.
Sinanan, B.
Boynes, R.
Hinds, F.
Williams, E.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

LAND ACQUISITION

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Dr. The Hon. Reeza Mohammed): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

"Resolved:

That this House approve the decision of the President to acquire the lands described in the Appendix for the public purposes specified."

For the benefit of Members of this honourable House, the description of the lands and the purposes for which they are being acquired are itemized in the appendix to the Order Paper. The parcels of land, as identified in the appendix, refer to lands located at Penal in the ward of Siparia, in the county of St. Patrick comprising of 14 parcels totalling 0.6208 hectare situate at Penal between the Moora Dam and the Penal Power Station which are being acquired for water pipeline reserve for the generation of electricity. One of the parcels now or formerly belonging to Usuf Ali Syne is being acquired for road access to the Moora Dam and water pipeline facilities.

Mr. Speaker, proceedings for the acquisition of the land for the water pipeline reserves for the generation of electricity were initiated on December 12, 1994 and a notice of intended acquisition under section 3 of the Land Acquisition Act, Chap. 58:01, was published in the Trinidad and Tobago Gazette and authority to commence work under section 4 of the said Act was issued on December 22, 1994. A notice of intended acquisition was not published in respect of the parcel of land acquired for the construction of the road to access the Moora Dam and water pipeline facilities.

On June 14, 1996 the House of Representatives, pursuant to the Cabinet's approval obtained by Cabinet Minute No. 909, dated April 18, 1996, under section 6 of the Land Acquisition Act, Chap. 58:01, approved the decision to acquire the 15 parcels of land which included the parcel for the construction of the access road. On July 7, 1996 the Senate purported to approve the decision under the same section. The matter was referred to the Chief Parliamentary Counsel who
indicated *inter alia* that the Senate's approval was without legal basis and the Land Acquisition Act, No. 28 of 1994, which was proclaimed on June 17, 1996 replaced and repealed the Land Acquisition Act, Chap. 58:01.

Mr. Speaker, formal acquisition of the 14 parcels was continued with publication of an order by the President, approved by Parliament, made under section 5(3) of the 1994 Act which sought to declare the lands acquired.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

*Question proposed.*

**Dr. Keith Rowley (Diego Martin West):** Mr. Speaker, I just want to ask if, as we pass this Motion this morning, we are still on schedule to avoid the penalties with this.

**Dr. The Hon. R. Mohammed:** Mr. Speaker, yes we are still on schedule.

I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this House approve the decision of the President to acquire the lands described in the Appendix for the public purposes specified.

**APPENDIX I**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Land</th>
<th>Public Purposes for which to be acquired</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The following parcels of land containing together 0.6208 of an hectare more or less, situate at Penal in the ward of Siparia in the county of St. Patrick and described in the schedule and coloured raw sienna on a plan of survey signed by the Director of Surveys and dated November 14, 1995 and filed in his office are required for public purpose; a reserve for water pipelines associated with the generation of electricity.</td>
<td>A water pipeline reserve for the generation of electricity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Land</td>
<td>Public Purposes for which to be acquired</td>
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**SCHEDULE**

Fourteen parcels of land containing together 0.6208 of an hectare more or less, situate at Penal in the ward of Siparia in the county of St. Patrick and comprised as follows:

(a) 985.7m$^2$ said to belong now or formerly to Usuf Ali Syne;

(b) 1332.0m$^2$ said to belong now or formerly to Shafura Ali;

(c) 148.9m$^2$ said to belong now or formerly to Shafura Ali;

(d) 977.2m$^2$ said to belong now or formerly to H. and R. Sookhan;

(e) 2.2 m$^2$ said to belong now or formerly to H. and R. Sookhan;

(f) 26.4m$^2$ said to belong now or formerly to H. and R. Sookhan;

(g) 548.2m$^2$ said to belong now or formerly to Sookdeo Ramnarine;

(h) 23.2m$^2$ said to belong now or formerly to David McGregor;

(I) 198.1m$^2$ said to belong now or formerly to N. Mohammed, R. S. Mohammed and R. Mohammed;

(j) 77.1m$^2$ said to belong now or formerly to Pearly Sirju;

(k) 76.6m$^2$ said to belong now or formerly to Pearly Sirju;

(l) 205.7m$^2$ said to belong now or formerly to Ashley and Carole Leung;
<table>
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<th>Description of Land</th>
<th>Public Purposes for which to be acquired</th>
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<tr>
<td>(m) 985.8m² said to belong now or formerly to Baby and Prairagh Bajrangee;</td>
<td>A water pipeline reserve for the generation of electricity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n) 620.6m² said to belong now or formerly to Joan Bhagan.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These parcels are more particularly shown coloured raw sienna on a Survey Plan filed as J.B. 104 in the vault of the Lands and Surveys Department, Red House, Port of Spain.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The parcel of land containing together 1965.0m² more or less, situate at Penal in the ward of Siparia in the county of St. Patrick and described in the schedule and coloured raw sienna on a plan of survey signed by the Director of Surveys and dated November 14, 1995 and filed in his office is required for a public purpose; an access road to a reserve for water pipelines associated with the generation of electricity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SCHEDULE**

One parcel of land containing together 1965.0m² more or less, situate at Penal in the ward of Siparia in the county of St. Patrick said to belong now or formerly to Usuf Ali Syne.

This parcel is more particularly shown coloured raw sienna on a survey plan filed as J.B. 104 in the vault of the Lands and Surveys Department, Red House, Port of Spain.
SEASON’S GREETINGS

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, may I take this opportunity, on behalf of this side of the House, to wish you and your family a very merry Christmas and a bright and prosperous new year, and also to wish the Members of the other side and their respective families a merry Christmas and a bright and prosperous new year.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I wish the staff and their families a very merry Christmas. I know they have worked very long hours during this year and we thank them very much. May I also extend the same wishes to the security officers who assist us in this House. May I also take the opportunity on behalf of this side of the House to wish the media—those who are here and those who are not here—and their respective families a very merry Christmas and a bright and prosperous new year.

Mr. Kenneth Valley (Diego Martin Central): Mr. Speaker, I join the Leader of Government Business, again, in wishing you and your family compliments of the season and all the best for the new year.

Of course, we are closing for the Christmas season and I take this opportunity to wish Members on the other side, on behalf of Members on this side, all the best for the season. We have had, in the main, I think, a very good year. [ Interruption] Whenever a politician stands he is expected to speak for 75 minutes. Mr. Speaker, we have had another good year with the very competent staff in the Parliament and I wish the Clerk of the House and her staff all the best for the season. [ Desk thumping]

I have heard no mention of the party for the season, but I would expect my invitation in the mail within the next week. We also thank the officers from the Ministry of Finance who we have kept here rather late. We want them to know how much we appreciate the work they have done with respect to the budget. [ Interruption] Their work! It is the Minister's budget and they take instructions.

Of course, we wish the media as a whole compliments of the season and, of course, the security services which are very important here in the Parliament, especially in these times. We want them to know how much we appreciate the work they do for us.

In general, Mr. Speaker, through you, I wish the national community all the best.
2.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I simply wish to acknowledge the sentiments which were expressed toward me and my family for the season. I, in turn, wish you and all your families, a happy and holy Christmas season. It is my wish for you that you have good health, happiness and contentment in the year 1997.

I am grateful to you for the tremendous amount of co-operation I got from all of you, notwithstanding, the times I appeared to be schoolmasterish, as some people say, but one does feel that one has to work very hard at lifting the standard in this Parliament.

It is my wish for this Parliament, and for the people who work in it for the new year, that there would be an appreciation by those of us who work here of some of the deplorable conditions that are to be seen, not just in this Chamber. There is a tendency, at times, to think that the Parliament is just this Chamber, but it is not. This is just an infinitesimal part of it. If there is a realization of what it really is, and we could take pride in the place where all of us hope to be for a very long time, we would be doing something that is good.

I acknowledge all the assistance we have gotten from my parliamentary staff who very often work very long hours, and it is not always appreciated. We do have quite a few new members of staff, some of whom are in here. It is their first budget, first long session—last night and tonight—and they have got a baptism of fire, in that they started just about two weeks ago.

I wish the entire staff, the Clerk of the House and the hard-working people under her, all the very best for the season. Together, we will work on the several problems that have to be solved in this place in the coming year.

To all of the others who labour in this building—the security, the police, the media and the rest of the staff from other departments who come here from time to time—you have my very best wishes for the season and for the new year. May God bless you.

I thank you for the confidence which I know you repose in me, notwithstanding the fact that you give me a hard time. All the very best.

ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed by the Speaker
and hope that we would not have cause to recall the House before January 17, 1997.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 2.55 a.m.