HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Wednesday, September 06, 2000

The House met at 1.00 p.m.

PRAYERS
[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

PAPERS LAID

1. The Value Added Tax Order, 2000. [The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj)]


Papers 2 to 4 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)

[Fifth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [August 28, 2000]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Ganga Singh): Mr. Speaker, I am particularly pleased to stand before this honourable House to support this Bill and to congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development whose budget entitled: “Building Trinidad and Tobago for a Better Future, More Jobs, Better Education, More Caring” clearly states this Government’s vision for Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development presented in his budget presentation, the macro-economic indicators over the last
five years are yielding the results and Government’s overall objectives for the society. This Budget comes in the midst of nearly five years of excellent management of the economy. The macro-economic indicators clearly support this assertion.

Since 1995 the national economy has grown every year and in 1999, it in fact, has grown by 6.9 per cent; the inflation rate on average has stayed around 4 per cent since 1995; the unemployment rate has fallen every year to 11.7 per cent last year, whereby the economy has created more than 60,000 jobs since 1995; and personal income taxes have been reduced, pensions have been increased and a minimum wage rate of $7.00 per hour has been introduced, thus benefiting all in the country.

Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised at the content of this budget. This budget, like the five others before it, carries the hallmark of the Hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development, Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung. His incisiveness, pragmatism, universality, forthrightness, discipline and hard work are all reflected in this budget, as in the five others before. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, this fact is borne out by the 2001 Budget Memorandum of Price Waterhouse Coopers and I quote from Page 2 which says:

“The Honourable Minister of Finance resisted the temptation to provide an expectant audience with an election ‘giveaway’ budget and continued the approach adopted in his prior budget presentations of maintaining tight fiscal discipline. In a Budget Statement captioned ‘Building Trinidad and Tobago for a Better Future, More Jobs, Better Education, More Caring’ the Honourable Minister provided an overview of his Government’s achievements over the preceding five years before proceeding to set out the Measures Proposed for 2000/2001.

In identifying his Government’s achievements the Minister noted that:-

- police presence on the streets has been increased;
- children taken off the streets and sent to school;
- poverty addressed such that T&T is ranked number five in the developing world on the Poverty Relief Index;
- old age pensions increased;
- 60,000 new jobs created and unemployment reduced from 18 % to 12%;
- sustained high growth rates achieved (2000-7.9%);
- inflation reduced to below 4%;
- taxes reduced;
- foreign investment doubled;
- public debt reduced;
- foreign reserves more than doubled to US$1,700 million.

These achievements are without doubt very commendable and are supported by the very positive economic indicators, which allow the Honourable Minister to boast that

‘We are far better off than we were five years ago and we can see it.’”

Mr. Speaker, I, therefore, take this opportunity to provide this honourable House and the national community with an account of my stewardship in the public utility sector since November, 1995. In keeping with Government’s plans to promote the development of Trinidad and Tobago, the utility sector continues to explore more efficient, user-responsive and resourceful ways of meeting the demand for quality utility services. It is clear that utility services are critical because of their importance in the national economy and the direct way they impact on virtually every company or household in the country.

Mr. Speaker, it was in the context that this Government at the start of its tenure had established the following policy objectives for the sector to ensure access to utility services, at reasonable cost, for every household in the country; to ensure a more equitable distribution of utility services in the country—non-discriminatory; to promote balanced development of utility services in the country; to ensure financial viability and sustainability for the sector; and to create an environment that is conducive to the effective operation of both the public and private sectors in the provision of utility services.

Mr. Speaker, in pursuing these objectives, our main objective had been to develop the utility sector to yield maximum benefits for all the citizens of this country. Today, there is dynamic and strategic management of the utility sector and we are committed to this proactive management approach of the sector to deliver the maximum benefit to all the people of our country. It is the foundation for the future of this sector that we have been working tirelessly to put in place as a launching pad for future development of this sector and the national economy.

When we assumed office in 1995, the sector was drowning in deficit; staffing was high and unproductive; maintenance of the network was non-existent; and the sector was adrift in the ocean with no end in sight.
There was no single vision and sense as to where we wanted to go or wanted to be in the future, in the short-term, or for the next five years into the immediate future, we had no idea how to get there and what resources we needed to achieve our expectations.

We in the UNC, on the other hand, had a clear vision of what we wanted to achieve. We transformed that vision into a concrete plan and worked hard to implement that plan. We initiated regulatory reforms, legal and institutional reforms, structural reforms, financial reforms and commissioned master plans for the water and wastewater sector, the water resources management sector, the regulatory sector and the postal sector: a sort of road map for the future, Mr. Speaker. A model to facilitate long-term strategic direction for the sectors.

It would be remiss of me if I do not take the opportunity to state the causes of the failure in the past. Although each utility had some special problem, we found that they exhibited some common features. They are as follows:

1. operational inefficiencies;
2. inadequate maintenance;
3. financial inefficiency and fiscal drain on the Treasury.
4. lack of responsiveness to users’ needs;
5. limited benefits to the poor;
6. insufficient environmental responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, a number of factors contributed to this unsatisfactory performance of the public sector, among them being:

1. The governance structure had led to a lack of accountability, transparency and the erosion of standards and controls.
2. The “soft budget” constraint, deficit financing and the regime of general subsidies that led to financial indiscipline.
3. The lack of competition had helped to widen the area of discretionary behaviour and reduced any impetus to lower costs and improve efficiency;
4. Higher than adequate employment levels had led to high personal expenses and low productivity;
5. The legal and institutional framework was outdated; and
6. The regulatory framework had been of little help in guiding proper pricing policies and providing for efficient operations.

Mr. Speaker, all these reflected in near water riots, power outages, inability to access telephone services.

If we were only to look at the inherited legacy of the Water and Sewage Authority, it is perhaps ridiculous to meaningfully compare the achievement of any person, team or organization unless the exact terms of reference are equal for both entities. However, this is exactly what I propose to do, given the previous administration's unfair head start of 34 years and the present administration’s but four.

What was the legacy of the water sector that my Government inherited in 1995? While many may be genuinely unaware and others choose to conveniently forget, the empirical data are readily available. The statistics paint a bleak picture of the water sector up to 1995. In that year, only about 11.2 per cent of our population received a 24-hour water supply. This meant that approximately 88 per cent of our nation was consigned to a sometimes erratic scheduled supply where some 42.7 per cent of residents received water just once per week.

More disgraceful was the fact that prior to the commencement of the saltwater project, there was no plan in place to address this totally untenable situation. Nothing had been implemented to augment the level of our poor water supply while hundreds of thousands of people suffered throughout the country. Particularly striking was the perennial crisis in central and south Trinidad where reform of regional depravation, contingent upon a lack of water, was a defining feature of daily life.

Mr. Speaker, appallingly, WASA’s supply system existed for five decades with many dilapidated components being in dire need of overhaul and maintenance. Some more details of this woeful history lesson on our nation’s neglected water sector as it stood up to 1995 would include:

a) A 14 million gallon daily water deficit.

b) Thirty per cent of wells out of production.

c) No concrete plans for producing more water even with rising domestic and industrial demand rapidly outstripping supply.

d) Scanned studies on aquifer watershed yield potentials.
e) No significant capital investment for over two decades.

f) Corroded, dilapidated, encrusted transmission and distribution network and ill-maintained plants and equipment.

g) Intense water scheduling with complex turncocking and high levels of water trucking.

h) A poor customer database and disenchanted, dissatisfied customers.

Mr. Speaker, this chronology of failure and general lack of maintenance was manifested in levels of leakage and unaccounted for water estimated to be as high as 50 per cent of net production 1995. This level of leakage astonishingly meant that more than the total production capacity of the Caroni Water Treatment Plant was being wasted.

We then had to proceed on a formula for corrective action. It was absolutely necessary that WASA embarked upon an immediate and rigorous programme of upgrade and improvement to correct these long outstanding injustices. The larger challenge for the Government was to create the institutional and organizational conditions necessary to make suppliers of utility services more efficient and more responsive to the needs of customers. The time had therefore come for performance and accountability to be placed at the core and to be directly linked to management tenure.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the reform proposals, our reform proposals for this sector included the reform of the structure of governance, sector restructuring and reorganization, restructuring of the management systems, changing work habits and the review of the legal and regulatory framework. Since 1995, as a consequence, the utility sector has been transformed and revitalized in virtually all areas.

We have made a number of policy changes and this has been achieved with the overriding Government philosophy that utility services must be for the benefit of all citizens and that the utilities must continuously upgrade their service delivery systems in order to meet the demands of a more assertive, critical and sophisticated public.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, the Ministry of Public Utilities has made impressive strides to reaffirm our commitment to the achievement of greater operating efficiency and the attainment of financial viability. Our goal is to make Trinidad and Tobago competitive in the global arena.
Overall, we have recorded some major achievements and revolutionized the sector. In dealing with the issue of institutional reform and, by extension, the structure of governance, this administration’s achievement has been its ability to change the structure of governance.

Governance is the underpinning discipline which dictates the business behaviour of the organization. A robust governance structure is generally accepted as being one of the key disciplines which, when implemented and adhered to, significantly influence the performance of an organization.

Mr. Speaker, the implementation of robust commercially-driven governance structures will, if strictly adhered to, contribute more significantly to achieving performance than any other discipline. Worthy of mention here is the postal services. We have brought critical changes to the postal sector by establishing a model worthy of emulation by all managers, all organizations attempting to change, whether in the public or private sector. I will deal with that subsequently, Mr. Speaker.

When we took office in 1995, we were committed to substantially reducing the financial burden that the utility sector placed on the Treasury. Consequently, we have been able to achieve where previous administrations failed. I can now announce that the utility sector has made impressive strides in improving its overall efficiency and has succeeded in recording operating surplus and, in the case of WASA, for the first time in its history, T&Tec has operated surpluses in 1997, 1998 and 1999.


In dealing with the macro achievements, we have introduced new and legal regulatory frameworks conducive to efficient utility provision. The legal frameworks establish the commercial role of the utilities with the activities based on principles of economic efficiency. In this regard, we have adopted a two-pronged approach to regulatory reform in the utility sector.

First, the proclamation of the Regulated Industries Commission Act to provide umbrella legislation and second, sector specific legislation and regulation in the water and wastewater and electricity sectors. In fact, new Acts for the Postal Services and Regulated Industries Commission have set a stage for modern,
reliable, efficient customer-driven and self-sustaining services which would no longer be dependent on the Treasury.

Mr. Speaker, this administration has also made significant capital injection to execute major capital projects and has been able, in other instances, to attract capital. Between 1996 and 1999, TSTT has undertaken capital projects amounting to $880.3 million; WASA, $1.02 billion and T&TEC, $317 million for the period 1992. Combined expenditure of over $2.2 billion compared with $904 million for the period 1992—1995. What was needed under this situation of capital starvation of previous decades was revolutionary approaches to solving the utility sector woes.

When we look at what we have done in the water sector, we have expanded and rehabilitated the sector through new investment. As I indicated, over $1.2 billion was invested in the water sector. Our objective is to eliminate the need for supply scheduling with the primary objective of providing 24-hour water supply to all our customers.

Mr. Speaker, having significantly reduced the water deficiency in the country through the implementation of the saltwater project, and soon to be completed, the desalination and north water projects, the Government’s initiative is to address the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the water and sewage network.

How have we fared in achieving our objective of water for all? Mr. Speaker, our population receiving 2-hour water supply has increased from the 8.1 per cent, that is 85,568 people in 1995, to 30 per cent, 356,474 people in June 2000 and together, at the completion of our projects, some 92 per cent of our people will receive between 120 to 168 hours per week; 92 per cent of the population.

Over 80 communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago now have significantly improved water supply. Furthermore, 59 communities are now receiving water supply for the first time. Total water production. Mr. Speaker, Caroni was producing 46 million gallons in 1995 and it is now producing 75 million gallons in the year 2000.

Mr. Speaker, for years, water production in Tobago and the inadequacy of water was a problem. In the last budget debate, the hon. Member for Tobago West raised the issue of the Richmond Dam. I can go back to 1982 in the records of WASA and even before that. With respect to Tobago water: 1982, the board of the Water and Sewage Authority, in its Board Minutes of June 24, 1992—the Chairman's report at paragraph 59/68 states:
“Cabinet had approved the Richmond Water Project which would serve the Windward and Southwestern areas of Tobago. Until the project comes on stream, the demand for water in Tobago will continue to exceed supply.”

Since 1992, demand continued to exceed supply.

1.25 p.m.

As I was indicating in the last budget debate, the hon. Member for Tobago West raised the issue of the Richmond Dam and I indicated to her that we were pursuing new and unconventional methods to produce the water required in Tobago and that the conventional wisdom of the provision of water by the Richmond Dam to supply water in Tobago will not be able to meet Tobago’s short to medium-term needs because of the time line in order to build the dam. The conventional wisdom could not be applied.

What we did was to utilize satellite imaging technology and a geologist would appreciate that—[Interruption] you did not even find—we expended over $20 million in order to achieve that and, in the month of October, next month, Tobago will have an adequate supply of water for the first time in its history.

I read from the Newsday of Sunday, August 6, 2000, under the headline "WASA project to provide water for all in Tobago".

"In two weeks the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) will be presented with a ‘revolutionary’ groundwater development project for Tobago which will apply new technology for identifying and accessing non-traditional water sources from bedrock aquifers through wells.

WASA said it is two months away from achieving its objective of 'Water for All' in the sister isle. ‘Sixty per cent of rehabilitation works have been completed in Courland, Hillsborough West and Richmond Water works as part of its short-term initiative.

It said the ‘fast track approach’ employs compact, high performance clarifiers such as Larneller Gravity Settlers as part of the treatment process. WASA is investing TT $27 million into this project."

The article goes on to say that:

"…WASA will host President Arthur NR Robinson. His Excellency will get a first hand look at WASA's latest initiatives to alleviate potable water problems of Tobagonians."
In the *Trinidad Guardian* of Thursday, August 10, 2000, under the headline "President sees end to water woes in Tobago".

"Residents of Daniel Trace, Carnbee, Tobago had no water in their taps yesterday, but at the site of the first of 13 water wells sunk by Lennox Petroleum and Earthwater Technology Int’l, water gushed forth, clear and cool and drinkable.

President Arthur NR Robinson and Mrs. Robinson, accompanied by Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly Hochoy Charles and WASA’s chairman, Nazir Khan, were on hand to see the first water well that will deliver potable water to Tobagonians and ease their water woes."

It is clear.

There was an article in the *Tobago News* of Friday, August 11, 2000, entitled "WASA GETS BLESSING FROM PRESIDENT". I quote:

"The Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) has received the blessings of President Arthur NR Robinson in its efforts to provide ‘Water for All’ in Tobago."

Mr. Speaker, I hear a muttering from the Member for Diego Martin Central about Severn Trent. It is they who imposed Severn Trent on this country a mere five days before the election of November, 1995 and it was an arranged marriage because they signed the contract with which we had to live. But you see, it was an arranged marriage and, as a young man, I will consummate any marriage. I lived with Severn Trent for three years, the duration of the contract, but at the first opportunity, Severn Trent departed this country very quietly.

**Mr. Manning:** Because you would not pay $1 million.

**Hon. G. Singh:** Today, the Water and Sewerage Authority is in the hands of local management and whatever you say, you have no basis whatsoever.

They come here and make all kinds of uttering. What had happened under the Manning regime is that they were incapable of dealing with the water sector, incapable of dealing with the problems of the water sector. What they did was to lie spread-eagled and welcome Severn Trent. When Severn Trent came up and down the country, a mere five days before the election, they signed the contract for three years and the World Bank did not want Severn Trent. It is the World Bank that refused to provide the capital injection for Severn Trent because it was not pleased with the manner in which Severn Trent came into the country. They
are talking about Severn Trent, because of the friends of the last administration that brought them in a mere five days before the election.

But we have utilized the local management of WASA; we have lent leadership and sustenance to them and, today, WASA is on its way to recovery. It is now not the WASA, the bed of thorns, the legacy which you bequeathed to me.

Mr. Speaker, water and wastewater are two ends of a pipeline conduit. You produce the water and take it to the community and you bring the wastewater back out. For over 30 years, there was neglect of the wastewater sector. The Beetham Sewerage Plant provided the kind of solid waste and environmental disaster over the last 30 years. But you did nothing. Now, you pay homage to the environment and you are talking about the Green Fund this and the Green Fund that. For 30 years, they did nothing about the wastewater sector.

What did I inherit in the wastewater sector? A highly degraded wastewater system including poorly functioning or inoperable treatment plants, pumping stations and collector systems from Lockjoint to Beetham, problems in the wastewater sector; a poorly developed legal and regulatory sector constrained by inconsistencies and gaps. Environmental degradation and public health risks attributed to the low performance of the wastewater sector, the subservient role assigned to the wastewater sector in relation to the water supply sector. For 34 years, they could not provide an adequate supply of potable water. As a result, you could not solve that problem so, obviously, you could not go to the next stage of dealing with the wastewater sector and, therefore, there was continuous environmental degradation. The wastewater sector under the last regime was the Cinderella of the sector.

Currently, only 30 per cent of the population—20 per cent by WASA and 10 per cent by non-WASA—is served by centralized public and private waste water systems. Only 21.2 per cent of the total wastewater generated is collected and treated, that is, out of 155 million gallons only 33 million gallons are treated. It is an environmental nightmare. WASA, through its 12 public waste water systems, treats about 22 million gallons and about 148 privately owned and operated systems; non-WASA treating the remaining 11 million gallons.

Mr. Speaker, the current situation therefore presents a considerable health and environmental risk. Given this situation, the Ministry of Public Utilities has formulated, with the assistance of Dillon Consulting Limited, a national sewerage policy for the maintenance and expansion of this country’s waste water system. Grant funds for this technical assistance were sourced from the Inter-American
Development Bank. Mr. Speaker, this Government is totally committed to the establishment of a sound and sustainable wastewater system and to improving the quality of wastewater services in the country. To this end, the Government will facilitate investment in the sector and outline the approach for the maintenance of the entire wastewater system.

Our goal is to expand coverage of sewerage facilities to areas that can viably be served by a national sewerage network. The proposal is to expand coverage from the present 30 per cent to 50 per cent by 2005; 70 per cent by 2010 and 90 per cent by 2020. The total cost of this exercise has been estimated at $880 million for the next 10 years.

In fact, this Government has already initiated a number of measures. Firstly, we have already committed approximately $279 million for 1999/2000 for the refurbishment upgrade of the existing wastewater system. This is a dramatic exchange from the previous period, that is, between 1987—1998 when only $29 million or 5 per cent of the total investment in the water and wastewater sectors went into wastewater projects.

The following are some of the projects:

1. The new Beetham Sewerage facility including Greater Port of Spain System and Maraval Sewer Extension—$226.7 million;

2. The rehabilitation of treatment plants including Trincity, Santa Rosa, Piarco, Lange Park, Penco and Techier and rehabilitation of lift stations at Trincity and El Rancho—$20.3 million;

3. Wastewater adoption pilot project—$22 million;

4. The UV Disinfection at three plants to meet TTS 417 effluent quality standard—$8.9 million; and

5. The Beetham Force Main—$9 million.

Altogether worth a total of $279 million.

Secondly, we have initiated the formulation and implementation of a national master plan to address:

- the strategy for the rationalization of non-WASA wastewater treatment plants;
- the integration of small non-WASA wastewater treatment where practical;
the identification of those private wastewater treatment plants that WASA can adopt or otherwise assume control of or other strategic reasons;

- the development of wastewater systems for areas currently on service; and

- the establishment of a centralized wastewater collection and treatment systems in all urban and industrial centres to allow for the commencement of the integration of numerous systems in the country and the phasing out of inadequate unnecessary plants.

Thirdly, in the near future, we will facilitate the establishment of a revolving fund of $50 million to finance and upgrade non-WASA wastewater treatment plants to ensure compliance with environmental and health standards.

Fourthly, we will undertake a multi-stakeholder consultation to address several issues including the need to develop a national master plan for the wastewater sector, especially the strategy for the rationalization of non-WASA plants and the need to improve interaction and co-ordination among all public/private agencies concerned with the wastewater sector and the need to build national understanding of key wastewater issues. Environmental time bomb—we are dealing with it.

**Miss Nicholson:** I listened to you attentively on what you will be doing with regard to the Tobago problem, that urgent problem in the south-western district of Tobago, destroying the most beautiful reef that we have, probably in the whole world, but at least in the whole Caribbean. We have not heard anything from you.

**Hon. G. Singh:** That is part of the national wastewater plan that WASA is currently working on and, therefore, the costing of it and everything will be dealt with.

**Mr. Sudama:** In Tobago, there is more waste than anywhere else.

**Hon. G. Singh:** When you look at the other aspect of the water sector, it is this Government, this administration that did the study by the World Bank for a water resources management strategy and, therefore, what we will be establishing and this was done with the World Bank and it is the World Bank that recommended the establishment of a desalination plant and the hon. Member for San Fernando East in his contribution on this budget debate said he did not know from where we got that idea. Obviously, he was asleep in Parliament because in a previous Private Members' Motion, we dealt with that. We said there were two
Appropriation Bill

Wednesday, September 06, 2000

[Hon. G. Singh]

reports and both of them recommended—one by the World Bank and one by the Water and Sewerage Authority. But we will deal with that shortly.

This water resources management strategy is meant:

- to integrate the water sector—in integrate everything that is happening in the water sector in order to establish appropriate strategies for meeting future water demands and to provide an effective policy and institutional framework and adequate supportive legislative and regulatory requirements;

- to develop efficient information systems; and

- to provide appropriate strategies and policy measures for water resources management.

We are establishing a water resources management unit in the Ministry of Public Utilities.

1.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, if there is one indictment of the utility sector which that administration, when it was in government for donkey years, could not deal with, it was the postal sector. They could not deal with the water sector and the waste water sector, because they had no clear frame of action. It is well accepted in this country that the postal services reform that we instituted—I see the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central is laughing. When we were piloting the Postal Services Corporation Act in the House he pooh-poohed it, he said why did we not leave the post office to die and bring DHL to deal with it. He said so whether sotto voce or part of the crosstalk. [Interuption]

Mr. Speaker: Order please.

Hon. G. Singh: What we have achieved in the postal sector is nothing short of a remarkable transformation of the sector. [Desk thumping] We have brought this new entity into being, from conception to fruition. Anything they started, they were barren. Continuously circulated! They could not provide potable water. There were also strikes in the mail. There was inability to receive mail. From conception to fruition, now we have a very efficient postal sector. [Desk thumping]

In its first year of operation, on time delivery by TTPost is currently over 90 per cent. This is easily the best postal service in the Caribbean. People have started once more to trust the mail service. Over 38,000 new gate delivery points
have been added. Public favourability is running at a very high level. Over 93 per cent of media articles on TTPost are positive. Virtually all the Christmas mails were delivered before Christmas. Over one million items of advertising mail for over 70 major companies have been delivered in the last half of the year.

Eight new post offices have been opened at La Horqueta, Maloney, Marabella, San Fernando, Tragarete Road, Excellent City, El Soccoro and Chaguanas. We have been with them. There are spacious surroundings; longer and Saturday openings; enhanced services and products along with new offices and stationery copying services. New services have been introduced from stationery, Western Union Money transfers to courier services. There is improved interaction with customers.

With respect to the new national mail centre, 96 per cent of our mail comes through airmail; whether packaged or letter mail. We located the General Post Office to a national sorting centre, in the very heart of the dockyard. At that time it was appropriate when the mail was surface mail. [Interruption] Mr. Speaker, for $4.2 million.

**Dr. Rowley:** From whom did you buy it?

**Hon. G. Singh:** We bought it from a lady. They should look it up before making wild allegations. Do it! Make wild allegations on the outside. I understand he has $1 million to pay Eastern Credit Union.

Mr. Speaker, 69 per cent of the customers now enjoy next day delivery of all mail deposited by 5 p.m. the previous day. The Express Mail Service to Canada has been established. What would be, no doubt, one of the principal achievements of TTPost, is that in the next month it would form a strategic alliance with one of the major courier companies in the world. Mr. Speaker, do you understand from where we have come? That is why, in the water sector, we say no turning back. That is why, in the postal services sector, we say no turning back. We have moved something from the donkey cart age of the last administration, into the electronic age into a strategic alliance with a first-world, first-rate courier company. That is what we have done! They could not have achieved that for obvious reasons. They were bereft of any sense of vision.

Mr. Speaker, in dealing with the electricity sector, we have to understand the reality of the environment in the electricity sector. The hon. Member for San Fernando East, in dealing with generation, attempted to place the approach of T&TEC into his top ten. I will deal with the hon. Member for San Fernando East. He wants us to return to a legacy of power outages, but we are not turning back.
I will read from the time when the hon. Member for Diego Martin West was a member of the Board of the Water and Sewerage Authority during the period 1982—1985. He had a career in National Quarries. That is a different matter altogether. Page 4067 of the Board Minutes dated 20th May, 1982 says that:

“The Executive Director reported that Minister Eckstein had planned to hold a colloquium on electricity, water and sewerage services in June 1982, with the participation of the local government bodies. In view of the current situation, regarding power outages, the exercise had been postponed to August of 1982.”

That is the kind of thinking that they celebrate.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for Caroni East has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I thank hon. Members for extending my speaking time in this important debate.

In a memorandum sent to me by the General Manager of Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission, Mr. Stanley Ottley, the generation planning philosophy was outlined. I would read this into the record. It states:

“Power generation planning (generation planning philosophy)

The Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission embarks on power generation planning, based on a number of set criteria which among other things are: low forecasts, power system reliability, timing of power requirement, source of power, plant type, reserve margin.

The reserve margin is defined as the available capacity divided by peak demand. In T&TEC’s case, we add 100 megawatts spinning reserve to the peak demand which, at present, gives a figure of 930 megawatts. Our total contracted capacity is 1040 megawatts. This, therefore, gives a reserve margin of 1040 over 9301.1. Reference is made to World Bank Technical Paper 243 which allows and recommends reserve margins up to 1.25.

Therefore, T&TEC is conservatively well within the World Bank’s recommendation for utilities which have embarked on prudent utility practices.”
1.50 p.m.

“Plant Maintenance

In the pursuit of proper generation planning, it is imperative that additional plant be installed above that required to meet the anticipated low, to allow for a plant maintenance programme. This will allow for the orderly removal of plant and equipment from service for planned maintenance, which will ensure a high level of plant reliability when the unit is returned to service.”

Why did T&TEC need more power? I continue to read the memorandum.

“Up until September 1999, when InnCogen was commissioned, the system load plus spinning reserve exceeded the capacity contracted from Powergen. With the commissioning of InnCogen, the contracted capacity from Powergen and InnCogen exceeds the system load plus spinning reserve.”

He goes on to say that:

“Excess capacity following the installation of new generation is not unusual as new generating equipment can only be added in discrete blocks. Excess capacity decreases in time as the system load grows.

In the year 2002, the system load plus spinning reserve will exceed the contracted capacity from Powergen and InnCogen. In the year 2002, T&TEC will need to contract additional generating capacity. Due to the long lead time in acquiring generating equipment, approximately 36 months, the planning process for contracting new generating capacity has already started. The forecasted system loads do not provide for any large unforeseen block loads. Should such loads be requested, new generating capacity would be required even earlier.”

He goes on to compare with our Caricom partners.

“Utilities in the Caricom region which have not been able, for whatever reason, to embark upon proper generation planning have found themselves in situations where electrical power is supplied to the customers with a high degree of unreliability. For example, Jamaica, the Domican Republic, Haïti, Guyana and Cuba, to name a few.

Trinidad and Tobago Industrial Development Thrust.

Trinidad and Tobago has enjoyed the highest level of industrial development amongst its Caricom partners and in some areas of Latin
America. This success is in great measure due to a highly reliable electrical power supply which has been the result of proper generation and system planning. Our reliable electrical power supply continues to attract potential industrial developers to the country and remain at an adequate level to satisfy the needs of our domestic, commercial and industrial customers.”

Mr. Speaker, in dealing with the issue of the provision of infrastructure services in the utilities sector, I want to read from an article by Dr. F. Deponbrock entitled “Privatization of Power Generation and Water Production”. I read from paragraph 4.

“Population growth and regional developments especially in emerging and developing countries have created increased demands for infrastructure. The capital resources of the public are often inadequate to sufficiently provide the facilities to maximize the development potential. Privatization provides the way to create capital and to attract foreign debt to accommodate systems expansion.”

It is clear that one can attract private capital whether through build/own/operate, build/own/transfer or build/own/operate and transfer products in order to bring infrastructure to bear upon your needs when the public sector does not have enough capital. It is well known that this is a system of provision of infrastructure that can be used. This is well known to the other side.

I make reference to what the other side had to say when they were in Government. The hon. Member for St. Ann’s East and the hon. Member for Diego Martin West in their presentations pointed to the fact that the Project Pride that they had embarked on was a BOOT (build/own/operate/transfer), so they were using outside financing. [Interruption] This was not what Lenny Saith said, but I take it from him, he was your leader.

So, they were engaged in a BOOT or BOT system and this is not unlike what we have done in the desalination project and in the provision of power generation—Inncogen. We do not utilize one cent of state’s money.

Mr. Speaker, I am quoting from the Guardian of June 28, 1995. Let me read what your erstwhile ministerial colleague, Lenny Saith said [Interruption]:

“Mr. Lenny Saith described Project Pride as a departure from the traditional approach to the financing of development projects. It explained that the government was seeking to bring in private developers wherever a project enjoyed a revenue stream that allowed for commercial viability.”
We have adopted the same approach. When he puts in the newspapers that InnCogen had a profit of $84 million, nothing could be further from the truth. That is the period of sales to T&TEC. The revenue from sales in a company that only started in September cannot be the equivalent of profit.

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way. Was there a Government guarantee involved in any way with the InnCogen arrangement?

**Hon. G. Singh:** Like in Powergen, Mr. Speaker, because T&TEC at that time was not making a profit or had any operating surplus, it was necessary to provide a government guarantee. * Interruption* That is why we have to learn from your errors. I quote the hon. Member for Diego Martin East. This is what he had to say with respect to Project Pride, that is why it was stillborn. This is the *Guardian* of Friday, March 17, 1995:

“Pride alive, says Imbert. Minister unwilling to predict completion date.

The project being developed in partnership with Used Airport Systems of the US, would mean financing from CIBC, which intends to provide a new modern terminal, modern cargo facilities and related infrastructure in the North Eastern side of the existing airport at a cost of US $80 million.

Work has already been completed on diverting a small river passing through the south but several deadlines for the start-up of other construction have come and gone without any activity.

Asked about the state of the project yesterday, Imbert told the Guardian that there had been a delay because of the method of financing employed for the project. What we discovered is going out on the market without a government guarantee has proven to be extremely difficult and simply proved to be far more complex than originally envisaged, Imbert said.

Imbert said that over the last three years the whole world financial market had changed and a lot of the international banks are no longer willing to do these types of projects without a solid guarantee. Imbert said the Government has been able to overcome that problem and he thinks that in the relatively near future, we can make some positive statements about it. Imbert was reluctant to make any…”

* Interruption*

**Mr. Speaker:** May I please invite the Member for St. Joseph, aided and abetted by the Member for San Fernando East and the Member for Diego Martin
Appropriation Bill

Mr. Speaker, to allow the hon. Member to make his contribution in peace. I am very sorry, Member for Diego Martin West.

Honor. G. Singh: I will continue.

“Imbert was reluctant to make any prediction on when work will actually recommence, but he was hopeful that it would be in 1995, adding that there was no significant change in the design or cost of the project.”

As he attempted to filibuster with the report, he was saying that the financial world was telling them that the project would not fly, as in fact it did not, without a government guarantee. That is what it said and we have the documentation to establish that, Mr. Speaker.

What is the kind of guarantee we have provided? We have not provided a guarantee to any member of the private sector. We have guaranteed that T&TEC will meet its obligations. We will guarantee that, if someone is buying 1,000 units, we will pay for the production of that 1,000 units. We are not guaranteeing anything else. It is an obligation to pay for what they have produced. [Interruption] That is why everything they have engaged in is stillborn and that is why the judge said he deliberately lied in the Elias matter.

What is the situation? We have heard a lot of song and dance from the Member for San Fernando East about T&TEC losing money while InnCogen is making money. Two things he failed to realize. One: that T&TEC has to ramp up its supply and capacity of power to meet the industrial demand. Before T&TEC made that generation planning, there were power agreements with each one of the firms in Point Lisas for that power supply. For the first half of this year PCS Nitrogen was down. ISPATT was down; Cliff Circle Rod was down; Nucor was no longer there; CNC Dethanol, parts of it were down. Therefore, T&TEC’s demand profile dropped but it had already contracted that.

T&TEC is utilizing all units contracted from Powergen and InnCogen and there is no fall in demand for electricity in this country. In fact, the demand for electricity is actually increasing. T&TEC, right now, is planning ahead. In addition to the normal 5 per cent per annum growth in electricity demand, there will be additional demands from projects such as Perrier Chemicals, Crop Chemicals, Cargill, Common Line, so one has to plan ahead.

Under the PNM, there was no future planning that is why there was an inadequacy of water. When the hon. Minister for Diego Martin West was a member of the board of WASA, he was told that there was need to make proper arrangements for Point Lisas water supply.
2.05 p.m.

Then it goes on in those very minutes, Mr. Speaker, to talk about the water balance deficit. So if there was forward planning they would have been able to meet that demand, Mr. Speaker. But you see, when we take bold and innovative initiatives they are unable to deal with that because today, by the end of December, some 92 per cent of this country would have a proper water supply. Some 92 per cent would have access to water. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Order please, order please.

Hon. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, when one deals with the districts in which there is an improved water supply—44 districts south-west. [Interruption] Do not talk, hon. Member for Diego Martin East. In 1996 he was in the newspaper parading. He has a better supply of water in Diego Martin. We took your picture—it was in the newspaper—sitting down next to the Maraval Reservoir. Does he want me to show the population that? Mr. Speaker, from Icacos to La Filette, to Moruga, to Mayaro, to Guayaguayare, to Penal, to Cumuto, to Coryal, throughout this country [Desk thumping] and he wants—

Yesterday lunchtime I was walking, during the lunch break, right next to the Attorney General’s building. A chap named Ken Griffith approached me. He said, “Minister”—no relation to Rupert, hon. Member for Arima. He approached me. He said, “Minister”. I said, “How are you?” He said, “I want to thank you for the water”. I said, “Where do you live? He said, “Belmont Terrace”. [Desk thumping] He said that for 16 years they did not have an adequate supply of water. [Interruption] Yes, but, you know, the people know differently.

Mr. Speaker, in the south-eastern district, 13 communities; the south-western district, 44 communities and the central district, 23 communities. All over this country the water sector has certainly been transformed. Under that regime—and I have read the minutes coming forward as to what the boards of WASA were doing over the years and what kind of policy initiatives they were taking in order to deal with it.

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with this issue of “water for all”. Water for all is an assertion of the basic human right as enshrined in the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, section 4. Water for all is therefore an assertion of that constitutional mandate which they never fulfilled and which we will. Secondly, water for all is the recognition that women and children bear the burden of a lack of water and poor quality water. Women are the primary users and the managers of water at the community and household levels. The provision of water for all is thus aimed at
the elimination of gender bias and the assertion of children’s rights and the promotion of good family life.

Water for all is the recognition of that intimate link between the provision of potable water, good hygiene and good health. They talk a lot about the health sector. It is an established fact that the single most important public health act that one can do is to provide a potable supply of water—[Desk thumping]—most important. They left this country dry so many years. Water for all eliminates the current distinction between the rural and the urban and provides for equality, regardless of location of this vital commodity, thereby putting a definitive end to this form of institutional discrimination. I think the Member for Diego Martin East represented that kind of institutional discrimination when he said that we were putting schools in the bush for “douen” and parrots, [Interruption] in the same way they continue that form of institutionalized discrimination in the provision of water.

Mr. Speaker, water for all is the recognition of the key role of the environment in the sustainability of the water supply and an integrated approach to water management in order to have the assurance of a decent water supply for future generations. Water for all is the movement to restore life to our rivers and river systems. Water for all is a shift in the paradigm of thinking in the water and waste water sector from adopting merely an engineering-based approach to a customer-driven modus operandi. You see, Mr. Speaker, we have transformed the utility sector and we can say so proudly and we can boast. We have transformed the utility sector. What used to be a bed of thorns and a political doghouse to confine Ministers, today anybody can walk into the Ministry of Public Utilities and have the kind of professionalism and the kind of support systems in place to run that Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for San Fernando East—you know, during the PNM regime, 1993, water provision was 150 million gallons per day. In 1994 when Morris Marshall died it went down to 130-something million gallons per day because the hon. Member for San Fernando East was in charge of utilities and he decided, well, he will run it on autopilot. But, Mr. Speaker, what I wanted to point out is that we have transformed the sector. We have brought about change to the sector that hitherto was a political doghouse. We have achieved a lot, during our time in office, in dealing with this whole issue of the provision of water.

I want to finally read, Mr. Speaker, into the records a letter written by Mr. Martin Kavanagh of La Romain and I know, my friend from Naparima, at the
time of *el niño* he and I went down into Naparima and we could have seen the deprivation suffered by the people in Naparima. This is what Martin Kavanagh said in the *Guardian* of July 12, 1995:

“Divine help needed with water problem”

He had gone through the whole litany of attempting to deal with it.

“Since there is virtually nothing more that I can do to try and have a supply of water I am open to suggestions from any quarter and I am wondering whether you might be able to inform your guardian angel of my plight so that she may be able to assist in this matter since it certainly seems to be a problem that requires some form of divine intervention.”

Mr. Speaker, with the coming into being of the UNC Government in 1995, we have brought the intervention of divinity in the water sector. Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [Desk thumping]

**Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis** *(Arouca North)*: [Desk thumping]. Mr. Speaker, the *Collins Concise Dictionary* defines the word “lie” as:

1. to speak untruthfully with intent to mislead or deceive.
2. to convey a false impression or practise deception:
3. an untrue or deceptive statement deliberately used to mislead.
4. something that is deliberately intended to deceive.”

The same dictionary describes or defines the word “corrupt” in the following terms:

1. open to or involving bribery or other dishonest practices: *a corrupt official; corrupt practices*.
2. morally depraved.
3. putrid or rotten.
4. made meaningless or different in meaning by scribal errors or alterations.
5. containing errors.”

We on this side have sat throughout this budget debate and have heard—[Interruption]

**Mr. Speaker**: Order please, order.
Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis:—deceptions and corrupt practices on every occasion when Members on that side spoke in this honourable Chamber. [Desk thumping] I say that without fear of contradiction because I will start with the last speaker who spoke in this honourable Chamber, the speaker who said that when the Severn Trent agreement was made it was a few days before the elections and their Government could do nothing about it. I would like to quote from a statement made in the House of Representatives by the Hon. Ganga Singh, MP—

[Interruption]

Hon. Member: Who?

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Minister, the Hon. Ganga Singh, and if there is any doubt, that is the name of the Minister of Public Utilities. It is also the name of the Member for Caroni East who just spoke in this honourable Chamber. He was making a statement on January 26, 1996 and it is entitled, Report of the Ministerial Committee Appointed to Consider Private Sector Participation in the Water and Sewerage Authority. Mr. Speaker, I just want to repeat the date—January 26, 1996. The Member starts off by saying that he is acting on the authority of Cabinet and he says, and I quote:

“In keeping with our Party’s election promises to revisit the Interim Operating Agreement (IOA) Contract signed on Wednesday November 1, 1995, just five (5) days before the General Elections, Cabinet at its meeting of December 7, 1995 agreed, inter alia, to the appointment of a Ministerial Committee to consider private sector participation in the Water and Sewerage Authority.”

He goes on to say, and again I quote, Mr. Speaker:

“Transparency in the selection process”

He said that:

“…the Ministerial Committee noted the following:

(i) Transparency in the Selection Process:”

And he said:

“At the completion of the pre-qualification exercise, five (5) international operators were selected to submit proposals.:

Anglian Water International (UK);

Lyonnaise Des Eaux (France);

Saur International (France)
Severn Trent Water International (with Wimpey) (UK); and

Thames Water International (UK)"

He also said, Mr. Speaker, and I quote:

“Proposers were required to submit proposals in three (3) separate mandatory envelopes ie. Technical, Financial and Supplementary.”

Mr. Speaker, this part of his statement is underlined, and not by me, but by those who prepared the statement which he read into the records of the Parliament.

“The Ministerial Committee was satisfied that the selection process was transparent with respect to the Technical and Financial Proposals, and there were clearly prescribed criteria for evaluation and scoring points with respect to these two Envelopes.”

2.20 p.m.:

This is the same Member who just said that they had no alternative and could do nothing else. It is the same Member who said that really speaking they had difficulties, but to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago in 1996 he said “The Ministerial Committee was satisfied”.\[Interruption\]

Mr. Speaker, the Member said they had three options. The Member for Caroni East just told us that they had no option with regard to the contract. He said:

“Having considered all the issues involved, the Ministerial Committee was faced with three (3) options:

Option 1 - to repudiate the Agreement;”

He said that was not an option.

“Option 2 - to implement the Agreement in its current form;

Option 3 - to renegotiate certain elements of the Agreement.”

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that you can recall that mere minutes ago we were told they had no option. They had to implement the agreement as they found it, yet on January 26, 1996, he told the Parliament and people of Trinidad and Tobago that they had three options. Lies, half-truths and innuendoes have characterized this Government. \[Interruption\]

I would now point out what the Member said about Option 1 which was to repudiate. I do not know why they did not repudiate the agreement since it was an option. They said that
“Apart from the possibility of lengthy and costly litigation there could be…financial implications…”

However, additionally,

“…there would be the need to restart the process of seeking a new operator…During this process…which required the intervention of an operator in the first place…”

the situation would have been exacerbated.

Mr. Speaker, they decided that with regard to Option 1:

“…WASA has in fact, authorised the mobilisation of TTWS resources in Trinidad and Tobago to begin the transitional agreements.”

They had the option of repudiation but they decided against it. Up to now this does not say that they could not repudiate.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to Options 2 and 3 – Renegotiation, he said:

“The Ministerial Committee in discussions with Severn Trent/Wimpey, introduced new proposals not previously included or considered under the existing IOA.”

We were told less than half an hour ago that they could do nothing with regard to the contract, yet, on January 26, 1996, we were told in the House that they could renegotiate and they did. [Interruption] So, when the Member stands here and tells us, and expects the Parliament and population of Trinidad and Tobago, to believe that the PNM had tied their hands and that the PNM was doing something that was not in keeping with the business of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we say, lies, half truths and innuendoes continue to characterize this group of people that govern Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, they renegotiated. It was not that they renegotiated one part of the agreement, they renegotiated and were able to insert seven new proposals into the original agreement, yet, he stood there and told us their hands were tied. Thank God the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago keeps a record and the people of Trinidad and Tobago are keeping a record of everything they are doing. [Interruption]
To make matters even worse, when he said that his hands were tied, he told the Parliament on January 26, 1996 that there were seven new renegotiated clauses. He said:

“The Ministerial Committee secured the Agreement of Severn Trent/Wimpy to these new proposals which would amount to a fairly significant improvement to the existing agreement.”

He stood there, less than half an hour ago, and told the Parliament and the people of Trinidad and Tobago that the PNM had tied their hands. Lies, half-truths and innuendoes. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, this is not all. On March 26, 1999, the same Member for Caroni East, the Minister of Public Utilities, said in a statement to this honourable House, under the heading “Transitional Management Arrangements” that:

“On November 1, 1995 the Government of Trinidad and Tobago signed a three-year management contract, an interim operating arrangement with the Trinidad and Tobago Water Services…a consortium of Severn Trent International and Tarmac.”

Suddenly it is “the Government of Trinidad and Tobago”. No longer is he claiming that the PNM tied their hands and they could do nothing because he went on to say—and that is why they continue to try to claim credit for certain things:

“Financial management has shown a marked improvement.”

Based on the same Severn Trent agreement.

“WASA will almost certainly post an operating profit for 1998/99 and should remain within its working capital financing limits. Performance to date has, however, been achieved by controlling costs and debtors rather than by increasing sales. Looking forward to the year following the interim operating arrangement, we expect a further significant improvement in profitability.”

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, under the same Severn Trent; whom they claimed their hands were so tied and they could not do anything about it—they were praising them by 1999—projecting profits, an agreement made by the People’s National Movement Government, which, initially they tried to indicate was not a good agreement. But in 1999, they were praising the same agreement that was made.

What is even more interesting is that—as the Member for Caroni East was saying: “Water for all”—he went through a list a little while ago, which was
showing water for all—his political leader has told us that it is now water for only 80 per cent. Where the United National Congress Government and the PNM government will always differ is in the area of integrity. [Desk thumping] The People’s National Movement Elections 1995 Manifesto said to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, under the rubric “Public Utilities”

“WASA

During the next five years the objective is to ensure that at least 75 per cent of the population will receive a direct daily supply of water.”

The Government talked about 100 per cent of the population receiving a direct daily water supply. Then it was brought to 80 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, knowing that they have no policy, they were trying to look as though they were not taking figures from the PNM Manifesto. Seventy-five per cent is what we predicted. Unfortunately, because of their mishandling of the situation, the percentage goes down almost on a daily basis. [Desk thumping] Because, not even the 80 per cent predicted are receiving water.

I wrote this Minister to complain about the situation in the Constituency of Arouca South, asking for some idea as to when the water situation will improve. To date, I am to get a response—no response, and the water situation continues to deteriorate. Along the North West Peninsula of Trinidad and Tobago, the water situation is worse than it has ever been. [Desk thumping] If we were to call WASA today and ask them, why are we not getting water in any part of Trinidad and Tobago—I have called, as the Member of Parliament for Arouca South, and asked on behalf of my constituents, what is the situation? I was told that the water in that part of Trinidad and Tobago is being diverted to South and Central. [Desk thumping] I have called on more than one occasion.

Given the fact that I have recently moved to Arima where, apparently, I have no representative, I have been calling WASA because the water situation in Arima has also deteriorated. Almost on a daily basis we hear cries from the population of Trinidad and Tobago that the water situation is becoming worse and worse.

I would also like to take this opportunity to talk about the T&TEC situation. Imagine, a situation where, for years we have not had total blackouts in Trinidad and Tobago, the Minister of Public Utilities is telling us that InnCogen was brought to Trinidad and Tobago to assist with the situation of blackouts in Trinidad and Tobago. We are fully aware of why InnCogen was brought to Trinidad and Tobago.
If the Member for Caroni East were honest, he would get up in the House today and tell us that he and the Member for Couva North had to ensure that certain friends of theirs must benefit from that InnCogen take-or-pay contract. [Desk thumping].

Mr. Speaker, ask the Member for Caroni East where did he live when he was studying overseas. I would not believe—[Interruption] If it is not a point of order I am not—

Mr. G. Singh: Sit, I will tell you now. Sit.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, I—

Mr. G. Singh: An absolute lie!

Mr. Speaker: It is not acceptable that if a Member asks another Member to give way, and that Member does not give way as, indeed, he is not bound to do, that one would make it difficult for the Member to proceed.

If one rises on a point of order on which I have to rule, it will be dealt with. But, please, I appeal to Members on the backbenches to allow the Member to make her contribution. There are still seven Members on the Government Benches to speak. There is one other Member on the Opposition Benches to speak. You will have all opportunity to refute that which is being said. I ask you, please, to let us try to maintain standards of which the hon. Prime Minister has spoken.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker—[Interruption]

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order—36(5)

Mr. Speaker: No, I overrule that. [Desk thumping]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, a short while ago, the Member for Caroni East quoted a letter from Martin Kavanaugh which he said was so high in its praises for him, his Ministry and all that he was about, and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote a letter to the editor, which is entitled Steps to Becoming a Politician, by Martin Kavanaugh of La Romaine. I would like to quote certain aspects of this letter. He says:

“There is not one single Minister of Government in this country that can honestly claim to be functioning in a satisfactory or efficient manner, including the Prime Minister.”
He goes on to say:

“It is impossible to comment favourably on any of the several Ministries, but the Ministry of Health needs little comment, in view of its exceedingly poor performance within recent years.

The Ministry of Works, perhaps, because of the wide scope that it embraces, is guilty of more inefficiency and mismanagement than all the others put together. Perhaps, the biggest misuse of taxpayers’ money can be attributed to this Ministry.”

He goes on to outline the rehabilitation of the Solomon Hochoy Highway, the Cross Crossing Interchange and, as he calls it, the famous Piarco Airport Project, which would have been finished or should have been finished by August 30, in spite of an incentive payment of several million dollars to the contractors to have it finished. He says:

“The gross deterioration of 90 per cent of the road infrastructure in the country, in spite of false promises and the fuel tax, intended to cater for road construction and repair.”

He also states:

“The utterly scandalous state of the sea transport system between Trinidad and Tobago in which the condition of the one and only vessel was systematically allowed by a lack of maintenance to deteriorate to the extent of total collapse.”

2.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, he ends his letter by stating, and I can quote:

“The only moral path that the present Government can possibly follow would be for them to resign en masse, but that and the Lord’s face are two things that we are not about to see, not while the grass is still green.” [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, I heard a question: who is Martin Kavanaugh? It is the same Martin Kavanaugh that the Member for Caroni East just quoted. But I am sure that you also recognize that the Member for Caroni East has a problem with the truth. So now you are asking who is Martin Kavanaugh because you recognize that the Member for Caroni East has a problem with truth. That is why you are asking that question.

Mr. Speaker, it is and it will be the legacy of this Government that they have not at any point in time in their time in Government, been honest, open and
transparent with the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] Again I say that I can say this without fear of contradiction.

I turn now to the budget that was presented to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and repeat that there has not been any time that this Government has been fair, honest or transparent to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, if there was one Member of the Government whom I expected to make a profound announcement with regard to the area of health, it was the Minister of Finance. I say this because the Minister of Finance made a public pledge in opposition to his other Cabinet colleagues to assist the nurses and the health sector of Trinidad and Tobago. He made that pledge in the midst of a stone-faced approach by the Members of the Cabinet. He said that he would assist and that was in the face of a Prime Minister who said, “no work, no pay”; in the face of the Minister of Health who said that the Regional Health Authorities would negotiate for the nurses; who said the acting Minister of Health echoed what was being said; and the then acting Prime Minister, the Minister of “lock jams” also did a similar repeat of what was being said by the Prime Minister.

On the other side, we had the Minister of Finance who said, and I quote: “we are playing the game badly.” This was said by the Minister of Finance prior to Saturday, June 17, because it was quoted in the newspapers of Saturday, June 17, 2000. I would like to say that I was very surprised that the Minister of Finance said nothing special about the Health ministry in the budget 2000 to 2001.

In the Newsday of Saturday, June 17, 2000, under the headline: “Kuei Tung and the nurses”, I quote:

“Minister of Finance, Senator Brian Kuei Tung this week added his own to the swelling chorus of voices in support of nurses protesting against the lack of medicines, linens, beds and proper equipment at State-owned hospitals.

He demonstrated that on an issue as vital as this to the nation’s well-being he was not prepared to, blindly, follow the herd, but rather to be guided by his conscience and common sense, even if this meant hewing to an independent line.”

The editorial goes on to say:

“In turn, Kuei Tung’s independently voiced position was an inferred rebuke, specifically, of Minister of Health, Dr. Hamza Rafeeq.
On the question of not enough dialogue it is to the nurses’ credit, though, and that of their representative trade union, the Public Services Association, that efforts were made to meet with the Prime Minister and others on matters that triggered their protest action."

He went on to say:

“We are playing the game badly.”

The article goes on:

“Was it a tacit rejection of the official Government position, unyielding and unsympathetic, of ‘No Work, No Pay’?”

That is why I say that I expected the Minister of Finance in his budget to say something special about health, because it was he who toured the facilities in January, 2000. He saw the conditions and agreed that they deserved additional financing. He even asked the Minister of Health how much they needed. To date, apparently nothing has been forthcoming from the Minister of Health. The question that must be asked is: why in the face of a Minister of Finance touring the health institutions and recognizing their dilapidated conditions—because he himself said so—had nothing special been done for the nurses and the health facilities over that period, where, for the past six months, the nurses have been demonstrating and pointing out all the problems they have been having in the health institutions?

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq: I thank the Member for giving way. I had made a statement on this before, but I just wanted to inform that after the visit of the Minister of Finance and myself to the various institutions, letters of credit were given to the different RHAs to borrow a total of $47 million and that has been injected into the health sector in this fiscal year.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, the Minister says that after the visit, letters of credit were given to the RHAs. But this is the same Minister who told us that when he became the Minister of Health the entire health services were in a state of disrepair and he went on a campaign to ensure that the health services became the kind of health services of which any country would be proud. Yet the nurses are complaining that there are significant problems in the health services. He said he had done things from 1995 to the present day, yet when he went on the tour of the health facilities, they had to immediately inject $47 million into the health services. He was on a campaign of taking care of health, yet from 1997 we had the first indications that health was in a difficult state.
I am saying this based on the fact that this Government did not maintain the health services of Trinidad and Tobago. I say this because the manifesto of the People's National Movement indicates quite clearly what had been done with regard to the health services between 1991 and 1995. If I may be permitted to quote from the 1995 manifesto with regard to what had been done, under the rubric: “The Health Care System”. I quote:

“Five Regional Health Authorities were established with the responsibility for the management and delivery of health care services. The decentralization of authority will bring greater accountability for the health services and lead to an improved level of service.”

Under “Physical Facilities” it states:

“Starting in 1993, the Ministry of Health embarked upon a TT$69M programme of upgrading the physical facilities in the Health Services. The following have been accomplished:

- Refurbishment of the Port of Spain General Hospital
- Addition of a new wing at the San Fernando General Hospital
- Completion of district hospitals at Arima and Mayaro
- Major refurbishment of the St. Ann’s Hospital
- Construction of a new Outpatient Department at Sangre Grande
- Refurbishment of several smaller health facilities.

There is more, but what I would like to do at this point is quote from a speech made by the then Prime Minister, the hon. Patrick Manning, in August, 1994 at the commissioning of the Pleasantville Health Centre, San Fernando and the hon. Patrick Manning said, and I quote:

2.55 p.m.

“This exercise represents one step in a broader three part strategy by the government to reform and improve health care delivery to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.”

1994, Mr. Speaker:

“That strategy, Ladies and Gentlemen, involves firstly, a shift in emphasis from tertiary care—that is to say hospital care—to primary care…secondly, improved management of health facilities through decentralization and
introduction of Regional Health Authorities and thirdly, the introduction of the National Health Insurance to help fund the ever increasing cost of health care.”

The hon. Patrick Manning went on to say, and I quote, that between 1992 and 1993 there was the:

“…upgrading (of) eight major hospitals and primary care institutions in Trinidad and Tobago.”

Between 1994 and 1995, eight hospitals will be further upgraded and 45 health centres and other ancillary facilities would also be built or upgraded. He also said that $89 million would be spent:

“…on the construction of a new health facility at Arima and on the new wing of the San Fernando General Hospital. Giving…”

Mr. Speaker, a complete refurbishment and injection of capital into the health facilities of Trinidad and Tobago between the period 1991 and 1995. [Desk thumping] Yet, Mr. Speaker, in 1998, under the watch of this Government, we see on September 11, 1998:

“Sando Hospital owes $1m grocery bill”

We see:

“Surgery by guess
Doctors slam conditions at PoS General Hospital”

They said, and I quote:

“Another senior doctor said that, apart from the unavailability of the operating theatres, medical supplies continue to be a serious problem.”

1998, Mr. Speaker, under the watch of this administration:

“South RHA $22m in the red”

“Ventilator shortage still delays operations”

“South hospital on slide”

“No sterile water, surgery put off”

Where we have the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health telling us that they have spent over $3.5 billion on the health services, we ask why, between 1998 and 2000, have these complaints come to the fore? What have they spent
$3.5 billion on? The Minister has said several things but the persons who work in the Health Ministry, in the RHAs and in the hospitals continue to complain that the conditions have deteriorated to a point where they feel they could no longer work effectively under those conditions.

On Saturday, August 14, 1999, in a similar vein to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health indicating that so much has been done for health, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh claimed that everything was being done for health under the North West Regional Health Authority. But, in the Express of Saturday, August 14, 1999, after Dr. Gopeesingh made those claims, we see:

“Hospital workers incensed by Gopeesingh’s claims”

I quote:

“Incensed by Dr. Tim Gopeesingh’s boast that all is well at the Port of Spain General Hospital, workers there talked yesterday of taking protest action to highlight poor working conditions.”

I continue to quote:

“They were exasperated by Dr. Gopeesingh’s scandalous comments that all is well at the hospital. ‘It was a gross exaggeration,’ said Pramand Marajh, assistant secretary of the Public Services Association (PSA) after a meeting with hospital workers yesterday.”

This is what Gopeesingh said, Mr. Speaker. [Interruption] Yes, this labour Government is now saying that the PSA are troublemakers:

“Gopeesingh, chairman of the North West Regional Health Authority (NWRHA), said at a media conference on Thursday that the positives far outweighed the negatives…and he described the country’s health sector as second to none in the world.

His utterances, Marajh said, ‘rubbed workers on the wrong side and now they want to hit the streets’.”

I go on to quote Mr. Marajh:

“‘How can all be well when a patient dies because he did not get a tetanus injection? There are no toiletries and drugs. It shows he [Gopeesingh] is not in tune with what is happening’.”

Mr. Speaker, if I can be allowed to borrow Mr. Marajh’s words, it shows by this budget and by the statements made by the Minister of Finance and the Minister of
Health that they are not in tune with what is happening in the health services of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] I go on to indicate that they are not in tune because, Mr. Speaker—[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for Arouca South has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: [Desk thumping] Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank Members, particularly the Minister of Health. I go on to indicate why I say, quoting, and taking the words of Mr. Marajh of the PSA, that they are not in tune with what is happening in the Ministry of Health.

The Ministry of Health put out a document called Health Quest on Sunday, September 19, 1999. In this document they tried to give an idea of all that was happening in the regional health authorities. I just want to talk again about the North West Regional Health Authority where, in this particular document, they say under:

“National Radiotherapy Centre

Complete Upgrade of Chemotherapy Room

Recognising the need for improved care for cancer patients we have upgraded the Chemotherapy Room to provide the appropriate environment for medical personnel to prepare the required chemotherapy drugs. New Cobalt Radiotherapy equipment is being installed for the cobalt machine.”

Apparently it was only the room that was improved because just two weeks ago we heard that cancer patients were in dire need of the same treatment that this radiotherapy and chemotherapy centre is supposed to provide. Yet, they are telling us that they have improved and upgraded the facilities. We understood that one machine was completely down and the other machine was only doing certain aspects of the therapy needed for cancer patients. We understood that there was an impending crisis with regard to cancer treatment for patients who are suffering from that dreaded disease. Yet, in September 1999 we are being told that there was a complete upgrade of the national radiotherapy centre.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Our understanding is that it was only when the information came out in the newspapers, that two officials were sent to Venezuela and Canada to look for the
part for the machine that had broken down. Those on that side are telling us that they care so much about the health services in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is also claimed that they have absolutely no idea of how to proceed with regard to the health sector and absolutely nothing new has been forthcoming from this particular Government with regard to the health sector.

The Minister of Finance says to us in the budget, and I am quoting:

“We have completed substantial improvement works at the San Fernando and Port of Spain General Hospitals. We have commenced design and pre-construction works on the new Point Fortin and Scarborough Hospitals.

We have already commissioned the Mayaro and Couva District Health Facilities and seventeen similar facilities and others are under construction or scheduled for construction in such communities as Cedros, Toco and Success Village, Laventille.”

The reason I am quoting what the Minister of Finance said with regard to the health situation is because—and again I take the opportunity to go back to the 1995 Manifesto of the People’s National Movement. Before I even do that I also want to indicate that he said they will be introducing a pilot project with regard to the national health insurance scheme. That is so interesting because, I repeat, that this group is bankrupt of ideas, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We said in our 1995 Manifesto with regard to the national health insurance:

“The preparatory work is being done for the introduction of the National Health Insurance System on a phased basis from 1998.”

They are two years late, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We also said that the following upgrading will take place. We will:

“Continue the process of upgrading physical facilities in the health sector;”

And:

“…this would include the construction of new District Hospitals in such areas as Chaguanas, Cedros, Couva, Princes Town and Tobago.”

As a matter of fact, the Tobago designs were substantially completed when we demitted office [Desk thumping] yet they have completed Couva and Princes Town and have left Tobago to languish. [Desk thumping] They have left Tobago to languish.
3.10 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is important for us on this side to also put the record straight with regard to other issues, which have been raised during this debate. I would like with your leave to refer to the contributions made yesterday, particularly, by the Member for Tobago East and the Member for Siparia, the Hon. Acting Prime Minister, whom I must congratulate.

A few weeks ago, the Prime Minister—the actual office holder—said to the public that the People’s National Movement must restrict their record to the period 1991 to 1995 when they are campaigning. Firstly, I would like to say that the Government cannot set the agenda for the People’s National Movement. [Desk thumping] They will not tell us what period of history we must talk about. We must remind them that the People’s National Movement is not a “fly by night” party, and we are a party with a history and, indeed, the history of modern Trinidad and Tobago is the history of the People’s National Movement. [Desk thumping] When we want to talk about PNM, we will talk about the PNM from 1956 to 2000 and beyond. [Desk thumping] The Government will not tell us which period of improvement of Trinidad and Tobago, under the PNM, we should talk about.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I were as fortunate as my male colleague to have a PNM tie with a balisier on it I will kiss it now because we have a proud history. [Desk thumping] Mr. Deputy Speaker, the kind of unfair tactics that this Government is trying to impose on us during this election we will not stand for it. [Desk thumping]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to state quite clearly that in terms of our record in education, we are unparalleled.

Mr. Assam: Dismal.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: As the Member sits on that side and calls the record of the PNM dismal with respect to education, I agree with the Member because it was under the PNM that most of them on that side got their education, and they are a dismal display of the education system that the PNM brought to this country. If they are the ones who have risen to the top in Trinidad and Tobago then the education system has failed and it is dismal.

Even though the Government is saying that we must restrict our campaign from 1991 to 1995, they could talk from 1956 to 1986 about “bobbol” and so on. The Government should talk about ‘bobbol’ from 1991 to 1995. They should tell us about that. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Deputy Speaker, we can stand here every day and talk about “bobbol” from 1995 to 2000. We could talk about “bobbol”. If the Government wants to restrict the campaign from 1991 to 2000, we can talk about “bobbol” up and down Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] So do not tell us what to talk about during our campaign. I will go on to say that it was the PNM that brought an entire revamping of the education system in Trinidad and Tobago. [Interuption] It was the Member for Tobago East who called all of you—with the exception of the Acting Prime Minister—illiterates.

The Tech/Voc education improved considerably or, indeed, was introduced during the educational policy of the People’s National Movement. During the period 1962 to 1986 over 80 secondary schools were built and this number excludes assistance to denominational schools. I just want to remind the Members on that side that it was never done on a partisan basis because we built schools in Tabaquite, Carapichaima, Couva, Chaguanas, Roxborough, Scarborough and up and down Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] During that period the PNM built several hundred primary schools. Indeed, between their period, that they want us to restrict ourselves to, 16 primary schools were built and six were under construction when we demitted office. Of the 16 schools that were built, four were in Tobago.

**Miss P. Nicholson:** Those are NAR schools. [Laughter] [Interuption]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order please.

**Miss P. Nicholson:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, on a point of clarification, this Government built no primary school in Tobago. None! [Words Expunged]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member for Tobago West, I have to continue with what the Speaker does. I am the Deputy Speaker and I rule that word be expunged.

**Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, my colleague from Tobago has indicated that no schools were built under this administration.

**Miss P. Nicholson:** That is true.

**Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis:** The Member is repeating that it is true. This Government did nothing. [Interuption] Several schools received assistance between 1991 and 1995, of over $5 million to ensure that they could be upgraded and these were schools like the Lakshmi Hindu School; the Simboonath Capildeo School, and Bishop Anstey High School in Port of Spain. Several schools were assisted to ensure that they were upgraded.
3.20 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to continue by saying that we introduced a system of book grants, we introduced a system of bus passes, and it was the NAR.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, I know the Speaker is not here, but the Deputy Speaker is here.

Dr. Rowley: What do you mean by that? When you are here you have the full authority! You could put them out too.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Sir. Try to keep it down and let the Member finish her contribution.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the book grant, the system of bus passes, the system of food stamps; it was all done by the People's National Movement. The school-feeding programme was under the People's National Movement. When they sit there and say that the PNM did nothing for Trinidad and Tobago, I want them to search their consciences and remember what the PNM, under the PNM administration, did for almost every one of them sitting there now.

Mr. Speaker, we heard the Acting Prime Minister yesterday indicate that the Opposition Leader had said that he agreed that the fundamentals of the economy were sound and it is only now that people are talking about quality, but, if it is that the Member for Siparia was attempting to take credit on behalf of her team, then I would like to quote from the Express of September 20, 1997 where it was said and I quote:

“5.8% inflation rate remarkable, says PM
For the past decade, and especially in the last three years,”

Mr. Speaker, I remind you of the date, September 20, 1997.

“Trinidad and Tobago has been well managed, admitted Prime Minister Basdeo Panday…” [Desk thumping]

“Delivering the feature address at a Tourism and Industrial Development Company (TIDCO) Investment Promotion Seminar in Boston, Panday described Trinidad and Tobago’s—”

Apparently he can only speak truths outside of Trinidad and Tobago. [Laughter]

“5.8% per cent inflation rate over the past three years as remarkable.
‘Quite extraordinary for a small open developing country,’ he said, ‘(it) points to prudent management (which) is reflected in the tight control of government spending.…

Despite these incentives, Panday claimed that Trinidad and Tobago's most significant resource was its people.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am smiling because of the next statement that was made in Boston. I repeat:

“Despite these incentives, Panday claimed that Trinidad and Tobago's most significant resource was its people. ‘Starting in the 1950s successive governments have laid great emphasis on ensuring that access to a quality education is a fundamental right,’” [Desk thumping]

That is what the Prime Minister said! Mr. Deputy Speaker, as was said at a wedding at one time, my heart is filled with such “philumstrophic joy.” I have to repeat:

“Despite these incentives, Panday claimed that Trinidad and Tobago's most significant resource was its people. ‘Starting in the 1950s successive governments have laid great emphasis on ensuring that access to a quality education is a fundamental right,’ he said.”

Yet, they are telling us that it is only now that education has suddenly become the greatest thing in Trinidad and Tobago, yet their political leader is telling the people of Boston that starting in the 1950s, quality education was ensured as a right.

Mr. Assam: He did not say that! Do not misquote the Prime Minister! [Interruption]

Deputy Speaker: Members for St. Joseph and Princes Town [Interruption] Order, Member for Diego Martin West. Let us not go into the other parts of the Standing Orders for order in the House.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we on this side know that we benefited from quality education, and that is why we on this side believe in the tenets of education, not just an academic education, but education that takes into account the spirituality of the person and believes that a person must be a person of decency and integrity.

I repeat, if those on the other side are saying that the education system has failed, I repeat that I agree, because it has brought to the forefront, people that
lack integrity, people who do not believe in honesty, people who do not believe in truth, Mr. Speaker, and people who believe that anything goes in Trinidad and Tobago and that they have no accountability to the people who have put them in office. [Desk thumping]

We are saying that the budget of 2000/2001 is a document that is contemptuous of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is perhaps not strange, because every single budget that has come from this Government has been contemptuous of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, we on this side are saying that we will never hold the people of Trinidad and Tobago in such contempt. We are saying that it is unfortunate that they feel they can take the franchise of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and deal with it in any way they see fit, once it is to benefit themselves, their friends and their families. [Desk thumping] They see no need to do anything to benefit the people of Trinidad and Tobago and, if I could repeat the comments of my colleague from Tobago West, in particular, those who put them in office. [Desk thumping] Those to whom they owe a debt of gratitude.

Mr. Speaker, there is a saying that says: “Ingratitude is worse than witchcraft”.

Dr. Rowley: They are sorcerers!

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, we on this side, to a man and to a woman, cannot at any time support the budget of 2000/2001.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Local Government (Hon. Dhanraj Singh): Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the budget presented by the Minister of Finance, as it lays the foundation for the continued prosperity of Trinidad and Tobago. Coming on the heels of such a heated presentation raised by the Member for Arouca South, in which the Member played with mere words to present her side—it is something that has become customary in this House where Members on that side always present a negative picture of what the Government is trying to do.

Dr. Griffith: Talking loud and saying nothing.

Hon. D. Singh: Mr. Speaker, my presentation today will not be a heated one. It will just be one that will be factual and will respond to some of the concerns raised by Members on that side. It will also be a brief picture of what the Ministry of Local Government has done over the last almost five years.
Before I get into that, I wish to draw to the attention of hon. Members, those painful years of adjustment that this country has had to undergo so that today we are able to enjoy a financially stable economy and a fairly prosperous country. As a former public servant, and soon to be a former minister, it will be appropriate for me to compliment those who have formulated policies in the past and those who implemented those policies which have resulted in the prosperity that we are enjoying today.

The removal of the negative list, the freeing up of the exchange rate, the reduction in duties, the introduction of VAT, the introduction of the CET, the simplification of the taxation system, aggressive policy of attracting foreign investment and aggressive policy of divestment have all resulted in what we are enjoying today. As I stand here today, I stand firmly in the belief and hope that this country will move from strength to strength. I say this for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

As I sat here and listened to the contribution of the Member for San Fernando West, he spoke about the fact that the Ministry of Local Government was unable to pave a particular road for him, and he named the road ‘Windy Drive’. If after five years that was the only road that was left to be paved, it speaks well about the Ministry of Local Government.

I wish to call out the list of roads that we have paved in San Fernando West and I will say this; I wish to call them out because there is a perception in this country, perpetrated by the PNM, that this Government has not done anything in PNM areas.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to put on the record some of the roads that we have paved in San Fernando West: Gulf View Circular Drive, Penny Avenue, Happy Hills Road, Gulf Link Road, St. Vincent Street, Burtress Avenue, Sea View Drive, Bel Air Drive, Sunkist Drive, Albert Drive, Farrel Street, Jones Street, Coral Drive, Ocean Drive, Gordon Avenue, and roads in Palmiste such as Rosalind Drive, McMillan Street and several cross streets in this area.

We in the Ministry, and this Government, have been working from day one and we have been laying the groundwork for improving the quality of the lives of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The fact that we have paved so many roads in that constituency, which is PNM, will convince the people of Trinidad and Tobago that we have done work, not only in UNC-controlled constituencies, but in PNM controlled constituencies.
Mr. Speaker, he also indicated that Windy Drive has been paved now by the Minister responsible for Works, Mr. Carlos John.

3.35 p.m.

In the contribution of the Member for Laventille West, she spoke about a particular road in her constituency which was not paved. She also indicated that I took her in my van to the constituency. I wish to draw to the attention of Members of this House that within the last year the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, under this Government, paved almost 25 streets in San Juan/Laventille. This is a remarkable feat. I must compliment the corporation for doing it. I must alert the Members of this House that, it is under this administration all corporations were able to carry out meaningful infrastructural work in their respective regions.

In the past under previous governments, opposition-controlled corporations and councils were denied funding. The record would show that only on the last day before budget some of these opposition-controlled corporations would get their releases; so that they were unable to spend it. People on that side have forgotten what used to transpire as good government. Under this Government all corporations have been able to carry out meaningful infrastructural development.

The Member for Laventille West spoke about one road which she took me to see. I would indicate some of the roads the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation recently paved in the last six months. They are Crichlow Trace and Hill, Mon Repos Road, Morvant; Caledonia Extension Road; Centre Hill, Malick; Plum Trace off Picton Road; Evans Circular Road, Upper Trou Macaque; Milshur Land off St. Francois Valley, Upper Seventh Avenue Malick; Weekes Trace, Blackford Street, Santa Cruz; Sun Valley Extension; McCarthy Street; Hard Road North; Angelina Street, Riverside Avenue; Park Avenue; Sparrow Avenue; Henry Boulevard; and Akal Road. Mr. Speaker, these are just some of the roads that have been paved in the last six months. Many more roads have been paved over the last five years. The Member just highlighted one road and wished to paint a dismal picture.

Much work was done by this Government and the Ministry of Local Government in the San Juan region. We have been able to do work on several community centres such as the one in Cascade and Shen Street. We have built new pavilions in the area.

The Member for Laventille West also spoke about the San Juan Market. The Ministry of Local Government is committed to improving the infrastructure as it
relates to the market. Several projects of that nature have started throughout
Trinidad and Tobago. Despite our limitations in terms of funding, we have taken
on these projects and have been fairly successful in that part of our programme.
We are about to start the construction of the San Juan Market. For some reason,
which I know, the corporation is raising a red herring. From day one the San
Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation has been involved in the drawing of the
plans and quantities for that project. It is a massive project which would require
engineering supervision which the corporation does not have.

The contract for that project was advertised by the Central Tenders Board and
the Central Tenders Board made the appropriate awards. The corporation is
saying that it is not involved or that it was never consulted. I believe that this kind
of game—playing with words and putting legal hurdles in the way of progress—is
not what the Ministry of Local Government is about. We want the market to be
built. I think the Member for Laventille West should be thankful or grateful that
we have put in place the necessary tools to start the construction of that market.
For over 30 years people have been selling in dilapidated conditions in that
market. I am sure that the people who vend and shop in that market look forward
to the day when a new structure can be put in place.

I am appealing to the Member for Laventille West and those on that side to
work with the Ministry of Local Government and convince the San
Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation that it makes no sense preventing this
project from going ahead. Tomorrow, there will be a sod turning ceremony and
the project will start. I wish to remind them that since 1990, all the assets of all
the regional corporations, including markets, have been vested in the Ministry of
Local Government and they belong to the Ministry of Local Government up to
this day.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Laventille West also spoke about consultation.
She saw it in the Draft Medium Policy Framework. She made a big song and cry
that there is no consultation. Over the last four and three-quarter years, the
Ministry of Local Government has been in consultation with the corporations. The
Permanent Secretary has regular meetings with the chief executive officers and
the political heads have met from time to time. For her to be amazed that that
aspect of consultation is now in the Draft Medium Term Policy Framework,
means that she has not been in contact with the corporation to know what is
happening.

Again, Members on that side pretend that they do not know or have forgotten
what transpired in the past. In the past, opposition-controlled corporations—when
they were in government under previous administrations—were never consulted. The minister never visited some of those corporations. [Interruption] That is the truth! The ministers never visited opposition-controlled corporations and never had consultations.

3.45 p.m.

We must stop this thing where some people pretend to be “holier than thou”. We have consulted and over-consulted to the extent that sometimes I felt that the PNM-controlled corporations wanted to take over the ministry and the Minister of Local Government.

The Member for Toco/Manzanilla raised very important matters in this House, something that I have had to deal with. I have a very political ministry. I have lots of politicians to deal with. All of them feel they could do my job better; some of them feel that they have been in the political arena longer than I have and I am “no big thing”. Some of them feel that they have direct links to the powers that be. The Ministry of Local Government has had to be very watchful and careful of what is going on.

The Member for Toco/Manzanilla in his contribution spoke about the misuse of public funds, especially URP funds, to pay food bills and maxi taxis and so on. I must compliment the administration of the Ministry of Local Government for rising to the occasion and protecting the public interest at all times. You see, every item of expenditure in the corporations is subjected to the financial regulations. If you have a vote for entertainment; if that vote is exhausted, you cannot spend any more money without a virement, to be approved by the Ministry of Local Government. Members of staff or administrators would not approve bills if there is any suspicion about it. What is happening is that any expenditure over the budgeted allocation is now being passed on to the Unemployment Relief Programme division.

I wish to put on the record—I have here a request from the programme manager, Sangre Grande who wants $413,000 for the month of August. In this document it states: Food and Refreshment, $45,000; Transportation, $31,000.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Local Government receives funding from the Ministry of Finance for the respective corporations. So it comes through the Ministry of Local Government and goes out to the corporations. If the Ministry was not vigilant, we would have released $413,000 to them, because their allocation would have been around, I believe, $500,000 for this month of August.
The Ministry of Local Government only released $125,000, which was for salaries and wages, because we have our own information about what is transpiring in the corporation. But we are placed in a very precarious position when we do that. Some corporations would accuse us of not releasing the money to them. We have been accused, on the one hand that we are not releasing the moneys to them and this has caused some eyebrows to be raised about what the Ministry of Local Government is doing.

We have found that certain corporations have nothing to show and, therefore, we have had to take steps to get things done. When we suspect that there is mismanagement, we identify projects for the corporations to do and we tell them, for example, “we want the Northeastern Regional Sporting Complex repaired and if you do not do it, so and so would happen.” This is the only way that we have been able to get some value for money from some of the corporations, in this case the Sangre Grande Corporation.

So on the one hand the Ministry of Finance is releasing money to us and we in the ministry would have to make a decision as to where the money is going. I have indicated here to you that out of a request for $413,000, we have released only $125,000. We did not take into consideration any request for payment for the food bill nor for the transportation, nor for rental of equipment, because we were advised there is no equipment being rented.

So there is a stop-gap by the administration and the ministry. Despite that, we have been able to live within our budgetary allocations. As a matter of fact, we have not been given all of our allocations as approved by the Parliament. Despite all of that, both the Unemployment Relief Programme and the Ministry of Local Government have been able to deliver to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I have walked with a list of some of the achievements of the Ministry of Local Government. These are some of the projects which the ministry played a key role in getting done. These are not projects that have been left halfway; these are projects that have been completed and delivered to the communities and paid for.

Mr. Speaker, under bridges completed by the Unemployment Relief Programme, I have listed 26 concrete bridges. These have been completed within the last two years. When the programme was given to me in the first year, because of the decentralized nature of the programme the Ministry of Local Government allowed the programme to be run by the corporations without scrutinizing the day-to-day operations. But when we began to scrutinize what was happening, we
found that we were not getting value for our money. But over the last two years
the programme has really been able to deliver much more. I have here listed 26
bridges which have been completed. Not one of them is made of wood, so nobody
can accuse me of doing any business for my parents who own a sawmill. The
Member for La Brea always jumps on my shoulders, “you giving your father
business.” So we have not built any of these 26 bridges from wood.

The corporations have also delivered a similar quantity of bridges throughout
Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, in the area of pavilions and sporting facilities
completed by the Unemployment Relief Programme, I have listed approximately
15 pavilions. This is what I sat and remembered. Mr. Speaker, we have repaired
over six pavilions also. The corporations, with their own funding, have completed
well over 10 pavilions. The document is here and I can lay it on the Table so that
Members can look at it.

Community Centres: We have completed 24 community centres under the
Unemployment Relief Programme and they are located throughout Trinidad and
Tobago. We have the Shend Street Community Centre which is San Juan;
Cascade Community Centre which is in San Juan; Cocoyea Community Centre
which is in San Fernando, and several other community centres throughout
Trinidad and Tobago.

Repairs to the following markets: The Chaguanas Market, the Marabella
Market and the Rio Claro Market have been undertaken under the Unemployment
Relief Programme. Eight police stations have been repaired under that
programme. And the list can go on and on. We have landslips, retaining walls,
offices, cultural centres, several projects; and I am not speaking about drains and
pavements. Under the programme also, some 24 schools have been repaired, and
they are not only in one particular area. We have Piccadilly school, Chatham
school, all of these have been repaired, built over, and supervised by the Ministry
of Local Government so that we got quality work, we got value for our money on
these projects.

The Ministry of Local Government with its limited funding, has been able to
do a lot of work. In order for the Ministry of Local Government and the system of
decentralization to move forward, I make a plea here for better councillors
because decentralization can only be meaningful if we have good managers
outside there. The people who manage those corporations must be good managers
so that the work of the people gets done.
Mr. Speaker, I have had a very meaningful five years in this House and it was an honour being here and working with Members on both sides.

I thank you and may God bless you.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Kenneth Valley (Diego Martin Central): [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, as I rise to wind up the Opposition’s contribution to the debate on the Budget 2000/2001, I am mindful of the fact that there are at least four Members on the other side who can still participate in this debate. My hope is that before the end of this debate the country would receive some answers from those on the other side concerning the case made by Members of the Opposition. I think—I am sure—you found it a beauty to listen to my colleague from Arouca South [Desk thumping] earlier today, dealing not only with the fabrications of the Member for Caroni East but dealing also with the issue of health care.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall sometime ago when we raised the InnCogen matter, a matter in which the top person on the other side, the hon. Prime Minister, was implicated, that debate was concluded without answers from the Member for Couva North. I find it also interesting that the Prime Minister, who informed this House that the budget statement would have been read on a particular date, did not realize at that time that he would have been absent from this debate for the greater part of the debate. It is more surprising that for all of today we are yet to see the Minister of Finance. All of last night he was absent. The same thing occurred the evening before. I say these things, Mr. Speaker, because I think the Government owes an obligation to the population of Trinidad and Tobago to answer some of the concerns raised by the Opposition. [Desk thumping]

There are a number of them, Mr. Speaker. My colleague, the Member for Diego Martin West, raised the issue concerning the Minister of Finance’s visit to Miami in late July, August of 1996 to visit with Birk Hillman and asked the question, “Why did the Minister find it necessary to visit with an individual or a company which was so interested in the airport contract?” You would recall that in the previous incarnation, Birk Hillman was involved with the Maritime Group with respect to that airport development. You will recall, or I am sure you are aware, Mr. Speaker, that the Maritime Group is headed by one Steve Ferguson of the famous tribe of Steve, Ish and Brian.

So, first of all, here we have on July 30, the Minister of Finance informing the Prime Minister that he is undertaking a private visit to meet with Birk Hillman to
have preliminary discussions because he understands that Birk Hillman is very experienced in constructing airports, although Birk Hillman was here before. Subsequent to that, Mr. Speaker, there is the contract dated October 17, 1996. So here we have the visit to Birk Hillman in August of 1996, a presentation to the Government’s task force for the development of the Piarco International Airport terminal on October 17, 1996 and, Mr. Speaker, you would also recall that when Mr. Deyalsingh looked at this matter he stated quite clearly that one of the members, and a key member, of the task force was Mr. Galbaransingh—Ish—of the Steve, Brian and Ish fame, that Mr. Galbaransingh was not only a member of that task force—paragraph 68—but that he voted to award the contract to Birk Hillman. Paragraph 68 of the Deyalsingh Committee Report, Mr. Speaker:

“Mr. Ishwar Galbaransingh, Chairman of TIDCO was a member of the Task Force by virtue of his office as such Chairman. He attended the Task Force meetings at which the Presentations of Birk Hillman and Scott Associates were made and at which Birk Hillman was chosen as the lead consultant.

Mr. Galbaransingh was at this time and for some time before, the Managing Director of Northern Construction Ltd, a construction company in which he held a substantial shareholding.”

It goes on to say, Mr. Speaker, that Mr. Galbaransingh voted for that contract. Subsequent to that, a contract was awarded to Birk Hillman—December 11, 1998 letter of intent for professional services—signed by the Chairman of the Airports Authority, one Mr. Ameer Edoo.

So there is a situation that the Minister of Finance needs to explain to the country. What part did he play in getting Birk Hillman that contract? Birk Hillman comes in, the task force appoints him, Birk Hillman turns around and awards the contract to Mr. Galbaransingh—all nice and dandy. It reminds me of a statement made, supposedly, by the Minister of Finance, that we would have corruption above the table, transparency in corruption, Mr. Speaker.

It is not only the Minister of Finance, it is also the Prime Minister because you would note, Mr. Speaker, that this letter clearly refers to discussion held between the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister the week before “as we discussed last week Thursday after Cabinet”, July 30, 1996, which is seven or eight months after coming into office. So that we need him to explain that, Mr. Speaker, because that is not isolated. The basic point that the Opposition has been making is that while, as the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre said a while ago, prior
governments put this economy on a sound footing, we have seen a squandering of the resources since 1996 by a clique in the Government that is compromising the economic fundamentals of this country; and that is the reality of the situation. [Desk thumping]

It is not only on this transaction, the Airports Authority, which has now gone to $1.3 billion plus interest—total cost to the country of some $3.6 billion as stated by my colleague, Mr. Speaker. Understand also that we saw a similar thing in the transfer of the Winsure portfolio to Maritime. Their argument, Mr. Speaker—after the Public Accounts Committee viewed this thing and sent it back, they went forum shopping. They had some actuary who advises the Ministry of Finance, the office of the Supervisor of Insurance, but they did not use him. They found an actuary who reviewed the work done by Maritime’s actuary—understand what is happening.

So the portfolio is to be transferred to Maritime, Maritime does the actuarial work, they find an actuary after forum shopping, they tell this actuary that they have a legal opinion saying that even though a policy is lapsable, unless one sends notice it cannot be lapsed, and tells the actuary he has to follow that. Nobody—could you imagine? Actuaries are insurance people. The Minister of Finance has an insurance background. All the people at Maritime are insurance people and nobody bothered to ask, “Well, if you failed to send lapse notices why do you not just send them now? All you have to do is to send the notice. It is valid for 28 days.” Nobody bothered to ask that because they were too much prepared to provide $69 million for a whole portfolio of lapsed policies, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping]

Understand why we have had five years of unplanned deficits. Understand that even after Mr. Deyalsingh said this thing is no good, after the Attorney General says that the contract is null and void, they are paying $29 million to Ish of the Steve, Brian and Ish fame. But nobody bothered to say, “We are going to appeal that matter”, because it did not suit their purpose, Mr. Speaker. I say that the Government has an obligation to answer these charges and let the country know exactly what has transpired in all of these matters.

It does not stop there, Mr. Speaker. My colleague made the point that the dealings start in the Cabinet but they do not stop there. My colleague from Toco/Manzanilla told us—was it yesterday—Monday, of the goings-on at the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, and we heard from the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre a while ago about a letter. He has not informed us as yet what he is going
to do, but listen to this one, Mr. Speaker. A letter dated August 11, 2000 from the Ministry of Local Government, signed here by the financial director. It is addressed to the Chief Executive Officer, Sangre Grande Regional Corporation. It says:

“Sir, I am in receipt of a request that entertainment bills amounting to $35,273.25 be paid out of URP allocation. Please be advised that these bills relate to the Council’s operations and should be settled out of your recurrent allocation. Further, it is noticed that the dates of these invoices are very frequent and the prices appear to be exorbitant. May I remind you that URP is intended to provide employment for the unemployed in the region and not to supplement your corporation’s entertainment expenditure. As the chief accounting officer of the corporation, it is your responsibility to ensure that all expenditure is within your allocations and that you prudently manage your finances. Please be guided accordingly.”

That is the type of officer I know in ministries, Mr. Speaker. But what the Minister said begs the question. He is dealing with another matter. They have applied for some $431,000; $45,000 of which—and note that $45,000 is different from this $35,000. They are having a ball. It is a feeding frenzy in the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation. Obviously they are saying, “If the priest can play down at Whitehall, who is we?”  [Desk thumping]  You see, in these things leadership is extremely important. It is the message sent from the top. So when the Prime Minister can listen to months of debate on a matter in which he is implicated and says nothing to clear his name, absolutely nothing, what is the population to think and what message is he sending to his underlings at the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation and other regional corporations? You understand?

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we had the Sumairsingh case in Rio Claro and up to now nobody hears anything about it. It is a done deal. Do you understand? That is the country of Trinidad and Tobago at the turn of the century, and the Government is telling us no turning back! The population is up and down saying we just cannot go on this way—a very solid bunch. [Desk thumping]

The Minister tells us that he got this request for $431,000 and he is only giving the corporation $100,000 to pay salaries and so on, and then he says that some people complained because they are not getting all their money. I want to ask the Minister: what action is he or his Government going to take if the corporation takes that $100,000 to pay the $45,000 and the $35,000 food bill?
When are we going to get to the point when the Government would take action against their party hacks who want to feed off the public purse? That is the issue. 

[Desk thumping] When are we going to put some of these people behind bars? I think the Government is afraid to do that because it may have to go too high up.

Mr. Speaker, so there was the InnCogen matter. Do you remember the Member for Oropouche spoke about four plants? The Member is still to speak and I want him to answer and tell us where are the plants. The Member came time and time again, the last time, in April, 1999 talking about ground-breaking and turning sod. Mr. Speaker, by sleight of hand, the Minister of Public Utilities, the Member for Caroni East told us that these people are co-generators; they are not independent power producers. So the Government directed the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission—no tendering procedures—and brought their friend Narinesingh, with whom the Member lived for some time and who is a buddy of the Prime Minister—to give him the contract. Do you understand?

Dr. Rowley: Almost $1 billion.

Mr. K. Valley: To tie this country for 30 years. If you are 67 years and you set up an annuity plan for 30 years you are well fixed and then you could go and retire in England or any part of the world—

Dr. Rowley: For the rest of your life.

Mr. K. Valley: —for the rest of your life. Who cares about the people of Trinidad and Tobago? Mr. Speaker, we are saying that this economy was in excellent shape at the start of this administration, and we have now, five years of unplanned budget deficits because of this waste and corruption of the Government. Mr. Speaker, understand that government revenues in 1999—2000 were some 44 per cent higher than revenues in 1995.

Dr. Rowley: Repeat that.

Mr. K. Valley: I will repeat that. When one looks at the figures, revenues are 45 per cent higher in this fiscal year, ending September 30, 2000 than they were in 1995. In 1995, there was a surplus on government’s fiscal operations; in 2000 there is a deficit of $280 million and it does not stop there.

Mr. Speaker, when my colleague started off talking about lies in this Parliament, honestly, before the advent of this Government, I thought “lie” in Parliament was a bad word that one had to say, “that is a terminological inexactitude; that one is a stranger to the truth” and all of these sorts of things—but the word “lie” was never used. It is so frequent on such petty matters that it
seems that, at least, in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago it is now acceptable.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Caroni East made the point when he read what Price Waterhouse and Coopers said about the budget. I feel sorry for them, because sometimes when one hears the Minister’s nice words, even some of us on this side are taken in. When the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development said that he kept his promise—let me read his words. The Minister was speaking about the Revenue Stabilization Fund on page 37 and it says:

“Mr. Speaker, this Government keeps its commitments, even if they mean taking tough decisions. This Government has put $415 million into the Revenue Stabilization Fund.”

Mr. Speaker, when I read that I said fine, but when I turn to page 38 where the Minister spoke about a deficit of $280 million, one was left to believe that the deficit of $280 million was after setting aside the $415 million. I am sure a number of persons in the national community think so.

Dr. Rowley: The Minister got praises for that.

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, that is not so. The Minister cannot set up any Oil Stabilization Fund because he has no money. [Desk thumping] When one looks at the figures there is a deficit of $280 million. I do not know where the Minister is getting the $415 million to set aside. The Minister has taken all the revenues. When one looks at the revenue documents, one would see that the Minister has taken away all the oil sector revenues of $2.1 billion when he had planned for $1.4 billion. The Minister has taken that sum into income and even after considering all his revenues, there is a deficit of $280 million. The Minister does not have “one cent” to put anywhere. The Minister cannot even buy ice cream, but he wants to set up an Oil Stabilization Fund of $415 million, fooling the accounting firms and so on. The Minister just does not care. [Interruption] I understand some consultant out of Texas wrote the Minister’s budget speech. They are real smart men.

Mr. Speaker, listen to the conduct of the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development. These are really the issues, which ought to be referred to the Committee of Privileges. [Desk thumping] Listen to the conduct of the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development when he says:

“Our strong economic performance means that our foreign currency reserves will add over one billion U.S. dollars to what we already have.”
Mr. Speaker, in one year the Government borrowed $5 billion, so if the reserves are in place most of it is coming because of that and he went on to say:

“Mr. Speaker, our country is the envy of the world because of our economic performance these past five years…”

One reason why, Mr. Speaker, is that we are saving for a rainy day…”

Mr. Speaker, for five years you had deficits, what is the Government saving for a rainy day. [Laughter] What is the Government saving for the rainy day when every year the Government has to borrow to finance its expenditure, because the Government’s planned budget surpluses are disappearing in the Airports Authority; in Maritime Life; in Miss Universe; and everything under the sun.

4.25 p.m.

Not a cent here, and he tells me he is saving for a rainy day. You understand? Understand that while he is chatting that “anancy” story, there is an increase in the public debt. If you look at Appendix 16, Mr. Speaker, you will see the case we made here. Some $11 billion incremental public debt from $18.8 billion in 1995 to $30 billion today. He tells us he is saving for the rainy day. Well, God help us. I hope rain does not come, because when we are looking for that umbrella, we will find out that it only has a set of holes in it! Long gone, Mr. Speaker!

So he tells us that he is setting up an oil stabilization fund out of a deficit. You understand that? He has minus but he wants to put aside that as though people would not read. I hope that somebody on that side—they have at least four speakers—I want to hear the Member for Oropouche who is now in agriculture. Poor fella. They had to move him. They say he is seeing too much and talking too much. I understand that everyone in the Cabinet who tries to stand up to the Minister of Finance, they want to shaft. Not so Attorney General? Not so Member for St. Joseph?

Mr. Assam: What do you want me to tell him?

Mr. K. Valley: I want you to tell me that it is true. When you stood and said it did not make sense—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Valley: True or not true? Ask my friend from Oropouche. I want him to get up here this evening and defend this. I want him to tell me that they set up that
Mr. Speaker, I want this country to understand also that were it not for our luck, were it not for the fact that oil prices were extremely good to us this year, the Minister would have had a deficit of some $1.1 billion? That is what it would have been. Year after year, he comes here with his fictitious revenues that he would never realize, and he knows it. Smoke and mirrors! Since the Minister is here, I really want him to tell me where the oil fund is. I want to repeat it.

I want to tell the Minister that he cannot set up any oil fund because he cannot have savings from a deficit. If there is a deficit of $230 billion, even before considering the oil fund, there is no oil stabilization fund, and while he may want to come and tell us that here, he cannot tell the IMF that. They will ask the same thing: Where is it? Is he going to borrow money to put in the oil fund? As my political leader said, the Member for San Fernando East, you are the only person to borrow and consider it savings. Excellent accountant!

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting is suspended for half-hour.

4.30 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

5.00 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. Speaker, when we took the break I was making the point that once again, the Minister of Finance has come to the Parliament with certain untruths. I make the point that this is not the only one. In the same budget speech a point that my colleague from Diego Martin East had to take up on page 17 of his budget contribution, is where the Minister informed us, quite nicely, that we have come a long way to rank No.5 among developing countries in fighting poverty.

Mr. Speaker, you were here when my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin East—based on information supplied by the United Nations Development Programme—indicated quite clearly that we have come a long way. We moved from position No.1 in 1995 to No.5 at present. While in 1995, on the Human Development Index, we were ranked 40th at present we are ranked 50th. In fact we have come a long way.

You also heard from the Member for Arouca South that this thing about coming to Parliament and telling untruth is not unique to the Minister of Finance. It seems to have permeated the Cabinet.

The Member for Caroni East seems to have forgotten what he said earlier with respect to the Water and Sewerage Authority and Severn Trent situation.
The Minister of Health, the person whom we would normally consider to be above reproach, in his contribution yesterday informed this Parliament that the National Health Insurance Scheme was based on some second tranche to be brought into effect somewhere in 2005. Again, the Member for Arouca had to correct him. In reporting on where we were, with respect to the National Health Insurance, we reported in our manifesto for 1995—we reported and stated quite clearly—that the work was done for the introduction of the National Health Insurance system, on a phased basis beginning in 1998. That is the reality. I remember as part of the Cabinet, the work done by Minister Eckstein in getting the unique identifier, doing all the proper preparatory work. The Minister is now saying 2005. This Government exhibits a habit that is well known to us who have been here for some time.

There was a previous government, not the PNM government, that was new to the game. It came in and talked about 30 years and he could not do this and that and they were able to do in five short years and so on. They were carrying on in that way. We counselled them that this is not the purpose of government: there is always work in progress. When a government comes in, it has to deal with the objective situation that is there; shut up and do the work to improve the quality of life for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They did not take us on. They continued in that vein. I just want to tell them that we have heard better cocks crow. [Desk thumping] Friend, we had them in pelau! You understand?

I say they were better cocks because while they were the PNM “B” team, these here are a bunch of PNM “C” team. I saw many comments on the newspapers, when I said Trinidad and Tobago is PNM country. I saw people writing all about. I saw my friend Sankersingh wrote from Couva and said that if I feel so, I can come and fight Couva South. I want to tell him that is the truth. The Member for Couva South is an old PNM. [Desk thumping] It is in that sense that I used the term “Trinidad and Tobago is PNM country.”

One just has to look. There is the Minister of Works and Transport, but who does he have to find to do the work? PNM! They have a Minister of Finance, a poor one at that! [Laughter] Who do they have to find? Do you understand, Mr. Speaker?

Dr. Rowley: Naparima.

Mr. K. Valley: Look Naparima! Mr. Foreign Affairs. It does not matter. Government comes government goes, he owns that!” That is mine! [Laughter] Tell them if they only try to move “yuh” is gone “yuh” gone. [Laughter] He is
my good friend. [ Interruption ] But you are nobody. [ Interruption ] They find that out. You boast that you did this and you did that. They are not putting you back. They said that while they thought they had a Minister of Trade & Industry and Minister of Consumer Affairs, who was supposed to be doing the people’s work, he was building bridges and roads in St. Joseph. They said they brought Carlos to do that.

5.10 p.m.

He had a right to see about negotiating treaties and market access deals. Tell me about them. All that I have seen is what I have left there. He has not built on anything that I have left. [ Desk thumping ]

The Member for Tobago East spoke yesterday and took up a little effort of the late Morris Marshall and the hon. Kenneth C. Valley. He said we criticized VAT and those state enterprises. Mr. Speaker, look through this whole document and there is not one word on VAT. It is not merely the Minister of Finance. It is all of them. The Member for St. Augustine talked about the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance—five years no mortgage. My colleague, the Member for La Brea, had to correct the records. [ Interruption ] Who is lying? I am lying? Mr. Speaker, that sorry lot.

What is important is the effect of the unplanned budget deficits of the Minister of Finance on the economy. When one reads the Central Bank report, one sees the fight it has year after year to control liquidity in the system. If a government is running those types of deficits, especially if they are unplanned, then it is putting more money into the system and people are like wild Indians—have money, will spend. They will demand goods and services, not merely locally produced goods and services, but also foreign. So, in the short term, the effect would be rising prices and demand for foreign exchange. When one looks at the interest rate in Trinidad and Tobago and sees how high it is, that is a direct effect of the Minister’s action. [ Desk thumping ]

However, there is another, more sinister effect. Because the deficit is caused by giving to a few friends millions of dollars, we will not see the effect on the economy. As these friends get the millions of dollars, they ship it out. So, the demand for foreign exchange is increased. [ Interruption ] That is what is causing it. As they give Ish and Brian and Steve, all of these people, millions of dollars surreptitiously, and they ship it out, there is a demand on foreign exchange.

Mr. Kuei Tung: [ Inaudible ] Mr. Speaker, I am asking for your protection, please.
Mr. Speaker: He says, as they give so-and-so and so-and-so, there is a demand for foreign exchange. That statement in itself does not go far enough to implicate you as Minister.

Mr. K. Valley: For the avoidance of doubt, Mr. Speaker, let me just assure the Minister, who has been my friend for a long time, that it was said as an example, without reference really to the Minister of Finance. I can use Tom, Dick and Harry, and perhaps I should. As they ship it out, there is a demand for foreign exchange and to protect the exchange rate, the Central Bank is then forced to keep the interest rate extremely high. When the interest rate is high, then small firms and even medium-sized firms, which seek financing, run into difficulty. So, there is that direct effect of economic activity because it crowds out the private sector who then seek financing from the commercial sector.

That is not all. There is an indirect correlation between interest rates and stock prices. So when you see the sluggish nature of the stock market, as has been the case since the beginning of the year, that is, at least in part, caused by the actions of this Minister of Finance as he comes to this House year after year telling us that he is going to finance this budget from surpluses and ends up with unplanned budget deficits. The cumulative effect of this is the undermining of the fundamentals of the economy that the Minister met.

To worsen the situation is the borrowing. In 1987, we heard a lot about the debt trap, and we spent years getting out of that. The Minister seems destined to put us right back. What can account—and I made an error earlier—it is not $5 billion, it is $6 billion the Minister borrowed in one year. The public debt moved from $24.1 billion to $30 billion in one year. Over the five-year period, it moved from $18.8 billion to $30 billion. The debt service is now $4.9 billion—almost $5 billion. That works out to 49 per cent of our tax revenue. Every dollar we earn, 49 cents must be allocated to repayment, just debt service. How much longer can we go on this way? Thank God the people of Trinidad and Tobago will shortly be given an opportunity to intervene. They are saying, “We just can’t go on this way”. [Desk thumping]

The fancy speech written by somebody for the Minister does not matter. I still cannot say the word “lie” in Parliament. It is packed with untruths: boasting about this and boasting about that; fictitious; coming to the Parliament with Aesop’s fables. That is what it is. [Interruption] I am coming to that. You know I will have to come to that.

Let us look at national savings. In 1995, national savings were 20.2 per cent of GDP. Do you know what it is in 1999, Mr. Speaker? It is 15.6 per cent. So, oil
prices are higher, we are saving less as a nation and they tell us all types of pretty things. But while they tell us that, understand that they are telling the IMF that foreign direct investment is tailing off. They boast about foreign investment over the period. I ask them quite simply: Why is it tailing off? Where are the initiatives they have taken to ensure that there would be a continuation of foreign investment?

Let us look at the Medium-Term Policy Framework 1997/1999. Let us look at some of the initiatives that this Government planned for that period. I am not going into the 1996/1998 period because they would argue, perhaps, that 1996 was their first year in office and they would have to get their feet wet and so on. Let us look at some of the things they told the population via this document that they would have implemented over the planned period, 1997/1999:

1) “Introduction of the Investment Promotion Act;”

Well, perhaps the Minister would say that he did. I remember he brought an Act to the Parliament, but where is it now? Where is this new Foreign Investment Act? Could not kill it if it were a good Act.

2) Continue expenditure restraint.

That sentence implies that at least they acknowledge that there was expenditure restraint in the prior period, but where is the expenditure restraint when we are having budget deficit after budget deficit? There was not one year of surplus.

[Interruption]

According to me? According to your documents. You check them.

For the avoidance of doubt, let me put on record that in 1996, the figure for capital expenditure in the Review of the Economy is incorrect. When we look at the Draft Estimates of Revenue, 1998 which indicates the actual outturn—the Auditor General’s figures for 1996—we see that the development programme was $949.9 million, and not as stated in the Review of the Economy 1996, some $580 million. We also see that given a capital expenditure programme for 1996 of $949.9 million, the deficit for 1996 was $208.1 million.

Mr. Speaker, in one year he started taking as capital receipts the proceeds of divestment. The Article 4 consultation last year had an interesting point to make on that. Let me just tell you what it says. It says, just as a footnote:

“The staff agreed with the Authority’s request to present divestment proceeds above the line from 1997.”
Prior to 1997 they were financing items, but from 1997, to colour the book, to make it look like a surplus, they convinced the IMF to allow us to put it above the line to allow consistency with the published budget. This includes the Methanol Company sale of $735.3 million in 1997. This is the IMF Article IV consultation, of last year. [ Interruption ] It is clear that these divestment proceeds and so forth are financing items. It is not considered capital revenue. Even after doing that, there are still deficits.

I talk about the initiative, Mr. Speaker, and I make the point that there have been no expenditure restraints.

5.25 p.m.

We continue. Reform of property taxation. What has happened with that? Can anybody tell us? Can the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, former Minister of Planning and Development, tell us? Can the Attorney General tell us? He is still to speak. Will the Minister of Finance tell us? Are we going to have answers this afternoon? That is why I am speaking now, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to wait and speak just before the Minister but I said, no, this is an election year so the Government must account to the people of Trinidad and Tobago for their stewardship. There are at least four front-line speakers left to speak. We need answers, Mr. Speaker.

Introduce the Mutual Funds Bill. Where is it? Mr. Speaker, we have a mutual fund industry in Trinidad and Tobago. We had that difficulty before, you know. Do you remember the non-banks? SWAIT and all of the others were operating in a virtually unrestrained legal environment, and remember the problem they caused in the 1980s? Well, we are sitting on another time bomb because there are mutual funds operating in Trinidad and Tobago. The only one governed by legislation is the Unit Trust. All the others—in 1997 we had been promised mutual funds legislation. Where is it? This is 2000, Mr. Speaker. That is a growth area and if one looks at the funds in the mutual funds one will see it is quite large—no legal environment. They are thinking only about sharing money up and down the place.

Implement the amended Insurance Industries Act. Where is it? Establish and operationalize a competition policy framework. Where is it? [ Interruption ] You? CBC office—and the Member would not be here to get it out. [ Interruption ] The Member said that.

Mr. Assam: No, I might be in the gallery.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for Diego Martin Central has expired. [Mr. E. Williams and Hon. G. Singh rose]
Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Mr. E. Williams]

Mr. Speaker: That is the significance of one not speaking before one is recognized by the Speaker, where two people apparently get up together. In fact, I was just about to recognize the Member for Caroni East but—

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. K. Valley: [Desk thumping] Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleague from Port of Spain South as well as the acting Chief Whip. Mr. Speaker, No. 7, adopt a Caricom harmonized fiscal incentive regime. I ask again—I think that is either the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Trade and Industry. I just want to find out where we are on that today—adopt a Caricom harmonized fiscal incentive regime. Harmonized fiscal incentive—[Interruption] They have harmonized the fiscal incentive regime? Congratulations. Implement—[Interruption] I know. There is no harmonized fiscal incentive regime. [Interruption] Implement the industrial policy.

Mr. Assam: That is in place. Totally implemented. I did the industrial policy in the House.

Mr. K. Valley: [Laughter] Oh Lord. Introduce the Investment Promotions Act and provide other incentives to stimulate foreign direct investment.

Mr. Manning: Let me hear you.

Mr. Speaker: Order please. Order please. Order.

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, one can continue and continue. No initiative has been taken by this Government to move the economy to the next level of growth. Even what they said they would do they failed to do but, more significantly, when they came in, there were at least two significant initiatives, one started by my colleague when he was in another place, the Orinoco/Apure Project, and one wonders why, now that he is there, he is not continuing with that initiative. But one understands, you know, if one is among a group that is inactive, lacking in drive, then one settles at that level. That is still a very important initiative, Mr. Speaker, and one that would be on the front burner once again very soon.

The other is, of course, the Piarco hub concept, positioning Piarco as an alternative route in South America. Another important initiative, Mr. Speaker—and one understands why the Member for Oropouche had to be removed from Planning and Development. He has listened to this side. He is aware that this side
had the airport planned at some $400 million but he is telling me I am against the airport. I am not against the airport. We are not against the airport. We all agree that there is need for a new airport terminal. We are against the $1.3 billion giveaway that is now the airport. You understand? So this is where we are and we ask the question, where do we go from here?

Mr. Speaker, the Member for San Fernando East in his contribution outlined 10 important initiatives that a PNM government would implement during the first year in office, that is, 2001. The first one is a tax reduction, and we say that we would move to have the rates reduced by 5 per cent in the first year—from 35 per cent to 30 per cent; from 28 per cent to 23 per cent. That, Mr. Speaker—[Interruption]

**Sen. Kuei Tung:** How much would that cost?

**Mr. K. Valley:** $184.7 million. [Interruption] Go back—well, it is an investment because experience has shown that as one reduces tax one provides an incentive not only for compliance but for further economic activity and that one recoups rather quickly. The Member for St. Joseph pooh-poohed the initiative and talked about the PNM. Mr. Speaker, what the population knows about the PNM is that we deliver on our promises. When we said in 1991, as we said in this Manifesto, and let me read it—[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Order please, order.

**Mr. K. Valley:** On the public sector pay issue, Mr. Speaker, because that is the second initiative, we said that what we would do immediately on coming into government is to stop the accumulation and then sit with the unions to negotiate the payment of the arrears, either in cash—we said it carefully, you know, Mr. Speaker—or otherwise. That is what we said on page 53 of the Manifesto. On March 1, 1992 government stopped the accumulation, paid public servants their correct salary and then started negotiations with the public sector unions with respect to the arrears.

You would note that when the first set of bonds was issued, the signature was that of the Minister of Finance, Mr. Wendell Mottley. Understand that. So we had started implementing the payment of the arrears by 1995. The population knows that it can depend on the PNM to do as it promises. [Desk thumping] So that when we promise public servants, bearing in mind that they have not had an increase since 1983, that one of our first acts would be to correct that, now that the economy is in some seven years of growth, they must share in the cake also. [Desk thumping] It must not be the few. If I am asked where are we getting the
money from, friend, I will say, “Well friend, listen nuh, if you could spend $1.3 billion on the airport tell me why you cannot increase public servants’ salaries?” [Desk thumping] They have been living on 1983 incomes. Understand—[ Interruption]  

Mr. Speaker: Order please! Order please! 

Mr. K. Valley: Understand that. [ Interruption]  

Mr. Speaker: Order. 

Mr. K. Valley: You know, I am hearing comments from them such as, “Sell the airports to pay”. So they do not pay public servants. They want public servants—they are extremely important for efficiency in public administration and if they are—[ Interruption] Mr. Speaker, you know there are certain persons in this House to whom I have very little to say. I just ignore their existence. I deny their existence, you understand. So that, Mr. Speaker, I really wish you would just counsel the Member for Arima, you understand. So that if we want efficiency in public administration, we—[ Interruption] He better had. Consultant on what, different types of what, posies, potties? How to make them? [ Interruption] So I say, Mr. Speaker, that if we want—[ Interruption]  

I do not have any million dollars, you know. I did not get any million dollars, you understand. I did not get any million dollars from anybody, you understand, you know. I live within my means. 

Mr. Speaker: Order please, order please. The Member for Arima, may I just say to you that indeed what the Member for Diego Martin Central was doing was appealing for my protection. I thought that good sense would prevail and I did not worry to get up and formally do anything, but if you continue to needle him and he behaves like this, it is absolutely necessary that I should get up and ask you please to allow him to make his contribution. 

Dr. Griffith: Very well, Mr. Speaker. 

Mr. K. Valley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So I make the point that if we need efficiency in public administration, we know we would have to pay our public servants properly. Public servants at present, Mr. Speaker, you see it in the actions, the morale is extremely low and we need to correct that immediately. 

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, especially when we look at the fall in the savings rate, we are aware that we need to do something to encourage savings in this economy. We say that to any individual his home is most important, and saving towards his retirement is extremely important also and that any vehicle, any incentive, ought
to be targeted to those two to encourage savings in the economy. We say that we need to increase the mortgage interest deduction back to $36,000 per annum. We need also, Mr. Speaker, to increase the maximum one can be provided with for retirement from two-thirds of final salary to 100 per cent of final salary.

5.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, either we do that or we start the indexation of pension plan. The indexation of pension plan is open-ended. You do not know what inflation rates would be, therefore, the safer thing to do in the first instance, at least, is to move to the provision of 100 per cent of final salary pension and allowing companies and individuals to save towards that goal.

Mr. Speaker, any economist will tell you that the level of national savings is an important indicator concerning the future well-being of the economy. We have to improve the savings rate in the economy.

We have mentioned other initiatives: health care, so ably dealt with this afternoon by my colleague, the Member for Arouca South and the major initiative there is the early implementation of the National Health Insurance Scheme. We have been talking about that for too long now and we have to ensure that every individual can be provided with the health care that is needed in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, education—and whenever I hear the present Government on this education kick, I cannot help but remember last year’s local government election. You would remember, Mr. Speaker, that the big thing was hanging for the local government election last year. Hang them! We will hang murderers. The Government had public meetings up and down the country, it brought a bill to the Parliament that was obnoxious which we could not support. It went ahead and hung nine persons and then hanging was no longer an issue. So I have to say that this Government is very macabre. On the last occasion they used those persons, on this occasion, they are using little children. They are not concerned one iota about the frustration that they would cause you know. They blessed a primary school, call it a secondary school, put some children in it and say that they are going to secondary school. Where are we going, what are we really doing?

Miss Nicholson: They are dishonest.

Mr. K. Valley: They are using the little children for this general election and I simply want to tell them the outturn then, would be the same as the outturn now. Understand that. [Desk thumping] Because while they feel that they can fool the
people of Trinidad and Tobago, that is not so. The PNM has already educated the population of Trinidad and Tobago and they cannot be fooled by them.

The other thing is, the jokes they make. Every year they tell the senior citizens they get $100 more. This time they are “tiefing” the money. That is a wrong word, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize. They are squandering and doing all types of things with the public purse giving $100 to the senior citizens and feel they could fool them. The senior citizens are all coming out to vote for the PNM. [Desk thumping] The lame, those in wheelchairs, the blind, everyone of them we would be bringing to the voting stations and they are voting PNM because even though they are old, they are saying they cannot go on that way, they want to—[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: May I please once more appeal for order and allow the Member to be heard in silence.

Mr. K. Valley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The PNM would continue to provide quality education to our young people providing alternatives because we are aware that they have different talents. Whilst the sum of one’s talents must be equal to the sum of the other, they have different talents and the education system must cater for the varying needs of our young people. Since we are conscious of the fact also that children develop at different ages our programme would be so geared to allow for that. That is PNM’s education. They cannot fool the population, it is Dr. Williams who said: to educate is to liberate. You want to hook on to that now and telling people to deal with the last five years and not go back to the last 30 years. You are always talking about 30 years this, and 30 years that, make up your mind. This is the PNM, proud and willing to go forward to provide good governance to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, our 10-point plan includes our initiatives with respect to Tobago. I think we all agreed that the Tobago House of Assembly Act was done, not only hurriedly, but with other motives and that we need to sit soberly and look at that Act once more and effect the amendments necessary so that Trinidad and Tobago can continue as the unitary state in peace and harmony.

Community participation. The reality of the 21st Century is that as the world becomes a global village, it becomes extremely important that we develop our communities, that we provide for the involvement and inclusion so that we can have the contribution and commitment of all our people in communities. The present Minister of Local Government has compromised that effort, Mr. Speaker. While the last PNM government was moving towards autonomy in the local government system, the Minister has taken to himself the role of Chairman, and
Mayors of all the regional corporations determine what has to be done, what roads have to be fixed and so forth because they are little boys. He wants better councillors. We want better MPs—[Desk thumping] Even the Prime Minister is saying that he wants a better MP for Pointe-a-Pierre. So he is not the only one who wants better representation, his Prime Minister wants better representation also.

Our system would emphasize power and authority in the communities. Most of what the central government is now doing in the communities would be passed on to those communities with their representative being held accountable by the people of those communities. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, for me, at all times the issue of security cannot be dealt with without emphasizing the prevention, the environment, building the communities, providing health care alternatives for young people and so forth. At the same time, we know that in the short term we have to do certain things so that people would feel safer and we really need to depoliticize the issue of crime and punishment. I think the Government must be wiser now; who do the crime, must do the time.

If there is one area that, perhaps, calls for a joint select committee approach, it would be the issue of security and perhaps the last one, energy, which is our major resource.

5.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition has outlined a case for the Government to answer. We have said that the Government is guilty of sqandermania, of corrupt dealings, of coming to the Parliament and telling untruths and we are hoping that in the time available to the Members, 75 minutes by four, that is 300 minutes—we have some in the back there also who can help—our hope is that the Members would use this opportunity to explain to the population why, in view of all the circumstances, they have been unable to balance their budget any of the five years; why they have increased the public debt by some $11 billion; why they are now demanding 49 cents on each tax dollar to service that public debt, and why they have undertaken so many nefarious projects. In other words, our quest is accountability.

I thank you. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Hon. Trevor Sudama): Mr. Speaker, I have sat here for three days now listening to the same song—stuck record—on the part of those on the other side, talking about
sqandermania, mismanagement, corruption and so forth. Mr. Speaker, since 1996 I have not heard anything else—

**Dr. Rowley:** True.

**Hon. T. Sudama:**—yet this economy is booming. We have the lowest level of unemployment in the last 20-odd years, ever since the oil boom. We have more educational opportunities today than we have ever had in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, Williams or no Williams.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to spend my time talking about those things. They have been dealt with in the past; they will be dealt with. I have a lot to say this evening. I want to talk about the so-called 10-point plan, the election manifesto of the PNM. I want to say something about the airport. I want to say something about Caroni (1975) Limited. I want to deal with our performance in agriculture over the last few years and our vision for agriculture in the next term when we will be returned to office. [*Desk thumping.*]

Today, what I want to do is rip through the pretensions of the PNM as embodied in this so-called 10-point plan. I want to rip through their incipient election manifesto. So if this evening I am called Jack the Ripper, I would not mind. [*Laughter*] I want to go through this plan, point by point, this so-called plan, and I want to deal with the Member for San Fernando East, because he may not be here for me to deal with him in the next term.

The first thing is, what is a plan? Is what was presented here a plan? Do they know what a plan is? What they presented here, they do not know the difference between a plan and some action items. One devises a plan on the basis of some empirical analysis of the reality and then on that basis one devises a vision and a strategy for the future. What we have had here is an eclectic ad hoc mishmash of things put together and called a ten-point plan. This is what we have been presented with.

**Mr. Imbert:** In ripping form.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** The other thing I want to say, is that this plan talks about foregoing revenues and increasing expenditures. Mr. Speaker, I just want to refer briefly to it. Item No. 1: Immediate reduction in tax rates—foregoing of revenues. Item No. 2: Immediate increase in public servants’ compensation—adding to expenditure. No. 3: Encourage savings—but in doing so, they are foregoing revenues by talking about pension income qualifying for favourable tax element. So they are foregoing revenues. No. 4: Infrastructure to develop entrepreneurship,
grant funding for innovators—adding to expenditure. No. 5: Immediate and complete restructuring of the health ministry—I have to spend some time on this one—adding to expenditure. It will cost money to set up the national insurance plan and so forth. No. 6: Education. Secondary education will continue to be a main focus of the PNM; quality universal secondary education.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Does that fall from the sky? Does this cost money, quality universal secondary education, for which we have been berated? They said well, we are trying to push too many things into a short period of time and we do not have the resources to do this. Where are they going to get this money, adding to expenditure?

It goes on: Necessary resources for defence force and protective services to provide them with training, equipment, support services—and you name it, dangling a carrot, adding to expenditure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when one foregoes revenues and adds to expenditures, what is one really doing? One is widening the gap between revenues available and one's commitments to expenditure. Firstly, where is one going to get the money to do this? Let me say very clearly, we are committed to reducing taxation as we have done over the last five years. [Desk thumping] But we have done so with a very clear appreciation of what the revenue situation is going to be. They do not know what the revenue situation is going to be, but immediate reduction of taxes. That is the harebrained first point of the Member for San Fernando East.

They who put up increases in taxes from 1991 to 1995 but now, as an election gimmick, are going to reduce taxes even further than we have promised to reduce taxes. Harebrained! It is a kind of kite-flying. The Member for San Fernando East is engaged in frenzied kite-flying to try to fool this electorate. Well I want to tell him, when that string “buss” he will not only walk away, he will fly away. [Laughter]

That is the first thing I want to point out. This thing is so totally unrealistic in terms of the funding capacity. Nobody is telling us what it is going to cost. The Member reminds me of a fellow who goes to a restaurant and picks up the menu and he decides to order. He does not know where the money is coming from. And this is a priceless menu. What he is provided with is a priceless menu. So he orders. When the time comes to pay, he cannot pay. I will tell you what happens in restaurants. If you cannot pay after you eat the people's food, they either call the police to lock you up or they send you to wash the dishes. It seems like he will
have to spend, if the worst comes to the worst and the PNM ever gets back into office, a great deal of time either in police custody or washing dishes. A large degree of his time will be spent on that.

It is just to show you this airy-fairy, unrealistic so-called plan. I do not know how they came up with that. Apart from that, there is the brazen plagiarism that is involved in this. When you plagiarize—tedious tautology that we have heard—when I went to school they used to call it follow-fashion, but I think a better description is, “monkey see, monkey want to do”. In all these things here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have already put plans in place, we were already doing things and they want to jump on this bandwagon, “monkey see, monkey want to do”.

So on the issue of reduction in tax rates for persons and corporations, I have already said that when one embarks on such a programme one has to have a clear appreciation of what one's revenue flows are going to be. Because how does one fund one's expenditure? One funds one's governmental expenditure from recurrent revenues and from borrowings. Some capital revenues, maybe, but from revenues and from borrowings. There is no magic about this. If the revenues are not forthcoming for one to do all these things, is one going to fund the expenditure one promised on the basis of borrowing? Is one going to borrow to pay public servants? Is one going to deal with recurrent expenditure from borrowings? Is that their fiscal philosophy? I want to know.

If they borrow money for developmental purposes, that is another thing. If we borrow money to build an airport that is for developmental purposes. If they borrow money to try to meet recurrent expenditure, I wonder which person who has any sense, any financial sense, will condone such a proposal from this Member for San Fernando East.

Mr. Valley: If the Member would give way. I just want to know if he will give public servants an increase.

Hon. T. Sudama: Sit! I have limited time and I have a lot of things to say, as I have told you. I do not want any foolish interruptions coming from the Member.

So, reduction in tax rate; flying a kite. Look at this foolishness: Immediate increase in public servants' compensation. But one has to negotiate the increase. But he says, as soon as they get in there; immediate increase, write a cheque; immediate to public servants. Foolishness!

Mr. Deputy Speaker, belatedly, they realize they have to engage in negotiations. We have already engaged in negotiations. We are already on the
point of finalizing proposals to pay public servants. [Desk thumping] What are they coming with, “monkey see, monkey want to do”? They have absolutely no vision. You see, I want to tell you that it is not just a question of paying the increased compensation to public servants; it is a question of having a public service that is an efficient, effective delivery tool for the services that Government offers.

So what is needed is not only to pay public servants, but a vision of a public service, a kind of public service that is an efficient machinery for the delivery of public services. You want to have a public service that is adequately trained; that is performance driven; that is incentive stimulated and that is action operated. In short, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you want to have a professional public service and you do not get that merely by paying them increased salaries. There must be a context and an environment which you will inculcate in order to get the professional and efficient public service.

6.05 p.m.

There is a holistic approach. One wants to have a public service where there would be rewards for merit and performance. One also wants to be able to deal with indolence, indifference and lack of performance in the public service. Jumping on the bandwagon of increased public servants’ pay is all they can think about. They have limited vision. Myopia! The Member should have surgery on his eyes as well to improve his vision.

Hear this one. They will encourage savings. It is under the PNM that the national savings rate went down to 10 per cent. Do you know why? They encouraged squandermania, consumerism and spendthrift, because they are the children of a spendthrift culture, the PNM. The only time the savings rate went up under the PNM was when there were high oil prices. The public savings rate went up because there was a windfall. They want to encourage savings, but they are the ones who impose interest and tax on interest savings.

This UNC Government reduced the tax on interest savings twice and brought it down to 5 per cent. If anybody can claim they want to encourage savings in this country, it is this Government. They want to encourage savings and they feel the only way to do it is by pensions. That is, they would deal with pension income qualifying for favourable tax treatment. That is important. Is that the only way they would give people incentive for saving? What about people who want to save to invest? Are they giving them any incentive? Did they talk about any incentives here for them to invest? Did they talk about widening the instruments
in which people can invest in order to promote higher savings in this country? Do they have any idea about that? All they know is portability of pension, and pension income qualifying treatment. They do not know any mechanism to increase the savings rate in this country. They have no vision. This is a wishy-washy 10-point plan that is not worth the paper on which it is written.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the next point is infrastructure to develop entrepreneurship. Imagine the PNM talking about infrastructure to develop entrepreneurship. This is the government that inculcated a dependency syndrome in this country. Dependency is the opposite of entrepreneurship. Do you understand that? You were the facilitators of patronage in this country. Do you remember the IDC? Do you remember the hundreds of millions that had to be written off as loans under the IDC; where they gave to their friends and relations hundreds of millions of dollars? They thought that was entrepreneurship. Patronage is not entrepreneurship.

It is this Government that has sought to empower the people of Trinidad and Tobago: small business, micro-enterprise, macro-enterprise—everybody. This Government sought to empower them in order to develop a sense and a capacity for entrepreneurship. With entrepreneurship one would like to develop across the spectrum. Entrepreneurship is not only about big business; it is about the small man and his capacity to innovate, look after himself and create wealth. That is what entrepreneurship is all about. He does not have a clue. He came here because he has to deliver a speech.

Here this one. They said that they will grant funding to innovators. What track record does the PNM have in dealing with innovation and invention? Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government on September 21, at the Trinidad Hilton, will be giving awards for inventors and innovators. I would like to invite the Member. That is part of the context in which we are dealing: not only identifying individuals who have shown themselves to be inventors and innovators but, of course, providing the environment, fiscal relief for research and development activities in all the corporations which are so engaged, and assisting individuals with scholarships, training and opportunities to become inventors and innovators. The UNC is having a programme to promote innovation and invention in Trinidad and Tobago, and the PNM jumps on the bandwagon—monkey see, monkey want to do.

What do they want? They want immediate and complete restructuring of the health ministries through the Regional Health Authorities (RHAs), where the Ministry of Health becomes a policy-making unit. The RHAs would be the
delivery unit, and the financing system would be carried out by the National Health Insurance System.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, every time they talk about health—the Member for Arouca South, she is not here—my blood boils. Do you know why? It is under the PNM government, they were wrapping newborn babies in brown paper. [Desk thumping] They come here to talk about health. It is under the PNM government they were lining up the corridors of the hospitals with beds, and sometimes without. They come here to talk about improvement in health and what they are going to do about health in the next few years. They have no shame. Under the PNM government, there were no lifts working in any of the hospitals in this country. Both patients and the dead had to be carried up to the wards using the steps. Under the PNM government, we did not have an adequate water supply in the hospitals. Under the PNM government, relatives had to take food to patients in the hospital. Under the PNM government, there were no linens in the hospitals; the relatives of patients had to bring linen into the hospitals, and they talk about health.

They introduced the whole reform of the health sector. I remember when I was here in the House—I think it was 1992—and Mr. Eckstein was the Minister then. They made a fanfare that they were going to restructure the health sector. When they introduced it, they claimed that they had the testicular fortitude of a government in order to take this thing and introduce and deal with the restructuring of the health sector.

All I can say is that this fortitude of the PNM government, testicular or otherwise, atrophied very shortly after, because nothing was done for the rest of the PNM term. I think that atrophy may be reflected in the fact that the Member for San Fernando East was so secretive about his surgery in Cuba.

And the health sector continued to decline until it was in a state of crisis in 1995 when this Government took over. Giving mental patients eggnog and killing them. This was done under a PNM government and they come here to talk about restructuring of the health sector. [ Interruption ] I say today if I am called “Jack the Ripper” that is all right. I will deal with them.

6.15 p.m.

They come here to boast about Dr. Williams and education. Yes, we give credit for Dr. Williams’ vision, but under that PNM this country produced more functional illiterates than ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago going through the school system under this PNM government, but they come here to talk
about education will be a main focus and what they want is quality universal secondary education and they are going to do it right away. Everything is immediate. Quality, universal secondary education, immediate. This is the same government that could not build a secondary school between 1991 and 1995, not one single secondary school, but come here to talk about universal quality education. [Desk thumping] They want to give more funding to the University of the West Indies and they want to utilize the facilities to increase the intake of the university and all that foolishness.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was that PNM government and other government which chalked up an arrears to the University of the West Indies to the tune of $300 million. When the UNC took office at the end of 1995, it could not even pay the current liabilities for the university. Now they want to increase the funding, double the intake and utilize facilities and so forth, this “jokey Joe” fella from San Fernando East. They want to facilitate this higher intake of qualified applicants in a parallel degree programme. They do not know of what they speak.

What has happened to the university is that enrolment has been falling. How are you going to increase qualified applicants when in the current situation enrolment is falling? Not only that, we spend a fair amount of money on the University of the West Indies. It is not a question of money. We have been paying the arrears for the last five years. Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know what the Trinidad and Tobago Government spent on the University of the West Indies? In 1995, we spent $189,500,000; in 1996, $199 million; in 1997, $272 million; in 1998; $252 million and in 1999, $372 million on the University of the West Indies. The issue is not how much we spent, the issue is how the facilities are utilized and made more efficient and effective as an institution for delivery of tertiary education. That is the issue. They have not got a clue. All they come with is this foolish 10-point plan and talk about increasing funding to the university. This is the reality.

Furthermore, you cannot talk about the University of the West Indies in isolation to other tertiary level institutions, and our view was that in order to reduce cost, what you do, is for the first two years, you let students go to other tertiary level institutions where it is less costly, and possibly in the last year or two, they go to university and then graduate. So by utilizing the facilities of other tertiary level institutions, you are going to reduce the cost of tertiary education in Trinidad and Tobago. That is a vision of the UNC.
This thing about College of Science Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago, again they are talking about COSTAATT. We already have COSTAATT going, we are looking at all the tertiary level institutions and bringing them under one heading and we are already moving ahead with that, and through distance learning we have all these facilities. As if they have not heard about it, and merely to put something they say we will have two COSTAATTs instead of one. Monkey see, monkey want to do. This is the whole foolishness we have about their 10-point plan.

Under the PNM, Tobago was regarded as a colony. We passed the Tobago House of Assembly Act to give them more autonomy. This Government has given more financial resources to Tobago in the last five years than were given in any previous five years in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] This UNC Government. He was the Minister for Tobago Affairs at one time, you know. Do you remember that? He was a parliamentary secretary and they had to run him from Tobago. Do you know why? Because of his attitude, they had to run him from Tobago and now he wants to have consultation about Tobago. I say well, good luck, go and have consultation.

Miss Nicholson: We running all “yuh”. You cannot come back, you are too wicked.

Hon. T. Sudama: Then they have management of the communities and they want to give it back to the communities. This is the PNM who had every village council controlled by a PNM party group and every community centre under the control of the PNM. So they want to have the good old days and give back the communities to the PNM party groups. [Desk thumping] This Government has a track record of community empowerment throughout Trinidad and Tobago in all the various programmes we had. Do not talk about giving the defence force and protective services the necessary resources for training equipment and so forth. I wonder what they were doing between 1991 and 1995? Did they not know that the defence force and the protective services needed all these facilities?

In this so-called plan they did not say anything about the diversification of the economy and about agriculture. Of course, they never had any interest in agriculture. For the last 40 years of their history, they were not concerned about agriculture in this country so I did not expect them to say anything about it. They did not say anything about manufacturing, or about tourism, so all this plan about which they are talking is not grounded in economic growth and the diversification of the economy and the creation of employment opportunities. It is this airy-fairy, high flying 10-point plan.
Mr. Deputy Speaker, my time is running out; I would like to deal with them a little more at length, but let me move on to something else. I want to say something about the airport. First of all, there was the Member for Diego Martin West. They are not here, you know, they do not want to listen, they talk their foolishness and run away. He says the airport is going to cost us $3.6 billion. Do you know how it was checked? They say we borrowed money. Fine, we did not borrow all the money, we borrowed some money, but we borrowed money. They say we have to pay interest on the borrowed money. Fine, but they say after we borrowed money and pay the interest to add to that, you have to add the expenditure on the airport. So I wonder for what we were borrowing this money. That is how he arrived at $3.6 billion. You have $1.3, then he added the expenditure of $1.3 billion and he arrived at that. The man cannot even do simple arithmetic but he sits on the Front Bench of the PNM. Ridiculous!

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are comparing their $400 million or $500 million airport to what we are proposing here. Let me explain what happened. In their proposal with Project Pride, they were projecting a one-storey terminal with 10 gates. Do you know what we are building? A two-storey terminal with 17 gates, so do you not expect that this terminal will cost more money than their mini one-storey with 10 gates?

Secondly, that estimate was seven years ago, 1992 or whenever. The prices have moved from 1992 to 1999, surely you have to accommodate an increase in prices. Secondly, the technology of 1992 under which they were building their much vaunted Project Pride has changed and with the newer technology there is going to be increased cost. Today we have the most advanced technology; fibre optics and whatever and 100 per cent of the baggage would be x-rayed and all these things cost money, Mr. Deputy-Speaker, a 17-gate, two-storey building, and their terminal building would have cost them US $80 million which is just about TT $500 million.

I would give a breakdown of what this airport is actually costing so this country will know and will not rely on the lies. This is not a case of lies, half truths and innuendoes you know, this is a case of lies, damn lies and the PNM. The foundation and steel works package is costing $153 million; the roofing is costing $13 million; these are rough figures. The enclosure and the interior CP9, package nine is costing $209 million; electrical, $33 million; plumbing $20 million and air-conditioning, $34 million. When we add that up, we get an airport terminal for $562 million, but you have to put in specialized equipment to get an airport functioning. When you add the specialized equipment, it costs $189 million so
that the building then costs $751 million, but we are building a different kind of airport with much more space, a lot more infrastructure, space for parking and the earthworks, the grubbing and clearing cost $35 million.

6.30 p.m.

Airside paving cost—$187 million; landside paving—$31 million; landscaping—$4 million and the site utilities cost—$41 million. So that, when these costs are added—airside, landside, landscaping and site utilities, we get a total of $298 million. When we add the other costs that I have spoken about we have a direct airport cost of $1,000,049 million. These are the facts, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The other point that was raised was, the Member called out engineers’ estimates and contract figures. Anybody in the building industry will know that the engineer makes an estimate on whatever basis of information he has, but when the thing goes out for bidding, then the contractors bid on the basis of the scope of works that is given to them, and that is the critical thing. But what is worse is that NIPDEC, representing the client, from whom I believe they got their information, were the ones to supervise and certify the contracts. They are the ones who are feeding the PNM with information. Are they derelict in their duties? [Laughter] Was NIPDEC derelict in their duties in certifying the accuracy of these figures? Why did they recommend the signing of the contracts if that was the case? So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think what has been said here is a lot of hoo-ha about this airport, charges of corruption, innuendoes, lies and damned lies the PNM has been instituting.

I want to put on record a letter, from the principal of Birk Hillman, which was sent to the Speaker of this House because, you see, they use the cover of parliamentary privilege to say all sorts of things about all sorts of people. They would not say it outside, you know. They would not just go into Abercromby Street and say it—all sorts of charges and allegations of corruption. Let me read this letter, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is addressed to the Speaker of the House. It is dated September 6; that is today’s date, and it says:

“Dear Sir:

It has been brought to our attention that certain statements were made in Parliament tending to reflect discreditably on Birk Hillman Consultants, Inc.

Birk Hillman Consultants, Inc. wishes to state that it is false to say or imply that Birk Hillman Consultants, Inc. made any payment to Overseas
Communications Investment Corp. on behalf of NIPDEC or that NIPDEC made any payment to Overseas Communications Investment Corp. as alleged or at all.

At a time when Mr. Noel Garcia was General Manager of NIPDEC, NIPDEC was afforded full inspection of Birk Hillman Consultants, Inc. books relating to the Airport Project and full explanations of everything relating to it. This was done on the basis of confidentiality, which unhappily has not been observed.

Overseas Communications Investment Corp. is an investment holding company fully owned by shareholders of Birk Hillman Consultants, Inc. It is incorporated in Florida and the company has never made any payment to any public official or public servant.

A financial transaction between Birk Hillman Consultants, Inc. and Overseas Communications Investment Corp. was queried during the inspection, this transaction had no bearing on the contractual relationship between Birk Hillman Consultants, Inc. and NIPDEC concerning the Airport project. Accordingly, there was no obligation to give NIPDEC any information about it, as was pointed out at the time.

The company further denies that it has made any payment of any kind to any public official or ghost company for the purpose of obtaining any contract as alleged or at all and resents the unwarranted attack on its integrity and reputation.

Yours truly,

Birk Hillman Consultants, Inc.
Eduardo Hillman-Waller, R.A.
Principal"

Now, I put this on record, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because if Birk Hillman is making a categorical denial about any relationship with any public servant or government official, and the Opposition has the evidence, please go to the police. We have said so now and we have said so in the past. Go to the police if they have the evidence. This is a categorical denial.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me say a little something briefly about Caroni (1975) Limited because my time is running out, but I want to clear up certain things.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for Oropouche has expired.
Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Hon. R. L. Maharaj]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon T. Sudama: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. First of all, the Member for San Fernando East came here to put on the record all sorts of falsehoods, lies and damned lies, and the PNM—he said, for example, that Caroni (1975) Limited has chalked up accumulated losses and has been supported by the Treasury to the tune of $1 billion with no end in sight. Then he said in another part of his contribution, “Well, it is $800 million”. He should make up his mind. Is it $800 million or $1 billion? Let me give you the facts for Caroni (1975) Limited since 1996, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In the year 1996 the Treasury supported Caroni (1975) Limited with $55 million. In 1997 it was $63 million. Then we had the very difficult year, 1998—1999 where there were bad weather conditions, the froghopper infestation, the fall in prices and so forth, and we had an extremely difficult year that year. We supported Caroni (1975) Limited from the 1st to the 30th of September, 1998 to the tune of $112 million. In 1998/1999 we supported them with $100 million and in 1999—2000, that is the end of this fiscal year, another $100 million. So that for the five years, Caroni (1975) Limited was supported to the tune of $430 million from the Treasury. I do not know where he got this $1 billion and this $800 million, because they are in the habit of coming here and putting down falsehoods.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will have to spend some other time to talk about Caroni (1975) Limited in the context of what we are doing. We are trying to get private sector investment for Caroni (1975) Limited. We are trying to get the distillery partially divested. We are going to get citrus and rice. So as we get private sector participation we are going to reduce the losses of Caroni (1975) Limited and the need for the kind of cash support we have been providing and then move to other aspects of the operation of Caroni (1975) Limited, whether it is livestock or sugar cane cultivation where we want to go to farmers and so forth; but there is a whole programme to do this. I do not want to get too involved.

I just want, for the records, to indicate that we have tried to make a determined effort to try to pull Caroni (1975) Limited around, but it is a structural problem. Caroni (1975) Limited is producing something which has little value in the international markets.

Mr. Manning: What, therefore, do you do?
Hon. T. Sudama: Let me just put this on the record. In the planning and execution of the year 2000 crop we sought to increase revenues and reduce costs. The company produced 144,068 tonnes of cane more than it did in 1999, despite the unseasonal weather. It produced 114,365 tonnes of sugar in 2000 as against 91,914 in 1999, which meant an increase of 22,421 tonnes of sugar produced over the last fiscal year. [ Interruption] If the Member listens he will get some appreciation of what—moreover, in addition to its local production of 114,365 tonnes of raw sugar, it imported 56,000 tonnes of raw sugar which was used as refinery feedstock. It therefore processed in 2000 a total of 170,365 tonnes of raw sugar, which was the highest volume of raw sugar produced since the company was taken over in 1975—highest volume processed, refined.

Despite this phenomenal level, the total revenues of the company declined in 2000 by $3 million; despite the increased production, increased processing. In 1999, total revenues amounted to $418.5 million while in 2000 it declined to $415.5 million, and there are a number of reasons for this. The depressed international prices is one such reason. At one point sugar was selling on the international market at US .05 cents per pound, which turns to US $100 per tonne, which is $630 per tonne for something which is costing more than $5,000 a tonne to produce.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank the hon. Minister for giving way. I wonder if he would be kind to tell us what was the TCTS ratio for the Ste. Madeleine and for the Brechin Castle factories?

Hon. T. Sudama: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have that information. I do not have it here with me but there was an improvement in the TCTS ratio, not improvement that we had sought, but there was an improvement over the previous year. The important thing, however, is one is dealing with a structural problem. We are dealing with a situation where we have committed ourselves to selling local sugar manufacturers at world market prices plus 15 per cent. In other words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are committed to selling local manufacturers, a substantial portion of the local market, at about $750 a tonne for sugar when it is costing us $5,000 plus to produce. Something has to be done and that is why we are engaged in a plan to deal with it, but I do not have the time.

Mr. Manning: We will talk about it another time.

Mr. T. Sudama: Yes, bring it as a motion and I will talk about it then.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, time is not on my side. We made some progress from last year to this year in the agricultural sector. We were able to increase certain
items of production. It was not only a wholesale decline. Fresh milk production increased from 9,623,000 litres in 1996 to 10,241,000 litres in 1999. Pumpkins—from 6,653 metric tonnes to 7,657 metric tonnes in 1999. Poultry—meat, from 39,754 metric tonnes to 45,875 metric tonnes. Poultry—eggs—from 4,328,000 dozens to 4,757,000 dozens and pork—from 1,625 metric tonnes to 1,923 metric tonnes. So, it was not just a wholesaler’s mixed fortune. Indeed a very critical indicator, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that we were able, from the first quarter of 1999 to the first quarter of 2000, to reduce imports and increase exports in the agricultural sector.

6.45 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for example, food and live animals, imports decreased by $44,363 million; beverages and tobacco by $9,120 million; animal and vegetable oils by $14,547 million; fats and waxes, cereal and cereal preparation by $19,272 million; and feeding stuff for animals by $18,987 million. Mr. Deputy Speaker, from the first quarter of last year to the first quarter of this year, the Government reduced the food import bill by $106,289 million. It is a start and I think we are moving in the right direction.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government increased the export of live animals by $91,000; meat and meat preparations by $1,813 million; dairy products by $79,000; cereal and cereal preparations by $3,356 million; sugar, sugar preparations and honey by $11,950 million; and coffee, tea, cocoa, spices by $6,911 million. So there was a total increase in exports of $29,977 million and a decrease in imports of $106,289 million.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have made a significant step in order to deal with our food import bill; in order to export more; and in order to make the agricultural sector more integrated. What this Government has in mind is to bring in the School Feeding Nutrition Programme—which already has approximately 75 per cent of local input—to increase that amount to maybe 90 per cent, and that is on the cards. From the beginning of the school term, the Government will be serving local milk products on the menu.

The Government wants to integrate the agricultural sector with the tourist industry, not only the internal tourist industry, but also the regional tourist industry. This Government has a vision for agriculture. There are a number of things to do in order to improve the infrastructure, whether it is access roads, drainage, irrigation, marketing, credit and most importantly, the availability of land. So there is an accelerated land distribution programme for agriculture,
which will make agricultural land more widely available and this will also deal
with the security of tenure for agricultural lands, so that people will then be able
to utilize it to avail themselves of credit.

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, more importantly, we are dealing with the extension of services
and the dissemination of scientific, technological and marketing information. This
is the only way the Government will bring the sector up to scratch. At the same
time, there is a range of incentives for people who are involved in agriculture and
fisheries and those incentives are being reviewed. The Government is coming up
with a renewed package which will be more focused and it will look at the various
areas of priorities that we want to deal with.

In order to do all of this, the government will have to identify a significant
amount of financial resources that will be required if it is going to try and put this
agricultural sector on an overall growth path. In doing so, the Government will be
making one more step forward to achieving that goal of having a more diversified
economy in Trinidad and Tobago; an economy that creates more permanent jobs;
employment opportunities; and which offers higher levels of income to all people
in all the sectors, particularly, in the agricultural sector, which for too long has
been very depressed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said before, there is a lot more I can say, but I just
wanted to give a brief summation of the vision the Government has for the
agriculture sector in this country. Of course, as we enter into the new term, that
vision will be given flesh and blood and it will be put into execution.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much. [Desk thumping]

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh
Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I just want to intervene in this debate and I
seek your leave for just about 10 minutes. The purpose of my intervention is that
during the contributions of the Opposition Members, the impression would have
been given that Ministers of this Government are corrupted, and that the
Opposition has produced evidence that Members are corrupted, and nothing is
being done about it. If that is correct, then that would be a reflection on the Office
of the Attorney General, if there were such evidence.

Mr. Speaker, may I say, what has been produced were merely allegations that
there have been overruns of projects. There has been no information produced
here to say that any Minister solicited, received or agreed to receive any bribe; or
any information or fact that any Minister here collected any gift, loan or money for any project. Therefore, I think, it is my duty to say, on what has been presented here, there is no information or fact to support any allegation that any Government Minister is corrupt.

I think it is my duty to say that this Government is committed to the principle that when corruption infiltrates public offices, authorities and enterprises, the principles of fairness, equality of treatment, professional ethics; and free market and fair competition can become distorted and that can undermine public institutions and confidence in the Government.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is committed to the principle that public trust and the rule of law are compromised, leading to social disintegration when there is corruption in public office. So, it is in that context that this Government took initiatives in order to bring greater accountability to the people. The hon. Member for Diego Martin Central said the question is accountability. When this Government came with legislation to support greater accountability so that every Government Minister can appear before a committee of Parliament comprising: Opposition, Independents and Members of the Government, the Opposition did not vote for that piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the Government also brought legislation to say that if it is that there are allegations of corruption and the police did not investigate those allegations and the Director of Public Prosecutions did not investigate them and you wanted to bring them to the Parliament and have a say in which the Permanent Secretary and officials could be summoned and get the books, documents et cetera, the Government was giving the Opposition that opportunity and they did not vote for it. So I do not think that this is a question where the Opposition is really seriously and genuinely interested in accountability. The records of this Parliament will also show that when the Government brought the Freedom of Information Bill, in which we were saying that everyone has the statutory right to get information from any Government ministry, the Opposition did not support it.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but say that when one looks at a budget you look to see whether the economy is performing, and whether the measures in the budget are for the public benefit, but those matters were not an issue in this debate. The only issue, which the Opposition raised, was corruption. If it is that overrun of any project—and I am not defending overrun or under-estimation but I am talking here as a lawyer—was a criminal offence, then it may be that when the Hall of Justice had an overrun from $98 million to $291 million, then they would have
had to lock up everybody in the government. If overrun were also a criminal
offence in a project, when the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex which
was catered for $79 million and had a cost overrun of $497 million, then everyone
in the Cabinet would have been locked up. I can go on and on. With respect to the
Caroni Racing Complex there was an overrun of $120 million. What about the
LNG Plant in La Brea when the geological data was that you could not build such
a plant there, and there were two geological experts. Notwithstanding that $120
million was spent, then it means that the Prime Minister and everybody in the
Cabinet had to be locked up.

6.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I say this, because I think that it is in fairness to the Parliament
and to the people of Trinidad and Tobago for it to be put on record for anybody to
examine and scrutinize that there is no information or evidence in support of any
contention of corruption against any of the ministers of government. [Desk
thumping]

Mr. Speaker, I think I owe a duty to the hon. Member for Toco/Manzanilla.
When he read from a report from the Sangre Grande Municipal Corporation, what
he read certainly would have touched the heart and the indignation of every
Member of Parliament, because we saw from that report where, on the face of it,
public funds appeared to be misspent and abused and there were gross
irregularities.

I want to announce that as soon as he made those comments and I became
aware of them, I contacted the Acting Minister of National Security and I asked him
to get the Commissioner of Police or his representative here and we had a
discussion. I want to announce today we have requested that the police service have a
squad to investigate this matter and to investigate all other allegations of corruption
that we hear in this Parliament, or that anybody wants to send to the police.

We have asked him to look at all the corporations and to look at any other
allegations. I also told him that—although I do not see any information, or any
allegation to support any corruption—I would mention to the Member for Diego
Martin West that he can speak to Mr. Grant, he can speak to the Commissioner of
Police and he can provide whatever evidence he thinks he has in order to lock up
anybody on this side of the House. If he has evidence, give it to the police and let
the police act. The hon. Acting Minister of National Security was there and we
told the police that the rule of law is that no one is above the law. That is a
principle, and therefore, if they are corrupt, lock them up. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Speaker, the question of ADDA was raised in this House and I recalled that sometime ago when that was raised, I did give an undertaking to report to this House what we were doing about it. As hon. Members would recall, that was the question where the sum of US $2 million was paid out of the THA fund to an entity called FICON in order that that organization would purchase, on behalf of the THA, an income-bearing security from Barclay's Capital Cayman Limited which would yield a 100 per cent return and would be fully repaid within 12 months.

One would recall that the hon. Minister of Finance made a statement in this House which was a very frank and candid statement in which he gave the facts. The Government was not hiding anything. He was putting before this Parliament the facts. The Solicitor General got the approval of the Attorney General and lawyers were retained in the United States to seek the interest of the state in a suit which was filed by the Tobago House of Assembly in order to recover this US $2 million.

Based on the advice given, both the Solicitor General and the Attorney General decided that it would not be in the public interest to waste funds in order to pay lawyers in that matter. We have heard officially that there was an arbitration and that the matter was in progress, and we have heard unofficially that the THA has not succeeded in the matter.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is my duty to tell hon. Members and the national community that the Solicitor General has advised that the Exchequer and Audit Act, which applies to persons who are in the employment of the state and who make unauthorized payments to be surcharged by the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development be employed in this transaction. That is the advice of the Solicitor General and also, advice was given to the effect that the matter should also be referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions. I think it is my duty to report to the House on this. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Manning: I thank the Hon. Attorney General for giving way. We just wanted to be clear on what is meant by the Exchequer and Audit Ordinance being invoked in the matter. Invoked against whom? Is it the public servants, the politicians or both?

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, I was very expressed and I cannot go into details as I would be prejudging the issue. The advice is that the Exchequer and Audit Act be employed and I am told that depending on what happens, the technical people would determine those matters. I am only on principles and those are the principles. In respect of the transaction, the Exchequer and Audit Act
should apply and, therefore, with the further investigation, wherever it leads, that will be a matter for the technical people.

I just want to show that we do not have anything to hide. Therefore, I want to say, and I have said it in this House, that the role and function of an Attorney General under our system is not like the role and function of an Attorney General under the United States system. The Attorney General does not have the power of investigation. His function is to advise and, in matters relating to legal affairs, to take whatever action he considers necessary subject to the restraints of his office as the powers given to him under the Constitution.

I have said here that the function of the Attorney General is that he gives advice and whether his colleagues like it or not, his duty is to give the advice, because his position in respect of giving advice is an independent position, separate and apart from his function as a member of the governing party. Therefore, I do not think anybody in Trinidad and Tobago could seriously say that if I, as Attorney General, have evidence of corruption against anyone, I am going to stifle it. I do not have any evidence of corruption which I did not act upon.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say in closing that when one looks at the landscape of the law and the action which we have taken on this side of the House, there can be no doubt at all about it that this Government has promoted openness and transparency in governance, but it got obstruction and opposition from the Opposition party in the promotion of that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Finance, Planning and Development (Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. Speaker, it has been a long and interesting four days for all of us. I know it has been more than four calendar days, but it has been four days of debate starting with last Friday when we had the contribution made by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I want to begin by thanking all Members on both sides for their very lively contributions. I particularly want to thank the Attorney General for that last contribution. [Desk thumping] [Laughter]

It is my view that the general feedback I have had on this Budget has been extremely heartwarming and pleasant. I feel that people generally have accepted that this particular Budget has touched many people in different ways and some more than others. I believe that we have reduced taxes and that has helped the taxpayer. We have eliminated the burden of having to file an income tax return,
and so forth. I was a bit surprised. Even the Leader of the Opposition admitted that the economy is more sound. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, I would like to just thank all of those who have had some comments and, in particular, I want to quote what Price Waterhouse Coopers had to say. They said:

“The hon. Minister of Finance continued the approach adopted in his prior budget presentations of maintaining tight fiscal discipline.”

A comment from the Royal Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Limited says:

“One bold revolutionary measure introduced by the Minister of Finance is to ask the employer to collect taxes from individuals on behalf of the Inland Revenue Department.”

Here is what Ernst and Young had to say:

“On health, the Minister has limited resources to utilize and is bombarded with requests from various ministries as most require significant development. In this regard, we must commend the Government on its efforts to continue training medical personnel to service our communities. We also welcome the removal of the filing requirements for salaried employees.”

On two specific areas, Mr. Speaker, Ernst and Young said on agriculture:

“The Minister ought to be applauded…”

And I am sure it is the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources he is referring to

“for the initiatives which appear to be working as evidenced by growth demonstrated in the GDP from 2.1 per cent in 1998 to 3.3 per cent in both 1999 and 2000.”

Ernst and Young had to say on Internet access:

“The Minister’s intention is commendable. In today’s world, the Internet is indispensable as the learning tool, and the foundation skills to cope with the global economy must be developed at the primary and secondary school levels.”

I think, Mr. Speaker, that these are mainly a sampling of some of the general comments that have been made. I do not want to repeat necessarily the Prime Minister's comment, but I was a little bit taken aback by the reaction of the environmentalists when they felt that the Green Fund is inadequate. I was even
more taken aback when the Chamber of Commerce said that they do not think they should be the ones to pay for it when clearly, the evidence is there that every company, everyone doing business in Trinidad and Tobago, is literally a polluter to some measure.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to talk a great deal about the issue of corruption, as the hon. Attorney General has addressed it in a very lucid and very comprehensive way. [Interruption] You are much better at saying that, but I accept your words and I certainly endorse them. I did feel that I would want to place on record a response to the question of my visit to Miami which the Member for Diego Martin West laid before this House in a context to suggest that I went there on other than Government business.

When we came into Government, we inherited a particular form of Government and, at the time in July 1996, the Member asked the question, “Why is a Minister of Finance visiting with American Airlines and Birk Hillman?”

Dr. Rowley: I never asked you that!


Dr. Rowley: You could ask your question and answer it yourself! That question is very clear.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: That is what I saw in the Hansard!

Dr. Rowley: I could assist you. Do you want assistance?

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: No. I do not need any assistance. I am trying to respond to your allegations.

Dr. Rowley: Do not put words in my mouth!

Mr. Speaker: Order please.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: To suggest that I went there on an unofficial trip, I do admit it was an unofficial trip and I will explain why I considered it as an unofficial trip. I always say, I listened to my grandmother when she said that those who live in glass houses should not throw stones, but I will get to that at a later stage.

Mr. Speaker, I was saying that when we came in, I was asked to carry two portfolios, the Minister of Finance—who had no right in that business—and the Minister of Tourism. As Minister of Tourism, I was able to secure an appointment
with certain executives in American Airlines which was able to bear fruit and which was able to benefit the people of Trinidad and Tobago and, in particular, the people of Tobago. [Desk thumping]

I am quoting this, but I will quote it later on because this was given to me. I did not hear it. I was not here when you said it. If you want to call the people in Hansard liars too, you will continue true to form. You have been calling everyone liars, but that is all right.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that the development of airlifts into any destination is a very complex matter which requires the support and commitment of those involved in the tourism industry. Developing an airlift into a relatively unknown destination is extremely difficult, and you see, I was able to convince the people at American Airlines that they should add flights into Tobago, which they did.

7.10 p.m.

As a consequence of my initiative in July 1996, by—want to make sure I get the date correct because you might say I am reading you wrongly December 14, 1996, the first American Eagle flight came from Puerto Rico to Tobago.

So Mr. Speaker, I was about the people’s business. I went about to see if I could secure additional airlifts into Tobago as the Minister of Tourism. I did not meet with Birk Hillman as Minister of Finance. If I have to be accused of anything one could say it is an indiscretion because I used Birk Hillman who had the connections in American Airlines. I am not saying that I have been indiscreet, but I could say that if it is considered as an indiscretion it certainly has benefited the people of Trinidad and Tobago, because we have been able to secure that for many years. I am sure the Member for Tobago West would bear me out by knowing that we were able to do that with limited—it is not easy trying to convince a huge organization like American Airlines; where you are not too sure where the decision making is on the chain of command to say they are going to focus flights from Miami into Puerto Rico into Tobago.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful to the Minister for giving way. Normally the other Ministers would not, and I am surprised he did, and I am very grateful. I want to point out what was before us, which we were trying to respond to, is when it says—we were not asking about American Airlines, I was asking about—and a firm called Birk Hillman which is very experienced in constructing airports”. If you could make a link between that and American Airlines flying to Tobago then you have fooled me.
Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: I am not supposing that you are fooled so easily. You happened to be sitting on that side and that is evidence in itself. I am merely indict ing to the point that Birk Hillman, because of their constructing airports—let me explain the connection for you in case it missed you. Birk Hillman built the airport in Puerto Rico for American Airlines. They built the terminal building. They had the connections, I did not have any such connections. Somebody dropped a letter in my mailbox telling me Birk Hillman has the connections. That is all that they did. So I went to the Prime Minister and told him I am not too sure at what level I am going to know American Airlines, I am trying a thing and I am prepared to go and see if I could secure something. I am happy to report—and let me explain to you, I have never been one to sit and brag about the initiatives, but it is because of my initiative that American Eagle started to fly into Tobago. [Desk thumping] I do not boast about that. I did not even go to the awaiting flight, because that is not my style. But I can tell you it is because of my meeting with people—I met with a Mr. Peter De Lara who is the senior vice-president with responsibility for Latin America and the Caribbean and Mr. Horace Horde, the Director of Marketing, with the responsibility for the Caribbean. [Interruption] I am talking about American Airlines. I am telling you that is what I went to do [Interruption] I do not remember. I have never met people of Birk Hillman since. I do not know the people that well. I have never socialized or did anything with them.

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: When we speak of indiscretion, maybe we should consider the indiscretions of the other side. Maybe we should consider the rumours that are making rounds among the private sector that the Member for San Fernando East failed to pay his mortgage instalments to a certain insurance company that I would not call, and this insurance company—[Interruption] That is indiscretion [Interruption]. But that is the PNM way: pay no money!

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, suffice it to say that this debate is now degenerating. I ask us just to have order. I ask that if the Minister feels that he must bring something which is relevant to the debate, or to what he is saying into it, so be it. But, I ask us please, let us proceed with decorum.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: I thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe that is what PNM is: pay no money. No it is pay no mortgage.

I have another one and this one is not allegations or rumours. The Member for Laventille/East Morvant has not paid his mortgage since he took it out from the
National Insurance Board. [Desk thumping] Pay no mortgage. Let me say between now and the end of the year, a lot more indiscretions would be told and I hope that people who cannot manage their own personal affairs, and want to offer themselves up to run the affairs of the state will be able to take the same allegations of corruption that they have been throwing on this side for five years. [Desk thumping] untruths, lies, dishonesty. I have heard it for five years.

[Interruptions]

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I hope you have paid the alimony you are owing your wife.

Sen. The Hon B. Kuei Tung: The alimony I owe my wife! Which wife? Every one of my wives are more comfortable than you sweetheart. [Desk thumping] [Laughter] Ask the Member for San Fernando East about alimony. You are asking the wrong person ma’am.

Dr. Rowley: You are in the Parliament. It is unbelievable. You are accounting for the public money.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Finance, I do think that we are going off course, and I ask you please to direct your contribution to me and not respond to the urgings or utterances of Members on the other side.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: I thank you very much for your guidance, Mr. Speaker. There is no doubt, in the minds of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that this Government has performed where it comes to its financial and economic affairs.

I was particularly pleased when I heard the Member for Diego Martin Central say that he has now had the experience where when tax rates are reduced, one collects more money. He has the experience that we gave him, because during the period 1991—1995 they increased taxes. During 1996 to now, we have reduced taxes on a consistent basis. We have reduced taxes in 1996 and 1997. We have increased allowances in 1998. We have increased allowances in 1999. Today we have increased allowances in this Budget for personal taxes.

But of course, we have brought this Budget bordering on the ludicrous. I remember when the Member for La Brea said I came here and boasted that there would be no new taxes, but I increased registration fees for clubs.
7.20 p.m.

Obviously, I have hurt him. Is he an owner of a registration club that he felt it imperative enough to bring to my attention that there were no new taxes, but there was one called an increase in the registration fee?

What the Member for La Brea was really saying, he is agreeing with all our statements that we have brought this economy forward; that we have reduced taxes. What they have said they are now promising to do in the next five years, we have done in the last five years. [Desk thumping] They now want to increase pension; they want to reduce taxes, when all along in 1991—1995 they have been pressurizing the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me just show a quick statistic for us to understand. According to the summary of Central Government fiscal operations, outturn for 1990, which is the final figure for revenues, $5,752 million. For 1991, when the NAR was still here, it increased to $6,801 million. In 1992 when that administration came in, it dropped to $6,238 million. It dropped by $600 million. Now they are planning to drop it further by saying “when we come back we are going to reduce taxes.” But they have not got a clue how to go about reducing taxes.

By the time they left office in 1995, the outturn was $8.6 billion in revenues. This administration has been able to increase that outturn in revenues, where last year it was $12.2 billion, almost 50 per cent more. So that whilst they are talking about how they left the ship of state and it was their policies and they want to claim some of the credit for these things, I think they are omitting to say that the NAR started some of these policies. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: And that in essence they continued the same policies pursued by the NAR. Then they carried on those policies and feel that they must claim credit for it. I will give you credit for those policies. We implemented the same policies, but successfully. [Desk thumping] That is the major difference. Because we were able to take the economy and move it so that very soon we had growth consistently; where we had increased productivity; increased revenues, as a result of which we were able to ensure that the people of Trinidad and Tobago had increased prosperity. That is what we have done.

So we do not need to promise for the next term to do anything. The people will believe that we have already achieved it. We have already demonstrated that we can do it. And I understand a ten-point turn. I will give you one hundred points for promises; zero points for performance. [Desk thumping]
I was going to say a bit about the cost of the airport and overruns, but as I said, I cannot emulate the elocution of the Attorney General. I would say that from where I stand, we on this side want the best for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We want the best possible airport that we can afford. [Desk thumping] So that the people of Trinidad and Tobago will judge when they see the quality of airport that we will be delivering before the end of this year. They will judge whether they have got something that they can be richly proud of and that they deserve.

I can go on to other areas—

Miss Nicholson: Talk about the ferry service.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: I could remember when the Member for Tobago West was among us, she took a note to Cabinet to build four stadia and to upgrade the Hasley Crawford Stadium. She said it was only going to cost $120 million.

Miss Nicholson: That was the estimated advice.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: Okay. We looked at it and said we do not want to build a Fatima ground in Tobago. A Fatima ground is purely a piece of ground with a small pavilion. We wanted to have the best for Tobago. We want the best for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Miss Nicholson: I myself want the best for the people of Tobago. The fundamental thing is, I am the person why Tobago is getting it. That is the fundamental thing. [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: But I have accepted that, but I did not want a Fatima ground in Tobago; I wanted the best for our sportsmen in Trinidad and Tobago, the best for our athletes. So what are we getting now? We are getting now, electronic score boards in Tobago—

Miss Nicholson: I have no problem with that.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:—an athletic track in Tobago, cultural facilities in Tobago [Interruption]

Miss Nicholson: When I hear people try to mock Tobago I get irritable.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: So help me, Ma’am, that is not the intent. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Order!
Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: The intent is to show you that we wanted to go—the minute it goes up in price you are not going to get those things if you do not pay for it. We want the best for our athletes in Trinidad and Tobago, and we want it on the basis—

Miss Nicholson: So you cannot spend $100 million dollars on Tobago? What have you spent on Tobago for a fundamental thing like that? The Crown Point Airport has not been addressed; Mason Hall School has not been addressed. None of the important areas that should have been addressed in Tobago has been addressed. Do not trouble Tobago. We put you there and you must pay attention to Tobago! [Desk thumping] You could find all kinds of millions for Caroni and all they are doing is sucking people's money.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: So that, Mr. Speaker, the four stadia that we were building, we wanted to give something of quality to this country. We wanted the best for Trinidad and Tobago. I merely used Tobago as an—[Interruption] I am sorry. So that, therefore, the other three stadia we are building in Couva, Malabar and in Union Park are going to be of similar quality. We are opening up the country so that the sportsmen of Trinidad and Tobago can enjoy the same kind of facilities. But the first thing they say, it is corruption because it went from $120 million with the Member for Tobago West to $300 million-odd.

Miss Nicholson: I never said that.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: I did not say you, I am merely using you as a reference point, because I am trying to show how, when you try to develop this country for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the Opposition tries its best to put as many obstacles in the way by talking about dishonesty, corruption and bribery. We have had five years of it and it has not deterred us from our task. [Desk thumping] We have stuck to our guns.

I can go on. The question of schools; we were going to build ten secondary schools and the first price that came to us was $13 million. I met with the responsible people and asked them, where in heavens are they going to build a secondary school to accommodate 875 students with computer and science laboratories, with facilities for the teachers, for kids, for TT $13 million? One school? [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: And everyone, including the Inter-American Development Bank, agreed that it was impractical to budget at US $2 million.
You could not build that in India and China where you have cheap labour. You could not build that in Trinidad if you had free labour, at that price.

So we wanted the best for the children of Trinidad and Tobago and we are going to give them the best secondary schools that they can get. [Desk thumping] We are prepared to take all kinds of criticisms about corruption and bribery because we are going to make sure we build and give to the people of Trinidad and Tobago the best that they can get for their money.

Dr. Rowley: The best airport!

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: The best airport. The people will judge it. The people will judge the stadia, the schools, the airport, the health centre, the community centres, because we are giving to the people of Trinidad and Tobago the best that we can give them. [Desk thumping] We were not dealing with the same wasted funds—

Mr. Speaker: I once more appeal to the Member for Diego Martin West that you are not on the floor. The person on the floor is the Minister of Finance and we cannot do business like this.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: Again, I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Maybe I feel too emotional about an issue like this, but as I said, for five years I have sat here and listened to wild talk that was never backed up by any kind of action and I feel that it has not really deterred us and, therefore, we are in a position to say there is no way we are turning back. [Desk thumping]

I do not want to repeat the wasted funds and the overruns that the hon. Attorney General has already indicated. I had planned to do so, but what I would do, just to come back to the question of the budget, is to quickly give a summary of how we see this budget as being able to develop and expand the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

In the first place we feel that this budget promotes savings and investments and it sustains economic growth. We have done that. As you know, by the end of next month I am hoping that I would be ready to have National Enterprises Limited floated. That would strengthen the stock exchange; it would strengthen our savings efforts because we would encourage individuals, pension plans, and so on, to invest in National Enterprises Limited. We are going to offer employees of the three state enterprises that would be packaged to form National Enterprises Limited, namely TSTT, Tringen and National Flour Mills, preferred allotment and possibly at a preferred price so that we can encourage them to have a stake in the companies through the form of National Enterprises Limited.
Mr. Speaker, we have also promoted savings and investment by reducing our tax liability of all taxpayers, and we did this in a way that we felt was fair, by increasing the allowance to all taxpayers. By increasing the allowance to all taxpayers, every taxpayer gets a fair and similar benefit. When you reduce rates, the people who are at the higher end get a better benefit than those at the lower end. So we feel by increasing the allowance we are able to give a more equitable benefit across the board.

Furthermore, because we recognize that pensioners have reached the stage where their medical expenses might be higher than before, what we have done is increased their allowance from $20,000 to $30,000, a 50 per cent increase in their case. Again, that is to ensure that we promote savings and investments and we sustain economic growth.

One of the things that we hope to do by that is to improve tax compliance through providing a one-off concession to those taxpayers with arrears with the Board of Inland Revenue. My office has already been bombarded with requests for consideration and the Board of Inland Revenue is at present gearing up to ensure that it can deal with the opportunity that they are being given now, to start literally with a clean slate in the year 2001.

Our focus—and this has been a very dramatic change—has been to remove the focus on tax collections from the employee to the employer and placing on the employer, in the first instance, the burden of having to ensure that appropriate tax deductions are made from the employees’ salaries.

Finally, in promoting savings and investments and sustaining economic growth, we have ensured that we can bring the Board of Inland Revenue, again, into a more tax compliant mode, by exempting persons with emolument income only from having to file tax returns.

I need not talk too much about what this budget does for protecting vulnerable groups. I am on record as saying that one of the first things that I felt any Minister of Finance must do is to seek economic growth, but in so doing we must not ignore our vulnerable groups, and in particular, our pensioners. Our old age pensioners today are a little better off than they were five years ago. But if this Government is returned, I can assure you they would be far better off than they are, even today [Desk thumping].

Mr. Bereaux: Would the Minister give way just for one question? I was just trying to inquire as to what is the status with respect to those national insurance
pensioners who were offered an increase in the 1998—1999 budget, which increase has not come into being as yet.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** Mr. Speaker, the national insurance scheme, as it is referred to, had not been looked at for several years; I am told as much as 25 years. What I sought to do in terms of pension reform, was to do a number of things, one of which was to bring the national insurance scheme up to scratch. By that I meant, it was embarrassing for the national insurance board to be offering a contributory pension scheme to which every employee had contributed, and give a benefit that was below what was being given by the state in terms of old age pensions.

7.35 p.m.

So the first thing I had to do was to bring it up to that level. Mr. Speaker, the national insurance scheme is based upon a contributory factor, meaning that if one contributes for 20 years at a particular level then one will get benefits at that level. If one contributes for 20 years at a lower level then one will get a lower level of benefits. When I said that the new pensions benefit for NIB shall be $100, or whatever it may be, I meant after having paid the required contributions. Do not expect—*[Interruption]* I am sorry?

**Mr. Manning:** You did not say that.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** I did say that. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please, order please.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** I did say that. You heard what you wanted to hear.

**Miss Nicholson:** But Mr. Minister, with due respect I would just like you to deal a bit with the Tobago question. There is the question of the sea ferry, which is a very important thing re the link between Trinidad and Tobago. I would like you to tell us if you are confident that we will have a ferry in October when the MF Panorama should be going on dry-dock. What about the funding and things like that? Those are important to the people of Tobago. I would like you to deal with that question, and payment by the Tobago House of Assembly to public servants. The Regional Health Authority section of the Tobago House of Assembly—up to this morning I was called: they have not received their salaries.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the Member for Tobago West that we too empathize with the situation in Tobago. Unfortunately,
the situation in Tobago is not of our making. It may very well be that the solution to the problem is in our hands. I do not know that for a fact. But—[Interruption] I am not going to talk about independence, Member for Diego Martin West. I merely state that we are empathizing, we are watching the situation very closely and we will not allow it to degenerate into a situation where the people, the public servants in Tobago, will have to suffer because of anyone’s actions. We are not going to sit by and allow it to go by unaddressed. By the same token, as you know, the Tobago House of Assembly has been charged with the responsibility of meeting those expenditures and we have no choice, as central Government, but to wait until the Tobago House of Assembly calls for help before we can go in. But I assure you, the minute we get any cry for help we are willing to respond immediately, as we have done in the past.

On the question of the ferry, I had already authorized the Port Authority to seek funding for a ferry as long ago as last year November, I think. Unfortunately, the procedure got—it just went off track. I hate to use that expression—and the bids that came in were not acceptable to the committee that had been put up to look at those bids. The bids that came in did not meet the qualifying criteria that had been set up, that had been advertised, and they were instructed to go back out for new bids. In the meantime, we are seeking to find temporary solutions, if we can, but our permanent solution would be to find a brand new ferry for the Tobago run. As a matter of fact, at Cabinet I have indicated that we need to start planning these things more appropriately. If we had decided that we needed two ferries for Tobago, then we must have two ferries. As soon as they are fully depreciated, get rid of them and bring in a new one almost immediately, because the time lag on ordering a new ferry could be as much as two years, as you know.

Miss Nicholson: But since 1997 the Government was instructed.

Sen. The Hon. Kuei Tung: Mr. Speaker, I am saying as much as I can. I do not have the direct responsibility for procuring a ferry but I am here—[Interruption]

Hon. Member: So you threw Sadiq in the bamboo?

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: I am here merely to indicate what knowledge I have of the matter as it translates over Cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, I will not, as I said, go into too much depth with respect to what we have done to protect vulnerable groups. I just want to mention a couple of things in passing. We have, as far as this budget is concerned, addressed in a small way the question of preserving the environment by establishing a Green
Fund. Let me say that in order to make the Green Fund affordable we have actually reduced the business levy and so imposed an environmental levy but that the two together still do not surpass the business levy as when it was introduced five years ago. The business levy at that time was 0.5 per cent. Today the business levy is down to 0.32 per cent and the environmental levy is 0.1 per cent. The only difference is that there are a number of companies, including companies in the energy sector, which were not required to pay a business levy but will be required to pay the environmental levy.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, we are developing human resources and among the action that we have taken one measure is to achieve universal pre-school and primary school enrollment by making more money and more schools available to the Ministry of Education. We have expanded the School Feeding Programme. We have developed an apprenticeship programme in which we are hoping to build a bond between the private sector and apprentices so that we can have an easier transition of students to the world of work. We are expanding tertiary education by allowing the student revolving loan fund and the student loan guarantee facility to include all post-secondary institutions which are accredited by the relevant authority and to make all courses available to recipients so that it is no longer confined only to the University of the West Indies. Of course, Mr. Speaker, as I said, we are increasing access to the Internet.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, one of the measures that this budget has taken is to help promote national identity. Again, we are trying to develop a bond between the private sector and our artistes—our people who are a part of the cultural expression, our sportsmen and women—by allowing businesses to claim a tax deduction of up to 150 per cent of expenditure in support of our art, culture, sport and so forth. So you see, Mr. Speaker, as I said at the beginning, this budget I hope would have touched as many lives as possible over the next year. In closing therefore, Mr. Speaker, let me—[Interruption]

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister very sincerely for giving way. I just want to ask a question for my own clarification. Firstly, is the Minister in agreement with the assertion that I made that the Tobago House of Assembly has bank overdrafts of $49 million now and bills payable which could take that debt up to $100 million? If you know that, or if you agree with what I have said, how is that to be treated with in the coming 12-month period if no provision is made to wipe off that debt? It does not matter whose fault it is, the debt exists and, if that overdraft remains in that way, the Tobago situation will go from crisis to crisis. How is this budget to treat with that if it treats at all?
Secondly, I ask you, last year as Minister of Finance you had to provide $300 million for Caroni’s operation as a subvention.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** The Minister gave the number. It is only $100 million on the Treasury.

**Dr. Rowley:** And why is there $300 million on the books?

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** On the what?

**Dr. Rowley:** All right, I will not argue about that. Are you satisfied that the $100 million provision for Caroni is an acceptable provision, given what is going on in Caroni now?

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** I had provided Caroni—and I hate to start with your second question but I think it is the easier one to deal with, in my view—with what I consider to be a reasonable transfer and what I considered to be affordable under this budget. I have not provided Caroni with any more resources than I considered affordable, as I said, and reasonable under the circumstances. The problem is, as central Government we have been trying to force Caroni to learn to live within its means, and part of its means has been that we support Caroni to the tune of $100 million in this budget, as we have done in the past. Time will tell whether they have been able to live within their means.

In terms of Tobago, I am aware, based on information that the Chief Secretary had provided me very recently, that there is an overdraft of $39 million. I am not sure if it is $49 million. I have no information differently. If the Member says it is $49 million and the Chief Secretary says it is $35 million, I am not going to question either one because I do not really know which one is correct. I have no idea why, either, as to whether he has unliquidated commitments to the tune of $51 million, as suggested by you, or whether it is $60 million or $30 million, or whatever it is. I am aware that he has some commitments. He has not shared that with me.

**Miss Nicholson:** But the problem is still there.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** What I would like to do in the coming year is to be able to sit with him, because he has got a substantial increase, in spite of the—I do not want to say rantings and ravings. That is a wrong expression. In spite of what has been said, we gave him as much as a 20 per cent—well it is about 19 per cent—increase in his allocation and we have to sit with the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly and tell them they have to learn to live within what is budgeted by this Parliament. This has been approved by this
Parliament. He must have the respect of this Parliament to say he is going to live within it. Now, I understand what he has done and I do not expect that I will be able to correct his problem in only one year.

So I may be able to sit and work with him and say, “Look, you have an overdraft, you have some commitments to honour, let us work out how much it is and see if we could eliminate it over a period of time, maybe two or three years as the case may be, so that we do not hurt the people of Tobago”. If we insist that we liquidate that overdraft as well as the unliquidated commitments, the people in Tobago are going to suffer. So I am not going to take any action so hard and harsh and drastic to force him, or to box him into a corner, as it were. I have to work with him so that he comes around to finding some kind of affordable and sustainable level within which the people of Tobago can live. That is going to be my solution to it.

**Miss Nicholson:** Mr. Minister of Finance, what about the question of monitoring and having them account, like on a quarterly basis, just as how every three months you give your thing *en masse*, or whatever you call it? Why is there not an accounting system to make sure that they spend it in a certain way and you, the Minister of Finance, are monitoring, to make sure that the error is not committed again?

**Mr. Joseph:** Mr. Minister, thank you. My matter is a different matter. I had raised the question about the repairs to the Parliament. The House Committee—I understand the Government was to allocate some $10 million for the repairs of the roof and I notice that in this budgetary allocation no mention is made of that $10 million and mention was just made of everybody who is supposed to benefit. I notice Parliament is not.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** The Speaker has written me on that matter and I have asked my technocrats to see what we can do, because it was through an oversight. I think the immediate concern, Mr. Speaker, I understand, is about a half a million dollars, which I am hoping I could find, in terms of its current—that is the current bills outstanding. That is what I meant by outstanding. [Interuption] I said for immediate—so that I am at present looking to see how I can meet that half a million dollars liability immediately, and thereafter I would try to see how much we can get back out of it. There are other financing mechanisms that can be used temporarily until I come back to Parliament to correct it. In the meantime, just to answer—[Interuption]

**Mr. Joseph:** Mr. Minister, just one thing. Do not forget what you had said, the best that money can buy.
Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: So you are not going to object if I come here to spend $800 million to—[Laughter] Mr. Speaker, to answer that other question—there is a monitoring that takes place under the Tobago House of Assembly, but unfortunately the Ministry of Finance’s responsibility is only to do that, monitor. We do not audit. The Auditor General is required to do the full audit. We really have no *locus standi* to go in and insist that they provide us with all the details that we would like, because the Tobago House of Assembly Act clearly gives them the responsibility in the way they handle their own affairs. So as I said, we do some kind of supervision and monitoring but, believe you me, it is fairly raw and primitive because we do not have the wherewithal to provide that. [Interrupt] I thank you very much for the warning, Member for San Fernando East.

Mr. Speaker I would just end by thanking very much the public servants and the people who have assisted me in particular in developing these budgets. In spite of the mouthings of the other side I believe that these budgets have helped and touched the people of Trinidad and Tobago and, therefore, it is my hope that the people of Trinidad and Tobago will understand it when I say clearly, there is no turning back.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move. [Desk thumping]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

Mr. Speaker: I need to advise members of the public, though, that when the House goes into Finance Committee, under the Standing Orders, the House must be cleared so that I am afraid I would have to ask you to vacate the Chamber, until such time as the Finance Committee is through when you will be invited to come back in.

*Bill and estimates committed to Finance Committee.*

**7.51 p.m.:** *House resolved itself into Finance Committee.*

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

**8.10 p.m.:** *House resumed after Finance Committee.*

*Bill reported, without amendment.*

*Question put,* That the Bill be now read a third time.

*The House divided:* Ayes 19  Noes 12
AYES

Maharaj, Hon. R. L.
Persad-Bissessar, Hon. K.
Lasse, Dr. The Hon. V.
Griffith, Dr. The Hon. R.
Humphrey, Hon. J.
Sudama, Hon. T.
Maraj, Hon. R.
Rafeeq, Dr. The Hon. H.
Assam, Hon. M.
Job, Dr. The Hon. M.
Khan, Dr. F.
Ganga, 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.
Manning, P.
Imbert, C.
Robinson-Regis, Mrs. C.
Narine, J.
Hart, E.
Appropriation Bill

James, Mrs. E.
Bereaux, H.
Joseph, M.
Sinanan, B.
Boynes, R.
Williams, E.

Miss P. Nicholson abstained.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. R. L. Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now stand adjourned to Friday, September 15, 2000 at 1.30 p.m. The matters to be debated would be in accordance with what is stated on the Order Paper for that date.

Mr. Speaker, I give notice to the Opposition that for the week following September 15 and the week thereafter, the Parliament will be sitting on a regular basis and it may be even every day until the end of September.

Question put and agreed to.

House accordingly adjourned.

Adjourned at 8.15 p.m.