PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

PETITION

Chief State Solicitor

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the petition on behalf of the Chief State Solicitor.

I now ask that the Clerk be permitted to read the petition.

Petition read.

Question put and agreed to. That the petitioner be allowed to proceed.

APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)

[Fourth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [September 14, 2001]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Stanford Callendar (Tobago West): Mr. Speaker, let me join with my colleagues on this side in congratulating the Minister of Finance for his first budget presentation in this House. I also congratulate the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro for his maiden contribution. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, I sit in this House in a unique position: being the PNM Member for Tobago West, I sit in this House on the Benches of the Opposition, but as a PNM Member I sit in the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) in governance. Therefore, that makes my position somewhat unique.

The Minister of Finance has been described in several ways. Some of those descriptions were mentioned by my colleague, the representative from Tobago East, as to how Tobagonians see the Budget.
There is a local cable company, Trico Industries in Tobago, and channel 5 they play a lot of local programmes and you get the local news, but at the end of it there is always a question they put to people in Tobago, “What Town Say”. One of the statements that came out strongly in the opinion of the people of Tobago is that this Minister is a good man who might have found himself in bad company. That is the opinion of some people.

Mr. Speaker, I feel that in Tobago, the feeling that the Minister is a good man, might have been influenced by the Minister’s intervention and positive response to the new Tobago House of Assembly administration, in attempting to treat with the $150 million in verifiable debt, as has been identified, thereby creating a good settling down period for the London administration in Tobago.

If I should judge by the front-page story in the *Tobago News*, which continues to amplify how some Tobagonians view the Budget, it is believed that this Minister is seen as the man who gave Tobago a bag of goodies.

Mr. Minister, you really cut a nice picture.

Mr. Minister, you really cut a nice picture.

I want to agree with the view of the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly that there were some encouraging signs emerging from the budget presented by the Minister of Finance, but that the jury was still out on some aspects of Tobago’s package. I would now give a Tobago perspective on the budget as presented by the Minister of Finance.

The budget reflects the process of a continuing successful dialogue between the central government and the THA. This is only the first phase of a process. We are encouraged that the letter of the law has been satisfied, in some respects, with the recommendation of the Dispute Resolution Commission; notwithstanding the fact that we only received what is considered the minimum of 4.49 per cent of that recommendation.

We also welcome the fact that the estimated cash releases for the THA are higher than they have ever been in recent years. This is due in no small measure to the skilful performance of the THA’s Chief Secretary over the past eight months and the cooperation and support of this Minister of Finance. However, there are several areas of concern.

The fact that the estimated cash disbursement to the THA falls well short of the legitimate request by the THA, means that the THA will have to resort, in part, to borrowing to finance its developmental needs. Without such borrowings, current
development needs will again be retarded. It is, therefore, incumbent on the Minister to facilitate and accelerate the current discussions with the Tobago House of Assembly, such that the level and conditions of Tobago’s borrowing can be expeditiously settled.

Mr. Speaker, there are also some aspects of the Dispute Resolution Commission that we need to address and to give some serious consideration. I hope that by now the Minister is in possession of a copy of the new financial regulations of the Tobago House of Assembly. Such regulations are necessary for the proper management of the finances of the THA, taking note of the events of the recent past that the present arrangement for the collection and deposit into the fund of taxes and duties, as indicated in paragraphs 7 and 11, be continued.

With respect to revenues to be collected in Tobago, that the revenue sharing arrangement should be worked out with the Board of Inland Revenue and the appropriate administrative arrangement be put in place to give effect thereto, as a matter of urgency. This aspect is amplified by the Tobago House of Assembly Act, section 49(2) which states:

“Upon the coming into force of this Act, any company, financial institution or a person operating a business in Tobago, shall pay in Tobago all taxes, fees, duties, levies and other imposts in respect to its operations in Tobago.”

Mr. Speaker, if Tobago is to advance, we cannot advance on recurrent expenditure.

This present THA came into office eight months ago. For the first time in more than 20 years, the PNM was given an opportunity to manage the affairs of the people in Tobago. I want to give the Minister the assurance that we intend to manage the affairs of the people of Tobago well. [Desk thumping]

I am sure that the Minister would agree that the present THA has met most of its commitment: we have lived up to the commitment of providing the financial regulations; we have almost completed the auditing of the Tobago finances and, I am sure, through you, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister is satisfied so far with the prudent financial management of the THA.

The THA decided that its policy objectives for fiscal year 2001/2002 will be aimed at consolidating the gains which the island has made over the years: upgrading the island’s human resources; promoting self-reliance; improving the standard of living and, in particular, providing adequate health care for all, increasing employment and reducing poverty. If Tobago is to achieve its developmental objectives, the main policy initiatives have to be human resource
development; entrepreneurial development and business creation; revitalization of agriculture; institutional strengthening within the THA; provision and upgrading of key physical infrastructure and governance.

The vision of this budget: “One People, One Nation: Leaving No One Behind”, is laudable, but it can turn out to be just “ol’ talk if we do not begin to put things in place with meaningful discussions with the Assembly to correct, what I call, the economic imbalance and the steric disparities, and promote equity and a level playing field for the people of Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I will give some examples. In Trinidad and Tobago, if you are a teacher, a policeman, a public servant, an ordinary daily-paid worker living in Tobago, you are faced with a serious disadvantage in terms of your spending power. While for these services the salaries are the same, the cost of living in Tobago is so high that, in effect, the average Tobagonian will pay more contributions toward VAT.

For example, if a teacher decides to build a House in La Horquetta and a teacher in Tobago decides to build a house in Milford Court, at the end of construction of the same house, you can guarantee that the teacher living in Tobago will pay almost 35 per cent more in cost.

9.50 a.m.

I am mindful, and the people of Tobago are mindful, that it would not be a thing in which the Government has a direct input, given the fact that is a simple process, but I am appealing for some type of approach that would attempt to level the playing field, whether it is in building materials, or some kind of concession which could be offered to cement. This Minister has been very responsive and receptive to the needs of the people of Tobago, and I am urging him to look into these basic needs of goods and services and the cost as they affect the residents of Tobago, living here in Trinidad and in Tobago. I am sure that the Tobago House of Assembly would be keen to sit and work out some sort of mechanism that would attempt to level the playing field.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to think that the Minister and the Government are indeed committed to leaving no one behind. Therefore, I would now attempt to make a case for the tourism sector in Tobago because I am convinced that if we do not address some of these shortcomings, Tobago would be truly left behind.

The tourism and entertainment sector is by far the most dynamic sector affecting the local economy, and currently accounts for over 50 per cent of the island’s gross domestic product. Given the importance of tourism as the main
vehicle for the transformation of growth of Tobago’s economy, the allocation of $7.47 million is clearly inadequate. This inadequate funding would impact negatively on the foreign exchange earnings, job creation and infrastructure improvement.

With the coming on stream recently of the Tobago Hilton, Blue Haven Hotel and Stone Haven Villas, where over US $300 million, mainly in the area of accommodation, brings the room capacity of Tobago to approximately 3,000. Therefore, while we in Tobago are happy to note that the Government has decided to construct a convention and conference/tourism centre on the Port of Spain waterfront, there is a feeling, or so “town say”, that the only area where Tobago seems to have a competitive advantage is tourism. This move is seen, among some people in Tobago, as setting up Trinidad in competing rather than complementing the tourism effort of Tobago, recognizing that Tobago is the destination of choice.

Infrastructure: It is a widely held view by most Tobagonians that we are coming from further back, in terms of development further back than our brothers and sisters in Trinidad, therefore, Tobago’s development must not be seen as a mere percentage of the national budget, but rather as the development needs of Tobago. The allocation of 16 per cent of the Assembly’s request for infrastructure is of concern to the Assembly; of major concern.

The existing terminal continues to receive no funding. Ten million dollars requested in a previous budget to provide for the renovation of the Crown Point terminal has not been granted. The terminal represents the first sight visitors see on entering the island.

I refer to page 37 of the Budget presentation by the Minister, which says in part:

“With respect to the inter-island service, a new vessel will be purchased to ensure the long-term integrity of the service.”

I am not aware as to whether that vessel has been ordered as yet, if not, I would encourage some meaningful dialogue with the Tobago House of Assembly and all its stakeholders.

We are moving into an area where we cannot continue to allow our wives, our sisters and our mothers to travel on the ferry service and when they land in Port of Spain or vice versa, there is no facility to allow them to shower and tidy themselves to go shopping. We are at the stage when we provide facilities of this nature, we need to understand the need and culture of our people.
On page 39 of the Budget document, the Minister says:

“…we intend to upgrade the services provided to the people of Tobago in areas such as the inter-island ferry service, the air bridge, the international airlift for bringing tourists to Tobago and in improving health and educational facilities.”

Again, it is a laudable statement and I want to commend the Minister for it, but as indicated by the Member for Tobago East, Tobagonians are starting to become wary of promises.

Thus far this Minister has kept all his promises to Tobago, but the time has come for us to recognize the air bridge and the sea bridge between Trinidad and Tobago as an essential service. The Minister of Transport and Minister of Tourism and Tobago Affairs agreed a few weeks ago that this service should be essential, therefore, the Minister and the Government must put in place the relevant authority or body dedicated to ensuring that this happens in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago. The Leader of the Opposition made the recommendation and maybe it is something we can look at and improve where necessary.

This authority must be given the mandate to make these services more reliable, more affordable, available and comfortable, and where profit is not solely the objective. The authority can have the responsibility such as T&TEC and WASA, where the rates are regulated. I think if we are to survive in this changing environment, travel between Trinidad and Tobago must be given some priority.

10.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to spend a few minutes to treat with culture. I listened to the representative for Ortoire/Mayaro speak glowingly about the cultural achievements of the Ministry and I compliment his Ministry for that, and I hope that when I am through dealing with culture, maybe the Minister in that ministry will indicate how much assistance he is prepared to give Tobago in the field of culture.

The Minister said at page 53 of the Budget speech:

“…we are convinced that our country can benefit from the widespread cultural expressions that exist within our society. In the new fiscal year, we will be finalizing the necessary plans for the construction of a Millennium Cultural Complex. A site has already been chosen and consultation will begin shortly with the various interest groups and stakeholders.”
We will also establish a Centre for the Performing Arts, in addition to the one to be situated at the International Conference Centre, and complete the renovation of Queen's Hall.

We will also explore the potential of making the celebrations at Point Fortin, Couva and the Tobago Heritage Festival into sustainable products for tourist attractions.”

I support those initiatives, but in the area of culture in Tobago, Tobago will be deprived of any development in this area, since neither of the two projects proposed by the Tobago House of Assembly received any funding. The Performing Arts Centre proposed in the Assembly’s budget is essential to Tobago’s development, since there exists in Tobago no venue—and I repeat—no venue in Tobago that can cater for the needs of all the cultural groups, neither is there any venue suited to showcasing the many talents of Tobago; and there are many.

It is no secret that the Signal Hill Alumni Choir and the Tobago Academy of Performing Arts have won international acclaim, because Tobago is rich in its cultural diversity. I am sure the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro can justify that. I do not want to start calling names of Tobagonians who have excelled, because I might run the risk of leaving out some, but it is important that if one area should be given consideration for seeking loan funding, it is this culture’s Performing Arts Centre of Trinidad and Tobago, as a matter of priority, as we seek to develop and unify the cultural expressions of the people of Tobago.

Diversifying the economy: The Assembly, like the central government, is also committed to diversifying the national economy. While the central government intends to be less dependent on oil, the Assembly would like to be less dependent on tourism. To this end, the Assembly has identified key projects that will drive the diversification process. Only 6.2 per cent of the amount requested for the diversification programmes was allocated. Among some of the key projects that received no allocation at all is the development of the Cove Industrial Estate, the development of the Studley Park Industrial Estate and the establishment of a business development fund.

Again, I urge the Minister to finalize whatever arrangements would be necessary to allow the Assembly to access grant fundings and to access loans, because if the Assembly is unsuccessful in achieving those initiatives as outlined in the budget, in terms of accessing grants and loan funding, the development of Tobago would be seriously retarded. Therefore the vision of one people, one nation and of leaving no one behind, could truly reflect to the people of Tobago as “ol’” talk. [Desk thumping]
There are some general questions I would wish to put, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister, in an attempt to gather some information. One such question is: What can Tobago expect as funding from the Employment Training Programme (ETP)? What can Tobago expect from the Roads Development Fund? Is there a reason no provisions were made for Town and Country Planning in Tobago, given the functions of the Tobago House of Assembly, in terms of Tobago’s development? Where is Tobago in the national projects? What is the take for Tobago on off budget funding? Would some of the benefits of the Government Home Improvement Programme, housing for low income, low middle class, be assigned to the Tobago House of Assembly?

I listened to the Member for Chaguanas on Wednesday night, I think it was, and, like the Member for Tobago East, I was impressed with his level of sincerity and his level of commitment to sport and sporting development in Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, through you, Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the Ministers of Community Empowerment, Sport and Consumer Affairs that I am sure that the Tobago House of Assembly will be too happy to discuss with him the necessary assistance in constructing, in the area of the Dwight Yorke Stadium, that area of land which has been developed for sporting and a cultural complex, a swimming pool. I am sure the cricketing fraternity in Tobago will be too happy to discuss with him whatever assistance he can provide in the construction of the cricket facility that is to be next to the Dwight Yorke Stadium. I make this appeal to the Minister, because, as I said, I am convinced that he is genuine in his concern for the development of sport in Tobago.

The Member for Tobago East made mention of a number of hard courts in Tobago where $10,000 was allocated. I do not know if it was an error, but I have to agree with him, that every one of those hard courts was budgeted for $150,000. So it would have had to be an error to allocate $10,000 to at least five of them. So it is a situation the Minister might have to look at again. If there are no funds to provide for the construction of all, Tobago will settle for 50 per cent of the hard courts to be constructed in fiscal year 2001/2002.

10.10 a.m.

Before I bring my contribution to a close, this is for the purpose of the records of Hansard. My colleague, the Member for Tobago East, made a statement with respect to the L’anse Fourmi/Charlottesville Link Road. I am only correcting the record because he sought to implicate the PNM in not providing funding in the four years of the PNM government.
I state, for the record, that no funding from the European Fund was made available for that link road because that road did not qualify under the conditions of the environmental impact study. Therefore, the PNM Tobago-controlled Assembly has requested $10 million because we recognize the importance of that vital link between two most scenic villages in Tobago. To the compliment of the Minister, $6 million was made available. If all goes well, we expect to begin some construction on that very important link in Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, in winding up, I want to address a few comments to the Minister of Finance, who appears now to be a friend of Tobago. He should not have any fear in coming to Tobago in the future. His picture is on the Tobago News, which is widely read in Tobago. They have labelled him “the man who brought goodies to the people of Tobago”.

The world has changed overnight. Trinidad and Tobago is affected by that change and, as a good man, he should not be ashamed to say that he will come back in the next few weeks with a more realistic budget and present the true picture of where Trinidad and Tobago stands today as a result of the events of last week Tuesday. Not bad advice is good advice. As I said in my opening statement, he is a good man, but he should not “take basket”.

The Minister of Housing and Settlements (Hon. Sadiq Baksh): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I, too, join with all my colleagues in complimenting the Minister of Finance on the presentation of his first budget to this honourable House.

Mr. Speaker: Please give me your indulgence. It has slipped me. Two Members of this House made their first input into the debate since this session has started. I compliment them for doing so. I was out of the Chamber last night when the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro made his first intervention, so I compliment him. The Member for Tobago West, while he posed questions, I think that this is his first major intervention. I congratulate him as well.

Hon. S. Baksh: Mr. Speaker, I, too, join with you in complimenting the two Members on their maiden contributions. This is our third day of debate and the Ministry of Housing and Settlements did not attract any real attention, except from the distinguished Member for San Fernando East and other passing comments, including that of the Minister of Finance.

As the Minister of Finance in his budget presentation said, we cannot speak about improving the quality of life of our citizens without working toward the provision of shelter for all. My colleague has also said that housing is a basic
human need. It is a human need that was long denied to the mass of the public of this country.

We have accumulated, over the years, a backlog of over 30,000 housing units in Trinidad and Tobago. Government initiated its first housing loan, SF150TT in 1968. In fact, that IDB programme was the first IDB programme to be facilitated. It was then intended, during the decade of the 1970s, to develop housing units in Trinidad and Tobago to reach the low-income earners and to encourage low-cost housing.

However, in 1983, we had not had any significant input into the renewal of housing stock in Trinidad and Tobago. In 1989, the second settlements programme was initiated and it was estimated to deliver 7,500 housing units. Mr. Speaker, after six years of overtime and six extensions—the most extensions ever given by the Inter American Development Bank to any country anywhere in the world—we have only been able to manage the construction of just over 3,000 housing units.

During the period 2000—2001, we have been able, in the Ministry, with an allocation of $73 million, to record a hundred per cent implementation during this period and completed the construction, through the National Housing Authority, of 57 housing units in three areas—Couva North, River Estate and Sangre Grande. Through the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee, 106 houses—the original target for this year was 100.

The Project Execution Unit came to an end yesterday after six extensions. It has constructed, during this period, the largest number of units—822. Of the original target for this year—1,242—we have completed over 1,000 units and by the end of the year we will in fact meet and surpass that target generally.

During the fiscal year, in addition to the delivery of loans for housing units, the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee developed 140 lots with full infrastructure—at Bien Venue, 22 lots, and Orange Field Housing Development, 39. The Land Settlement Agency developed 604 lots at various sites throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Full planning and engineering designs have been completed to facilitate the distribution of an additional 600 lots.

In squatter regularization, the Ministry continued the process of Certificates of Comfort and to date we have been able to deliver 1,072 Certificates of Comfort, 300 statutory leases and nine deeds of leases. The agency also facilitated the construction of 44 core houses in the settlement areas.
Mr. Speaker, the position is that we are continuing to encourage much sweat equity in the development of housing units and one of the important questions raised by the distinguished Member for San Fernando East was how we could improve on the delivery of houses on a reduced budget. I will try my best to explain that. It will be a difficult task, but I assure him that within the change in policy, which he enquired about, we will be able to shed some light on it.

The United National Congress Manifesto 2000 is very clear on Government’s housing policy. On page 16 of that document:

“Our Housing Sector policy was aimed at meeting the basic housing needs of all sectors of society. This policy included a squatter regularisation programme, the development of a land bank to ensure more effective and efficient utilization of land for residential purpose and the adoption of cost efficient land use planning and infrastructure standards.”

On page 14 of the same document, it says:

“Our strategy is to encourage large numbers of persons to own their own homes and property, to involve themselves in business and to invest in savings and equity instruments.”

The Government has been in consultation with the construction industry in shaping Project HOME. The construction industry is very excited about the new policy of Government. Moreover, it is the first time that the private sector and the non-government sector will play a leading role in providing housing opportunities that Government will be facilitating the process.

Mr. Speaker, whereas in the past the Ministry concerned itself mainly with construction and taking on the responsibility from start to finish, without real input from prospective owners, it is now important, as we facilitate this new project, that we develop new criteria. The criteria and rationale for the allocation of houses, the location of sites, the choice of contractors and developers, the expenditure on the projects were not transparent; certainly the results were not equitable. Project HOME will change all of that.

Project HOME is a six-year programme under negotiations now with the Inter-American Development Bank and Cabinet recently took the decision to go forward with it. We are in the final stages of negotiations. This programme will facilitate the construction of Greenfield sites for 12,000 families—an average of 2,000 families per year.

The living accommodation of 8,000 squatter families will be upgraded and their lives will be immeasurably improved. About 4,000 poor families will get
help to improve or expand their homes, thus looking at home improvement, which is another question raised by the Member. Because of our emphasis on removing the blocks and barriers that now slow down the building process, we expect to encourage the private sector to build another 6,000 houses during a six-year period.

There are four important elements to this programme that make it different and distinct from previous programmes. The first and most important is that the Government will not build any houses. They will be the facilitator. It will create the environment in which the client and the private sector providers will come together, but we will not actually be building houses.

The second important element is the emphasis on quality. While we would not be responsible for construction, we would ensure that standards are developed for both sites and structures within the project. These standards and specifications will be rigidly adhered to. Mr. Speaker, there will be zero tolerance for poor quality.

In discussions with the Contractors’ Association, we have made it very clear to them that a contractor will be as good as his last job; a developer will be as good as the last house or lot. That is the bottom line. The third departure from the norm and third significant element of the programme is that the final decision about what to purchase and from whom to purchase would be made by the client, since the client would be the one paying the contractor in terms of their savings, long-term mortgages or matching funds and they are the ones to choose which contractors they would work with or buy from.

This leads to the fourth and most important element that makes this programme different and far better than previous programmes. It is transparency. Everything about the programme—criteria for clients, why they get or do not get support, the list of approved contractors, the database of artisans and trade persons—all these will be available and accessible to everyone. Information about how much we have spent at any time; about any given time; how much money we have allocated or committed, or how much we have left will be available to all the stakeholders. These would be at a web site with access to all those who wish to know about the project. If they are stakeholders, they would have an access code and would be allowed entry to the heart of the system to check progress on their requests. If they do not have computer access, they will be able to go to the office of Project HOME for help. This is one project that will be utterly transparent.

10.25 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I repeat that the criteria for selection would be known to everyone, and these forms will be available. The clients or beneficiaries will be
chosen on the basis of a computer-based and objective-based system called the Unified System for Evaluating Requests (USER), through a system called (HELP), Helping to Expedite the Legal or Lengthy Process. Everyone who wants help to acquire land or to develop land, build a house or houses, would get help to either expedite the process or to reduce the cost.

From next month, anyone, from the poorest person to the biggest developer, can ask for help to expedite or reduce the cost of construction. Mr. Speaker, we will not be cutting any corners in quality or environmental requirements, but we will do all that we can to reduce the time taken for the necessary permissions, and to solve the other problems.

Over the years, within the Ministry of Housing and Settlements and the National Housing Authority, in particular, in terms of our existing housing stock, which stands at over 6,000, I am happy to report that over the last year we have been able to increase our drive on arrears collection, and we have recorded to date that for the comparative period in the year 2000/2001, a 14 per cent increase, on a voluntary basis, from tenants on their rental and mortgage payments.

Mr. Speaker, generally, people are trying and are making efforts to make good on their arrears payment and we are very pleased with that. So that we would be able to utilize those same funds collected to go back into the provision of housing for low-income and low-cost housing construction.

As we look at our allocations for this in terms of $59 million, we would look to complement that with moneys collected from our drive, in terms of our drive over the years which currently stands at over TT $300 million, to plough it back into housing to achieve the objectives of the provision of 30,000 housing opportunities over the next six years. It is the challenge that will extract from all the employees and management within the Ministry the skills that must come to the forefront to be able to manage such a situation, to deliver the type of housing needs that our citizens in Trinidad and Tobago deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Martin Joseph (St. Ann’s East): Mr. Speaker, let me join my colleagues in complimenting the Minister of Finance on his first budget presentation and to congratulate the Member for San Fernando East, the Leader of the Opposition, for dealing thoroughly and clinically with his response.

The Member for Caroni Central in his contribution yesterday lamented the fact that, unlike other jurisdictions, both sides could debate the budget and come to
an agreement. I cannot remember which jurisdiction he used as reference but I would ask him whether or not in that jurisdiction—what kind of arrangement takes place in terms of Members of Parliament contributions towards the development of a budget, and, as a result of the needs and requirements of their constituencies, are able the find some way into that budget preparation document, so that at the end of the day we do not find ourselves in the particular situation as we have found ourselves over the last few days.

I am sure some people may say, “Well that is not how it was done in the past.” That may be so, but the circumstances in which we live today, 2001, are quite different from what obtained in the past, and I see why. As a result, Mr. Speaker, if we are talking about a country that would grow and develop and serve the needs of its citizens, then it is necessary. I am sure that perhaps we need to review how things are done. I can assure this Parliament and this country that if the PNM was in Government that would have been done. [Desk thumping] When we get back into Government, that is going to be done. [Desk thumping] There is no way that we can talk about the country stepping into the future and taking its rightful place among the community of nations, if we continue to do business in the same way that we have been doing business in the past.

Having said that, I wish to join with two previous Ministers of Finance who made some comments on this budget. I quote from the Daily Express dated September 20, 2001. It says:

“Former Finance Minister Wendell Mottley said on Tuesday that while the study of economics usually began with the notion of scarcity of resources Finance Minister Gerald Yetming had seemingly been able to provide a $17 billion ‘budget of plenty’.

The symposium, organized by the Greater Tunapuna Chamber, took place at the Bureau of Standards auditorium at Macoya. Addresses were delivered by Mottley, another Finance Minister, Selby Wilson, and political scientist Derek Ramsamooj.

Mottley cautioned, however, that while economic growth continued at 4.2 per cent, unemployment had fallen to 11.2 per cent, and there were foreign reserves of US $2.4 billion, the macro-economic picture ‘masked a darker side’.

He suggested ‘two Trinidad and Tobagos were emerging, not driven by evil, but simply by the way the world is turning out, driven by international forces’.
Mottley said there were places in the country where unemployment was twice the national average. What was needed was 100,000 jobs for ‘raw, unskilled, semi-literate workers’.

Wilson suggested that Yetming’s ‘vision’ was good but was unsupported by serious, workable and sustainable strategies and actions.”

I want to take off from there, Mr. Speaker, because the Minister of Finance’s budget “One People, One Nation: Leaving No One Behind”—I cannot agree with this budget’s theme. My experience as Member of Parliament for St. Ann’s East does not check this out. As a result, I have to agree with the statement made by the former Minister of Finance, that there are two societies developing in Trinidad and Tobago, “a have and a have not”. When I read this budget and listened to the Minister—he talked about unprecedented growth over the last four or five years—that is a fact. He talked about our finances, how they have improved—that is a fact. What is also a fact, is that there are many sectors in our society benefiting from this boom. When we come here and articulate that, we are told, “PNM was there for 30 years, why you did not do that?”

The history is that with the NAR’s policies of 1986, and continuing with the PNM’s policies of 1991—1994, the UNC coming into Government in 1995, inherited a bonanza, to say the least. [Desk thumping] It is the first time in the history of this country that we have had sustainable growth over such a period of time. One would have expected that as a result of that, mechanisms, systems and policies would have been put in place so that some of the disadvantaged would have benefited.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, during the period when PNM was in government and we had revenues, certain social programmes were introduced: School Feeding Programme, Book Grant and other types of social service programmes. However, with the economic situation changing, NAR having to tighten their belts, having to go to the IMF, there were certain conditionalities that caused the Government at the time to remove all those things.

The PNM coming in, in 1991—1995, had to continue that stringent economic situation. The UNC for the first time was able to inherit an economy that should have been doing a whole lot better for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] Let us review what they did when they came into power. They came with a kind of agenda, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, they were giving people the impression that over the years the PNM discriminated against a particular segment of the society. What happened?
They came in with: “We time now.” Mr. Speaker, what is meant by, “We time now”? The policies of the Government indicated that. So that, for example, old-age pensioners should be able to get more because the economic circumstances are such that they could get more. They came in with this thing about “We time now”, setting the stage for a certain amount of inequity and unevenness in the way in which the resources in this country are to be allocated and are allocated.

Mr. Speaker, “One People, One Nation: Leaving No One Behind”, I can tell you that there are parts of St. Ann’s East, and there are people in St. Ann’s East who have been left out of the social programmes and the infrastructure development that ought to be taking place, balanced across the country, is not taking place. I listen to some of my representatives having to come here and literally on our knees begging for this to take place in our constituencies—“Can I get roads fixed?” “Can I get my drainage taken care of?” “Can I get water?” The Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government said “We are improving the water situation in this country and people do not have to beg for it.”

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that you have to beg for almost everything and not for yourself, but for your constituents. I am saying that the time has come for a different approach. You know what is ironic, Mr. Speaker? On the surface when you talk to the respective Ministers they would say, “Yes, I will help you. You need this, yes, yes. I will take care of that.” However, the reality is that nothing is happening and they turn around and talk about bad representation. What can I do? Walk into a particular ministry and demand that the circumstances of my constituency be taken care of?

Mr. Speaker, let us get back to the fact that the economy is now trickling down. The former Minister of Finance talked about the need for 100,000 raw, unskilled jobs. For those of us who are in our constituencies on a regular basis—and most of us are—the number of requests from our constituents is for jobs, and most of them are from the low-skill level.

The Unemployment Relief Programme, or whatever it used to be called—it is now called the Employment Training Programme—is supposed to be one of those programmes designed to provide assistance and unemployment relief. This programme is now managed as a political football. The representatives of the constituency, whether at the national level or local level, have nothing to do with it. In my constituency the defeated UNC personnel are the ones running the programme. It is now being used as a means to continue to perpetuate the UNC. For example, Mr. Speaker, known PNM persons are given no employment and that ought not to be happening but that is exactly what is happening. The programme is not managed
in a way—through some means test or something—that people who need to access the programme can access the programme so that they can eke out some basic minimum living.

I am saying the miracle is not manifesting itself in terms of improving the living standards of the people in parts of my constituency. People who are employed, people who are upper and middle, obviously they would be benefiting from some of the measures. I am saying that there are large segments of constituents who are not benefiting from the programme. Unemployment continues to be high. In some instances, just recently the question about the need for schoolbooks, you literally have to beg corporate citizens to provide assistance so that the needy can be assisted.

10.40 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, we use the self-help project to help in terms of improving. Again, “lil’” things like drains, walkways, et cetera—self-help. Self-help, a programme that was introduced again by the NAR back in 1987 as an opportunity to provide assistance to communities by way of self-help, this programme is now so politicized that, even to get projects, “you know what you does have to do?” You “ha to” call this one and beg this one and say, “Well, help us with this project in this particular constituency”.

Mr. Speaker, elected representatives ought not to be subjected to that humiliation in order to get things done for their constituencies. I am saying that the time has come when a new approach needs to be put in place in order to make sure—because, like I said, we are not begging for ourselves, you know. It is the people whom we represent, but then I can understand why the UNC is doing that. [Desk thumping] The UNC’s intention is to try to make elected officials irrelevant. They say that—make them irrelevant, you know, so that people do not need to go to their elected representatives to make sure that their community lives are improved.

Mr. Speaker, we see it also in terms of allocation to local government. Almost every single one of us lamented that and especially in PNM-controlled regional corporations, look what has happened. They are emasculating these places and to come and say, “Oh, it is because there is a certain level of corruption taking place.” All of that is just to deflect from what the reality is. So I am starting out by saying, I cannot agree with the theme of this budget. I am saying that the experience that I see is an experience where certain communities are being deliberately left behind and this Government is continuing to develop a society
where you have two Trinidad and Tobagos. You have the “haves” who are getting better and the “have nots” who are suffering more and I am saying that this needs to be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, I believe—I may be wrong—that it is the first time in a while that I have seen a budget presentation in which the Minister was forced to spend a lot of time dealing with the issue of corruption—corruption and transparency—a lot of time. At page 15, under the heading corruption and transparency, you know, I mean, and let me just put on the record—[ Interruption ] No, no; let me just put this on the record once again, because they keep talking about “no government”. The Minister, in presenting—talking about, “This Government has taken the most steps to deal with the corruption”; this Government has had the greatest amount of corruption ever so they must take steps [ Desk thumping ] you know, and they are not even taking adequate steps.

To say that the PNM has no moral authority to talk about corruption, Mr. Speaker, let me remind this honourable House, and, by extension, the national community, that there was a time when the People’s National Movement was accused of mismanagement and corruption. The party paid the ultimate price for that accusation. We were voted out of government in 1986. When we came back into government in 1991—1995 they cannot say anything about corruption and mismanagement during 1991—1995. [ Desk thumping ]

Now, Mr. Speaker, the fact that you can have defenders of the UNC, and they are Ministers, who keep saying that “PNM t’ief”, is as if to give justification for the “t’iefin’ that taking place now”. [ Desk thumping ] So that even if people stole 10 years ago, I keep making the point, Mr. Speaker, the circumstances are different today. There is a requirement that is expected from elected officials that requires us to raise the bar and to set examples for this national community. [ Desk thumping ] We “cyar” continue to be talking about “They did it then”—to do what? “So da is justification for you doing it now?”

So, Mr. Speaker, to say that we have no moral authority to talk about corruption is another excuse. However, I was making the point that the Minister of Finance had to take pains to deal with the issue of corruption and transparency and the Minister talks about the measures that his Government has put in place or is putting in place to deal with corruption. One of the things he mentioned—well first of all let me put on the record, because I heard Members on the opposite side say that we are making this big song and dance about corruption, you know, as if corruption is not a big thing. I heard the Member for Siparia last night say that all
we do is to come here and we accuse people of being corrupt, and keep saying it over and hopefully it will stick on somebody, et cetera.

The World Bank in a World Bank Report June 2000 “Helping Countries Combat Corruption”, said a couple of things that I think I need to quote and put on the record of this honourable House. It says here:

“The Bank views corruption as a symptom of underlying institutional dysfunction, and thus employs a proactive and holistic approach that attempts to help clients strengthen governance and public sector management, to improve economic policies and legal/judicial systems, and to develop and implement specific anticorruption measures. The Bank has made strengthening borrower capacity a priority through increased lending, enhanced country-level advisory services, and the inclusion of ‘good and clean governance’ as one of the central pillars of the Comprehensive Development Framework.”

It goes on to say in another part:

“Fighting corruption is a complex, long-term problem, and it is important to maintain realistic expectations. The first step is to ensure high-level political support, without which an anticorruption effort is unlikely to succeed. To achieve this, our in-country operational work often starts with in-depth empirical survey work to help diagnose the extent and nature of the problems and raise public awareness.”

Mr. Speaker, it went on to say that:

“Corruption leads to misguided resource allocation, excessive government intervention, and inadequate service delivery. High levels of corruption deter private sector investment, slow growth, and can hamper poverty reduction efforts in numerous settings.”

Mr. Speaker, they talked about a strategy for combating corruption and the strategy for combating corruption is four-pronged. The first one is economic policy and management, and under economic policy and management they talk about deregulation, tax simplification, macroeconomic stability and demonopolization. Under administrative and civil service reform they talk about pay and meritocracy, decentralization and community action. This decentralization and community action, let me just say something about that.

You know, we have been clamouring for decentralization, the role of local government to be improved, to be enhanced so that we decentralize, we tend to
bring about a certain amount of administrative reform which would also help in
terms of dealing with corruption, but we are seeing the contrary. What we are
seeing—and many of the other Members on this side debated it so I do not want
to rehash that—is that more and more resources are being placed in the hands of
the Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government and not being
given to local government bodies which are in the best position to manage those
resources in the interest of the communities that they represent.

They talk also about financial controls, financial management, audit and
procurement, and then legal-judicial review, legal framework, judicial
independence, judicial strengthening and alternative dispute resolution
mechanisms, and the final piece is public oversight. They talk about
parliamentary oversight; civil society and media and they talk about independent
agencies and the NGOs. I want to spend a little time on the public oversight, Mr.
Speaker, and talk about parliamentary oversight, because when we come here as
Members of Parliament and ask questions and raise issues in debate, we are being
made to feel as if we should not ask anything. We ought not to ask anything about
the Government, but then, what is the role of Parliament, Mr. Speaker?

I want to use one of the CPA’s documents, “Parliamentary Committees”, again
to put on record some of the issues. This is because we are talking about
parliamentary oversight as one of the means of dealing with corruption, okay, and
I am saying that when we as parliamentarians raise issues here, we are made to
believe that we have—“You ain’ ha no right to ask nutten. What you asking?”
However, Mr. Speaker, if we do not exercise this same parliamentary oversight,
then the Government is going to run crazy, but then we should not be surprised.

Remember, one of the first things this Government wanted to do was to have
what, a unity government. There was supposed to be no Opposition, remember,
no Opposition, and we were made to seem as if we were uncooperative. We were
not about national unity when we scoffed at that thing about forming a
government of national unity and we asked, “If we form a government of national
unity, who will question the Government? Who will hold the Government
accountable? In what direction will our democracy be going if we follow that
particular approach?” Thank God, because of our history, because of the political
organization that we are, the PNM, we are able to be a “lil’” more circumspect.

Mr. Speaker, let me just say something about the question of parliamentary
oversight. I am looking at parliamentary oversight within the context of the World
Bank dealing with the issue of fighting corruption. Before I get into the details, I
think I need to put something on the record about the principles of people who are
in public office. It says, again—I am quoting from the CPA “Parliamentary Committees”. It says:

“…it is important to look at the principles of public life as outlined by the United Kingdom Committee on Standards in Public Life, chaired by Lord Nolan. This committee outlined several principles that elected officials should follow to be respected leaders in public life:”

The Member for Tobago East in his contribution yesterday talked about us as leaders, you know, and that if we did not understand our leadership responsibility, then, I think he said, we ought to leave, we ought to walk, and that when we stand here we stand here as leaders in our communities. Here is what they said about the respected leaders in public life:

“…selflessness; integrity; objectivity; accountability; openness; honesty; and leadership.”

Mr. Speaker, we went on to hear—the reason, again, that I am emphasizing this is because the Minister of Finance in his presentation indicated—and, you know, it was interesting “eh”, the Member for Couva South, the Attorney General, used to be mouthing this all the time, you know.

When people raise issues of corruption and mismanagement they talk about all the laws! “He say”, “I pass anticorruption law, integrity in public life law”, and then also brought into Parliament a constitutional amendment. The Minister quoted directly and I quote page 15 of the Budget:

“The Constitution (Amdt.) (No. 3) Act 1999, mandates the formation of joint investigative parliamentary committees to monitor and investigate instances of misuse or abuse of power or corruption in the Public Sector.”

I wonder how the Member for Couva South and the Attorney General feels about that now, because we resisted the establishment of those committees on specific grounds. We resisted it on the grounds, Mr. Speaker, as you would recall, that these committees would serve no useful purpose because the committees were going to be—the membership was going to have more Government members on it and it was going to be chaired by Ministers. So it is going to be themselves onto themselves, you understand, so where is the parliamentary oversight that these committees were supposed to have taken care of? [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, here is what the CPA document on Parliamentary Committees had to say and I quote:

“The main purpose of a committee, and in fact, of the Parliament is to hold the government accountable.”
Let me just say that again, Mr. Speaker:

“The main purpose of a committee, and in fact, of the Parliament is to hold the government accountable.”

It went on to identify 21 options for consideration by those committees. I just want to quote a few to underscore why it is that we on this side disagree with parliamentary committees as suggested by the then—well not the then, he is still the Attorney General and Member for Couva South.

Mr. Speaker, they said:

“The success of any committee will be determined by the amount of research resources that are made available to the committee.”

The number one requirement, the question of resources to the committee in order that the committee will be able to discharge its responsibility. The second, Mr. Speaker—I am pulling out of the 21. The second one I want to highlight is:

“It was strongly agreed that Parliaments should be spending more time in committee reviewing proposed estimates and holding ministers to account for where the money has been spent and where it will be dedicated for the coming year.”

[Desk thumping] The third:

“Chairs of various committees should be divided up amongst the various parties represented in the House. If committees are to be more non-partisan and an area where Private Members can contribute to the parliamentary process, less control by government of the committee chairs would be advantageous.”

[Desk thumping] So, Mr. Speaker, you can understand and I would like, when the Attorney General responds, to hear whether or not—what his comments are today on these committees being watchdogs for the corrupt practices of this current Government.

Mr. Speaker, while I am on that let me just say something else on the Parliament. At page 38 of the budget statement the Minister said, and I quote—it is so unfortunate because I want to believe it is a mistake. At page 38 of the budget document the Minister said and I quote:

“In addition, the sum of $45 million has been allocated for the replacement of the roof on the Red House. This is the first phase of a comprehensive restoration of this historic landmark.”
If we look in the development programme at page 6 you will see that restoration of the Red House—$12,900,000. [Interruption] I beg your pardon? I am not contradicting what my colleague said. It was based on the information provided, and you know, Mr. Speaker, that is creating a lot of public debate—$45 million to remove the roof of the Red House to renovate. Well remove, change the roof of the Red House. Some commentators suggest that they just break down the whole Red House. I could not understand how this mistake of such mammoth proportion could have been made.

You see, Mr. Speaker, I, over the years, have been raising some of the issues with respect to the Red House. I mean, I do not track the Red House but, as the seat of Government, and if Parliament is supposed to be the highest court of the land as it is said, you know, one sometimes wonders how we could be serious about Parliament and the role of Parliament and then where Parliament sits is treated with such contempt, you know. They will say, “30 years of PNM”, but I will put it on the record again. The Government has unprecedented resources that if they want to allocate the resources in areas that are important to national development, they can do that and people have already talked about instances in which squandermania has taken place.

We have talked about that, you know, overspending and all kinds of other things. As parliamentarians—when the debate started earlier this week, Mr. Speaker, you were not here—you should have seen the tearoom where we are supposed to spend some time. “If you see bucket and parliamentarians sitting and we ducking water on this side, ducking water here!”

11.00 a.m.

One wonders how important is this Parliament. The building is just part of the very institution of Parliament. It just shows you the contempt with which this Government treats Parliament. I am trying to correct the error of the $45 million. I also understand, because I have enquired as to the so-called renovation of the Parliament. It seems to me that the approach that is intended to be used is what is costing money and going to be costing time, because I understand that one part of the building needs to be renovated, and then they need to be housed there, and then another part has to be renovated, and so forth.

All I want to urge the Minister of Finance is, one, the question of—you hear what the Member for Chaguanas is saying? He says close Parliament. How could we make such a serious error in terms of saying $45 million for the changing of the roof when, obviously, somebody did not pay close enough attention to what
Mr. Joseph: Was done? He said it was an error? I am saying the statement says $45 million, and then when you look at the first-year development spending—

Mr. Imbert: Who tells you that the estimates are right?

Mr. M. Joseph: I do not know, but all I am saying is that some clarification needs to take place as it relates to that.

I want to turn, Mr. Speaker, to water. The Minister, in his presentation again in the budget statement at page 37 talking about infrastructure, talked about:

“Mr. Speaker, our agenda for infrastructure development would involve the expansion of the nation's road network, the modernization of all our urban areas and sea ports, and the expansion of the telecommunications sector. These initiatives are in addition to providing the more basic requirements of water, sanitation, irrigation and drainage.”

Later on he comes down on the same page to talk about expansion of the nation's water supply and Solid Waste Management services are as much a part of the programme as the modernization of the telecommunications sector. Then at the bottom of the page he talks about:

“Mr. Speaker, the Desalination Plant is scheduled to come on stream next month. It is expected that water produced by this plant will service the industrial sector at Point Lisas…”

and that he intends to establish an integrated water resources management system.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Joseph, the Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government, indicated the improvements in the water supply and he quoted statistics in terms of the number of people who are now in receipt of pipe-borne water. While we refute those statistics, because he gave the impression that only 11 per cent of the population received 24-hour water supply and that by 2000 it had gone to 85 per cent, let me tell you my experience. When I say “my experience” I talk about the experience of the people whom I have the good fortune of representing in this House—the people from the constituency of St. Ann's East.

What we can say is that water distribution in the constituency has deteriorated in the last six years. Whereas people could have relied on a reliable supply of water—they used to get water three days a week. For example in the Santa Cruz Valley, they could have been sure it was Monday, Wednesday and Friday. We now have a situation where they are uncertain as to when water is going to come.
Whereas in other parts of the constituency, like Acono and Maracas, St. Joseph, they never had a problem with water, they now have a problem with water. For them it is not water for all in 2000. Let me just indicate because I have had to ask WASA why this has happened. In the earlier days, I was told that what has happened is that water coming into the valley comes through the treatment plant at St. Joseph, and I was reliably informed that what happened is that they have now diverted the water from coming in there on some of the scheduled days.

It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that the people in St. Ann’s East cannot align themselves; they cannot feel anything about water for all. As far as their experiences are concerned, the water situation is getting worse and the number one problem brought to my attention outside of the question of unemployment from a certain segment, but this is a problem right across the constituency. Now, it affects some more than others. Those people who can afford tanks are in a position to make sure and secure, but in today’s age we ought not to be having problems with respect to water and again, given the kind of resources that this country now has available to it, we should not.

There is another problem with respect to water, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about the desalination plant as an opportunity to increase. One of the problems plaguing this country’s water system is the question about distribution and leaks. We still experience about 40 to 50 per cent leakage and, whereas in the past there was a system of improving supply, but dealing also with the distribution pipes, I do not know what has happened with WASA and that programme; because it seems to me that we have to address the question of leakage. If we increase the supply and we did not address leakage, then we have the same 40 to 50 per cent of water loss.

We are talking also about becoming First World. In First World countries this is about 15 to 20 per cent. Here we are at 40 to 50 per cent. Mr. Speaker, it seems to me, like I said, that the Water and Sewerage Authority must be mandated to do a better job. Some little incident occurred recently. I am almost sure I saw WASA indicating to customers that they are not accepting cheques anymore because of the number of bounced cheques in today’s age? I want them to send back my cheque, because it is ridiculous. The Minister used to talk about customer-friendly, customer-driven—all of our agencies becoming customer-driven. I am sure we passed a law about bounced cheques. Secondly, I am sure that it is only a small segment of the population that will pay with cheques. Most of the other people are obviously paying cash; but I find it arrogant of an agency—
Mr. Singh: The hon. Minister who has jurisdiction is not here, but I thought that I might clarify this issue as I have knowledge about it. The issue with respect to cheques—the position of WASA is that they accept personal cheques, but if those cheques are provided and you have a history of the cheques bouncing, then they will not accept personal cheques from you subsequently.

Mr. M. Joseph: Thank you for the explanation but that is not what was cried in the newspaper. It would be interesting for WASA to clear that up, because that is not what was written in the newspaper. WASA across the board indicated from now on, if you are paying with cheques, it must be certified or it must be some banker's order.

The reason I bring this—and it may seem incidental—is to underscore the kind of arrogance that you see existing in some of these agencies, and some of them seem to forget what their purpose is. Their purpose is to provide consumers with improved products and/or service. In some instances, they become law unto themselves, and it seems to be permeating most of our institutions—another one which I do not want to say anything about at this particular time.

Mr. Speaker, let me just say something else, also—the Minister is now walking in—about water and sewerage. The hon. Leader of the Opposition in his contribution raised some concerns about the Minister's programme of 30,000 new houses over the next five or six years. There is a vexing problem that still confronts many communities that has to deal with the sewerage system. There is a particular community, again, in St. Ann's East, where what happened is that those systems, I think the home developers developed these things, and I do not know whether or not they are supposed to be passed over to the agency for the question of its maintenance, and in some instances that does not happen, but there are people who are living in communities—they have written.

Remember the particular instance in Maracas, St. Joseph? They had written the Minister of Health, they wrote the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Public Utilities because there was this housing complex. The Minister of Health is aware, and they got the runaround. For the last two years they have been attempting to get this matter resolved. I see the Minister of the Environment is shaking his head as if I am providing the Parliament with misinformation. Mr. Minister of Health, am I not correct? Four ministries written to over and over, and the people got the runaround as to who is responsible for correcting that problem. In the meantime, while we cannot determine who is responsible, they are living in a state of hell on a daily basis having to deal with that stench. These are people
who have spent some good money, because these are upper class people who are subjected to that situation.

The question about sewerage and the intention of the 100,000 homes, I see a particular NGO refers to them as the orphan sewerage plants. Those are plants that no one seems to take responsibility for and they said there are about, at least, 100 large housing projects that find themselves in this particular situation where no one takes responsibility for these things, and I think that needs to be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, I need to say something briefly on drainage also. Last year, we suffered from the worst type of flooding in the Santa Cruz Valley in a long time. I do not know if it is one of those cycles. Geographers, or whoever has trained in that area, talk about flood cycles every 20 years or 30 years as the case may be, but last year we had a situation where we were shocked in terms of drains, avenues and communities along the Santa Cruz valley being flooded out.

We have been making requests for some time with respect to the maintenance of those drains in the constituency, and you know, it is amazing. When you go to the ministry of drainage that used to fall under works and is now under infrastructure, they lament about the allocations provided to them as they relate to drainage.

Mr. Speaker, I think in this year's allocation, if you look at drainage and irrigation programmes that falls under the local government bodies, it is estimated that some $3,191,000 is allocated in 2002, but interestingly enough, in 2001, some $3,860,000 were allocated among the 14 corporations for drainage. You know how much was actually approved? I am just going by the Government documents that were provided to me. Do you know how much, according to the revised estimates for 2002? It is $489,341.

We saw a budget that says $3.8 million. That in itself is miniscule, because when you give, for example, the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation $400,000, do you know how large that is? Mr. Speaker, $400,000 was allocated in the 2001 budget for drainage. Do you know how much they actually got? None.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. M. Joseph: Mr. Speaker, I thank Members on both sides for giving me some additional time to make my contribution. I was making the point that the
estimates in 2001, as miniscule as they were, $3,860,000; actually spent, $489,341. What is estimated for 2002? Mr. Speaker, $3,191,000. Again, I have to focus on San Juan/Laventille. Do you know how much was allocated for San Juan/Laventille? They are getting $114,000. How many drains could one clean with that? I guess if last year's experience is anything, we could expect this year they will get absolutely nothing.

So, for 14 regional corporations, $3 million, but when you look also in terms of the allocation for drainage in the Ministry of Infrastructure Development, the allocation for drainage is $9,700,000. It is always instructive to go back and see what happened. In 2001, $5,700,000 was allocated. Actually received, $2,373,000. That is for the whole country.

You see, constituencies that have a drainage problem, we see the problem. When we call drainage and we say, for example, the Santa Cruz River needs cleaning, do you know what they tell us? They ask residents to get together and put moneys to rent the equipment needed to clean the rivers. Mr. Speaker, that might have been appropriate at a time when the country's financial circumstances called for that, not now, with the kind of revenues that we are receiving.

I am saying, Mr. Speaker, clearly we have a problem with respect to identifying the needs of communities in our constituencies. That was the reason for local government. So that because they are closer to the ground they have a better idea of what those needs are and are able to address those needs. When you emasculate the local government bodies, how can the citizens’ needs be addressed? Do you know what happens? All the resources are now resided in the Minister, and everybody now must go—and you see, this goes back to what the World Bank said. That is how the corruption comes about. If I want to get my project faster than somebody, I have to know somebody.

Let me give you an instance, Mr. Speaker. When I was living in Santa Cruz, I had a problem with my sewerage. I called the corporation then. It was then referred to as St. George West. I called them up and said I have this problem, the thing is stinking. They said that through the corporation, the normal cost was about $40 or $60 to come and clean the system, but the point is they told me, “Hey, Mr. Joseph, do you know when we will reach to you? We will reach to you in six months’ time. Look at the number of names there, but we could expedite it for you.”

You are faced with a dilemma. You are a good citizen. What is the dilemma? You and your family can keep smelling that for the next six months, or you
acquiesce. What was acquiescing at that time? It was seven or eight years ago; $200. You put your hand in the pocket, give them the $200 so that they would come early and, also, you had to provide two bottles of rum. I did it, Mr. Speaker! So, in a way, I also encouraged, but you understand what happens and you understand what the World Bank is saying with respect to how our institutions are managed.

I am getting back to everything with the Minister. The Minister is not a superhuman. He could say as much as he wants. He “ain't” superhuman and he has to be able to determine what is going to be prioritized. Who gets what. I am waiting.

Let me just say something else. I am not afraid to put it on the record. I am to meet with the Minister of Works. Again it hurts, because I have to meet with him to say, “Listen, these are all the problems that affect my constituency”. Can some mechanism be put in place where on an ongoing basis there are some arrangements made for representatives to meet with ministers concerning certain types of things? I am asking. We need to find newer and better ways of doing what we are doing. It cannot be one where you literally have to go and beg.

It depends on how good they are. There are some, and I am not afraid to say it. My experience, Mr. Speaker, is that I have had to deal with Ministers. I have had to deal with Minister Assam. You know you have to take all the little flack from him, “La, la, la”, but after you take all that, at the end of the day, he assisted because I had to deal with a problem involving vendors at Maracas Bay. They wanted to kick them out because they were owing rent. Suppose he decided that he was not going to have an open heart and decide, “I am not listening to you; I am not hearing you,” what was going to be the case?

11.20 a.m.

When the Member was the Minister of Education we had a situation where the Acono Presbyterian School burnt during the August vacation and by calling him at night and with the Self-help Commission, we were able to get the school rebuilt. Supposing he decided, “I ain't taking on Martin Joseph; let Martin Joseph ‘ketch’ he tail so people ‘ain’t’ go vote for him next time!” Supposing he had taken that position, as some of them do now? I do not know, Mr. Speaker, if you realize that some of them are taking the position to make our Members of Parliament ineffective.

The former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, Dr. Reeza Mohammed, helped with some agricultural matters, but they help because; there is
nothing that compels them, so you are forced also to make sure you have a particular kind of relationship with them so that you can get things done. It ought not to be like that. Do not tell me it used to be like that 10 or 20 years ago; we are in a different period now. People are demanding things from their representatives. As representatives we have to be able to find ways and means of treating with the people who elect us, if the system is to continue and if democracy, which we are all about, is to continue.

All of us ran to listen to President Bush deal with the whole question about what is going to happen. What about our situation? How do we make sure? As leaders of our communities, we put things in place to make sure that Trinidad and Tobago continues to be a society of which we can be proud. This place ought to be better than it is, given the resources available to us, but we continue to manage things in a way in which only fewer and fewer people are benefitting from the resources that belong to all of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, we need to find ways and means of ensuring the sentiments of the budget: "One people, One nation: Leaving No One Behind". Too many people are being left behind.

One other thing, Mr. Speaker, about the environment: let me just say something about the environment. We are bringing all these pieces of legislation about environmental management protection and it seems to me that there needs to be a clarification between the responsibility of the Minister of the Environment and the Environmental Management Authority (EMA). I do not want to get into any details, but it seems to me that that needs to be clarified. If the EMA is being given a greater amount of responsibility, it needs to be staffed and it needs to be given a whole lot more resources.

I have my own little concern with respect to the Green Fund and the reduction of the money to the Green Fund. The Minister, again at page 50, talked about a national solid waste management system—laudable things, unleaded gasoline and all these other things that are designed to enhance the environment. There are a couple of things that I would like to ask. How much was collected in the last fiscal year from the Green Fund levy? I notice that the Minister is anticipating collecting $55 million. Who made up the Green Fund board? Why are we allocating 20 per cent of the annual receipts under the Green Fund to finance expenditure in carrying out the purposes of the EMA, other than its operational expenses?

The Minister talks about expanding the board to bring in three non-governmental organizations or community-based organizations. I am just curious: Who is going to determine which ones should come in? The ones that
give trouble like, for example, Friends and Fishermen of the Sea? I hold no brief for them, but we came across an interesting development recently where, I think, they were supposed to get an environmental award; I think they made some statements that somebody did not like and the next thing you know the award, reward or whatever it was, was pulled. I want to know: is it going to be NGOs and CBOs who are in step with the Government, who are the good boys? I would like to find out from the Minister how we are going to determine who the three NGOs will be, because he intends to expand the board by including three environmentally related NGOs or CBOs. I am just curious who will determine who the additional three would be.

I want to ask the hon. Minister: why did he move the management of the fund from the Green Fund Agency to the management of the Treasury? I am just curious.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I told you earlier on, and I am saying it again, I have a little difficulty coming here to a budget debate and literally having to beg and say, "I need this for the constituency, I need that and can you help me with this and that." A mechanism needs to be put in place where those kinds of discussions can take place prior to the budget. I do not expect everything to come in but, clearly, a mechanism can be put in place where those things are put. We would come up here and say, "I need this, that and the other", but nothing is going to happen, because the budget will be passed. How are these things going to be addressed? There is no contingency; there is nothing. You hope when you raise them that they would form part of the year after, but it does not happen. We really need to find some better way of making sure, because these are people who are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, like everybody else, and there is no reason why they need to be left behind because their representative happens to be a PNM member. [Desk thumping] No man!

We need water. Like I said, we have a problem with water. There is enough water in the Santa Cruz valley to provide water for all the residents there and enough to export. I have said this before; the Minister could tell you. For the last three years the Member for Caroni East would say: "I put $3 million, right; I put another $2 million for some facility in Santa Cruz." Nothing happened. The situation has gotten worse, because whereas it used to be confined to one part of the constituency, now it is the whole constituency.

Do you know what is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker? Sometimes residents call you, "Mr. MP I have no water," as if I have the water and I decide to give it to somebody else or I keep it for myself; but I empathize with them. Then you call
the authorities and you are subjected to all the little humiliations and humour, if they decide to do that to you. As a result, your constituents continue to suffer.

Concerning roads, hon. Minister of Infrastructure, there is a part of the constituency called Laventille Road, as you know, in Febeau; if you see the condition of those roads; and La Canoa Road. I can go ahead and list them: the State Quarry Road and these other places. I am sure St. Ann's East is no different. I am not asking for any special treatment. We need to put something in place where systemically these things can be dealt with, without reaching a crisis; that is all I am saying.

Drainage; electricity; the Saddle Road. I am sure the Minister is familiar with it; he comes in there every now and again. At nights it is in a terrible state. Local government does not have responsibility for that and even if they have responsibility, they got $1,000 for lights. What kind of light for $1,000 for an electoral district?

I will have to talk to the Minister about the Las Cuevas fishing facility. What ministry is that under? I am not so sure it is under agriculture anymore.

Community centres—there are parts of the constituency in community centres. Sporting facility—two parts of the constituency: La Baja and Acono—no playing facilities. I could go on with the list of needs for the people who I represent in this honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you and the Members of this House for listening to me. I do not know whether it is going to make a difference but, anyhow, I thank you.

The Minister in the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Local Government (Hon. Chandresh Sharma): Mr. Speaker, we also thank the Member for St. Ann's East. It seems as if he is too close to a facility there. He raised some questions here; very unfair.

This budget debate is not about blowing up emotions. Here you need to present the real facts. The fact of the matter about the Employment Training Programme (ETP) is that people seeking employment register to be considered for employment. To date, close to 75,000 people have registered, of whom 55,000 have obtained employment. The employment is largely in the East/West Corridor where, I suspect, the need for it is highest. So for the Member to come here this morning and claim that it is political, is totally unfair.
It is no longer under the PNM. The Minister of Labour, Manpower Planning and Industrial Relations made a very correct decision to keep the politicians out of it. For this reason we have seen absolutely no quarrels over ETP for this year and last year as well.

The Member for St. Ann's East also raised the question about the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA). One has to appreciate that it is under this Government, since 1995, we have injected in excess of $2 billion in water works. At this point in time, we are repairing more than 2,500 leaks per month. In the absence of no other capital investment over the last 30 years, one would appreciate that everything cannot happen overnight.

We are producing close to 200 million gallons of water per day, so there is enough water. More communities are obtaining a fair share of water on a daily basis. In our surveys conducted recently, more and more homes are accessing water almost every day.

The Member raised an issue, and it is a very good example of his experience with the St. George County Council then, which is under the PNM administration, but that has changed. If you call any regional corporation now, whether PNM or UNC, you can get a service within 48 hours.

Mr. Imbert: Rubbish!

Hon. C. Sharma: Well, let us put it to the test. Everything is rubbish. You all specialize in rubbish.

I want to congratulate the Member for Tobago West on his contribution today and he raised a number of concerns: one, infrastructure in Tobago. You would appreciate, Mr. Speaker, that it was only on April 6th this year that the THA signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry to be part of the National Highways Programme, so that a significant amount of work is taking place with funding coming from the Government and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) as well. In fact, in Tobago our water production is in excess of what is needed by the people of Tobago. Then there are a number of other projects coming on. The Minister of Finance indicated that on page 89 of his budget presentation.

We saw a while ago the Member for St. Ann's East reading from a document that has no relevance, and was only convenient to himself. Let us look at what PricewaterhouseCoopers says about the budget:

"This year's budget was well looked forward to with a sense of expectation and anticipation."
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  
Friday, September 21, 2001

[HON. C. SHARMA]

They are talking about the Minister here:

“In a short time in office, Minister Yetming has impressed most observers with his no-nonsense, forthright and frank approach to issues. We expected no less in the Budget and we were not disappointed. [Desk thumping] In one of the longest presentations in many years, he provided a comprehensive review of the economy and the Government's vision for the future. On the surface, all appears well in the economy: growth is strong, unemployment continues to fall, inflation is in check, our foreign exchange reserves are strong, the TT dollar has strengthened against the US dollar, a first for any Caribbean country. Our energy commodity prices are very good.”

That is Ernst & Young. Let us hear what they say:

“This Budget has come at a time when the economy is at its strongest. The Trinidad and Tobago dollar has experienced some appreciation and our foreign reserves continue to grow with gross official reserves at US $2.4 billion or five months import over, a first for Trinidad and Tobago again.

The Minister expressed on several occasions that he was open to ideas and solutions and, in this regard, he held several meetings with various interest groups, each of whom presented what they felt should be in this year’s presentation—again a first.”

So, Members opposite have to appreciate that times have changed. The national community is looking for sincerity, a higher level of intelligence in what we do and how we do it as well.

The Member for Arouca North raised the question yesterday about employees working only one and two hours. It is very unfair to attack the employees of our local regional corporations. That is not correct. In some instances, some employees would obtain tasks which have been with us for the last 30 or 40 years; meaning that some people would arrive very early on mornings—sometimes 4.00 a.m.—to cutlass or sometimes clean drains where, because of sanitary conditions, they have to work shorter periods. So it is an attack on the workers. I want to indicate under our watch we are getting a high level of work from our employees.

The Member for Arima—I congratulate him on his presentation as well—raised the question of councillors obtaining higher salaries. As you are fully aware, that is largely the responsibility of the Salaries Review Commission, but, certainly we take note of it and we have been having very good, meaningful and productive discussion with the association which represents all 124 councillors. We have a very good relationship with them. The Member for Diego Martin
Central is sometimes a party to it. What we are looking at is to find other ways to assist. One of the proposals we are going to consider is to make sure that councillors perhaps obtain tax breaks on the purchase of motor vehicles. Already, they have access to telephones, stationery, and other similar benefits at the corporations.

The Member for Toco/Manzanilla raised the question of the maintenance of recreation grounds and called for a partnership, perhaps, with the sporting groups or NGOs in the communities, to enter into a contract agreement with the corporation. We are exploring that. Perhaps that would be a very good way of incorporating more and more. As you know, the recent development with the regional corporation that is there is a larger effort to establish partnerships with NGOs and CBOs. We would be lending support for that particular area.

The Member for Laventille West raised the question of street lighting. That has been engaging the attention of the Ministry, and we are looking at a number of options. One such option is solar lighting. With this we would be able to cut the cost of electricity. We also hope that would be cheaper, because it should be maintenance free. We are also looking at the dusk to dawn lights; which are much cheaper to install. If that comes on stream, more lights will come across the country.

The Member for Arouca North, I think, also raised the question of the work environment for our employees at the Ministry of Local Government. We are proposing a number of administrative complexes. One would be started soon in Siparia. What some of these will offer is an opportunity to earn income as well. Therefore all the needs for employees’ children would be provided. Children could be able to wait for their parents after school. There would also be training facilities together with shops and stores for rent, so we would be generating revenue at the same time and it would be user-friendly.

Again, we have had discussions with the National Gas Company. We are exploring in some areas to make sure that natural gas is used for air conditioning and, in some instances, lighting as well. More and more benefits can be obtained by working in partnership. A number of these matters are coming up in the association with our discussions with a number of stakeholders in the communities with the association representing all local government bodies and all the other stakeholders in the community.

Yesterday—in keeping with his usual self: always short in content and substance—the Member for Diego Martin East tried to capture national attention by talking about $45 million for the roof of the Red House. I spoke to him when
he entered, and he said, “You know you have to do anything to get in the papers.” Well he did make the papers. The roof repairs are expected to cost approximately $10 million. One has to appreciate this is one of its kind in the world. The OAS recognizes this Red House as one of its kind in the world. The slates for the roof in this particular building have to be obtained in Spain. The nearest we saw was in Cuba. I have been on the roof to look at it myself, but that is going to cost us $1.5 million. This particular roof, it is not the kind of roof that the Member for Diego Martin East—one knows his history with building walls and other things. Certainly we will not want him to touch the roof. Construction costs will be approximately $6 million which include removing and replacing the tiles, the structural repairs—[Interruption] I will make sure the media gets a copy of this so that we can have the exact report—removal and replacement of tiles, structural repairs; the copper area that needs to be repaired as well, together with the concrete areas on the roof. So that the $45 million is only an estimate for the total renovation and repair of this Red House. More than likely it is going to cost more than that at the end of day.

Part of the building has to be repaired to accommodate the move of the Parliament; which is normal. If one is repairing the roof of his or her house, one may need to take some temporary measures as well: either use tarpaulins while you stay in it, rent or stay at a relative’s house. If repairs have to take place, some kind of accommodation has to be made. I hope the Member for Diego Martin East will not continue in his trend to give wrong information.

11.40 a.m.

The Member for St. Ann’s East talked about the economic situation in Trinidad and Tobago not being good. That is totally incorrect. Only yesterday we saw the signing of another methanol plant to come by the Atlas Group, in excess of TT$2 billion. I think approximately US$400,000. So that alone indicates clearly the confidence that investors have in Trinidad and Tobago. The Minister of Finance indicated that we are attracting close to US$4 billion. No other country in the Caribbean or Latin America is attracting that kind of investment.

Last night, after the dinner break, we were all looking at television to see President Bush's address on the situation in the United States. Less than a month ago we celebrated the 39th anniversary of independence of Trinidad and Tobago, it caused many of us to reflect and in that reflection we have to go back and look at what obtained prior to 1962 and soon after 1962. What comes to mind in 1962 and just before then, the Father of the Nation, Eric Williams, and Capildeo got together to look at the independence of Trinidad and Tobago. They subscribed to
the fact that we in Trinidad and Tobago can take care of ourselves and not be dependent upon Great Britain to the extent that we were.

It is in this context that independence was negotiated and obtained. “What Eric Williams wanted for us?” He wanted Trinidad and Tobago to have education for all. Prime Minister Williams came; Prime Minister Chambers came; Prime Minister Robinson came; Prime Minister Manning came but education was not obtained for all. It was only under the Panday administration that we were able to access education for all our people in Trinidad and Tobago.

He also wanted us to have access to the basic things of life. Water—and again under the Panday administration, more than 80 per cent of the population are obtaining water. Housing has always been a problem, a global problem, but again under this administration you are seeing the desire and the sincerity and the willpower to build 30,000 homes and this has nothing to do with UNC supporters, this has to do with the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

For too long the PNM has come and said UNC this, UNC that. It is clear. The very book that the Member for St. Ann’s East read from was largely because of PNM corruption. It is crystal clear that the masters of corruption in the Caribbean have been the PNM. It is documented all over the world. Today we live in the world of technology and we can go on any web site and pull up information. When you talk about corruption in Trinidad, you talk about PNM. We must not fear the truth, we must not fear to deal fair and square with each other.

This budget identifies all of us—every child, every mother, every father in this country. There is a very calculated effort to reach out to everyone. There is absolutely no need for Members opposite to try to score points on this. Let us look at it. A budget of close to $15 billion and the larger part of it is for goods and services; for books for our children; for buses for our children. It is not only for one sector. The school my children attend, it is not only for UNC children, it is for the children of Trinidad and Tobago, whether it is secondary or elementary school. We have done 50 schools within the last five years.

We are working towards a quality nation where education is going to be the passport to access the world. Too many of our colleagues opposite come here and want to score cheap political points. Let us wake up, let us look at the events in America a week ago as some kind of reminder to do something. It is said that something must happen in our lives that requires us to do some soul-searching, to go deep in our souls and reflect.
Things are going very good in Trinidad and Tobago and it is not the UNC only that is saying that. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West makes the most money under this Government. He is right. There are opportunities available.

We have an average GDP growth of 4.2 per cent, consistent in the last many years under this administration. Are we not all benefiting from that? Or some of us do not understand it. We have double foreign reserves under this administration. When I was elected in 1991, I went out to the community—and history would show that in 1991 I won the Fyzabad seat with less than 200 votes. Four years later, under a PNM Government—and PNM suffered us. The PNM did not deliver anything. We could not talk to the Member for Diego Martin East. Even his own colleagues could not talk with him. He would not treat with you. He delivered absolutely nothing.

We were able to capture Fyzabad with the highest new votes in the country, even though I was in Opposition. That was because we went out and met the people and treated with them. It was during that exercise that I enquired of my constituents what it was they wanted. They wanted to make sure, mothers in particular, that their children could access health care. Every mother has that psychological fear. A group of researchers once said that the greatest pain a human being can suffer is a mother giving birth to a child. Some years later another group of researchers said that there is still a greater pain and it is for that mother to see her child go hungry. Hungry here does not only mean the absence of food. It means the absence of opportunities, of education, of pipe-borne water and similar things.

So the mothers wanted to make sure that their children could obtain health care. Look at the kind of money we have spent on health facilities in Trinidad and Tobago. In every community, under this administration, we have built a health centre. We have spent more money on medication. When we came into government in 1995, we were spending about $50 million on medication. To date, we have spent close to $100 million. More of our people who cannot afford medicine can now get it at a reduced price. Persons suffering with diabetes can now access medication, the cheapest in the Caribbean.

We have been training nurses, health visitors, midwives and others. So you see the level of improved services throughout our health facilities. That is what the mothers wanted. They wanted to make sure that their husbands had jobs. The Member for Tunapuna read the CSO report. There were more than 60,000 jobs during the past five years. Who are these people getting these jobs? Are they not your sons and daughters?
Mr. Hinds: No.

Hon. C. Sharma: You have no sons and daughters. You are not privileged to have that.

We saw more people coming into training and this Government’s desire is to educate and to make sure that more persons can access better jobs. The Member for St. Ann’s East read the sayings of a former Minister of Finance, Mr. Mottley. Mr. Mottley endorses this budget, but he made an error, he said we must provide any kind of job. He is not interested in providing qualified jobs for our people. We want to train our people. Under the computer programmes in this country, more than 100,000 persons have accessed it at minimal cost and, in some instances, at no cost. We have introduced 24-hour day-care in some health centres in Princes Town and in Couva.

11.50 a.m.

We have done pre-schools, so a number of children in rural communities, in particular, can now access that. We have trained more teachers and hired more teachers as well. You have heard about the secondary schools, so I do not want to go into that.

We have introduced an apprentice allowance; never before. So that we are not only saying we are going to do these things, we are putting money into it as well, so that more and more young boys and girls can be trained in communities in business houses and earn some money at the same time. We have put aside $52 million for that benefit.

We have done 53 community centres. In the past the community centres were the meeting places for PNM meetings only; not today. Every community centre was managed by a PNM party group. Today you can access training in any area. Mothers can go there and do some refresher courses. A number of them have distance learning facilities as well.

So Members opposite really need to wake up. Perhaps after I speak we could conclude the budget debate. I really think so. [Desk thumping]

Homework centres: We are making sure the children of this country can access facilities wherever they are.

We have provided grants for persons willing to go into business—the Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC); FUND Aid. Previous to the UNC Administration, it was contact. Which Minister do you know, you get a loan and
you do not pay it back. Times have changed. The Member for St. Ann’s East knows that very well.

What is very clear is that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is treating with its citizens across the board. Look at the way the PNM treated Hasley Crawford, with contempt; and Morris Marshall. [Interruption] You listen and learn—

Mr. Assam: And repent, and we will forgive you!

Hon. C. Sharma: The PNM government treated him very badly and they want to use him as a role model today.

Miss Beckles: Could the Minister give way, please?

Hon. C. Sharma: Sure.

Miss Beckles: Could I enquire from the Minister, the sum of money that was promised to Mr. Crawford, whether that entire sum was paid, please?

Hon. C. Sharma: May I allow my learned colleague to answer that?

Mr. Ramsaran: Thank you for giving way—

Hon. Members: No, no, no.

Mr. John: He gave way.

Mr. Hinds: On a point of order—

Mr. John: What is the point of order?

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, we were told previously in this House that that was not permissible. He cannot allow another Member, especially one who has already spoken, to have another opportunity to speak.

Mr. Speaker: The Member raised a question to the Member for Fyzabad who is on his feet. Apparently, the Member for Fyzabad does not have the answer and he is seeking information from the Minister where that responsibility lies. All the Minister is seeking to do is to assist that Member with the answer to provide it to the Member. I do not have a difficulty with that and it does not contravene the Standing Orders, according to the point of order that was moved, that the Member has spoken and he is getting another chance to speak again. He is merely providing that specific piece of information asked of the Member on his feet so that the answer can be provided to the Member for Arima.

The Member for Chaguanas will only address that part of the answer and the Member for Fyzabad will then continue.
Mr. Ramsaran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you again, Member, for giving way. I would like to say that the money that was promised Mr. Hasely Crawford was not promised by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, but, indeed, a consortium of businessmen. As far as I understand, the money was given to him; also to add that everything that this Government promised Mr. Crawford, he got. We gave him over $3 million in the value of a house, plus cash to fix that house, and we continue to work with Mr. Crawford. Do you know why? He has been the best sportsman in Trinidad and Tobago and we continue to help him. Thank you very much. [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Sharma: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to tell the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, we are members of the CPA. This practice is the norm. If a Member does not have the correct information and another Member has it, the correct information must be supplied.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Fyzabad, there is really no need for further explanation on that. I have ruled; I have allowed it, so please proceed with your input.

Hon. C. Sharma: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I was making the point that 5,000 young men and women of Trinidad and Tobago have obtained assistance in going into business, a first in the Caribbean again, a first for Trinidad and Tobago under the Panday administration. How are they going to respond to this? Are they going to say it is 5,000 UNC business people; people in Port of Spain, Point Fortin, Laventille, Barrackpore, Cedros? Some of them buy goods from people who have interests right here.

So that we have to be certain that we are delivering. What seems to be the situation here is that Members opposite have nothing to say. These are facts. These are available even by an independent author.

Let us move on. The employment rate continues to fall with an average of 11.1 per cent for the six-month period ending March 2001, again the lowest for Trinidad and Tobago in the last 15 years. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Rahael: Your whole contribution is from Price Waterhouse.

Hon. C. Sharma: It does not matter where it comes from. The whole contribution must be based on facts and on truths. In fact, do you want me to do like the Member for San Fernando East, who spoke an untruth about salt fish? I am a vegetarian but my wife eats meat and I found out that salt fish is $10 a pound. [Desk thumping]
Hon. Member: What kind of salt fish? [ Interruption]

Hon. C. Sharma: I know at one time there was a consideration for Members of Parliament to have some training, and perhaps we may need to know the difference between pound and kilogram.

I want to focus a little on local government. In so doing, I want to thank Members on both sides for encouraging councillors to be part of the association, and in particular the Member for Diego Martin Central, who understands local government a little. [Laughter] What we have done is to bring the association together and to treat with the issues. [Interruption] The local councillors are not only interested in earning money. They want to serve Trinidad and Tobago. So at the local government level we are encouraging them more and more to go into partnership throughout the communities, whether they belong to Tunapuna, Fyzabad or wherever.

We have also seen that a lot of training is taking place. In fact, recently, some of us went to Brazil and on our return we conducted a workshop for all the councillors. [Desk thumping] This is the practice that is going to take place as of now. Once our councillors participate in any training programme, locally or abroad, they will bring that information to all our councillors.

We are also encouraging them to establish communications with all the NGOs and CBOs, and this is working out very well. So that in any community, all the stakeholders come together for a common cause. We are seeing many good results coming out of that.

We are in the process of establishing a web site so that in the future the Member for St. Ann's East will not have to phone; he can e-mail the county council, a regional corporation, and immediately they will respond to him and tell him the services available, the cost and how quickly he can get it.

Again, this is bringing technology, and in that context, we are encouraging all our councillors to become computer-knowledgeable. We are also proposing to arrive at some kind of arrangement where each councillor can obtain a laptop so his work can be done much easier. We are going to assist in that development taking place.

12.00 noon

We are focusing very heavily on human resource management. We are establishing, as much as possible, a partnership with all our players, so that the workers at the county councils will start seeing themselves as partners. As you
know, most of the regional corporations now have the ability to collect taxes and other fees that may be payable. Those monies will stay with them in the corporations to be used for further development. So, they have a vested interest. Recently, in this Parliament, we did the Vesting Order for all the corporations, so that the real estate is owned by the corporations and is under their total management.

We are also exploring, in some areas, to have contracts with the communities, for instance, in cemetery management. Most of us pass cemeteries and are not happy with their condition. We are finding more and more creative ways to treat with it. In fact, we heard from the Member for Tunapuna about the condition of cemeteries in that area.

The Dangerous Dogs Act is soon to become effective. All our corporations, under the Freedom of Information Act, now have information available. Any person needing information can obtain it from our corporations. They are reporting to us that they are happy with that area.

The question of markets has always attracted our attention. We do not see the markets only as a place where goods are bought and sold. It is also a meeting place when the culture of a particular country can come to the forefront; where the traditions of that particular community can also be displayed. More and more of our markets are going in that direction. We are also looking at the possibility of having longer opening hours and public holidays. The community, through the programmes they may have; through the Employment Training Programme, for instance where they may have a class in handicraft or some kind of food preparation, can now bring their goods to be sold there as well.

This is working out very well. We have seen that in Chaguanas we have removed the street vendors by providing for them the best of facilities. They are very, very happy for it. We are looking at San Juan, at this time, Princes Town, Penal and elsewhere. Here is an opportunity for all of us to get involved in that kind of partnership because the markets will not be built without consultation.

One Member raised the question of flooding. I think it was the Member for St. Ann’s East. One has to appreciate that flooding is a global problem. Look at the Americas, look at Britain, China and India. There is always flooding. We will reduce it. We are working towards that. While we may claim that a particular area has a lot of flooding, this year we saw a lot less flooding.

Flooding is not just water, it is the damage that comes with it—the diseases that could spread, the loss of property and lives sometimes. We have not seen that
in this particular year, nor for the last two or three years. The last flooding we had was under the PNM, when two persons lost their lives in the St. Ann’s area.

Again, we are working with it. We have found that, through consultations with the community groups, people were blocking the waterways in front their homes. We are dealing with that and we are getting a lot of cooperation. I thank all the persons who have been assisting in that particular area.

As you know, the lifeguards have been added to our watch and we are very saddened when people lose their lives public bathing areas. We are revisiting that. We are having community lifeguards. In addition to having those persons who work as lifeguards, there are a number of persons who have indicated an interest in serving as volunteers and we are going to formalize those arrangements. Through consultation, through bringing people to be part of the process, we are getting much more production. We are getting a whole new commitment.

The other area I want to touch on, which was raised by the Member for Laventille West, is the question of our youth. Through the regional corporations, we are also establishing youth forums so that the young people in any community can go to the regional corporations and raise with their councillors, the chief executive officers or the mayors their concerns as they may relate to any activity in the area. They may want to start a youth group or need a place to have a meeting or they may need some assistance. We are making sure that our regional corporations go in that direction. Again, we want to encourage Members opposite to make sure that it is happening even in their own areas.

One of the highlights of the work of regional corporations is community empowerment. This is something that has been talked about in many, many different places. Community empowerment for the regional corporations simply means that persons within that community would have a visible say in how things take place. They will be able to respond to questions asked. We have also encouraged our regional corporations to become involved in the observation of the celebration of all our national festivals, for instance, Emancipation Day, Eid and Divali.

The purpose for that is to make sure that the communities are being a real part of everything that is happening. We have gotten very good responses from our schools. In fact, some of our corporations have taken their meetings to the schools. We have seen that happen in Princes Town, Chaguaramas, Diego Martin and Tunapuna. The teachers there are seeing it and other communities are seeing it.
I am extremely happy to report that this Government continues to deliver. There is no government in the world that has all the money to do all the things it wants. There never has and never will be. [Interruption] The Member for Laventille East benefited from a scholarship paid for by the Government and he has not delivered on it. One has to be careful. We want to make sure that we will continue to serve. We will make sure that we continue partnership. When Members opposite ask that we do things, they must also come back and report that it takes place. Many Members opposite ask us to do things and we respond to it; in roads, in drainage. It is totally different from when the Member for Diego Martin East was a minister. His own colleagues could not access him. I want to repeat it. It is important that I repeat it. The national community must know. They must know and see the difference as they continue to benefit.

I endorse and congratulate the Minister of Finance. The constituents of Fyzabad are extremely happy with this budget and look forward to more.

I thank you.

Mr. John Rahael (Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West): Mr. Speaker, I also would like to add my words of congratulation to the hon. Minister of Finance for delivering his first budget presentation, and to the Leader of the Opposition for an equal, if not better, response and all the other speakers before me.

It could be said that it is the best of times to be the Minister of Finance, yet the actions or, rather, inaction of this UNC Government is making it the worst of times for most of our citizens, in particular, for those citizens who are unemployed or underemployed. As the Minister himself put it—for the poor man. They have certainly been left behind.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard the previous speaker say that the economy is strong and it is. Over the last six years, Government has received direct revenues of over $67 billion. As if that was not enough, they went out and borrowed an additional $13 billion, making it $80 billion that they have spent in the last six years.

In 1995, when the PNM demitted office the national debt was $18 billion. Now it is over $30 billion and our debt service rose from $2.7 billion to $5.4 billion per annum—a 100 per cent increase. What do we really have to show for it—a leaking airport with no control tower so that an airplane ends up in a pothole? In their term of office, they have built no hospital. We were told today by the Minister of Housing and Settlements that they are building no houses. No new highways or roads were built; yet somebody got $1 billion to pave roads. You
know what is happening with some of those roads. What has become of the highway to Mayaro? We are not hearing anything more about that.

Agriculture they claim is one of the five pillars of diversification, but there have been no new rural access roads built and the budget allows for a mere $21 million to repair and rehabilitate agricultural access roads, while Carlos and Assam spent $80 million on a fashion show.

The hon. Minister of Finance has described this as a people's budget. The issue is, how much has he done for those who really needed his help? Is his budget going to make a difference in the lives of our citizens? Are our poor going to be better off because of all those grandiose ideas that he normally spouts?

The Member for Fyzabad was referring to a PricewaterhouseCoopers document on the budget and making a statement of how they paid glowing tribute to the budget. Well, let me just quote some of it since he left out what, I think, are the important facts. They recapped the 2000—2001 budget and what was achieved or not achieved. They asked the question, under “Promises”.

Promise one. “Inflation would be less than 3 per cent.” Was that achieved? No! “Unemployment will average 10 per cent.” Was that achieved? No! “Create 60,000 additional new jobs.” They went the length and breadth of this country saying that they were going to create 60,000 additional new jobs. Was that achieved? No! “Budget surplus $182 million.” Was that achieved? No! “Construction of health centres at San Rafael, Freeport, Claxton Bay, Williamsville and Tabaquite.” Was that achieved? No!

I can go on and on. Should I continue? “Expansion of school feeding programme to provide meals, five days a week, to all secondary schools. Was that achieved? No. “Removal of shift systems in secondary schools.” Was that achieved? No! All of these were in the 2000—2001 budget. “Funding for additional new buses.” Was that achieved? No. “Dredging of the Port of Spain harbour to accommodate larger cargo vessels.” Was that achieved? No! “Development of a Science and Technology Park in Wallerfield.” Was that achieved? No! Nothing was developed.

Mr. Speaker: Let us keep it down so that the Member could continue with his contribution.

Mr. J. Rahael: I will just pick three more. “Construction of primary schools.” They talk so much about education and what have they done. In their budget for construction of primary schools is included Scarborough Methodist, Delaford R.C. School, Buccoo Government, Castara Government: none was built.
Was that achieved? No! They keep repeating it. Hon. Minister of Finance, I hope you just did not copy what was in the last budget. “Introduction of a Defined Contribution Pension Plan.” Was that achieved? No! Mr. Speaker, we can go on and on, and there is a lot more that reference is made for here. There is so much that one can continue on but we will leave that. “Water for all.”

12.15 p.m.

The track record of this Government speaks for itself. With all the money flowing through their hands and into the select financiers, $80 billion; remember that. The cost of living, as measured by the Index of Retail Prices, has shot up. In 1996, under “All Items”, it was 114 points, today, it is 142 points, an increase of 25 per cent. [ Interruption ] Well, do something about it. The index for food prices—and this is what is most disturbing—increased from 144 points in 1996 to 245 points, an increase of 70 per cent on food. This is CSO’s statistics.

What has this Government done to alleviate the problems the housewives face at the supermarkets? They took a few cents off toothpaste and salt fish and blue soap. What about a drop in basic items and medical supplies? This budget makes no reference to that. I have been also informed that the price of chicken, one of the most basic foods in our basket, is at its highest price ever—the highest price ever! [ Interruption ] While internationally—I want you to listen to this Minister of Enterprise Development, Foreign Affairs and Tourism—prices of flour and oil have dropped drastically, in Trinidad and Tobago the price remains the same.

Mr. Assam: No.

Mr. J. Rahael: Do you want to know why? National Flour Mills, which is under your portfolio, did not pass on the benefits of these lower costs.

Mr. Assam: They had.

Mr. J. Rahael: If the price of flour had dropped then the cost of flour to our bakers would have dropped and bread would have dropped. [ Desk thumping ] If the prices did not drop, you are responsible, Mr. Minister of Enterprise Development, Foreign Affairs and Tourism! You are responsible for the price of flour not being made more affordable to the consumers of Trinidad and Tobago! I want to take this opportunity now—since as Minister you did not do it—to call on the business sector in Trinidad and Tobago, whether they are manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers, in the restaurant business, whatever business you are in— savings in the lower interest rates that the banks are now providing, the interest rates are dropping, the fact that the TT dollar is appreciating against the US dollar, it means therefore that the cost of goods and services is going to be made
Y is it that the majority of the citizens are not benefiting from lower prices over which you have control?

Mr. Assam: Because of people like you, the retailers.

Mr. J. Rahael: May I point out, since you want to refer to my personal affairs, in the same Index, clothing and footwear, in 1996, was 97.6; today, in June 2001, the Index is 90.5. Do you understand? [Interruption] You always have some silly excuse for you not doing your job.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please! Let me appeal to you one more time. We cannot conduct this debate with this kind of noise yelling across on both sides. I am appealing to you, once again, allow the Member to make his contribution. There are ways you can ask leave to get answers, make an input or clarify something, but yelling across the House like that is just not proper. I am appealing to you once again, please allow the Member to make his contribution.

Hon. Member, please continue.

Mr. J. Rahael: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, while all this is happening, the poor man is looking to get jobs. You know it is ironic, the day after the budget was presented there was a letter to “The Editor” headlined:

“Unemployment in the midst of prosperity.”

As one of my colleagues said earlier, when we go to our constituency offices, one of the most pressing problems is that our constituents enquire about jobs. I spend at least two days a week in my constituency office, unlike most of you all on that side. However, when the poor man hears about all these billions of dollars: Science Park, Waterfront Project, $1.2 billion, he is confused. He gets a little “ten days”, or he finds a job that is paying him minimum wage and on a Friday afternoon, the guy wants to drink a beer, but now the Minister of Finance is making it impossible for him to even enjoy such a thing. I do not understand what was the reason for this. Let me say that those in the lower-income bracket certainly do not have the luxury to enjoy champagne and Johnny Walker Black and Blue, like some of you on that side. So you increased the imported alcohol by 30 per cent and you increased locally made beer by 15 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, I would not have had a problem if the Minister of Finance had increased imported alcohol by 50 per cent or 100 per cent, but why the 15 per cent increase on locally produced goods? The Ministry of Enterprise Development,
Foreign Affairs and Tourism should have made sure that the Minister of Finance would not have done something like that, so that locally produced products would not be as expensive as the imported ones. However, I do support you, Mr. Minister, with respect to the increased age limit for the purchase of alcohol and cigarettes. I support him and commend him on that. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn my attention now to the only so-called incentive to the private sector. Within the manufacturing sector, the manufacturer, who has money and business that require retooling, will not be allowed a one-time write-off of 60 per cent, as opposed to the existing 50 per cent; but the reality is that there have been closure of manufacturing facilities.

Outside of the energy sector, what new plants have gone up? Where is the paper mill and the glass plant, the thousand-room Couva hotel that InnCogen was supposed to service? Where are those? Mr. Minister, how many factories did you open during your term in office? All I saw you opening is ice-cream parlours, KFCs and Hi-Lo's. I have not seen any new manufacturing plants being opened during your term in office. So instead of just sitting there and talking away, let us get some action! [Interruption] You spoke about how many you did.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for St. Joseph, please!

Hon. Member: Member for Tunapuna.

Mr. Speaker: Sorry, Member for Tunapuna, please!

Mr. J. Rahael: Mr. Speaker, the increase in non-oil exports has come about not from already existing re-tool manufacturing, not from any Government incentives and initiatives or help. It, in fact, happened in spite of the UNC’s policies. It dates back to when the PNM liberalized trade and the financial sector. [Desk thumping] We are responsible for the manufacturing sector developing. The figures that the hon. Minister quoted for the export, it is because of the liberalization of the economy that he was able to do that. We gave them the jump-start, while the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Trade were picking fights with our Caricom Leaders. Do you remember that? On the foreign golf course, the hon. Prime Minister was busy enticing foreign retailers onto our soils.

Mr. Speaker, the manufactures would have been better served if they had received an incentive, similar to that which is obtained in the tourism industry. That is where the financial institutions do not pay taxes on interest income earned from loans to that sector, thereby reducing the cost of borrowing. This type of help would go a long way towards stimulating new manufacturing. When
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[MR. RAHAEL]

investors want to invest in new manufacturing and new plant and equipment, what do they look at? They look at the raw material costs, the machinery costs and the financing costs. The financing cost is a very important ingredient in the course of whether or not a manufacturing concern will be profitable. Here is where you had an opportunity—and I trust you still have the opportunity—to assist new entrepreneurs and existing manufacturers to expand and to employ more of our citizens, by allowing them the same incentives that are allowed in the tourism industry.

This Government cannot seem to decide whether they believe in the private sector or not. They spout the rhetoric of the private sector being the engine of growth and proudly announce the further divestment of state companies into National Enterprises Limited, which we support. They propose to sell some of NFM shares and, I think, Pheonix Park shares, into NEL. Yet while they are doing that, they allowed Tidco to spend millions of dollars to build warehouses. Mr. Speaker, warehouses? They have built warehouses in Frederick Settlement. The building of warehouses, if feasible, of course, is surely the domain of the private sector. Therefore, it is no surprise that Tidco warehouses, built with taxpayers’ money, cannot be rented. Although they were built over two or three years ago, they are still empty in Frederick Settlement! I do not know who built the warehouses or who benefited from that. Mr. Speaker, why are the Government and state enterprises building warehouses?

The hon. Member for Tunapuna, my dear good friend, seems to have a hard-on for the private sector involvement in the horseracing industry. This industry has long been in the hands of private operators who have always paid additional taxes and levies. It has served the needs of the punters and racehorse enthusiasts. I fail to see how the Government, by opening and operating tote shops, would revitalize the horseracing industry. Is it that they would lower the cost of gambling by imposing, on their betting shops, the required licences and taxes? If there is any chance of our horseracing industry becoming a tourist attraction, then let us provide the incentives for the private sector to develop the industry. Personally, I do not see horseracing and dog racing being an attraction for tourists in Trinidad and Tobago. I do not see that!

As a matter of fact, I think the Easter weekend’s goat race in Tobago stands a better chance of being a tourist attraction. [Desk thumping] Maybe we could ask our Tobago colleagues whether we should start promoting goat racing in Tobago as a tourist attraction, not horseracing and dog racing, competing against Miami and those other countries.
Mr. Speaker, while I am addressing the hon. Minister of Enterprise Development, Foreign Affairs and Tourism, allow me, Sir, to simply correct him on a statement he made here on Wednesday. The Minister actually misled the population and this House into believing that insurance premium tax was being removed from cars, and fire insurance on homes. That is what he said. In fact, if he had listened closely to the hon. Minister of Finance, his colleague—

[Interruption] That is the problem, Mr. Speaker, the Minister does not listen! He only wants to talk, and talk, and talk, and then, you, Mr. Speaker, have to try to stop him from talking so much! [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this is a good point to break for lunch. The House is suspended until 1.30 p.m.

12.30 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

1.31 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. Speaker: You spoke for 20 minutes.

Mr. J. Rahael: Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to take up much more time, except to indicate that, whenever I stand to speak in this honourable House—

[Interruption] [Cellphone rings]

Mr. Speaker: One second, please. This is the third time for the day I have heard cellphones. I think now is a good opportunity to ask everybody in here who has a cell to check it and please turn it off. Thank you. Go ahead now.

Mr. J. Rahael: Yes, Mr. Speaker, as I have been saying, whenever I stand here to make a contribution in this honourable House, I do it with the conviction of representing the people of Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West and the wider population of Trinidad and Tobago. In doing so, it is not my intention to offend anyone or to say anything that is not in keeping with the honour of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I recall when the hon. Minister of Education, in fact, brought and piloted the Bill to form school boards, I indicated to the hon. Minister at that time that we supported the idea of having the implementation of school boards and I also indicated that I would have hoped that by now those school boards would have been put in place. The hon. Minister did respond and indicated that she was awaiting releases from the Ministry of Finance in order to put certain things in place. I would only like to recommend that, while you are waiting on that, maybe you can start identifying those who are going to be on the school boards so that once you get the financing this will take effect as quickly as possible.
I say so because I really believe that the appointment of these school boards would play an important role, not only in our schools but in the community as well and I know that you share those objectives, and those are your objectives and that of your Government. I indicated then that we on our side, our constituencies, would be willing to assist and help. In Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West in particular, there are quite a number of schools. I think most of the schools in Trinidad and Tobago—the majority of schools located in any one constituency are located in the constituency of Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West so that is why I am also raising it again and to urge you, Minister of Finance, to probably make that release available as soon as possible so that that programme can be implemented.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to commend the hon. Minister of Finance for trying to discourage private off-the-floor share transfers. That is commendable because in doing that we would strengthen our capital market. However, there is something further to which we need to pay attention, and we need to be concerned about what mechanisms can be put in place to protect small shareholders. We must always be concerned also about those persons who have purchased shares in public companies and really may not have a say in the operation of those companies because whoever is the majority shareholder will be the one who really has the power to do whatever they want with a company. So I would like to ask the hon. Minister of Finance to pay attention and to protect the small shareholders.

Let us say a shareholder, who has shares in a successful rum distillery company, which majority shares were acquired by a leading finance company which then, Mr. Speaker, proceeds to deplete the balance sheet of that company. Mr. Speaker, let us say that they run down the company’s cash reserves from over $300 million in 1998 to $90 million in the year 2000. That said company—in 1998, the company had no bank borrowings. It was a solid, strong company; a company that is well known not only nationally, regionally but internationally; a company that has stood the test of time, yet this new investor goes into that company, and, because he has control of the company now, is able to deplete the balance sheet of that company by running down the cash reserves of that company.

In addition, the company had no bank borrowings yet we see, in the year 2000, that the said company has bank borrowings of almost $300 million. Mr. Speaker, these are large numbers. The said company had only $30 million in long-term finance. Today, that company has in excess of $500 million in long-term finance, leaving the company in a position where there are no profits to be
made. Share prices have dropped drastically, and any future dividends are definitely in jeopardy. Where is, as the Minister himself put it, the transparency and equity that are critical to the smooth functioning of a strong capital market? Therefore, I hope that this Government would pay heed to this.

Then I reflected, Mr. Speaker, that this shareholder who has invested in this company that I referred to, is also a financier and an advisor to this Government. As a matter of fact, I believe he is part of the Wednesday club. Is there such a club, apparently, that meets in the Prime Minister’s residence? So I understand also the kind of advice that was being given to the Government. You go in, “There is $67 billion there—spend it. You could borrow more money, go ahead and borrow $13 billion more and spend it—[Interruption]—$13 billion.”

So I am just trying to bring to the attention of the hon. Minister of Finance, who has only recently joined the UNC party and that Government, please, please Mr. Minister, keep your integrity intact. Do not try to justify the comments of your political leader when he refers to people by their different names as if that is “no big thing”. We do that with common flus. I was really disappointed with that and I want you to know that because I have tremendous respect for you. So do not allow these political intrigues to get in the way of your job.

Mr. Speaker, in an attempt to make this a people’s budget—or is it an election budget—the hon. Minister has taken a nibble here and a nibble there. One per cent drop in taxes, which of course means nothing to the bulk of our population who earn below the threshold $25,000 per year. Anyone who earns less than $25,000 per annum is not going to benefit from that one per cent because they do not pay tax in any case. Indeed, if someone earns about between $25,000 and $55,000 per annum, and takes advantage of the allowable deduction that is available to them, then the one per cent is also meaningless because they too will get no benefit. So it will only help those in the upper income bracket and it will help those, certainly, whose salaries are in excess of $55,000 per annum and I am sure they, too, welcome it.

I would like to see that those in the lower bracket as well get some relief. In fact, there has been no relief because you could have increased the threshold from $25,000 per annum to $30,000 and then everyone would have benefited, those in the upper bracket as well as those at the lower income bracket. So there is always a reason. So do not tell me that they are not paying any taxes in any case. Those who are earning above $25,000 could have now been earning $30,000 or $35,000, whatever is the economic sense, so that they too would have benefited.
A correction in the wear and tear for baker’s plant, Mr. Minister of Finance, is not going to drop the price of bread. Bestowing a few lots of land here and there will not provide enough shelter for our citizens. Fifty-five million dollars in a science park will not make us the Silicon Valley of the Caribbean. Giving pensioners an $80 monthly increase will not help as much because—it will help but it certainly will not help as much as making sure that our hospitals and our health clinics are adequately stocked with the medication they need, because $80 cannot buy that medication. So let us make sure that, while we help with one hand, we do not take away more with the other hand.

So Mr. Minister of Health, please, ensure that our health clinics are adequately stocked with the proper medication for our senior citizens so that when they go there they will not be told that, “We do not have this and you have to purchase it in a pharmacy.” That is the way we should also try to help our senior citizens. While we are continuing to take a nibble here and a nibble there, Mr. Minister, come off the diet. Put some meat on the table. Take a real bite at poverty and take a harder bite at stimulating the private sector investment. Digest the needs of the health sector and give us some substance there. Sweeten the pot with Government housing. Do not tell us that you are not going to be building houses. Give us more than tokenism and words.

Mr. Speaker, this budget contains more words, headlines and subheadlines than probably any other recent budget. There is much ado about the five drivers in the budget document but nowhere else. It has not engendered any excitement, either in the boardroom or in the barroom, to quote columnist Keith Smith.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. J. Rahael: [Desk thumping] Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I thank the hon. Members but I could assure you that I do not plan to take up any more than three more minutes.

Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated before, this budget could have done a lot more. This budget, although termed as “One People, One Nation: Leaving No One Behind” in fact has left, certainly those at the lower income, the unemployed and those who are most in need, behind. I want us therefore to try as far as possible to ensure that we bring them along as well. To the business sector, there
has been no inspiration given, not only to the business community but also to our citizens. There is no motivation, no incentive, a meaningful plan that would make it a people’s budget. So, Mr. Minister, let us go forward. Let us ensure that our citizens are not left behind. In order to do that, Mr. Speaker, let us not despair. The time of the PNM is near.

I thank you for your indulgence. [Desk thumping]

**The Minister in the Ministry of Health (Dr. The Hon. Fuad Khan):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for allowing me to participate in this debate. First, let me commend the Minister of Finance for a budget that was so comprehensive and so—made such an impact on not only the poor of our country but it would appear that it made a significant impact on most of the Members on the Opposition, and I refer to the Member for Arima and the Member for Laventille East/Morvant.

First let me respond to the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. When the hon. Member for Fyzabad was speaking, he asked the hon. Member for Fyzabad if he was speaking from this document and then he said he had one. Maybe I should read some comments from this document. This is what the man in the street says about the budget—comments by a business professional. It is the *PricewaterhouseCoopers 2002 Budget Memorandum A Vision for the People*:

“Comments:—

Reduction in Corporation Tax and Income Tax miniscule though welcoming.

Happy to know that the economy is performing well. He really tried to address the social welfare of the country.

{Business Professional}

It was a ‘responsible and broad based budget’ since it catered for old age people, housing, social services and the economy.

{Shop Owner}

A budget that appears to be steering Trinidad and Tobago to becoming a more developed nation and fast tracking the country.

{Small Businessman}

One or two things available for my children like no VAT on disposable diapers. It would be good for my mother in law since she is always complaining
that the price of salt fish too high so now she is going to be happy that salt fish
is now VAT free.

{Single Mother}

I do not believe that old people should have to pay tax therefore I was
impressed with the reduction of taxes for them and the fact that they are now
allowed to travel on all the buses free.

{Senior Citizen}”

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, further than that, the hon. Minister in his budget—and I think I
have the authority to say that the budget was seen by the Cabinet members and
documented and as I say input made and it was passed by Cabinet. So each one of
our Cabinet members saw this document and also okayed it and hence
recommend it to the House, [Desk thumping] and I think the recommendation
should be given to Members opposite.

Let me also deal with the Member for San Fernando East in a small way. The
Member for San Fernando East, in his contribution, made allusions to the
resignation of the junior Minister in the Ministry of Health. I know that the
Member for San Fernando East is a long-standing Member of this House and he is
quite versed in the politics of diversion and deflection and hopefully—I am
hoping that he was not deflecting his resignation onto me [Desk thumping]
because I understand that this is what the Members of the PNM are saying about
the Member for San Fernando East, but I always say, he is the statesman on that
side and I always look up to his contributions and I enjoy them.

Mr. Speaker, health is a deliverable ministry and a deliverable ministry
always, no matter in what part of the world you are, will have its problems and
we, for the last five years, have been trying to find the solutions to certain
problems that we inherited from the health system. The Minister of Health and
myself have discussions together with the officials in the Ministry, et cetera, and
we look at the health sector reform programme, and, as they say, dissect it and
sometimes change it.

1.50 p.m.

One cannot do everything in such a Ministry in a short space of time, and I
will throw you all back to the times before. People do not understand that the
health sector has come a very long way in the last five years. If we could
remember when there were long lines outside of the casualties; people went to
casualty and had to wait nine and 10 hours. There was no ambulance service. People were always complaining about the Red Cross or the Fire Service.

The operating theatres in most of the institutions always had problems, be it linen, staffing, be it something. The X-ray facilities always had problems. We, in the last five years, have been able to upgrade most of the major hospitals, and they are still being upgraded. We have started a programme with the health and outreach centres in most parts of the country that are being upgraded and rebuilt. In it, there are different levels of health in our improved centres. One is, the enhanced health facility and the district health facility.

The district health facility is one that has the Accident and Emergency and the 24-hour outreach programmes. The enhanced health facility has a lot more services like lab services as the common, normal health centre. They are so positioned that our citizens can obtain certain necessary health care. Our hospital upgrade is moving and, if you notice, in the PSIP the Ministry of Health was able to use most of its allocations for the last year. In fact, we are on overdrive as far as our allocation and our programme is going.

It is a bit unfair when I hear talk that the health system is this and that. Nothing is perfect, even in the United States. We go to the United States, but there are approximately, believe it or not, close to about 50 million people who cannot access health services. Canada has a very good health system, National Health Service, but there are long waiting lists and people move from Canada to the States for service because they can pay for it. England has a good NHS, but it is so burdened it is actually taking a lot of the health budget.

We have to strike a balance here and we are trying to do that where we can have a mixture of proper basic health care, and also some input from the private sector. So, when we are doing this, what we are really doing is overhauling a system that has been left defunct for the last—and I am not casting any aspersions because it is a difficult ministry. The health system and the repair of the damage on the health system, the end result is implementation of basic health care to our population.

Each person in this country should be able to access what we call basic health care. Now, we hear things such as angioplasty, bypass surgery, kidney transplants and so forth. They should be available to everybody, but they are not what we term, as they say, basic health care packages. In most countries they are taken up either by NHS trust hospitals which are research hospitals, not every single hospital, and also insurance-driven hospitals.
Our basic level of health care is that somebody should be able to enter a health facility. When they enter, they get what we call a check-up or medical check-ups. You then are able to access blood pressure readings, urinary readings, blood tests, X-rays, ultra sounds and so forth, at that basic health care facility. It is what we call preventive medicine.

If there is something wrong, people could refer to the health office and they are treated in a curative manner, or referred to a major institution, but because of the lack of movement in the health centres in the last—as I say, before we came into office, what was happening is that people in the health centres were not getting the adequate treatment, so they went directly to casualties in hospitals and overburdened that area.

Studies have shown that the cost per patient per bed in a hospital is enormous, as compared to the treatment outside which they can get. That put a serious strain on the health sector and, at the same time, decreased the ability of the health sector to perform on the patients who just need basic primary health care. So a decision has been taken and it is a decision that has been taken throughout the world now. Preventative medicine is the way to go, because if you could prevent by means of diet, healthy lifestyles and also control of major illnesses in our country such as hypertension and diabetes, one could stop the proliferation of cardiac diseases, renal diseases, and so forth.

Coupled with that, Mr. Speaker, you are looking at education which is a basic function of this primary health care. For too long our citizens have been going to health offices and doctors—private doctors included—and what has been happening is that they get a blood pressure tablet to take for two weeks and then they do not take it again.

The education aspect of it is lacking in most of these institutions. We have put a drive on a health promotion council and they are now teaching with a designated approach and a systematic approach on educating our population on that problem. When you have high blood pressure, Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of everybody, you have to take your medication throughout your life. You have to continue taking it or else the day you do not take it, or the week you do not, your pressure goes up. Just recently I saw someone in my family who was 46 years old end up with a stroke because he did not take his medication because he thought he did not need it. When he took the pressure afterwards, it was down.

Diabetes is another problem. People think, in denial, that they do not need insulin or different medications because their sugar is good; they are feeling good
when you treat the first part of it. Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Leaving these things to linger, you end up with heart disease because your heart is strained, kidney disease because it knocks off the kidneys, and a variety of organ damage. What has been happening in the developed world, they are allowing people to eat and do what they want but, at the same time, fixing the problems.

What has happened, it has generated an industry of repair and in the generation of an industry of repair are things such as CT scans, which are expensive, and every single year they come up with a new one; MRIs, which are expensive, and every single year they come up with a new one. They cost about TT $3 million to $5 million for new ones, and the process goes on and on.

We hear about angioplasty and bypass surgery, but that is a result of overindulgence initially, lack of prevention, fried foods. I am not knocking anybody. Fried foods—the increased cholesterol—clog up your arteries, you end up with a problem, hypertension, and you end up now with the need for bypass and angioplasty. Angioplasty service, I understand, costs about $60,000 or more—sometimes more if you have to do one or two.

Bypass surgery here costs $110,000. We have been trying to put a programme together where we could allow bypass surgeries and angioplasties in the public hospitals. Unfortunately, Mt. Hope is not in it because certain things have happened there that we need to go to other areas. So we are looking at Port of Spain and San Fernando. What I am trying to say here, kidney transplant, and we mentioned dialysis—it costs $2.5 million for dialysis. It was knocked. Why give $2.5 million when you are fixing a roof for $45 million?

Mr. Speaker, $2.5 million is a lot of money to buy machines, and there are provisions in the health budget for disposables and, also, the material used to run the dialysis machines. We have had a problem where the dialysis machines we were getting were substandard and maintenance was not there. So taking this money and maintaining and buying some new machines will fast-forward and increase the level of dialysis services.

Mr. Bereaux: How many machines?

Dr. The Hon. F. Khan: The dialysis machines are used every day, sometimes as much as 16 to 18 hours every day right through the week, and wear and tear occurs. So, we are grateful to the Minister for finding the $2.5 million for dialysis, and it is for the machine upgrade and also for one or two machines because, as the Minister quite rightly said, a dialysis machine is not like a stove. It
must have disposables for it to run. It must be done not just today, but every single time it is used.

From that, the kidney transplant movement has taken place, Mr. Speaker. We have done close to about 20 kidney transplants, as I say, successfully in the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. It is the best in the Caribbean. It gives the best results in the Caribbean but it is kept a very good secret because it is in its initial stages.

Be that as it may, when you look at all these repair industries, most of it is as a result of lack of proper prevention at the initial end. So, when we talk about primary health care, Mr. Speaker, we speak about going down to the basic movement and basic health care of our population. Why are we doing this? From the reports that we have had and from the research that was done by the various consultants, it was shown that the people in rural districts and the people who do not frequent hospitals, and so forth, gave reports about the health system. This was in 1993 and onwards.

What they asked for was centres to be located close to their homes which they could access regularly and, at the same time, obtain the basic blood care packages to test for themselves, their families and their children—antenatal care, paediatric care and other chronic disease care. This was taken into consideration and, as a result of this, basic health centre packages were moved around, and basic hospitals.

I heard the Member for Point Fortin speak about the Point Fortin Hospital. That is there. It is in the budget and construction will be moving in Point Fortin. Princes Town has what they call a District Health Facility, and these types of facilities are not the normal health centres we know about. If you go through the budget statement, as well as the PSIP, one should see exactly where things are located. The Member for St. Ann's East made a very good contribution this morning and he would attest to the fact that our health centre in St. Ann’s is almost completed.

The basic problem—now that we have the infrastructure, now that we have equipment, all we really need to do now is have our human resources and to have our training processes. The training is going on and, if you look at it, we are training doctors in primary care medicine at the University of the West Indies. We are training oncology nurses in abundance, and different strategies basically should kick in very soon.

We also have a programme, the Minister said, for District Health Visitors and these will be manning the health offices. As we quite rightly say, buildings do not
give health care. Equipment does not give health care. We need the human resource part of it. That is looking like the most difficult part in the last couple of years. This is as a result of the Regional Health Authority Act, 1993 where it allowed public servants different options: to come across to the Regional Health Authority; secondly, to take secondment for 10 years and come across; and the third option was to stay in the public service.

We are in the process of trying to entice the public service doctors, nurses and ancillary staff to come across to the Regional Health Authorities because, according to the Act, the hospitals are Regional Health Authority hospitals. There is no public service hospital at this point in time.

We are having that little problem, but that should be solved come November 01. Come November 01, we are trying to give packages and, also, we have done the pension plan so the doctors and nurses will be given better remuneration and also terms and conditions which are now being produced to be encouraged to come across to the Regional Health Authorities. They could be deployed in all aspects of the health facilities.

Another bugbear that has been mentioned is that there is a competition between the public and private health care systems. Many doctors in the public health care system work in the private health care system. We are formulating plans to keep full-time doctors in the public system and only consultants will be used in the private system on their time. The reason behind this, Mr. Speaker—what will occur is that we will get benefit for money. Many a time, you may have heard that people go to the health centre in abundance and do not get the basic treatment. The district health visitor does part of it, as well as the medical practitioner, but we are looking to increase the remuneration package and, at the same time, give longer hours.

Mr. Speaker, there has been a movement where the hospitals—the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, the Port of Spain General Hospital and San Fernando General Hospital—are duplicating services throughout the region. People complain of long waiting lists, lack of surgery and the same linen problems. What we have done is put in place the solution. We are trying to create different levels. The Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex was designed for what we call tertiary health care and elective surgery. The Port of Spain General Hospital will be used for partial elective and more acute trauma care, as they say in medicine.

In doing so, Mr. Speaker, emergency surgeries and emergency movement will not replace elective movement and, as a result of it, push them off the list. We are
hoping that this will decrease the waiting list and also let our citizens increase their operations, get the operations in prostate, hernia, different surgeries and same day surgeries. In doing so, Mr. Speaker, the health system will be transformed, but it takes time.

I have heard a Member mention the National Health Insurance. The National Health Insurance is a good concept, but being a good concept does not just make it work. We need to put our infrastructure and delivery services in place and then kick in the National Health Insurance, because the National Health Insurance will be giving each and every citizen in this country the right to enter any single institution.

Right now, if we put a National Health Insurance into place, most citizens would go to certain private institutions and the public institutions as they say—the public money at the Ministry of Health will go into private institutions. So both must go hand in hand, and they are going hand in hand. When we talk about National Health Insurance, of course it is taking time, but it is just not something that you do right away.

The budget also talks about radiotherapy. The St. James Radiotherapy Centre is going to benefit from a new cobalt machine, as well as an upgrade and refurbishing of the area. This is long overdue and it is just part of a total movement of cancer care in this country. The hon. Minister and the Ministry have taken the initiative of doing a technofeasibility study in oncology and cancer care and we have decided that cancer care should be given a priority, as well as HIV. Studies have been done where we will be able to put a full cancer care centre with linear accelerators and full staff, biophysicists, and so forth, at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex to tie in with the systems, as well as to increase the level of tertiary care services in health in this country. St. James, at this point in time, will be refurbished for comfort as well as for putting down a cobalt machine and increasing the treatment of cancer. Along with that, the cancer care drugs and so forth will be given a priority.

2.10 p.m.

In the budget debate it was mentioned that there would be an increase in the oral dental care movement. It is our intention to strengthen the capacity for oral health care and mental health evaluations. We have a dental school, but our students have not been allowed to go out to the health facilities to assist in dental work. As result of that, we have a lot of dental doctors locked in an institution, the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, without getting the experience that they need.
We have been having discussions where these dental students, in the final and in the fourth year, can go out into the districts and, under supervision, do basic dental care and see specialized dental techniques at the basic primary health care level.

Mr. Speaker, HIV and AIDS. HIV, as the hon. Minister said in his budget presentation, is a serious problem. We have not yet reached the exponential curve of HIV, but we are soon to reach there. As a result of that, it is becoming, as they say, a national as well as worldwide epidemic. The money that we have assigned in the Capital Programme for HIV will be to assist in providing, moreso, drugs for the HIV victims. These drugs are very expensive and negotiations are taking place right now to decrease the cost of the drugs to the Caribbean. The hon. Minister is spearheading this for the people of the Caribbean.

I must mention alcohol and tobacco. [Interruption]

Mr. Boynes: Could the Member give way? I heard you mention the money for the HIV programme being utilized in terms of drugs. Do you have any programmes in place with respect to HIV awareness, especially among the youths and in schools?

Dr. The Hon. F. Khan: Yes, we have programmes that are going to the schools with the Ministry of Education officials. We are using a group called “Rapport”, a youth group for awareness of HIV. We, together with the Ministry of Education officials, are touching the schools in our country at the level of Form III to Form VI and also the primary schools, to some extent. There is an ongoing programme. In fact, the programme has been stepped up, more for awareness, as you quite rightly said.

Although this may be for drugs at this point in time, we have money to put into the total programme itself. There is more money allocated in the budget for that. We see it as a serious problem, because of two things: people believe that somebody who looks good does not have AIDS, and that is a fallacy. Somebody looking very good could have the HIV infection and not the full-blown syndrome.

We have to support our young people. As you know, Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is one of the few places that is doing the vaccine trials study. The vaccine itself is safe, but the fear of AIDS makes people stay away. It is going very well. There are certain people doing the blood counts and the immunoglobulin testing.

Concerning alcohol and tobacco, it is common knowledge that just recently my daughter was a victim of a drug that was used to make her unconscious; thank
God nothing occurred. After my investigation, I have come to realize that there are many young people, young girls in this country, who have been subjected to being molested with these drugs, but never reported it because of fear of victimization. I have realized that this is a serious problem in this country.

At most of the discos and clubs there is ready access to a drug called GBH or ecstasy. It is a liquid or crystalline substance. All it takes is a capful or small amount thrown into a normal little drink—it could be a coke—and in 10 to 15 minutes the victim loses their mind, they are unaware of what is going on and they undergo what is called amnesia. In half an hour, they are basically not the person that you know. The bad part about this drug is that in two hours it is metabolized from the system, so if any blood test is taken it does not show anything. I have been told that this is being used by bartenders and security men in various institutions on many young girls in this country.

I make mention of it because I was very grateful that the Minister of Finance put in the budget that he is enforcing a law that is already there. We passed the package of children’s bills where the drinking age was amended from 16 to 18 years. This budget serves to enforce that legislation and also to put certain mechanisms in place, where there will be penalties against owners and so forth who do not adhere to this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, you would be surprised at the high incidence of the use of this drug in this country. It comes, I understand, from Miami and it is a very, very dangerous drug. In fact, you have to buy it with a prescription in Miami before you can buy it on the Internet. It comes in a very small bottle. In fact, it is such a problem that when I was in Miami, about three weeks ago, it made the front page of USA Today. The world is now becoming aware of the effects of this drug. It is here in Trinidad and I say so today to make parents aware of it because I, as a medical doctor, was not even aware of this drug—believe it or not—and the effects or the metabolizing of this drug. It could also kill you. If it is put in alcohol it could cause respiratory depression and kill. I found my daughter unconscious.

Mr. Speaker, may I start by saying that I had a meeting with my constituents in Barataria/San Juan and they are very happy with what has occurred in this budget. [Desk thumping] They are extremely impressed with the budget. One comment was that the man read so much of the budget and only took half glass of water. I asked them how they knew that and they said that they saw it on television. They are very convinced that this is a budget for them, for the people.

What they really like in the budget, apart from the old age pension, is the 100 new vehicles for the police. [Desk thumping] They are convinced that the police
will now make more patrols in the area. The police will make more movements in the area as well as apprehend certain people who live in the constituency; and that is another story. [Interruption]

Mr. Hinds: They could circle Whitehall.

Dr. The Hon. F. Khan: The Member for Laventille East/Morvant said they should circle right around his house.

Hon. Member: Circle Whitehall on a Thursday morning.

Dr. The Hon. F. Khan: The budget has a little for everyone and when it says that “No One Will Be Left Behind” I think that is adequately said.

There is a small part of this budget that I do not think anybody is seeing: there are provisions for sportsmen and tax-free concessions for people who sponsor sportsmen. There is also a provision for sponsoring educational or entertainment productions. If people make educational or entertainment productions up to $300,000, it is tax deductible. People could form a business on that.

When you keep going through each and every part of this Budget you see: corporation tax is down; the removal of tax on interest income—the older people are very happy to see that—and a decrease in VAT on most foodstuff.

I am not saying to drink alcohol, but what I am worried about when I look at this aspect of the budget, is that the increase in a bottle of Reunite is only $6.23. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, tell your business colleagues not to raise it more than that. Black and White Scotch Whisky, only $9.17 and when you go up, there is only a minor increase in wholesale prices. There is just between a 25 to 50 cents increase on cigarettes and on salted fish—Member for San Fernando East—it is $22 per kilogram, not per pound, which makes it approximately $11 per pound or even less than $11. It is cheap, so we will start to eat more salted fish now. That is imported salted fish not salted shark.

Mr. Speaker, what we have done is to carry the vision for yet another year. People believed that there was no way the vision could have continued and also the goods delivered. We have heard that there is nothing in the budget for local government. The Member for Tobago West in the opening of his contribution said that he was in a funny position: he is in Opposition in the House of Representatives, but yet his party is the governing party in Tobago. I am in the same position, reversed: I am in Government in the House of Representatives, but in the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, the PNM is in charge. So there is
opposition there for me in the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation. I understand what is happening to you. I am so glad that the equality—[Interruption] That is why you cannot get your drain cleaned by Trade Zone.

Mr. Manning: Speak to the Speaker. [Crosstalk]

Dr. The Hon. F. Khan: I am glad that the Member for St. Joseph, the Minister of Infrastructure Development and Industrial Relations, will be handling most of the corporations. They have gotten their allocations and I know him to be a very fair person. As I said, we will also benefit from this development in Local Government in the coming year.

With these few words, I commend this Budget to the House and ask the Opposition to kindly support this Budget, because this will be for the benefit of everyone here in this country.

Thank you.

Dr. Keith Rowley (Diego Martin West): Mr. Speaker, I join this debate to make a distinction between a budget statement and a budget; between the budget statement and the budget.

I am amazed at what the Government spokespersons have been saying on this matter before the House up to now. I think that the last speaker epitomizes what the Government is all about: seeking to highlight trivia while the serious matters go unattended.

The Minister of Finance has been commended by certain persons in this country for presenting a budget speech. I want to draw the attention of this country to the fact that a budget speech could contain anything. In fact, what the Minister of Finance has presented to this House is not even a good campaign speech, because it is too easy to tear it apart. Insofar as it pretended to be a budget speech, in summary, it was boring—three hours worth of it—it was plagiarized rhetoric, full of unrealistic promise and sprinkled liberally with failed policies of the past, [Desk thumping] but that I could let go.

It was when the Minister of Finance appointed himself as spokesperson and chief defender of the Government, where the Government stands accused of incompetence and corruption that, today, I will say to the Minister of Finance: when we were party colleagues in the PNM recently and we had a conversation about what they really represent, I had some respect for him, but since he has taken it upon himself to be their chief spokesman and defender, I have lost all respect for him. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Speaker, when he joined the PNM, the same comments that he was making about the PNM last Friday, the PNM was already in office, so I do not know how those comments became relevant. They were not relevant when he joined recently. I am not even sure that up to now he did the decent thing and resigned from the PNM.

Let me say, Mr. Speaker, what the Minister of Finance and his Government are seeking to do. This is not the budget; this is the budget speech. These yellow documents are the budget. I want to say to all those persons, especially those who should know better, like those persons in the business community who did not have the time or the inclination to look at the budget or did not have access to these documents, do not jump out and make commendations when you hear the Minister of Finance present his campaign speech. This is, in fact, a campaign speech full of challengeable public relations. I will demonstrate, Mr. Speaker.

There are two things in here that I want to agree with: the Minister of Finance said, “Our performance to date speaks for itself.” That is the truest statement in the budget. [Desk thumping] The most frightening part of the budget says, “I propose to accelerate this trend.” [Laughter]

Let me draw the country’s attention to what the Minister of Finance is talking about. I take my colleagues in this House to page 239 of the draft estimates, because a budget is about money, inflows, outflows and where the money is going to be spent. Page 239, “Our performance speaks for itself”: “Head 01, sub. 04, Current transfers and subsidies, Airport Authority Trinidad and Tobago.”

For the performance that speaks for itself, the shed of shame, in the budget of 1999/2000, the transfers to the airport was $78 million. In the budget of 2002 it is $317,000,000. That is what this country is going to have to pay for that shed of shame for the next 20 years, and the Minister gets up here and tells us that he has given pensioners $80 a month and I must congratulate you all? I say, shame on you! [Desk thumping]

2.30 p.m.

I say shame on you. They want to ride on the misfortune of the least fortunate in the country. Take five cents off “salt fish”; give pensioners $80; take a penny off blue soap: but they are stealing $300 million in the airport. It is right here in the budget. In fact, they succeeded. In the Mirror, I saw one of my favourite journalists, Mr. Ken Ali, saying, and I quote him:

“Generally, Yetming looked impressive.”
I am not concerned with how he looks. He can come in here half-naked if he wants.

“He is impressive with his flair for detail which he backed up by making the media rounds and offering explanations on calculated matter.”

Clearly, Mr. Ali does not know that all of us, including him, will have to pay an extra $300 million. Mr. Speaker, you know what it is made up of? I will tell you what it is made up of. Why are we paying $300 million to the airport? To service loans. Listen to the loans on page 244. Item 05—$300 million; item 07—$239 million; item 09—$189 million; item 11—$379 million. A total of $1,407 million that they borrowed to build that shed of shame. They have to pay for it now. The chickens are coming home to roost. Of course, if I go to the other documents on government revenues, you would see that the airport revenue is $63 million, which they magically bumped up from $32 million in the last budget. In the last financial year they earned $32 million. They have some magic that they would double it, but assuming that they double it in the current arrangement with the airlines, they are only earning $63 million.

We warned this country that the Government was embarking on an expenditure on the airport that is threatening to bankrupt Trinidad and Tobago. So earnings of $63 million; a debt of $1.4 billion for the next 20 years and every year, in the budget, we have to put aside $300 million to pay for that. Interestingly enough, while the Airports Authority is in that situation, and while the Minister of Finance is being expansive, as they say, he did not mention to us that in the last budget estimate, there was no provision for loans to officers of the airport. Yet they spent almost a million dollars where there was no provision for loans to officers. So the airport is now a bank. On top of that, that was not enough, we see a million dollars again in this budget for loans to officers. So in an agency that is earning $63 million, with a debt of $1.4 billion, this Minister is making provision for loans to officers.

I told this Parliament a month ago that in Caroni, where they could not pay their bills, the board appointed by this Government was allowing the Chief Executive Officer of Caroni (1975) Limited, who was earning $40,000 a month, to borrow unsecured money from Caroni. Mr. Speaker, where will it end? When will it end? All the old talk he is carrying on with, but not a mention of this major item of budgetary expenditure; and they get up here and talk about matters of trivial nature. This is in fact, the budget. It does not end there, Mr. Speaker. WASA. I am not going into any detail about the corruption of the desal plant, but it is panning out in the budget on page 497. Current transfers and subsidies—You
would see WASA's actual expenditure in 1999/2000, was $586 million. By the time they got to 2001, it was $653 million. Provision made to buy water—the water is not ready yet from the sea, but in the next financial year it should be ready, so provision is made to buy water.

So WASA's expenditure in the coming year is $737 million, including provision to buy water. The revenue is $414 million. Taxpayers are facing a situation where WASA is going to spend $737 million and its revenue would be $414 million. You do not need to be Albert Einstein to understand that the people of this country are facing an increase in water rates somewhere down the road. They can say what they want. One of two things, either money from the Treasury, which should go to the health services, the schools and the infrastructure, would be used to make up that difference; or the taxpayer is going to be asked to pay more for water. In his budget, the Minister of Finance has an expenditure of $737 million and $414 million income. There is no other way out.

I was looking for T&TEC. This is the Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Bodies—all of them. I want to ask the Minister of Finance, is T&TEC still one of those bodies? If it is, why is T&TEC’s situation not in this document? I searched this document from top to bottom and T&TEC appears nowhere in there. You know why? If they put T&TEC in here, the effects of InnCogen and T&TEC's borrowing will be reported.

T&TEC borrowed $500 million recently; and T&TEC finances vis-a-vis the InnCogen calamity would be in here. So the same way I can demonstrate what has happened with the airport, and demonstrate what is happening at WASA from this document, I cannot do that with T&TEC because they have left out T&TEC. This is a budget where we are dealing with the country's finances. Inflows of funds, outflows of funds, expenditure, and he comes here playing Pontius Pilate and wants me to congratulate him.

I only would remind him of our earlier conversation, when he agreed with me, that as long as these “fellas” stay in government, this country is in danger.

The numbers in this document should indicate to all the people of this country—I told you last year that these are the good times, and after the good times, if we are not careful, our prosperity can very quickly turn to despair. Look at what happened in the US last week Tuesday. The world is teetering on a calamitous recession. We were looking at decline before last week Tuesday. What would be Trinidad and Tobago's position if what is threatened comes to pass and our economy cannot sustain the level of profligacy that this Government has put us into?
Look at transfers and subsidies. I want to show from the *Review of the Economy* where the Government, in last year's document—it was rearing its head since last year. I do not know where the commentators are looking to commend this Government. This is the *Review of the Economy* for last year.

In 1992, the total public debt was $12.9 billion—this is Government's own figures—after a Minister of Finance, who for five years kept telling us that the debt is going down. The debt is now $30 billion as of last year. Government’s liability for guaranteed debt—that is the money they are borrowing left, right and centre and spending in certain enterprises. It was $1.7 billion in 1992. It is now $9.1 billion, eight years later. Debt service was $2.2 billion in 1992, it is $4.9 billion eight years later. The internal debt was $976 million in 1992, it is $3.2 billion eight years later. External debt was $1.3 billion in 1992, it is $1.7 billion eight years later. What has improved? All of that is in a period of high oil prices.

2.40 p.m.

What will be our position if the oil price falls as it threatens to? As our oil production falls, the Minister is projecting increased oil revenues.

I want to know if those persons who are talking about good budget are familiar with these things. In fact, if you go through these documents, one of the things you would notice, you are going to come to the conclusion that, notwithstanding the Government's statements, the facts and figures in the budget documents indicate that the economy is slowing down or has slowed down and, in fact, we are already in decline. The numbers would bear that out. I do not have time to go into all the numbers, but I have a few interesting ones to ask the Minister of Finance.

Land and Building Taxes: In 1993/1994, we were collecting $100 million in land and building taxes. I did not hear of any policy to reduce land and building taxes, but the projection for the last year was $59 million, down from $100 million in 1994. They have gambling houses all over the country, but Government revenues from gambling were $11 million in 1993; projected $7.5 million. VAT, something that we collected $2.1 billion on as recently as 1998, there is a difference of about $600 million in VAT collection. If you look at the growth of VAT receipts over the years, in an economy that is growing, you will see how VAT should have grown. Instead, it has fallen and it is a gap of about $600 million of uncollected taxes because this Government is in cahoots, collusion or incompetent at collecting the VAT. So it records itself here as a loss in revenue. With all these losses in revenue, how does that improve our position?
There is something I want to look at. Why is it that the Government’s figures in last year’s document are very different from the figures in this year's document? I make one accusation again. This Government has been guilty of changing the official figures of this country in order to suit its public relations. [Desk thumping] If you look back at last year's document, Appendix IV, “Population Labour Force and Employment”, you will see the figures put there from 1993 to 2000. In this document, it says in 1998 there were 913,000 persons in this country over age 15, but because I have been making the point that we have an anomaly in this country where this document—the official figures of the country—is saying that we have 913,000 persons age 15 and over, but the Elections and Boundaries Commission has on its list, 947,000 voters who are 18 and over, and I have been making the point that it is not mathematically feasible to have more 18 and over than 15 and over, do you know what this Government did? They just raised the numbers in here.

So if you look in this year’s document, you will see a mysterious increase in the population of Trinidad and Tobago for the same year, which was published—whereas this document said, in 1998 we had 913,000 people 15 and over, this document now says, yes, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, matches this one, but from 1999, there is a jump from 913,000 to 961,000 people above the age of 15, to cover the EBC’s figure.

So the EBC says, you have 947,000 voters, and what the Government does, it raises the figure here to 961,000. So although it is published in here that in 1999 we had 926,000 persons age 15 and over, somewhere in his ministry, in the Prime Minister’s office, it jumped mysteriously. You find 40,000 persons and add it here. So whereas between 1996 and 1999 that age group jumped by 40,000, in the following year it jumped by only 4,000, and the following year by another 3,000 but the person who did this forgot to change all the other things. So they left all the other figures in place. So the population has risen by 40,000, but unemployment is still the same, labour force is still the same, unemployment is still the same, everything is still the same. [Desk thumping]

We are dealing with a bunch of crooks! [Desk thumping] Everything is still the same; but to cover the EBC problem, we now have 15 year-olds mysteriously growing in the Prime Minister’s office to the tune of 40,000-odd, and you already have an official document. That is why the IMF, in their record, indicated that there is a problem in Trinidad and Tobago with respect to our official statistics. [Desk thumping]
How could you trust people like that to manage $16 billion? As I say that, those who are looking for good times based on his old talk, Government’s revenues in the financial year that we are now closing, was $14.8 billion; projected in the coming year, $15.9 billion. Government’s expenditure in the last year that we are closing was $17.9 billion; they are projecting $18.2 billion. So there is no big difference, a difference of about $200 million. Therefore, just to maintain what we had in the last year, we have $200 million more, but we have introduced into the programme—just one programme—the so-called dollar for dollar that is going to eat up $259 million. So that takes care of it one time. There is no good time to come out of this budget. In fact, the Government is likely to find itself in serious borrowing difficulties; but what is new, they are borrowing to save.

What I find particularly offensive in the Minister of Finance’s political statement, is when he talks about this vexed issue of corruption, where he has appointed himself, even to the tune of attacking his own colleagues, as spokesman for the Government and had this to say at page 15 of the budget speech.

“…during the course of the year in particular, this Government has taken courageous and unprecedented steps…”

and that in the Parliament:

“The Constitution (Amndt.) (No. 3) Act 1999, mandates the formation of joint investigative parliamentary committees…”

to deal with incidences of abuse of power.

You have a Government Senator, labelled by a Government investigator as having abused his power and the Prime Minister says, “I not even thinking about that” but he is coming in a budget speech to tell me about how Government is dealing with corruption. He talks about the Integrity in Public Life Act that he is going to bring the whole thing under. He says:

“Under this Act, public officials are required to declare their assets.”

Since he is the spokesman, I want to ask him something. Since he is a banker he can help us. I have a particular copy of a cheque here, cheque No. 399382, drawn on a bank in this country, dated December 07, 2000—the week before the election—for the sum of exactly US $50,000, that is TT $312,000, paid by the North West Liaison Office—which you are familiar with—and paid to a certain Basdeo Panday.

Hon. Members: What?
Dr. K. Rowley: I want him to tell me, if that is all he is doing, when he responds in the budget debate, under what circumstances is the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago receiving US $50,000 from something called the North West Liaison Office?

2.50 p.m.

You see, Mr. Speaker, when I made mention—

Mr. Speaker: Member for Laventille East/Morvant, you shouted “thieves” twice. The next time that happens you will have to leave this Chamber.

Mr. Hinds: Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Be warned.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I pointed out what happened at the airport and that taxpayers were being put at risk, facing increased costs and what happened at WASA and T&TEC. In this very House we made the point that public moneys are being misspent in a very serious way and we have good reason to believe that those moneys are making a circle right back into the ruling party. They pooh-poohed us.

Why in God’s name would anyone want to give them large sums of money like that? Because they look good? Because they smell good? Because they taste good? Since the Minister of Finance invoked the Integrity in Public Life Act to defend his Government, I want to ask him personally and directly through you, Mr. Speaker, whether he can verify to us and the country that the Prime Minister declared this money to the Integrity Commission. If he is not in a position to tell us that, he must withdraw that pretentious defence of the Government. He cannot use his holier-than-thou attitude to try to bring comfort to the people, letting them feel that everything is all right, while the numbers do not add up, while danger is facing them, while scandal is engulfing them, while persons in public office are enriching themselves in the most scandalous way. If he cannot answer that, then all his platitudes must be withdrawn.

The North West Liaison Office, as far as I know, is an office of the ruling party in a PNM constituency, where there is a losing candidate trying to undermine my colleague from Port of Spain South. These kinds of moneys are flowing in there and they come from the Treasury. In my own constituency, one of the losers is down there trying to win support, as is his right, on the public moneys. It is $3 million. I want the Minister of Finance to tell me whether that is acceptable.
What is the Prime Minister’s salary? The sum of $15,000 x 12. So, this cheque represents two year's salary. We have reached the stage in this country where we do not know who our Government is. We do not know who is running the Government. Insofar as we see them, we do not know for whom they are working. We are seeing a stripping of the State’s assets and scandalous spending at the expense of the taxpayers. Not one of them who spoke up to now mentioned the risk to taxpayers with respect to the utilities. There is nothing more that taxpayers can look forward to than an ease with their utility and their health. As for the health, I would not touch that yet.

My friend from Caroni Central, I thought he was a man of integrity, but he is trying to convince me otherwise. When the Leader of the Opposition, on Wednesday, called for his resignation, he could not understand why. Let me explain to him why.

When your colleague, the Member for Barataria/San Juan, said what I said in Fyzabad last year December, which is, that the North West Regional Health Authority was a nest of crooks and cockroaches, and that they were raiding the public Treasury, you intervened and said to leave the board alone, let them serve. That was your position. You took the position of defence of the board. It is on record in the press. Do not shake your head. [Interruption] He might get up and contradict you. He took the position that the board should be left alone and when the examination was done we saw scandal.

He invoked the unfortunate situation of eggnog. People made eggnog and some people drank it as a meal in all good faith. No minister of government mixed eggnog and gave them, but a minister of government received this cheque. You are the Minister responsible for health.

By the way, as I see my colleague here from Siparia, I want to talk about her. You see every person in this Government, one after the other, we begin to lose faith in them. I heard the Minister of Education yesterday prattling away about what a wonderful job she is doing. Obviously, what is acceptable to them is not finding favour with the rest of the country. We have a problem here with standards.

Last year before the election the Government embarked on an educational school placement programme. One of the things this Minister did, as part of the highlight of her career, was to go down to London Street, in a warehouse that the owners could not sell because if you look to the east, no window; west, no window; you look north, street with gasoline spraying in your face; you look
south, gasoline and fumes in your face. They could not sell the building; it is a warehouse.

This Minister went down there and bought it and converted it into a school. That was one of the Government’s big selling points in the last election. Let me go through the Cabinet record of those carryings-on. With all the statements from the Minister of Finance and the prattlings from the Minister of Education, the population will not know what is happening with their business. I will tell them.

Cabinet Note dated February 2001 is on the acquisition by private treaty of the B.H. Rose property. I only want to quote item 3(b). Here is the Cabinet, in February, talking about the Minister of Public Administration—whoever that is. There is a minister with that responsibility and it is not the Minister of Education. It says that the Minister of Public Administration must enter negotiations for the purchase of that building. What the Cabinet is also being advised in Article 4 is that, according to the Memorandum of Understanding, the Ministry of Education had already committed the State to purchase the property for $12 million.

So, even before the Cabinet authorized the negotiations to purchase the building, the Ministry of Education committed the State to a purchase price of $12 million. We have to ask ourselves why a ministry would have that happen. [Interruption] That is not true. That is the Cabinet Note. Let me quote for you from the Cabinet Note of February 2001, Item 4. It says:

According to the Memorandum of Understanding, agreed with the owners on July 25, 2000, the Ministry of Education has already committed the State to the purchase of the property for $12 million.

There are no words, “not exceeding” here. How do you mean not exceeding? It says for $12 million. It goes on to say that the only provision for refund of expenses was the cost to replace the asbestos roof and that is how the building ended up being bought for $11.7 million.

The Ministry of Education committed the Government to a $12 million purchase and a small deduction for the asbestos removal. The Minister is telling me no. Cabinet Note No. 1053 dated August 2001 states that the lease was entered into, the building converted, equipped and furnished at a cost of $19.4 million. In March 2001, Cabinet agreed to purchase the building for $11.7 million—so they took off $300,000 for the asbestos. Do not tell me about it saying “not exceeding $12 million”.


So the public now owns the B.H. Rose warehouse. Some people call it the “Kamla Sec”. Some call it the Ibis School. The Ibis is our national bird and deserves better than this. It is not even a good bird school.

Now that we own the building, hear what the Cabinet is being told on June 12, that there was poor ventilation in the building and the building is possibly polluted. MTS puts in a further bill now for $5.9 million to work on that. The Minister goes to Cabinet and asks that funds be provided in the draft estimates of the Ministry for 2001—2002 for expenditure of $5.9 million to deal with defective works and to air-condition the building.

Has anybody seen any provision in here for that building? They own the property. Listen to this. This is March 29. The classrooms have two doors but no windows; not adequately ventilated; fans are noisy; plumbing not complete; cooling system in the Ibis High School is not satisfactory. That is an official document.

The next document states that on Wednesday, June 13, rain fell, the Ibis was flooded, children sent home; roof was leaking; ceiling falling, library waterlogged, computer flooded, electrical wires exposed, hazard to the children. That is June 13.

The next month, July 24, rain fell, school flooded, garbage bins were brought in to collect water; they overflow, library flooded, classes 13, 14 and 15 were all under water; all classes along the corridor and sick bay flooded; roof tiles disintegrated and waterlogged; water entering into the electrical circuits pose a health hazard; the kiosk housing the computer flooded.

How many millions did we pay for that? So then the Minister who was telling us about salt fish did not tell us that he did an audit of the Minister’s Ministry about provision of furniture and other items for the schools. He did not tell you that. I will tell you that. I have it here.

This is an audit that was done when the Minister could not account for the items purchased. I am doing this to show the public how our moneys are being spent. This Minister, in the context of the speech that was given by the Leader of the Opposition, is squandering our inheritance.

An audit was done because they bought items for the school and they cannot find the items. The schools involved are the darling mother school, Excel Composite, Valencia Secondary, St. Pierre Composite in my constituency, Pavarti High School and Barrackpore Girls. In respect of the above seven secondary
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...schools, $3,279,879 worth of items was delivered and cannot be accounted for. The agency that they hired to do that, they said that the Minister agreed that the MTS must take immediate steps to have the firm supply the undelivered equipment for which payment had already been received. So they paid them $3.2 million for items that have not been received. How did that happen? He has all the information, you know—the great defender of corruption. [Interruption] He has a Cabinet Note too.

3.05 p.m.

The internal audit revealed that there has been overexpenditure at three of the schools: the Model School, Excel Composite and Valencia Secondary. With respect to the Model School, taxpayers please hear this. I repeat, with respect to the Model School, the audit revealed that while the amount budgeted for that school is $6 million, the actual sum expended was $19.465 million. How did this happen? They pointed out overexpenditure was due to the non-authorization by the Ministry. There was no certification of receipts or furniture by personnel. Payment was made on verbal authorization with respect to the Model School. Somebody loves that Model School!

Mr. Speaker, I can go on and on and on, on this matter, [Desk thumping] but I have said enough to demonstrate to you that when you hear them prattling and praising themselves, the Government documents say otherwise. [Desk thumping] If you want to find the corruption the best place to look is in the Cabinet; the record is there in the Cabinet. No wonder Members of Cabinet have now found that, their craw full, they cannot take any more and they have to come out in the gang of four! They cannot take any more! They are, after all, Trinidad and Tobago citizens and this is hard to take. Out of this, she is humbled by being appointed Prime Minister for a day or two. You should be humbled by this profligacy, expense and corruption to taxpayers. [Desk thumping]

There is an absence of class that attends this Cabinet that I find irritating. I go to the stadium to support our national team, in a programme which—I was very happy to be part of the Cabinet that took the decision that our country would host that tournament. Notwithstanding what they will tell you, we took that decision! We took that decision to build four stadia! At that time a stadium was to cost $45 million but under this dollar for dollar government it doubled the price! [Laughter] I went there to support the team and there is a published programme...
with the Prime Minister to speak, the relevant Minister to speak, and officials to speak—and the world is watching us [Laughter] and I hear this prattling that sounded familiar. I said: “What’s that?” When I looked, the Minister of Education—not on the programme, you know—storms the programme, prattling away, in the most crass manner about “my ministry”, and “my ministry” because she came to announce that 16 of our citizens came in the first five. When I see you in the tearoom I want you to explain that to me. How could 16 of our citizens come in the first five? [Laughter]

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

**Motion made.** That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Mr. C. Imbert]

Question put and agreed to.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, even from the acting Prime Minister to the least of the apostles, my friend for Nariva, they are not to be taken seriously and they are not to be trusted. [Laughter] They believe in the face of this mountain of facts, fraud, incompetence, negligence and facilitation—they believe that they can throw out any innuendo; he can raise eggnog to defend Dr. Gopeesingh; this one can raise O’Halloran, and yesterday I sat there and I heard my friend for Nariva attempting to throw out innuendo directed at me. I would not let it pass—about Nariva and rice farmers because I heard it before. He put on *Hansard* about rice farmers—

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you know better than that. You need to refer to Members by their constituency. You have been saying “He” and “she” and “this one” I know you better than that. I know you know better than that so would you please do the correct thing?

**Dr. K. Rowley:** The distinguished gentleman from Nariva [Laughter] as part of his contribution put on *Hansard*—while pointing at me to create an innuendo—something about somebody going home with money in brown bags from rice farmers in Nariva, and looking at me and asking me to explain that. I could explain it! You see when I was Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Marine Resources I met Nariva being raped by farmers. I was the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources who made Nariva a prohibited area under law. [Desk thumping] Under law, the Nariva farmers were prohibited from going there and they took the State to court and they hired my friend there as their lawyer. [Laughter] I had to appear in court and sit in the witness box to be cross-
examined by him, because I have taken Nariva away from the farmers who were damaging the area. So I want to understand what is this innuendo that my distinguished colleague from Nariva is trying to talk about. I raised this only to show you the extent to which they will go to try to cover up when they are exposed.

Mr. Partap: The bags had rice in them? [Interruption]

Dr. K. Rowley: If I knew you were going to waste my time I would not have been so courteous to you. Mr. Speaker, I come back to this cheque made by the North West Liaison Office to tell you that public business in Trinidad and Tobago, as we see in the budget here, is inextricably tied up with the Government business. Unless we are able to disengage the ruling party’s business from public business, we are going to get into serious trouble in this country. This cheque of $50,000 from the North West Liaison Office—an officer of the party run by a Senator who the whole country—he is a friend of mine, and I will say it to him as a friend of mine of long standing, 20-odd years, do the decent thing and walk away from that position. It cannot be defended. Now, there is a link between him and the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister is not going to be able to do his duty so he says, in the face of a report commissioned by the Minister of Finance, “I am not even looking at that”.

Mr. Speaker, more interestingly, I would like to hear what the treasurer of the party has to say about this. The only thing the treasurer might be able to say is that, in asking for this cheque, police raided his house looking for drugs. Who is the Minister of the police in Trinidad and Tobago? Mr. Speaker, you must understand what is happening to our country. The treasurer of the ruling party writes the Prime Minister and asks him about this money and the next thing he knows—[Desk thumping]—is that the State police was in his house, allegedly, body searching him and his family. If that could happen to the treasurer of the ruling party, what is in store for the rest of Trinidad and Tobago? [Desk thumping] Those who do not want to take it seriously, can not take it seriously: I am saying that corruption has come home to the average person in Trinidad and Tobago today—every one of us!

I want the Prime Minister to enter the debate. He said yesterday he was going to enter the debate. I am looking forward to him entering the debate and explaining to us the circumstances under which he, as Prime Minister of this country, is in receipt of these and other moneys because there are other cheques, you know.

Mr. Partap: Who gave them to you?
Dr. K. Rowley: Who gave them to me? You are concerned with small things, I am concerned with the big things and there are more, Mr. Speaker. This is only one instalment, you know.

Mr. Speaker, a few months ago, the wife of the former Nigerian Head of State, Mr. Abacha—you remember Abacha?—Sani Abacha’s wife was caught leaving Nigeria and entering Europe with as many as 35 suitcases full of US dollars. I wonder if that sounds familiar to Trinidad and Tobago? We have to ask ourselves whether, in fact, there is any connection between the budget expense, the hundreds of millions to cover those various expenses; whether there is any nexus between those and Campden apartments.

We have to ask ourselves that! The Nigerians did not ask it and the next thing they knew, the Prime Minister’s wife was going away with 35 suitcases of money. I am taking in front! I am asking it now! Is there a nexus between this kind of payment, this budget and Campden? I believe when they go behind closed doors they laugh because it is not by accident that the company in the Cayman Islands owns Campden apartments. The company that owns the Campden apartments is called Sampson. Saint Sampson, strong! If you have to carry away 35 suitcases of money you have got to be a Sampson; like a lion and you take it to the home of Sampson and Delilah in Campden! We want to know if there is any connection, we have to ask those questions and we need answers.

I am saying this afternoon, the last time my colleague here brought evidence in this House, where in the minutes of a state agency it was said that the Prime Minister instructed the CEO to buy the rice, he has not said a word in his defence. Today I am saying silence is not an option! The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago must explain this! [Desk thumping] It is not sufficient for him to make quips and try to make jokes out of serious matters. This is where our country has reached. We want answers and we want them now! [Desk thumping] He knew I was coming to ask him here this evening so he was running scared. I waited for him this morning; he did not show up. I am here this afternoon; he is not here. The budget is being debated: where is the Prime Minister? This country must not tolerate a Prime Minister who can find himself in this situation; who can be so accused by his own party and chooses silence as an option.

3.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, when I said the budget is full of failed policies, let me give you an example. With great aplomb and great fanfare the Minister of Finance announced, in the face of a precipitous decline in agriculture—these fellows came
out of agricultural constituencies. When they were in the Opposition they invoked racism to describe lack of movement in that sector. They are in Government now for six years and agriculture has declined to precipitous levels and he comes today with new policies, and “hear de policy”—tax break for approved agricultural projects. That is a failed policy of the past, because what happened then is that every doctor and lawyer in town and other money earners found a piece of agricultural land, bought it from the farmer so the land became alienated and used it as a tax shelter. It led to no production. It led to no productivity. As a result of that, that was discontinued.

This Minister was living in a bank, comes out into the Cabinet and resurrects it and presents it as something new. We have gone through the whole gamut of making the ADB a lending agency—refinance it and all of that. He now comes and talks about a one-stop shop. The classic one-stop shop in this country is Tidco and Tidco is an F-A-I—come on, man! Tidco? Tidco did its own examination, brought in experts to examine itself and the report showed that Tidco has wasted $200 million and has not achieved any of its objectives. Tidco abandoned industrial development. This morning I heard my friend asking his colleague here from Tunapuna, “How many factories you have opened?” He could not answer. He could only bellow and “boof”, because none.

Tidco has abandoned industrial development. Tidco has abandoned tourism in Tobago and Tidco is now a road-paver and, in the face of the one-stop shop, Tidco, which is a monumental failure, he is telling us now that “We are going to create a new one-stop shop in agriculture.” This country cannot be serious. To make matters worse, insofar as he talks about any expansion of activity, a billion-dollar project down by the port; in this climate, in this season, with all that we are facing? With the world changing in front of our very eyes you want to go and spend $500 million of taxpayers’ money to build something down by the port called a convention centre? You all could not be serious.

Insofar as you are promoting tourism in this country, people have already invested hundreds of millions of dollars in Tobago. The Hilton is a convention centre underutilized, but you want to take taxpayers’ money to build a convention centre to compete with the investors who already exist. Why not promote Tobago as a convention destination and put people in the rooms in Tobago? Why not do that? No, you cannot do that because, if you do that, there is no money to “t’ief”. You promote construction because it is through the award of contracts that this Government has been able to remove large sums of money from the public sector into the private sector. So even while the projects are laudable, it is the construction phase that the Government is interested in.
So common sense should tell us as a people that it makes no sense at this point in time to talk about that kind of expenditure in that kind of location to compete with Tobago; but no, it is an opportunity to award contracts and to make financing deals and in that situation you will get more Benzes, more chauffeurs and more apartments in Campden in London. [Desk thumping] That is what we are about. You do not care if, at the end of the day, the people of this country end up facing a Trinidad and Tobago economy in a world recession where we cannot make ends meet, because, if the trend that is now threatening us continues for nine months, the Minister of Finance will have great difficulty raising revenues to meet even the basics in this budget, even the basics. However, “yuh” going ahead with it, “yuh” going ahead with it because it is your opportunity.

Where in the budget is there any activity, any policy, to bring about additional economic activity to create more wealth? Where is the new idea? I heard my friend, the Minister of Health, talking as though he “doh” live here. I wish you good health, Sir, but, Mr. Speaker, when he talks like that I wonder if he knows anything about the hospitals? Only this week the doctors in our main hospital were saying they are not doing surgery because they do not have enough nurses, they do not have theatre nurses and they do not have this. At one hospital, they are borrowing medical equipment from other people and this Minister comes here and talks as though everything is fine.

Where is the new idea? Instead of spending $500 million on a convention centre, spend $200 million on a national nurses’ training programme and train 2,000 nurses. [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, I can tell you, if we advertise tomorrow morning for nurses’ trainees and give the qualification, you will get 3,000 applicants of young males and females who qualify to be nurses. Let us train them as nurses. [Desk thumping] Let us oversupply our hospitals with nurses and then, when we oversupply, those who come and recruit the handful we have can recruit them. What we would have done is created an opportunity for people to go abroad and earn a living. In so doing they will send back remittances. There are economies in the Caribbean that survive totally on remittances. While they are abroad, they will learn new skills. They will eventually come back here, some of them, and they will contribute and we can create an avenue for our young people to develop themselves in that way. Two hundred million dollars will do that; but no, we do not see that.

Look at what is happening with offshore financing. I have been advocating all along that Tobago, as a part of Trinidad and Tobago, has the potential to be one of the soundest offshore banking centres in the Caribbean. Our record was good and
clean until you came into office, but Tobago can now go into offshore banking because the ground rules have now been settled. The whole question about money laundering, and who could do what, caused some problems for a few years, but now that the situation is settled and the ground rules have been laid out, we can follow those ground rules and Tobago can become an offshore banking haven within Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Only two years ago I had the opportunity of going to Guernsey in the Channel Islands. The entire economy of Guernsey was based on offshore banking. What it means is, all you have to have is good credentials, which I think we still have, notwithstanding this Government’s behaviour, you have to have good credentials, good systems, stability and a willingness to participate in international good behaviour. If we do that, that would be an expansion and addition to what we are doing now. It will be something new. It will create jobs for all the people in Tobago who are qualified. In fact, we will have to hire persons from Trinidad to work in Tobago because the employment levels would be so high in those banks. Security would be good.

Now that what is happening in North America is happening, we must now seek to prosper by that. We must see opportunities. No, we do not see that. What we get is dollar for dollar. Election nonsense—come down to my constituency and tell my constituents who have children abroad, “For every cent you spend on your child, for every dollar you spend, the Government will give you a dollar”, so it is called dollar for dollar, and I am still hearing in this Chamber “dollar for dollar”. When the programme materialized, it became one dollar in every six. “Yuh know why? Leh me show you.”

First to begin, if you are abroad, children going abroad do not qualify. [*Interruption*] So immediately—[*Interruption*] Children going abroad do not qualify, and, if I am to respond to that gentleman from Nariva, I will tell him that the tax break was there in place when the promise of dollar for dollar was made, so the tax break cannot be the result for it. It was an additional offering to what was there. At the University of the West Indies, what the Government is now doing is paying half of the tuition. So in a situation where tuition is $12,000, like in natural sciences, the Government is undertaking to pay $6,000 and is quite happy to have us call it dollar for dollar when the single largest cost, except for those few students who can live at home, is the cost of maintenance—the other costs, not tuition. Tuition is less than half in most instances.

So when you tell me, “For every dollar I will give you another dollar”, you are not telling me “I am going to pay half of your tuition”. That is a cop-out and
“yuh” fooling no one. You are fooling no one with that because you are creating no new places. Where is the new John S. Donaldson Technical Institute, San Fernando Tech and the Tobago Institute? Where are they? Where are the spaces? Why am I surprised? I should not be surprised because in my own constituency I have talked to the Minister. I reasoned with her. I thought we had it solved.

In a national school building programme to build four secondary schools, Carapichaima, Sangre Grande, Diego Martin, Mason Hall in Tobago, I have talked till I am blue in the face in this Parliament. Carapichaima is about finished, Sangre Grande not built; Tobago is only now under construction—five and a half years late. The Minister came here and talked yesterday about children in Tobago, how many were on the street. Well, if they were on the street, it was because this Government took five and a half years to build a school for which money was left by a PNM Cabinet. [Desk thumping]

That money was there since 1995 for construction in 1996. All those years you did nothing because you were fighting with Hochoy Charles and telling the Parliament it is Hochoy Charles’ fault why you cannot build the school. Thank God it is being built now. I want to ask you, is there a Hochoy Charles in Diego Martin? Why is the Diego Martin Secondary School not being built? “Yuh” know why? Up to this day this Government cannot or will not determine the site for the school. The Government will not determine a site for the school so there is no construction. The money has been there for six years. The Minister and I agreed that the school can be built in the area of eastern Chaguaramas, just west of Carenage.

If you can build a school in BH Rose’s warehouse, in those conditions, somebody has found that it is wrong to have a school in the salubrious environment of eastern Chaguaramas. The Minister agrees, the Member of Parliament agrees, the people agree but no school because somebody somewhere has more authority. [Interruption] Planning?

**Mr. Imbert:** Planning? Humphrey?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Town and Country Planning.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** So Town and Country Planning approved the Ibis High School, the one where they poisoned our children with fumes? You know the one where it is too hot and too polluted, Town and Country approved that? Town and Country Planning is saying that you cannot build a school for Carenage children round the corner in Tembladora? What madness is this? My constituents must go without school places because somebody in Town and Country Planning is bigger
than the Government? The Minister has the authority to overrule that statement from a public servant and today I am calling on the Government for the umpteenth time to get on with the construction of the Carenage school. [Desk thumping]

The children in the western peninsula from Diego Martin, Point Cumana, L’Anse Mitan and Carenage are being deprived of an improved environment because the Government is deliberately refusing to build them a school for which there is money approved by this Parliament year after year after year, and I am calling on the Minister—he said Minister of Planning. I am calling on the Minister of Planning to overrule whoever there is in the Town and Country Planning so that such a person—[Interruption] The Minister has the authority under the law—and have the school built at the location agreed upon by the Minister and the consultants. [Desk thumping] [Interruption]

While the Member for Nariva is making some noise, I want to draw his attention to Agenda 2001 with which he should be familiar, “Dollar for Dollar Education Plan”. This was appearing all over Victoria Gardens, Bayshore, Westmoorings and other selected places. It says:

“…matching dollar for dollar, assist every young person who wants to further his or her studies or to develop special skills at accredited technical tertiary institutions, here or overseas.”

Mr. Valley: What document is that?

Dr. K. Rowley: UNC Manifesto. So, Mr. Speaker, I will have numerous other opportunities to talk about this budget, to talk to the Government and about the Government. Today was just an opener. I have every good reason not to vote for this budget and I will not be frightened by the Prime Minister who says anybody who votes for this budget is a terrorist—[Interruption]

Hon. Member: Does not vote.

Dr. K. Rowley:—because I have absolutely no intention whatsoever of voting for a budget which threatens us in the way that the contents of these other documents threaten us. [Desk thumping] What this document contains—the development programme, the expenses in the utilities, Government largesse here and there, misbehaviour in education ministry and all over the Government, I cannot vote for this budget. However, I have a suggestion that this Parliament could pass an interim three-month budget, because, during that time, we will have made enough effort to get rid of this Government on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]
The Minister of Food Production and Marine Resources (Hon. Trevor Sudama): [Desk thumping] I have never seen so much applause from the Members on the other side as I have today.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to do my duty in accordance with my oath of office, which I may repeat today, and that is that I will bear true faith and allegiance to Trinidad and Tobago and will uphold the Constitution and the law; that I will conscientiously, impartially and to the best of my ability, discharge my duties and do right to all manner of people without fear or favour, affection or ill will. This is the oath I took when I assumed my responsibilities, Mr. Speaker, and this is the oath that I have attempted to adhere to and I will attempt to do it, adhere to it. One operates in the belief that our partisan interests coincide with the public interest, with the national interest, but where there is a perception that there is a divergence, it is my duty to pursue the interest of the people or the larger public interest.

3.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, it behooves me in the public interest to make a few comments which I hope are received as constructive observations and taken in the right spirit. They reflect my own perspective and my own concerns and uncertainties, and they will be made with forthrightness and candour in pursuit of the truth.

Let me first of all congratulate the Minister of Finance on this, his first budget presentation. Mr. Speaker, this is a very detailed budget, comprehensive in scope and of corresponding length. It has touched many areas. It seems as though the Minister of Finance was trying to be all things to all men. I am not sure if I understand where its focus lay.

The theme, “One people, One nation” must be grounded in an appreciation of the fact that a nation is the sum total of diverse relationships between individuals and groups and organizations, reflecting different legitimate interests and aspirations with an acceptable level of consensus in the rightful place of each; a consensus and a sense of belonging and a consensus in the common goal to which each group aspires. We do not have an appreciation of that, Mr. Speaker.

The theme, “One people, One nation” may only reflect an empty slogan. As regards the sub-theme of “leaving no one behind”, that depends on how you define behind. [Laughter] Is it in access to benefits and opportunity? Is it in terms of participation? Is it in terms of exercising influence? Is it in terms of making one’s voice heard? These are all elements of being behind, at the side or in front.
Mr. Imbert: Volume!

Hon. T. Sudama: With respect to achieving the objective of diversifying the economy, I think we shall wait and see. I merely wish to say that the dynamic for diversification is largely internally generated through influencing a diversified pattern of significant levels of private investment and associated levels of investment in public infrastructure.

We have seen over the years the very dominant quantum of investment by foreign investors in a particular sector. The diversified economy is not a compartmentalized economy. The interrelationship between sectors and the mobility of factors of production will provide the dynamism and the sustainability for diversification.

I want to give an example. We are saying in the budget that we are going to provide additional disposable income by a reduction in corporation and individual income tax and that is fine. If that additional disposable income goes to purchase foreign goods and services, then you are not diversifying the economy. If that additional income is used in the domestic economy to create demands and to create investment opportunities and, indeed, to add to the sum total of saving and investment then, of course, you are getting somewhere towards creating a diversified economy and creating the dynamic for that, as I said.

The budget statement claims that people want good governance and transparency and we all want good governance and transparency. The question, Mr. Speaker, is, how do we get it? In order to find out, one has to identify or define what constitutes good governance. In my view, good governance constitutes, among other things, adherence to a democratic ethos and acceptance of its processes and institutions. Good governance has to do with how a political party functions, for example: respect for its institutions, and opportunity for the expression of all viewpoints.

Good governance has to do with acknowledging the diversity of legitimate interests and aspirations, but more importantly, good governance has to do with the reconciliation of those interests in pursuit of a larger public interest. First of all, we acknowledge the diversity of legitimate interests, and then, having done that, how do we go about reconciling those in pursuit of the national interest? What this implies, Mr. Speaker, is that no one interest, no one group, should dominate in Government policy formulation and thinking and in the operations of the processes of Government. If that happens, then the larger public interest or the
larger public good cannot be served. At this point, if I may quote Machiavelli, who is a distinguished political philosopher, he said:

“It is impossible to satisfy the oligarchy without doing violence to the interest of others.” [Desk thumping]

I am merely quoting Machiavelli who wrote four centuries ago. [Laughter]

Mr. Imbert: Repeat that, man!

Hon. T. Sudama: Now, Mr. Speaker, all governments anywhere in the world are subject to a diversity of influence. Everybody wants to get their views heard. All governments, many individuals, attempt to peddle influence. They even make substantial contributions. We have been told that he who pays the piper calls the tune, but good governance means that a government should not be dominated by any single influence, whether it is formal or informal. [Desk thumping]

So, when the Minister of Finance talks about good governance, I want to support him. When he speaks of transparency, I want to support him, but I also want to tell him what I conceive of those terms. The budget statement notes that diversity is our strength and Government understands the diversity of our people and, I hope that that is true; but the question is: Having understood that diversity, how do we manage that diversity, and to what end? That is the question—the management of diversity and to what end.

For example, we have cultural diversity about which we have heard so much in this budget. The question I want to ask is, do we have a cultural policy that gives full expression to our cultural diversity? It is only when you ask those questions and you seek to get answers that you give meaning to statements and phrases—only then.

We are told that we have to become a knowledge-based society and, true, we have to but a knowledge-based society. Mr. Speaker, creates knowledge and a knowledge-based society acquires knowledge, and it disseminates knowledge generally and comprehensively. That is a knowledge-based society. We have to work towards it. We are asked certain questions. I mean, a simple question like, we want a knowledge-based society, but what is the percentage of our population who are functionally illiterate? From the reports I am hearing, it is a significant portion of our population. When I say significant, in terms of percentage of the whole, not the majority, but significant.

We have to ask questions. What is our policy with respect to creation of knowledge? Research and development. What is the level of our research and
development pool of people—the personnel? We have to ask, how much money is spent on research and development as a percentage of our GDP if we want to create a knowledge-based society? These are questions that we are forced to ask and to get information.

We have also witnessed in the budget that one of our objectives is the inclusion of all our citizens. We are going for inclusiveness and, again, I am fully supportive of that. However, while we are doing that, we must also understand that in certain sectors of the society, not least in certain elements of our own party, there is a sense of alienation, there is a sense of not belonging, there is a sense of feeling that you are marginalized. Therefore, we have got to understand that and create policies and programmes to incorporate as far as possible—there will never be a perfect world, but as far as possible—all our people.

The budget speaks to the issue of creating an enabling environment. It gives pride of place, creating an enabling environment to attract more foreign direct investment. That is important, Mr. Speaker, but surely, let us put this thing in perspective. More direct foreign investment has traditionally gone, particularly in the last number of years, in one sector. What about creating the environment, a positive environment for local savings and investment? In fact, while we speak of these things, I think on page 20 of the budget, these things are spoken of, savings and investment.

I want to say that savings and investment—and savings, in particular—must go beyond pension reform. Inducing local savings must go beyond pension reform and reduction and elimination of tax on interest, because what we are dealing here with is a larger problem. It is a culture of consumption that we have to address. Then, as we create, we attempt to create that environment, we have to measure whether our policy measures are, in fact, achieving the ends.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when I was in the Ministry of Planning and Development, I tried to find out what is the quantum of investment that was taking place in different sectors of the economy, particularly the local economy. It is difficult to find out, let alone to try to assess whether the measures that the Government is putting in place are, in fact, having an effect; the desired effect. So, we may be doing things and thinking that they are having a positive effect on local savings and investments when they may not be.

I want to say here that while we welcome more private sector participation in the economy, the transfer of investable funds into the hands—from the private sector into the public sector—that is through the sale of National Enterprises Limited shares—does not create additional investment.
Mr. Valley: Quite true. [Desk thumping]

Hon. T. Sudama: That is laudable because you have broadened the base, but it is merely transferring investments from one side to the other. It does not create any additional investment. Mr. Speaker, the budget is, in my view, a bit ambitious in certain of its objectives, if I may say so. There is nothing wrong in being ambitious. Of course, ambition should be tinged with a little realism as well. I see here that on page five, let me read what it says:

“By 2005, commuting will become less stressful as congestion on our nation’s roadways would be minimized as a result of our new road network infrastructure.”

We are at the end of 2001. By 2005 we are promising a new road network infrastructure. I do not think we have done the designs. I do not think we have done the planning and so forth. Are we saying that in a matter of three or four years we are going to have this new road network infrastructure?

My friend from St. Joseph here, he is an action man. [Laughter] I commend him because he has done a lot of things in the area of road infrastructure, except when it comes to Oropouche. [Laughter] I think he becomes a little less energetic. Regardless of that, I think to talk in these terms is to talk a bit—you know.

Then when I looked at the employment projections and tried to calculate it, we are talking about thousands and thousands. I think it would be a good thing if we could achieve this, but when we make projections which do not seem to be realistic and which we cannot deliver on, all we do is open ourselves up to attack from the Opposition. I made some projections for permanent jobs promised between 18,550 to 32,950 and construction jobs, anything like 21,700 jobs in the next five years or so.

The question I am asking is, even if we do create those opportunities, what about the supply side? Do we have in train the scales and so forth in order to fill these positions? So, I am just expressing my own concerns, Mr. Speaker and, as I said, I may need a little assurance and I am sure that the Minister of Finance will, indeed, assure me. I am also a little confused, and I think this statement needs a little clarification when he says here under fiscal policy:

“The budget for the next fiscal year has been prepared using an oil price of $22 per barrel.”

Mr. Speaker, the budget of 2000/2001 used an oil price of US $22 per barrel, but the next sentence gets me confused:

“As a result of using...”
Using US $22 per barrel I imagine.

“...current revenue is estimated at $15.365 billion or 20 per cent higher than the budgeted interest for 2000.”

4.00 p.m.

So am I to understand from this, merely on the basis of the same US oil price per barrel, that we are going to get this increase in revenue? There must be some other calculation in the Minister’s mind, to come to this conclusion. I just make these observations simply because I am sure that he is in a position to explain these things, but it does create a little confusion.

On page 27, we have talked about the benefits of the Science and Technology Park. Yes, I think it is a good idea. In fact, I, myself, when I was Minister of Planning and Development, initiated discussions to have a science and technology park, but I think maybe we are claiming a bit too much for it. It says here:

“This facility will attract foreign investors seeking the right location to establish ‘near shore’ operations, as well as industries that produce or use information technology to service the North American Market. The project will also contribute to the development of a national system of innovation, that is, the creation of a set of linkages and relationships in the economy that allows for continuous development, absorption and diffusion of relevant technologies throughout the society.”

I wish it did. I am not sure.

The Minister of Finance did talk about state enterprises at page 16 and he, rightly or wrongly, wants to put a measure of control in the issue of the operation of state enterprises. I do not want to go too much into that. There are two questions, however, I want to ask: first of all, one measure of control to ensure the state enterprises operate properly is the composition of the boards. [Desk thumping] The question, therefore, is how boards are appointed; very critical. I, myself, am not sure. I made recommendations. I do not know. My recommendations do not seem to carry any weight.

Mr. Speaker, because we want transparency and we are rightfully pursuing the objective of transparency, the other issue I want to raise here is—and I have raised it before—whether a key institution like the Divestment Secretariat in the Ministry of Finance is headed by a person who may have some conflict of interest. I think it is a legitimate question to ask in the light of all the outcomes that we are observing.
Mr. Speaker, we know that the small and medium scale enterprises have a significant role to play in the economy. On page 23 of the budget statement, one of the things that the Minister spoke about is the question of access to finance. We will have to deal with that; making finance more accessible; the question is how we guarantee the loans and so on. However, there is one critical issue we have to address, both for the small and medium scale enterprises generally and for the agricultural sector. It is to distinguish between loans for capital expenditure and loans for current expenditure.

Normally, when you go for loans for capital expenditure, you go for loans at a lower rate of interest, because it is a longer time to maturity. For current expenditure you go to the commercial banks. If you are going to the commercial banks for all your loans, whether long-term or short-term, my question really is: Would it be at a rate of interest, particularly for long-term expenditure, which will make the projects viable?

Quite apart from finance, do you know what is a real constraint for small and medium scale enterprises? Access to land; a simple thing as access to land on which to put down a factory for light industries; serious constraint, given the number of people who come to me complaining. We have a policy for taking more and more marginal lands—and I am not saying to take good agricultural land and convert it for other purposes—for the purpose of creating room for small and medium scale enterprises.

I want to give you my own experience: for five years since 1997, we have been trying to construct a food park and light industrial estate in my constituency; five years and it is still there. They built 100 metres of road and that is it; five years. So if you want to encourage this sector of the economy then, of course, we have got to do something about that.

May I also tell the Minister of Finance that one of the things that will assist small and medium scale businesses enormously is if we pay them on time. I know some steps are being made to do that, but I think you would have to make a special effort, simply because, if you say that if you do not pay them on time, you will pay them 1 per cent interest per month, the next question I am going to ask is: Where will you get the money to pay the interest? Are you going to provide a special fund to pay that interest when we could prevent that by streamlining that bureaucracy and letting these people get their money on time?

People have come to me in tears, small or medium scale business, they are up to their necks with the banks. They cannot get money from the Government and
instead of making a profit on a transaction, they end up incurring a loss; simple things like that. If we address these things, I think we will be—when we make provision for a project, we do not also make provision to pay interest. My question is: Where will the interest payments come from?

Mr. Speaker, let me come to the very important question about the financial system. The Minister has rightly said that a properly regulated insurance industry is essential for the effective functioning of an economy, simply because of the volume of savings which are under the control of insurance companies and so on but I would really like some insurance—assurance. I do not have any insurance; maybe I need that as well. [Laughter]

Let me quote a report, and this is from our largest insurance company. This is a report from the Supervisor of Insurance which relates to the year of business 1997. So this is what we recently got from the Supervisor of Insurance and it is dated. I have seen certain ratios of assets, liability and so on, but, the truth is, I cannot make head or tail out of it. In other words, from the information provided here, I cannot glean whether, in fact, there is solvency or insolvency, whether the operations are within the law or not within the law; I cannot tell.

For example, I see here that investment of ordinary shares in Trinidad and Tobago companies are $337 million out of a total investment of $1,000,000,343. I do not know if that is a satisfactory ratio or not. Bonds and debentures in Trinidad and Tobago companies are $69 million. We would like to know where these investments take place. Are these arm’s length transactions?

Then, of course, I see something called “admissible asset valuation adjustment” of $669 million. As a layman, I do not know what this all means. Then I see on the liability side a set of values. I really do not know. Therefore, if we are going to have a report of the Supervisor of Insurance, I would like a clear and meaningful report and that we get information, that provides information rather than bland statements.

I have a report here on the operations of Clico which says certain things, which makes me a little worried; not that things may not have been regularized and improved, but I do not know.

It says here:

1. The relative inability of the company to satisfy its statutory fund:—

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<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>($62,462,192)</td>
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<td>1993</td>
<td>($1,383,324)</td>
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Mr. Speaker, if you are unable to satisfy your statutory fund, what sort of infraction is that with respect to the law?

It says here:

“2. The insistence on the part of the company to pay dividends, contrary to the Law. A company should not pay a dividend if its fund is in deficit. However, the Company paid dividends in each year except 1992.”

The reports goes on to say:

“3. The Company consistently failed to submit an acceptable actuarial certificate. The certificates submitted were not prepared according to the Act. Our Consulting Actuaries have repeatedly made this observation i.e. the liabilities appear to be understated which prima facie makes the deficit in the fund worse than that which immediately meets the eye.

4. The company has been technically insolvent. For the years 1992—1995, the margin of technical insolvency was as follows:”

Mr. Valley: Could you give way please? Which is the company that is technically insolvent?

Hon. T. Sudama: The Colonial Life Insurance Company of Trinidad and Tobago.

“1992 $63,655,902
1993 $113,557,865
1994 $84,740,153
1995 $390,173,666

5. The Company continues to use policyholders’ funds to offer guarantees to affiliates.”

Mr. Speaker: Can you identify that report for us and, perhaps, if you can lay it since you are quoting substantially from it?

Hon. T. Sudama: Yes; this is a report on “The Operations and Financial Affairs Of Colonial Life Insurance Company (Trinidad) Limited (Clico) Under The Insurance Act, 1980 and the Related Regulations”. I will be willing to lay a copy on the Table.
That is, in my view, a rather dangerous thing to do, simply because you must have some liquidity values and ratios by which you ought to be operating.

The report continues:

“6. The consulting actuaries have repeatedly stated that CLICO, being the largest local insurer, should demonstrate more corporate responsibility, by operating within the Law.”

Mr. Speaker, I raise this issue in the light of the comments I made on good governance and the role of the Government in pursuing good governance, because if you are unduly dominated by any single particular interest, you are going to put the national interest in jeopardy; it is as simple as that. [Desk thumping]

I want to move on to the issue of corruption. I want to acknowledge what the Minister said and I support him: “Corruption strikes at the heart of economic growth and development.” I am fully supportive of his view on that. The question is really, while we acknowledge that: How do we deal with this issue of corruption? He has made certain observations with respect to his own Ministry, the Ministry of Finance, and what plans he has. My question is: How does this apply to the wider society?

For example, in page 10 of the budget document he states:

“Government will also establish a Tax Fraud Investigation Unit in the Board of Inland Revenue since there are many instances where taxpayers’ returns show little relationship between what is declared and their lifestyles.”

I want to find out: What is that scope of this? Does it also apply to public officials? This is because there is abundant evidence: public officials, people in various agencies who could not pay their rent in 1996 but, two years later, are buying expensive properties in expensive locations and having BMWs and Pajeros, you name it. So I would like to know what is the scope of this—lifestyle and your earnings?

We have also the proposal:

“…the Inland Revenue Division is also working on the establishment of an Inspection Unit. The main function of this Unit will be the preservation of the integrity of the staff of the Inland Revenue Division. Any reports of impropriety will be investigated to either clear the officer’s name or, where there is merit in the report, to take appropriate action against the officer.”

I want to find out really the modus operandi of how the Minister will proceed, because we are told, “Look here, you must have evidence.” I want to know the
quality of the evidence, because if he receives a report and makes an allegation against an officer, how does he proceed? How does he determine whether that allegation has evidence to support it and then proceed? I would like to know in terms of the wider society. This is only applicable to people in the Inland Revenue Division. How do you proceed with respect to investigating reports about people in the wider society, if you are really serious about dealing with corruption?

As I said, I think that if we are going to project an image that we are a society that is serious about dealing with corruption and irregularities, then we must adhere to certain standards of public behaviour. We have got to show that.

4.20 p.m.

Even if as a result of all this we are achieving some measure of success in economic growth and there is an increase in wealth and so on in the society—of course, let me say that by and large that growth and that wealth has been fuelled by investments in the energy sector. By and large there has been some increase in manufacturing and so on. There has even been some increase over the last two years in agriculture, contrary to what my friend from Diego Martin West was saying. I will deal with agriculture a little later.

Merely by saying that we are having growth and so on, therefore there is no corruption, the question is: How much more growth could we have had without corruption? Therefore, the fact that you have growth does not deny that there are levels of corruption in the society that must be addressed. That implies there must be vigilance on the part of the society at all times. I am reminded of a line in Oliver Goldsmith's poem, “the Deserted Village”, which goes:

“Ill fears the land to hastening ills of prey, where wealth accumulates, and men decay.”

What we want to set our face against is that while there may be some increase in wealth, we want to avoid the decadence that might be associated with that increase in wealth.

I want to speak now about the agricultural sector, which is my more immediate responsibility. It is in the nature of the sector that the infrastructure, and particularly the physical infrastructure, is expensive. It costs large outlays. It is also in the nature of the sector that greater reliance for provision of infrastructure is placed on the public purse. That is the nature of agriculture, not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but also throughout the world.

We have had certain provisions. I have said that given the nature and scope of the demand for infrastructure, what is provided is minimal. Let me talk about
access roads. For 1998/99 we did about $14 million worth of access roads. We got no releases. In 1999/2000, we got some releases that went to pay for work done in 1998/1999. So in 1999/2000, not a metre of access road was built in this country. In 2000-2001, the princely sum of $5 million was allocated which could not even pay for the mobilization of contractors. So no access roads.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. T. Sudama: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did an initial investigation to see what it would really cost over a four-year period—and this is merely the first phase of dealing with the access roads programme. We have a total number of roadway of 700,630 roads throughout Trinidad and Tobago, which I regard as priority, a total length of 747 kilometres, which on a conservative estimate would cost us $436 million over a four-year period. Therefore, I have asked that perhaps $110 million a year over the four-year period would have enabled us to make some dent in this issue.

The neglect that we have had over the years of PNM administrations and of other administrations with regard to the infrastructure of agriculture, that is a fact. I get up here to speak the truth which you must accept. The sum of $21 million is really miniscule under any calculations but, as I said, we would see what can be done.

Irrigation facilities, water management and so on: We have had a report made on calculations of what it would cost. It would cost an average of $30,000 to irrigate one hectare of land. If we had a programme to irrigate 5,000 hectares, it would cost $150 million. If we went to 50,000 hectares, it would cost $1,350,000,000 over a 10-year period.

Three per cent of our agricultural land in Trinidad and Tobago is irrigated. So you understand the nature of the problem. If you wanted 100,000 hectares to be irrigated, that would cost us, at today's value, $3 billion. So you understand the nature and the significance of this problem. We are not only talking about irrigation, infrastructure and water management. We also have marketing infrastructure. We have to improve NAMDEVCO, which is very important. We got $5 million.

We are constructing the Northern Wholesale Market. We are in the process of completing a packing-house facility at Piarco for about $4 million to facilitate the
export of agriculture. We also have to spend money to access and penetrate foreign markets. We have to deal with the issue of freight for export. Today we are being told that the prices that BWIA charges for freight are really not viable for the exporters. We have to deal with the infrastructure for sanitary and phytosanitary facilities and food safety standards. All these are important infrastructure in order to promote the export thrust even for domestic agriculture. We have to spend much money on research and development and we also have to support our farmers with price support mechanisms.

I have a report here where the House Agriculture Committee in the United States approved $73.5 billion for the overhaul of the US Farm Laws that promise additional money will flow automatically to farmers when prices slump. We have no such thing here. There is an additional $5.5 billion to bail out grain, cotton and soya bean farmers.

Mr. Speaker: The sitting is suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

5.00 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Oropouche, you have 25 minutes left.

Hon. T. Sudama: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we took the tea adjournment, I was on this issue of the kind of support that other countries give to their farmers in terms of price support and so on. We go nowhere near that scale of support. Even when we have certain disasters like flooding and so on, it takes an enormous length of time for us to get a few hundred thousand dollars in order to provide relief to farmers. I recall there was severe flooding in 1998 and we had to make representation after representation to the Ministry of Finance. In the end we were provided with a little money which only came in the year 2000. That gives you an idea of what is the perception of farmers in the society. So we are not serious about support for the agricultural sector.

Let me just indicate to you what are the percentages involved. In 1996, the agricultural PSIP, that is, that portion of the PSIP which was devoted to agriculture: $34 million, which constituted 3.6 per cent of the total PSIP, and .35 per cent of the total budget, and .10 per cent of the GDP. That was what we were allocating to agriculture. When we go down the years: 1997, 49 per cent, $49 million, 3.71 per cent of the PSIP; .4 per cent of the total budget and .13 per cent of the GDP.

This is the pattern. In the year 2000/2001, $30 million which was actually released net of any provision to Caroni (1975) Limited—we are talking about the
non-sugar agricultural sector now—that amounted to 3.13 per cent of the PSIP, .23 per cent of the total budget and .05 per cent of the GDP of this country. When we look at the figures for research and development, we see even more miniscule amounts: $1.13 million for the year 1996; $4.93 million, 1997; $1.25 million, January/September 1998; 1998/1999, $3.84 million; 1999/2000, $3.21 million and 2000/2001, $3 million, which, when we look at the percentage, a miniscule per cent of the GDP and a miniscule per cent of the total budget and of the PSIP. There has been some improvement in the years 2001/2002; but even so, we are talking about 5 per cent of the PSIP and 1.89 per cent of the total budget for that year. 

So with those kinds of allocations—and I made the point that heavy reliance is placed on the Government for providing infrastructure in agriculture. When we make those sorts of comparisons and the allocations, you will see how far off we are in terms of identifying funding for the sector. I have made the point that if we are to meet any of the significant demands for agriculture and the capital investment in the agricultural sector, it has to be off budget financing. We have done hundreds of millions of dollars of off budget financing; whether we wanted to build an airport, whether we want to dredge a harbour, whether we want to build a library, whatever, you name it; hundreds of millions of dollars; but when it comes to agriculture, we do not seem to have the will to get that level of funding to extend in this sector. 

It is really not a question of money or access to money; it is a question of priorities. Let me quote from this Annual Economic Survey 2000, issued by the Central Bank. I am quoting from page 16. This is what it says.

“Despite collecting additional receipts of $2,395.5 million in fiscal year (FY) 2000 (October 1999—September 2000) the central government incurred a deficit of $96.8 million for the period as expenditure in several categories rose to absorb $1,543.3 million or almost two-thirds of the increase in revenue.”

5.10 p.m. 

These are additional receipts. These are not receipts for which we had budgeted. These are additional moneys coming into the hands of the Government, but when it comes to expenditure, we find the agricultural sector does not receive any of these benefits. There is an irony, as I looked through the budget while we are speaking, about there being $20 million for access roads and $10 million for drainage. We come to the next item, which is the International Conference on the waterfront. One project will cost $1.2 billion. Here we are allocating small sums of $20 million and $10 million to agriculture. It is a question of priorities, not of funding.
We come to the issue of the Revenue Stabilization Fund, to which we are putting $600 million on deposit—and we are adding to it to make it $1 billion—and that is for the rainy day. However, the rainy day for agriculture is today and has been for a number of years and we are putting aside for the rainy day for other things.

Sometimes when you go to the bank, they tell you if you want to borrow money, and you have money, you should put it on a fixed deposit and get 6 per cent interest or whatever. However, you will borrow from the bank at 15 and 16 per cent interest. That is banker's logic, I imagine. Here we are putting aside in a Revenue Stabilization Fund for a rainy day when there is urgent need for expenditure on the infrastructure in the agricultural sector.

I make that point, Mr. Speaker, to emphasize that it is not a question of money, it is a question of priority. If someone is running a business and he wants it to increase and to improve, he must invest in it. It he does not invest in it, there will not be any increase in its output. I want to emphasize that.

Let me go on further to talk about the Agricultural Development Corporation. My only concern is that, if we put too many functions under the purview of one corporation, I am not sure that we could have a focus. These functions are too diffuse. We are talking about access to credit as a function that we must pursue. We are talking about investment facilitation. That is another function. We talk about extension services that generally have been provided by the public sector. We are talking about marketing promotion for which we already have an institution. We are talking about incentives. While I am in agreement, I am not sure that all these things are necessary to promote the agricultural sector, whether the arrangement can be facilitated by a single organization.

The Minister of Finance did say on page 28 of the budget that there is a Disaster Relief Fund. There was one for the fiscal year 2000—2001. I think there may be an error there. For fiscal 2001—2002, I have looked through the budgetary provisions and I have not seen one. Maybe the Minister should look into that. It may be an oversight on the part of his bureaucrats.

In that context, we have been having flooding and I have been complaining about a drainage plan. I have been told that we have not had any kind of severe flooding for two years. I heard that mentioned in this House by two Members. I am committed to speaking the truth. I have a report, Newsday Saturday, August 18, 2001: “Baksh seeks help for flood victims”—enormous flooding in San Fernando West. On the same day in the Express—“Sudama: South Floods a
disaster”. In the Newsday the following day, Sunday, August 19: “Floods wreak havoc in South: Flood chaos in South”.

Yet, we have been told that we have not been having floods. I am amazed that such bold statements could be made in this House when the reality is quite different. I do not know if some Members of this House are in a state of denial.

I want to speak briefly on an item as to how we can promote agriculture by creating local demand. One of the avenues for doing this was that the School Nutrition Programme would access most of its inputs from domestically produced items.

The Minister has made a statement that I think has to go beyond this:

“Efforts will be made to utilize more domestically produced agricultural growths in the School Feeding Programme.”

I want to tell the Minister that this School Nutrition Programme is a runaway horse, in the sense that there is very little one can do to influence that programme as it is currently operated in order to achieve this objective. I have had the Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises writing to the School Nutrition Programme saying that they are willing to provide processed milk for the School Nutrition Programme and for months they did not get a reply. Feeding children is an investment in our future and it should not be regarded merely as consumption. This is more so because it creates a demand on the agricultural sector.

Mr. Speaker, one of the other issues I want to touch on is the constraint on available lands, suitable land, good quality agricultural lands. I commissioned a report to look at this issue of agricultural land in the state sector, in the state enterprises sector, agricultural land in private holdings. We have a problem. Therefore, we have to do something very serious.

First of all, we should have a policy not to alienate good quality—that is between Class 1 and Class 4 agricultural land for any other purpose. There are other lands—marginal lands—which can be utilized for commercial, industrial and other purposes. That has to be a policy, but regarding the state sector the vast majority of state agricultural lands has moderate to severe constraints to production and 41 per cent of state agricultural lands is considered unsuitable for agricultural development.

The findings indicate that out of the acreage of state agricultural land in capability Classes 1 to 4, less than half comprise parcels of two hectares or more. We are told that there are some areas of forest reserve which are being farmed and
maybe we can regularize that position and reserve those areas. The findings clearly indicate that there is only a very limited area of state agricultural land available for allocation to large-scale commercial farms. That is a constraint.

It is also indicated here that the obvious land base for the development of large-scale commercial farms is approximately 36,000 hectares of land vested in Caroni (1975) Limited and approximately 10,000 hectares vested in Petrotrin. This is quite apart from lands vested in private ownership.

Even if all land base needed for housing by 2020 were to be sourced from Caroni (1975) Limited’s existing agricultural landholding, there are still at least 28,000 hectares of Caroni (1975) Limited land available for agricultural development beyond 2020. This area is of great significance to the development of a viable, productive agricultural sector in Trinidad, especially as the majority is Class 2 to 4 which is good to reasonably good lands. Caroni (1975) Limited’s and Petrotrin’s landholding are crucial to the development of a commercial and vibrant agricultural sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

Government also needs to find mechanisms to ensure that the significant areas of abandoned or underutilized private agricultural lands are used productively. That is the scenario as far as the constraint on land is concerned.

I made a statement earlier that we cannot talk about restructuring the agricultural sector. We cannot talk agricultural growth, increase in agricultural output, more commercially viable agriculture without taking Caroni (1975) Limited into the picture. It just is not possible. Unfortunately, this budget presentation made no mention of Caroni (1975) Limited. We are at a loss. I am at a loss to find out how Caroni (1975) Limited’s land fits into our agricultural perspective as defined in this budget statement.

Caroni (1975) Limited has lands which are under different uses. The total lands under Caroni (1975) Limited’s holdings is 77,498 acres, but some of the lands are taken up, for example, as recreation grounds, loading stations, residential purposes, roads, ponds and watercourses. If we take out all of that, which is 8,486 acres, we are left with 69,012 acres of Caroni (1975) Limited’s lands, some of which is uncultivated, some under sugar cultivation—citrus, rice and different usage.

The question we have to ask, first of all, is whether the current usage is the most efficient and productive. What do we do? Do we structure these holdings to have those lands inputed as a critical factor of production in the agriculture sector? I do not know what the plans for Caroni (1975) Limited are because these
matters have been dealt with by the Divestment Secretariat under the Ministry of Finance. We have not, so far, had a report submitted to the Cabinet, so I do not know how proposals which have been made are being looked at and analyzed.

5.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know what are the plans for Caroni (1975) Limited. As I said, these matters are being dealt with by the Divestment Secretariat, which is under the Ministry of Finance. We have not had, so far, a report submitted to the Cabinet, so I do not know how proposals have been made and are now being looked at and analyzed. I merely want to indicate that I have a report, which has identified certain initiatives, which were recommended. The Government is being asked to invite private sector proposals—local, regional and international—for Caroni (1975) Limited sugar operations by June 2001. This is what appeared in the media. I have not had any direct report sent to me.

“Sever Caroni employees on October 2001 with enhancement.”

Mr. Speaker, I repeat.

“Sever Caroni employees on October 2001 with enhancement.


Privatize Caroni’s operations by December 2001, if an acceptable proposal is had.

If the above is not achieved, operate one factory in crop 2002 with a total shutdown at the end of the crop”.

Mr. Speaker, “a total shutdown at the end of the crop”.

“Payment to farmers for contract obligations.”

What is interesting, Mr. Speaker, is that this new company is to engage in new economic activities, heavy and light industries, commercial and industrial development of the company's vast land holdings, divestment projects and joint ventures.

I have not heard anything about agricultural activity in this scenario. I have said that if we are going to do justice to the people who work in Caroni (1975) Limited; if we are going to have a viable agricultural sector; if we are going to promote growth in that sector, then the lands, particularly the good quality Caroni lands, must be utilized for agricultural purposes, regardless of who makes the investment. Mr. Speaker, I maintain that position.
As I said, Mr. Speaker, I am at a loss to know where we are heading, and furthermore, if we do sever Caroni (1975) Limited’s employees—I understand that plans are afoot to do this severance. If you give people some money in their hands, it is not going to last very long, except you take that money and invest it in employment opportunities. I am hearing reports coming from the sugar industry that plans are afoot to proceed with this divestment exercise but I, as a Minister of Government, am none the wiser. I just thought I would bring that to the attention of the public at large.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that I have tried to touch on some areas which are of concern to me. I have supported some aspects of the budget, which I feel need commendation and support, but I need clarification in other areas. All I can say is that in conclusion I am reminded of a Latin phrase: dixit animam meum salvit, which translates to: “I have spoken and saved my soul.” But that is a bit of hyperbole. I prefer to say: “I have spoken and I have done my duty.”

Mr. Hedwige Bereaux (La Brea): Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend the heartiest congratulations to the hon. Minister of Finance on his budget presentation. It is the first one, and in the tradition of this honourable House, I extend my congratulations to him. That may be all I can do at this time but nonetheless, such that I can give, I do give.

The hon. Minister has entitled this budget statement: “One People, One Nation: Leaving No One Behind”, brave and laudable objectives, Mr. Speaker, but we have heard lines like these before from a different singer, in the person of the former Minister of Finance, and the hon. Prime Minister, at times. However, in the execution of previous budgets, we have been assailed with broken promises, total falsehoods in some instances and, in others, clear, present and unmasked discrimination in distributing the resources of the nation to the extent that vast areas of this country remain unserviced, large segments of the population are ignored insofar as the provision of opportunities, development and amenities are concerned.

These infractions were not carried out in secret or behind closed doors. They were done in full glare and under scrutiny. Therefore, one can fully comprehend the Minister’s subconscious motivation, prompting him to state early in this presentation:

“The stark reality is that a nation cannot progress if it marginalizes any of its citizens.”

We know that, Mr. Minister! However, it appears that you and Members of your Government have, like Rip-van-Winkle, now awoken from the years of slumber;
six years in which the policies of your Government, your party hacks, your financiers—like Colonial Life Insurance Company—and petty politicos wreaked havoc, rampaged and visited untold hardship, deprivation and discrimination on certain segments of the population. Nowhere have your mismanagement, graft, corruption and discrimination been more pronounced, and have caused more hurt, misery and suffering, than in the constituency of La Brea. I propose, in my contribution today, to chronicle for posterity the multitudinous infractions which this Government has visited upon the people of the La Brea constituency.

The Minister, on page 25 of his presentation states inter alia: “Today the energy sector in Trinidad and Tobago—[ Interruption] Mr. Speaker, I want the Hansard reporter to be able to take down my contribution but the noise coming from the Member for Nariva—I am hearing him, and I am certain that the Hansard reporter may be having some difficulty.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Nariva, please.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Just a word to the wise. Mr. Speaker, the Minister, on page 22 of his budget statement states inter alia:

“Today, the energy sector in Trinidad and Tobago is bustling with activity. The traditional oil and gas industry has changed its face considerably. Fifteen years ago, only four energy companies were in operation in Trinidad and Tobago. Today, this number has increased to twenty six.”

Even a Minister of Government now owns an oil company.

Mr. John: Call the name.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Look at that. I do not have to call names. I did not imply impropriety. I just stated a fact.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, let me help you a bit. I think you will proceed very well if you would ignore some of the asides. You are an experienced Member in this House, I know you can handle that, so please proceed and try to ignore some of the asides.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I just said a Minister of Government owns an oil company, I did not imply impropriety. [ Interruption] It is not your business; it is the Minister’s business and my business. I know it! So shut up! [ Interruption] You do not worry, you leave the Minister.

Mr. Speaker, you will note that no effort is made to identify these companies by name anywhere in the documents. If this was done it would immediately be
revealed that the advent of all but three of these companies had nothing to do with the efforts of this Government.

Mr. Speaker, what, or who, or whose policy or policies accounted for the existing oil and gas prosperity in Trinidad and Tobago, is not the focus of my discourse. My focus is on the state of those villages and towns which are situate in close proximity to the petroleum industry, and the destitution and impoverishment of the citizens who live there. That is the case I wish to advance to this honourable House today. I speak in particular of Siparia, Quinam, Quarry, Santa Flora, Los Bajos, Palo Seco, Rancho Quemado, Los Iros, Carapal on the South East and Aripero, Rousillac, Sobo, Chinese Village, La Brea, Vessigny, Vance River, Lot 10, Guapo and Salazar Trace.

Mr. Speaker, we are all aware that for more than a year we have had high oil revenues. The Minister in this budget stated that the price of oil is now US $27 a barrel but he had budgeted at US $22. The last budget was at $15 billion and oil companies posted huge profits. The Government collected exceptional revenues yet unemployment in the villages which I have named is high. There is no other economic activity but oil exploration and production, and the contractors are coerced by a certain UNC activist in the state company, Petrotrin, to take employees from elsewhere than in the La Brea constituency. It seems to be an unwritten policy not to hire people from the La Brea constituency.

The roads in the La Brea constituency are in the worst condition that they have ever been. I know that the Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government will immediately point to the fact that the Siparia Erin Road was partially paved by Aztec, and that the road between Aripero and Point Fortin has been paved, part by Atlantic LNG and some by the Government. Mr. Speaker, I shall name a number of other roads to which nothing has been done: Pond Road, Paria Gardens, Silver Stream, Sobo Road, all roads inside La Brea, Los Iros Road, Palo Seco Settlement Road, Rancho Quemado Road, Carapal Road, Oil Field Road Los Bajos, and all the streets in Alexander Village, Warbled Village, Jacob Settlement and Vance River.

Mr. Speaker, to make bad matters even worse, a number of the residents, about 1,000 households, live on lands either purchased or rented from a subsidiary of Petrotrin. The roads leading to their homes are owned by the oil company and are used to access the wells. In previous years, before 1995, there was some maintenance of these roads by Petrotrin. These roads are now all in a state of disrepair. Petrotrin and/or its lease operators are not repairing the roads nor have they released these roads to the State so that they can be repaired and maintained.
by the local government body. I know that the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries will say that it is not the function of Petrotrin to fix roads, but I would like to point out that in the village of Lot 10, the heavy vehicles of Petrotrin and its contractors pass along the only link road to Parrylands and have damaged the road which is owned by the State. The State is not fixing it and Petrotrin’s servants and/or agents continue to destroy the roadway and refuse to repair it.

5.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, moreover, but more important, Petrotrin and Lake Asphalt, two companies that are based in the La Brea constituency, in the latter part of 2000, were involved in full-scale paving activity in Palmiste—I should not call it a village—Palmiste development in La Romain. What they were doing there was boosting up—doing that, they are using the state enterprise to boost the chances of the hon. Member for San Fernando West. They were using the state enterprise for political purposes and not one foot of road was paved by any of them in the La Brea constituency.

The Minister spoke about a policy for natural gas, which is considered to be the fuel of the future. Would you believe, Mr. Speaker, the Daly Village community has natural gas piped to their homes, so too do certain areas in Point Fortin, and Petrotrin—this Government—a state enterprise, threatens to disconnect them, notwithstanding the residents’ willingness to pay for their use! What a retrograde step is this? Barbados, which has a miniscule petroleum sector compared to ours, has gas piped to homes. Trinidad and Tobago, with more than 50 years’ gas reserves at present usage, and we refuse—a state enterprise is intending to disconnect gas from homes.

One would have expected that the company would have been doing a feasibility study to have gas piped to most homes and that is part of what I would expect the hon. Minister, when he gets up, to speak about. However, I wonder if any one of the Members opposite or their friends or cohorts have any vested interest in the sale of bottled gas, and that is why they are trying to stop piped gas, Mr. Speaker. There are several—in the face of all this suffering for amenities, the PTSC buses do not go into La Brea proper and there is no bus plying for hire between Penal and Erin.

This Government, which spent $487 million to build four stadia and repair one, stands idly by, although the Minister gave me some commitment recently and is allowing Petrotrin to close the Palo Seco velodrome. Mr. Speaker, they
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[MR. BEREAX]  

appear to be in a closing frenzy in the constituency of La Brea. They have closed the post offices in Palo Seco, Santa Flora and La Brea. I understand this Government is due to move the District Revenue Office from La Brea to Point Fortin. The police station and the courthouse are in advanced stages of disrepair. Maybe they are getting ready to move those too.

The Daly Village community centre, Lot 10 community centre, Los Bajos community centre, Salazar Trace community centre and the Quarry hard court have remained unfinished for six years and finally, the unkindest cut of all is the deliberate and unconscionable stultifying of the La Brea Industrial Estate with its natural deep-water harbour. The full blossoming of this estate would have a most beneficial effect on employment in La Brea. They do not want to develop La Brea so they try to ensure that LABIDCO is stillborn. However, in doing so, the Government, or should I say the Minister, is saying that there is now to be a rights issue with the Point Lisas Development Company Limited in order to have a deep-water harbour in Point Lisas.

So they are going to spend money, more money in Point Lisas, when you have a ready-made, natural deep-water harbour in La Brea. That is why I agree with you, you cannot marginalize La Brea and expect the country to move forward. You will have to waste money in Point Lisas and put a heat sink over Point Lisas and end up killing people in the constituency of Couva North and Couva South. You see, Mr. Speaker, they are doing all of that in order to let the Senator who has been appointed—the loser who has been appointed—control the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) in La Brea.

According to reports, with the URP in La Brea now, people come to work and the next thing is they work, they are given coke on the job and the coke man collects the money on payday from them. The man who is selling the coke is the coordinator and he is telling people that he is selling for the Senator. [Interruption] He is telling people that he is selling for the Senator. [Interruption] “Da is what he telling dem.”

Mr. Speaker: I do not think it is necessary for you to go there and impute any improper motive to a Member of the other House, the Senate. So please just withdraw that and let us move on; please.

Mr. H. Bereaux: I am not imputing any improper motive. [Interruption] I do not know. I do not know. Yes, Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, now—[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: I have asked you to withdraw it. I have not heard you withdraw that statement.
Mr. H. Bereaux: Which one—part of the statements?
Mr. Speaker: Where you said—let me repeat what you said.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Yes, sure, you will tell him and you—and it will be withdrawn. [Interruption] I have no problem. [Interruption] No, I do not know. You are telling me to—[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Well, if you will allow the Speaker to say what I am about to say, you would hear what I have to say.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: You said you were told by someone that coke is being sold on the job for the Member, for the loser at La Brea.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Never said that, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: You said that.

Mr. H. Bereaux: No.

Mr. Speaker: The Hansard record is there.

Mr. H. Bereaux: No, I did not—[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: And they are collecting moneys and giving it to the loser—the former—the loser of La Brea.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Mr. Speaker—[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: That Member—[Interruption] That Member—[Interruption]

Mr. H. Bereaux: I will withdraw it.

Mr. Speaker: That Member is a Member of the other House and I am saying you are imputing improper motives and withdraw it—so withdraw it and let us proceed. Okay.

Mr. H. Bereaux: It is withdrawn, Mr. Speaker, but—[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Let us have some order, please.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Mr. Speaker, when I was speaking before, I heard the hon. Member for Tunapuna and Minister of—was it Industry, a super ministry? I cannot remember all the words—disturbing me. I want to tell him that he has behaved most improperly, as I understand he has hired his former wife as a culinary consultant at Tidco and he has placed his present wife on the board of
PLIPDECO. Mr. Speaker, it is improper because it is these—both companies are under his control. So if you will allow me to do my job I will do his.

Mr. Assam: Just to correct the record, Mr. Speaker, my former wife was employed at Tidco long before I became a minister. She was employed there in 1992 when I was chairman and president of Clico Investment Bank. Secondly, my present wife became a director before she was my wife and she has since resigned as a director of PLIPDECO.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: When?

Mr. Assam: To say that I employed the former wife and I made the other wife a director is a total lie.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Mr. Speaker, I recall—[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker. Order, please.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Mr. Speaker—[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: I said order, please! Order.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Mr. Speaker, in the 1998/1999 budget statement, the then Minister of Finance said on page 35 that the national insurance pensions would be increased to $1,055 for those in the highest bracket and I quote:

“An individual—”

[Interruption] Tidco did not exist in 1992, Mr. Minister. [Desk thumping] Tidco did not exist in 1992. [Interruption] You do not even know how to speak the truth. Stay quiet and shut up. [Interruption] [Laughter] [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker—[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: I will suspend this House for 10 minutes, let Members think about what we are doing and we will be back and proceed. The House is suspended for 10 minutes.

5.50 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

6.03 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to reply to the hon. Member for Tunapuna because I have a very important contribution to make. As I was saying, in the 1998—1999 budget statement, the then Minister of Finance on page 35 stated that the national insurance pensions would be increased to $1,055 for those in the highest bracket, and I quote:
“An individual earning $3,600 per month and who would have been entitled to a pension of $388 per month will now receive a pension of $1,055 per month.”

This is what he went on to say.

“This means that 38,000 existing National Insurance pensioners will receive higher pensions than they are receiving now—”

In 1998.

“—at no additional cost to themselves.”

The reality is that the existing contributors today are paying more and the existing pensioners have not received their pension increases.

Mr. Speaker, in that budget speech they increased the pension contributions and they made this promise. In fact, it is not a promise. It was a provision of the budget and they did not keep it. You see, the reason is, the National Insurance pensioners who have contributed their money, would have worked for a long time and they are now entitled to their pensions and the Government is using an excuse and saying en passant about certain National Insurance issues of the National Insurance system.

They must not be allowed to get away with actuarial valuations at all, because Claude Musaib Ali, former Chairman of the National Insurance Board, in a breakfast budget meeting, right after that same budget, indicated that when he was Chairman of the National Insurance Board, the National Insurance fund, through an actuarial valuation, was able to pay the pensions without any increase in contributions. As a result of that, Mr. Speaker, you see what we have now?

We have a situation in which contributions have increased, they are collecting more money, and they are not paying the increased pensions; but there is a reason for that, Mr. Speaker. I want the hon. Minister to level with the population. Let him tell them that the Government has taken their pension money and allowed Nipdec to build the airport terminal with it. The shed of shame! Because that shed of shame is unable to service the debts, they are now pulling back on the National Insurance pensions.

That is the reason the former workers of Lake Asphalt, of Van Leer, of Trinmar, and of Texaco, Trintopec and Petrotrin had to write me to ask me to raise this matter here. In fact, on TV6 yesterday, a call came in with respect to that. So, Mr. Speaker, I hope that the hon. Minister, when he replies, will indicate that.
Now, in the budget at page 32 the hon. Minister made the comment in respect of small business and assistance to small business—Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development. Before that, Mr. Speaker, Members on the opposite side have been trumpeting about how Coopers and Lybrand find this is a good budget; PricewaterhouseCoopers finds it is a good budget; the big business community finds it is a good budget; and the American Chamber of Commerce finds it is a good budget.

I just want to quote from the Trinidad Guardian, Friday, September 17:

“Little help for small businesses—Tunapuna Chamber.”

The President of the Chamber says:

“…this year's budget has done little to address the plight of small businessmen faced with foreign competition.

…paid no attention to the plight of the local retail and distributive sector which are faced with foreign competition.”

Then he went on to say some other things about no trickling down and so forth, but on page 33 of the statement the Minister says, and I read:

“Accordingly, Government will continue to promote and facilitate Small Business Development funding through the agencies of FUNDAid and the Small Business Development Company.”

I want to deal with FUNDAid. To FUNDAid, they will give a subvention of $4.2 million and further, Government's loan of $1 million to FUNDAid will be converted into a grant. So it is the intention to give FUNDAid a subvention and to convert the loan to FUNDAid into a grant. So, FUNDAid benefits from this budget by $5.2 million.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that FUNDAid does not deserve any grant from the State unless it cleans its act up. Before I do so, I want to declare an interest; that is, that a Member of my constituency took a loan from FUNDAid and asked me to be one of the guarantors to that loan. FUNDAid usually requires three guarantors. Well, I guaranteed the loan. It was not for a lot of money. The total loan was for $6,859.84 and the person defaulted. The other guarantors also defaulted. They could not pay, so I am repaying the loan. I want you to know that. [Interruption] That is why your wife should have resigned when you became Minister. That is the proper thing to do.
So, Mr. Speaker, you see FUNDAlid is Trinidad and Tobago Development Foundation Limited. The man borrowed on April 18, 1997, $6,859.84. Cost of amount loaned, $1,852.15. Total amount, $8,711.99.

I am reading from the promissory note which says:

“For value received I promise to pay to Trinidad and Tobago Development Foundation Limited or order at its Port of Spain office the sum of $8,711.99 which is $6,859.84 being the amount loaned (receipt of which is hereby acknowledged) plus the cost of borrowing the amount loaned (namely interest at the rate of 24.09 per centum per annum”

Did you hear that? My credit card interest is 24 per cent, but to borrow from FUNDAlid is 24.09 per cent! That is the company we are going to give a subvention and write off a loan for?

Mr. Speaker, further, they go on to the default part. I know this will warm the heart of the hon. Minister, being a banker himself. Hear what it is:

“Upon default in payment when due of any instalment or any part thereof:

(1) the part of such amount thus unpaid representing capital shall carry interest at the above rate until payment as well as before as after judgment;”

I want you to understand the implication of that, Mr. Speaker. If a man owes a debt and he is taken to court and a judgment is passed on him, that judgment at the time when this loan was executed would have been 6 per cent interest, but now, the judgment is 12 per cent interest.

Normally, what banks do, since they know that if they take you to court they will only get 6 per cent interest, the lawyers have found a very ingenious way of making them get their full interest by saying that the above rate until payment, as well as before and after judgment. So if a bank takes you to court and they get a judgment on you, you be sure—do not come and tell them judgment interest is 12 per cent. They are going to take their full interest. Most banks, it would not reach 24.09 per cent, but in FUNDAlid it does. That is why we have so much failure in some of these very poor people.

This man who borrowed this money did not pay. He could not pay. All right, I signed, I guaranteed him and they made me pay! That is all right. Most of the poor, up and coming businessmen who have to go and borrow from these agencies that get free funds, they lose before they start. Business buss before they start, simply because of the kind of harsh conditionalities attached to what should
be favourable loan circumstances. So when the hon. Minister comes here and talks about FUNDAid, we have to make a close scrutiny of FUNDAid.

I also know of another situation in my constituency where they hired some bailiff to take from a man a very large fridge which he had bought. The bailiff came—the fridge was full with fish and other meats—and threw the stuff outside, carried the fridge and then it turned out that the man had paid and they had made an error. What they did as an excuse, they said they did not send the bailiff. They fired the bailiff, backdated his firing and said they did not send the bailiff.

Not only will they charge you, overcharge you on interest, overcharge you on judgment interest, but they also say, “and any legal fees or collection charges incurred or payable for the recovery of the said balance”. So you see, Mr. Speaker, FUNDAid needs to be investigated. FUNDAid needs to be corrected, not so much investigated. FUNDAid needs to be told they have to deal in a certain way with, not only the poor people, but the entrepreneurs, because we in this Parliament are giving them money to help the poor entrepreneurs and the struggling; the young entrepreneurs and this is what they do.

I am sorry, Mr. Minister, that you are not still in Royal Bank. Hire this man and let him go and squeeze people who come in Royal Bank. Move him away! He has no place in a development institution. So when we are passing money in Parliament, first I am saying that FUNDAid should not be given any money. They should first not be given any money, made to come in with a set of principles and a method by which they will lend to poor people, to lend to the entrepreneurs, and see how they will handle it.

When the Ministry of Finance or someone is satisfied that those interest rates are in keeping with the spirit of the development, then they should get the money. They should be made to pay their million dollars. If they set up their business properly, then fine. I have no problem with them getting it, because it is a method by which we could fund loans to the poor and the struggling entrepreneur.

6.20 p.m.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister spoke in the budget about the insurance industry. It states:

“A properly regulated insurance industry is essential for the effective functioning of our economy.”

He also talked about a revised Insurance Act. Originally, I was going to tell him, and I still believe it, that the Supervisor of Insurance with his powers under the
Act, is really a toothless bulldog, tiger or whatever you care to call it or if he has any teeth, he is not using them for what he should be doing. There is a problem existing in this country with a number of insurance companies.

I do not want to go ahead and call any names. We know that CLICO seems to be insolvent, but I am not dealing with that. The hon. Member for Oropouche dealt with that most extensively and comprehensively. There is a situation in this country where there are certain insurance companies that when you hit or when somebody who has an insurance policy with them hit you, you could forget about collecting money. They have a few lawyers working for them and they do not pay. They try every means.

I happen to know the claims manager of one of them and I called him. I told him I was calling for a relative of mine and he confided in me, he said, “We have no money to pay.” He had to pay only $43,000 and he proposed to pay it in four tranches, two months each away. So we have to regulate this insurance industry in such a way that we get rid of these companies that are just collecting premiums and not paying claims.

They tell you, “Don't worry about going to court,” because if you do, firstly, you have to pay to go to court and then they stretch you out. So most people settle for a lot less than their claim is really worth or they abandon their claim. The Government must do something about it. When we come to amend this Act, they should put some real teeth to deal with errant insurance companies. I will tell you why.

What will happen? You see, Mr. Speaker, we have become a violent society and weapons that kill easily are too available. If we do not do something—I do not want to predict it but I cannot help but see down the road. I have seen old men in tears trying to get money from these insurers and they could not get it; they could not get their just claims. So there is something we need to do about that.

When the hon. Minister of Food Production and Marine Resources spoke and read from “The Operations and Financial Affairs of Colonial Life Insurance Company Trinidad Limited (CLICO)” under the Insurance Act and spoke about Clico using its policyholders’ funds to guarantee loans to its affiliates—\[Interruption\]

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

Mr. H. Bereaux: Already?

Mr. Speaker: You had an additional 11 minutes.
Mr. H. Bereaux: Did you include the 10 minutes you left here?

Mr. Speaker: You got an additional 11 minutes.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Thank you.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. H. Bereaux: I thank hon. Members for giving me the extra time, which I will take all of. [Laughter]

When I heard about an insurance company using policyholders’ funds to guarantee loans to affiliates, I suspect, as far as I know, that it is not only unethical, but I believe it is fraudulent. The Minister or whoever saw this, may not have focused on it, but it is now in the public domain. We, the Members of this honourable House and the hon. Minister of Finance, know about this. So if it is not yet a criminal act, we should seek to make it so because this is highly improper.

Mr. Humphrey: Make it retroactive.

Mr. H. Bereaux: I do not believe in retroactive legislation, even if it is to deal with this. I do not believe in that.

Mr. Speaker, this budget has been presented against a background of chaos and confusion in the health sector. The regional health authorities were introduced to streamline decision-making and facilitate the delivery of health care. However, as a result of mismanagement, cronyism and unbridled dishonesty, the citizens of this country have been visited by some of the worst excesses ever to disgrace any government department.

Drug orders worth tens of thousands of dollars disappeared without a trace. The hon. Minister and Member for Barataria/San Juan can attest to that. Take the case of the $26,000 immunoglobulin drug order, the disappearance of which was reported to the new Chairman, Robin Maharaj by Ameena Ali, Acting Hospital Administrator, appointed by the Minister, and all that happened is that she was fired.

 Millions of dollars are paid to senior executives after they attempted to pull off a resignation scam. The Chairman, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh finds out, takes part in a disgraceful attempt to cover up the fraud and insists that he has done nothing wrong. I want him to know that he is an accessory, after the fact, to the
commission of a fraud. I am calling on the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) to prosecute him and his accomplices.

In the meantime, while millions of dollars evaporate into thin air, there is a woeful shortage of nurses as they have become so fed up with the lack of amenities, drugs and other basics to carry out their function. They have moved to greener pastures. Surgeons are threatening to take action if their needs are not met. Of the five operating theatres at the Port of Spain General Hospital, at present, only two of them are functioning. There are inadequate and irregular supplies of sterile linen, consumables, and items like splint plates and suture material. There are no clamps available. Because of these shortages of staff, material and equipment, the waiting list for elective surgery has been set back by two years.

I know the hon. Minister came here and told us how good the system was working. For instance, on July 3, a shortage of surgical equipment led to cancellation of surgery for persons on the elective list. On July 16, they cancelled for nursing shortages. On July 17, there was no linen and, again on the 15th there was a nursing shortage. On the 5th they were forced to stop elective surgery as certain equipment to monitor patients’ vital signs were not available. Junior doctors are being used as messengers, fetching things used in surgery and bringing patients from wards.

Where is the hon. Member for Caroni Central? I see the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan is here. I cannot understand how these gentlemen, who are doctors in their own right—he is a top—I cannot remember—

**Hon. Members:** Urologist.

**Mr. H. Bereaux:** I know what he does, but I did not know the big name. [Laughter] He helps men. He makes an organ. [Laughter]

**Mr. John:** You will call on his service shortly.

**Mr. H. Bereaux:** Well, if I need to, I will.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** You “doh” talk.

**Mr. H. Bereaux:** Mr. Speaker, these men are here and they are all telling us that the system is working well, but I could understand him saying the system is working well. I understand that the Minister of Health also took objection when he was called upon to resign, but section 5(1) of the Regional Authorities Act says that a Regional Health Authority must take specific and general direction from the Minister. So if they must take directions from the Minister and they are letting
$1.6 million of the Government’s money go into the bank accounts of executives and they are letting the Chairman abuse his office, who is to blame?

I have to assume—although the Chairman did not say—that the Chairman took instructions, “specific or general”, from the Minister or understood that the Minister would have done nothing if he knew about it. Therefore, the Minister must resign. To prove that “general and specific” instructions are given, we had a junior Minister giving 26 letters; writing and saying, “Hire this driver; hire that cleaner and hire this one,” and even hiring an Acting Hospital Administrator. So what do you say? He should resign. [Interruption] I do not worry how many “name” Khan.

We have the situation where they are going down to Invaders Bay to build a cardiac centre; that is one of the facilities in that big tourism sector. Maybe that is why they did not speak about the economy generally, because there is a situation in the world where we have problems with tourism. It seems as though we are going to have some kind of recession, although I hope not, and we have tourism problems; yet they are going to build a big convention centre in Port of Spain and put a cardiac centre.

Mr. Speaker, you have the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex where there is space and the space is not used in Trinidad. The space is rented to foreign doctors who come down from time to time and carry on certain open-heart surgery there; so we have the space and we have all the other supporting facilities next to it. Why then do we want to put a cardiac centre down at Invaders Bay? That does not sound logical at all. The only reason could be that they believe there is some financial gain coming somewhere, somehow to them.

To crown it off, to show that there is so much space in the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, do you know that CLICO is renting space there for their HealthNet? Yes, they are renting space there. I mean, if they are paying a good rent, okay, but we have so much hospital space now that we could rent it to a private company.

The hon. Minister came here and told us about the Emergency Health Service (EHS). I love to hear that siren. I love these emergency people around, but we are paying US $89,000 month to manage that function; nothing wrong with that. However, do you know that for the moneys paid, other than that, there is no accounting? When I say accounting, they would say: repair of ambulance—US $7,000, and nothing to back it up. [Interruption]
If I tell you that Member for Nariva, you must know that I know about it, because I know that the cheque to Basdeo Panday from the North West Regional Health Authority liaison office for US $50,000 was deposited in a Point Lisas Bank on December 13, 2000. After election, it was converted to TT dollars to $312,000. “Yuh” get any of that? [Laughter] I know that; so if you do not know, I know. I know this too and I am just talking about it.

I want to point out, as we have the question of Clico using policyholders’ funds to support or to guarantee loans for their associates, there is a practice developing in this country whereby a number of companies are using their pensioners’ money—the money in the pension plan—in order to fund their industrial relations operations. I will tell you how they are doing it.

They would have a deal with the union to increase the present pension and instead of them making a direct contribution to increase the pensions or causing the pensioners to pay more money for better benefits, they are using the surpluses to fund that. That is wrong; that is improper, because if you are going to use pension fund surpluses in order to fund a benefit, you have to fund the benefit in respect of all pensioners. Just so that you would not think I am talking in the air, I am speaking about Petrotrin and its recent rationalization and harmonization of their pension plan.

When I wrote the Inland Revenue Department and everybody in Petrotrin about it, I got no answer from the Inland Revenue Department. So I want the hon. Minister to deal with that, because they are not alone. There are a number of people in this country who feel they can do what they want because they are in certain high positions. I am saying that they are misusing the surpluses on the pension plan. Those surpluses belong to all the pensioners and you cannot use them to fund a benefit that is not also brought on by increased pension contributions.

The hon. Minister is not here. He talked about making companies that do not pay contractors on time pay a 1 per cent penalty. He would not talk to the Attorney General first; he wants to get somebody else to draft the financial legislation. If he had spoken to the Attorney General, the Attorney General would have told him that penalties are not enforceable in law and it has to be liquidated damages. That is the first thing the Attorney General would have done.

The second thing he would tell him is that you cannot deal with a penalty by saying, “If you don't pay on time;” there might be several reasons why you may not pay on time. I am not saying that I am not encouraging the state enterprises to pay on time, but they must allow the parties involved in a contract to deal with
their contractual relationship without trying to legislate, especially if you do not
know what you are doing.

I was saying, Mr. Minister—now that I see you here—that penalties are not
enforceable in law and it should be liquidated damages. I would prefer you to
correct the state enterprises and deal with them. Set a timetable by which they
should pay and then punish the people in the state enterprises for not doing their
jobs. Do not make the state enterprise, itself, pay the 1 per cent.

If an officer is not doing his job, then deal with him. The Minister talked
about putting guidelines for state boards and so on; those guidelines have always
been there. Since this Government came into power and ran its rogue elephants
into the state boards, that is why they are behaving like that, but the guidelines
were always there. I am telling you. They were there in the days of the PNM.
When the NAR came, they put in some more and when the PNM came back again,
we put in more; but with this Government, it was a free for all; it was a trough to
feed on, so they allowed all the guidelines to go out the window because they
came in to move people.

6.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, there is a point I would always raise in this honourable House.
When we were talking about delinquents and deviants and so on, there is a
situation existing in this country today where a number of poor, innocent people
stay in jail for months and sometimes years simply because they are poor. That is
in respect of bail. We have to see about amending that Bail Act because there are
too many persons who are forced to plead guilty because they cannot get bail. Too
many persons are left in jail because the police have to do a trace on them. If the police
do not like you, or feel that you are really bad, they take long to do the trace.

Additionally, if per chance you have been charged with having narcotics, they
would then say that they could not get the report from the forensic centre. I am
not blaming the police for this because it would take at least six months to get a
report from the Forensic Science Centre. All this time the parents have no money
and you are still in jail. After all this, you are eventually proven to be innocent—
and even if you are proven to be guilty—we have to change the law for two
reasons. One, to try to soften this particular problem; and two, in the event that
they stay in jail for a certain period of time, waiting on bail, to allow that time
spent in jail to be part of their sentence.

Mr. Speaker, I could not allow this to go by. Time and again we have
Members coming into this House, especially on the Government’s side, and not
do anything talking about the PNM did not do anything for education. I have lived
to see it and I am pleased. I am going to keep this budget statement for a long
time. Listen to what this hon. Minister said, and he was speaking the truth—

“A literacy rate, which is among the highest in the world…”

If you do not speak the truth, the stones will speak it, but he spoke it. The UNC
could not have done that. They could not have “a literacy rate among the highest
in the world” because they have been here for just six years—and they should
only be here for five, and we would take care of that just now—but the PNM
education gave us a literacy rate that is among the highest in the world.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister spoke about money, surpluses and the
increased price of oil. I want to remind this country that when the PNM had oil
production and oil prices like this Government has, where they can convert
equivalent barrels of gas to equivalent barrels of oil, the students of Trinidad and
Tobago, when they were going to university, whether in Trinidad, Barbados or
Jamaica, never paid any fees. So when they come and offer 50 per cent for only
the first-year students, with their dollar for dollar gimmick, they need to come
again. They have only reached 50 per cent of where the PNM was when we had
the revenue that they now have, but they really do not have the revenue because
they are misspending it.

**Hon. Member:** That is why you are over there.

**Mr. H. Bereaux:** You do not worry with where I am. Wherever I am, I can
make a contribution that is superior to yours.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to put that on record because this dollar for dollar
gimmick, they are selling the people short. They are only doing 50 per cent of
what the PNM did. They still have to do some more.

Then they talk about petroleum taxes. Where is the Member for Pointe-a-
Pierre? I am hearing talk about gas prices and taxes and so on.

I just want to warn the Government that the presence of oil companies in
Trinidad and Tobago, dealing with gas and all these developments, came as a
result of planning the tax regime properly and they have to be careful. I am not
saying do not adjust the taxes, but they have to be careful that they do not throw
out the baby with the bath water. I mean that they have to be careful that they do
not tax the oil companies in Trinidad and Tobago to a point where we are no
longer as attractive as we would like to be.
Furthermore, the land-based oil companies, 26 of which we speak, are in stripper operations and they also need incentives. I would have thought that the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, being a squatter in this House, would have at least paid for the time he is here by taking a good look at the legislation and the incentives in respect of land-based operations and try to do something for them. He may have come in here under strange and improper circumstances, but nonetheless, I think he knows something about oil and they better make use of him quickly because he does not have long to last.

I was going to deal with housing very shortly. The hon. Minister spoke about squatting and then he said that they are going to start breaking down people’s houses. I want to see if the hon. Member for St. Augustine is still the man that I think he is. Breaking down the houses of squatters when you do not have a proper distribution system for lots for people who require lots, is a bit harsh. Not one of the applicants from the constituency of a La Brea who applied for squatter regularization, has received one lot since the Squatter Regularization Programme came into being.

The Member for San Fernando West is a man for whom I have some respect but he had better stop this discrimination against my constituents. Moreover, there are thousands of acres of land in the La Brea constituency doing nothing. Petrotrin is not using it, Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises is not using it; and the people want to rent it. I see the Member for Fyzabad is pointing to himself. I know on a previous occasion he came into Sobo, La Brea, and brought some people and eventually when he was confronted by influence, he left and allowed a few people to stay there. Maybe they had better put that programme under his control.

Mr. Speaker, we need houses. I appreciate the low interest rate that would be charged, but I believe that it is necessary for us to have land distribution in the La Brea constituency.

Before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the hon. Member for Tunapuna that Tidco came into being in 1994. His former wife went to work there in 1997, three years after he was the Minister responsible for Tidco. So do not come with that.

Mr. Speaker, because of the way this Government had behaved; because of some of the omissions in the budget, I cannot support it in its present form. However, if the Government requires the budget to be supported, they would speak to the hon. Leader of the Opposition and we would tell them the areas of
the Budget that we would be prepared to support, in that event, and for how long we would do it.

I want to tell the hon. Member for Nariva, once again, that I am not against poor people, I am against people who should be role models condoning the selling of narcotics to children and young people. Thank you.

6.50 p.m.

Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis (Arouca South): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to make my contribution to the budget debate currently taking place before the House of Representatives. I have had the good fortune of having several opportunities to participate in budget debates in this House and, indeed, in the other place, and I am pleased to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition, the distinguished Member for San Fernando East, on his contribution, which I think was an excellent response to the contribution of the Minister of Finance. [Desk thumping]

I stand in this House and I am appalled by the fact that I think, for the first time since independence, a Minister of Finance has had to place in his budget statement an entire section that deals with corruption and transparency. I think it is a dark day in the annals of our history when we have to record in the Hansard of our Parliament that a government has had to devote part of its budget strictly to corruption and transparency, in circumstances where this Government continuously trumpets that it is not corrupt, and additionally, if we find any evidence of corruption, we should take it to the police.

I think that this Government, although in its budget it says it will be doing all in its power to stamp out corruption, in fact I think—and I am of the clear view—that this Government will not be doing anything about corruption and that what has been said by the Minister of Finance are meaningless platitudes.

We, on this side, are of the clear view that, in fact, if this Government were really serious about corruption and transparency, it would not have significantly cut the budget of the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs. We, on this side, are of the view that if this Government were really serious about dealing with corruption and being transparent, it would have provided for forensic analysts in the Ministry of the Attorney General; it would have provided for forensic auditors within the Ministry of Finance; it would have provided for an increase in the allocation of the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions; an increase in the allocation of the Auditor General's department and, indeed, an improvement in terms of all the forensic auditing ability of the institutions in this
Government that can really deal with corruption. That is why I stand here today to say that this Government, as usual, is attempting to perpetrate a farce on the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I am not going to go into what I would like to call foreplay, in dealing with what I consider an extremely—

Mr. Sudama: Why, you “doh” like that?

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: I am sure, I hope, the Member would know that foreplay is not always necessary to get to your point. [Laughter]

Mr. Speaker: I just want to remind the Member, for her protection, her mother and husband are in the public gallery. [Laughter]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will go directly to the issues with which I would like to deal this evening, without foreplay.

We have heard the Minister indicate that he is very interested in dealing with the poor people of Trinidad and Tobago; in making sure that he leaves no one behind; in ensuring that there is fairness and equity in the provision of funding for institutions and the people who need to operate those institutions. We, on this side, are of the view that persons who raise those kinds of issues must come to our Parliament to talk the truth and come to us openly and with clean hands.

7.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, an examination of the budget will indicate that there are certain issues raised by the Auditor General in the report for the period October 1999 to September 2000, which were not at all dealt with by the Minister of Finance. No clear explanations were given and, I repeat, if this Minister is truly interested in dealing with corruption and being transparent, we should be able to see quite clearly how he would deal with them.

I would like, through this report, to give you some blatant examples of corruption where most of the local government corporations have had reduced subventions in circumstances where there is overburgeoning unemployment in most of our constituencies and nothing appears to be in the focus of the Minister of Finance in terms of dealing with those issues.

Whilst that is the situation, we see, in the Auditor General’s Report, under the heading “Unemployment Fund (Special Projects)”—what is curious about this is that this fund is not, apparently, used in any of the PNM-controlled corporations.
I would like to give you some information as contained in the Auditor General’s report, and I quote:

“Unemployment Fund (Special Projects)
Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation

Background

Cabinet noted in 1999 that the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) would include ‘Special Projects’. Such ‘Special Projects’ were identified as ‘Construction of Police Stations, School Repairs and Quarry Operations.’ Cabinet also agreed to the allocation of funds from the Unemployment Levy receipts and from the 1999/2000 budgetary allocations of the Ministry of Local Government to provide for the management and administration of the programme.

The underlying Note to Cabinet proposed the establishment of a special project unit at the Ministry of Local Government. However, the records of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation revealed that ‘special projects’ were also undertaken by that Corporation.”

This is a clear situation where the Cabinet said one thing and the Ministry of Local Government allowed, or turned a blind eye, to one regional corporation taking this funding and using it for special projects.

I quote again, the amounts allocated by this corporation to special projects were as follows:

$  
“Unemployment Fund 21,311,305.00
Consolidated Fund 6,619,242.96
Transfers from Road
Road Improvement
Fund 1,680,530.50
Transfers from Unemployment
Fund 99,082.40

29,710,160.86”

The Auditor General goes on to indicate that the authority for use of funds from the Road Improvement Fund and the Unemployment Fund was not seen.
Transfers between funds by a corporation is contrary to financial directives. We also saw, in this corporation, that they failed to maintain adequate recording of the moneys spent in this corporation. The Auditor General goes on to say that two cheques, totalling $4,806,194.62, were omitted from the remittance register of the corporation.

Whilst the Minister says to us that they would be dealing with corruption, we ask him: When things occur of this nature in corporations controlled by UNC councillors, what conclusion should the people of Trinidad and Tobago come to when the independent office of the Auditor General makes it clear that these corporations continue to do work without authorization; without carefully recording how moneys are spent, and what, according to his corruption and transparency agencies, will be done to ensure that this does not take place during the year 2001—2002?

Mr. Speaker, this is not all. We are saying, from the Auditor General’s reports, under the heading “Payments”, that payments were paid to suppliers without the necessary supporting documents. Payments were also made in the sum of $15,454.77 to TSTT on behalf of an official of the Ministry of Local Government, being paid out of the funds of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, it gets worse. A 10 per cent deposit in the sum of $42,500 was paid towards the purchase of a property at San Juan; and a payment of $1,000 for the valuation of this property. Supporting documents to verify the authenticity of these transactions were not produced.

Mr. Speaker, you remember that the fund was set up for the construction of police stations, school repairs and quarry operations. Out of these funds, Mr. Speaker, we have the heading, “Unusual Expenditure”. We see construction of a religious house—$100,000; payment to a religious organization—$20,000. The Auditor General makes the point that it was not established whether these payments were authentic and whether they were approved by the Cabinet.

What is interesting is that under this particular heading, it is corporations like Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation, Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation, Siparia Regional Corporation, Penal/Debe Regional Corporation, Princes Town Regional Corporation; all having difficulty with the Auditor General’s Department, because in each instance they did things contrary to the financial regulations and the laws of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General in her report talked about the Road Improvement Fund. Several of us on this side have said that the roads in our
constituencies are in a deplorable state. They are dilapidated and we have consistently cried out for assistance in getting our roads fixed.

I repeat that the allocation in the budgets to the regional corporations for local roads is miniscule. However, we see, under the Road Improvement Fund and the Auditor General report that again in the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation, the sum of $3,008,000 was transferred from this corporation to the Penal/Debe Corporation’s Road Improvement Fund on instructions from the Ministry of Local Government. Sums totalling $1,807,530 were transferred by the administering officer from the Road Improvement Fund to the Unemployment Fund. An amount of $250,000 was transferred from the Penal/Debe Corporation to this corporation for the paving of roads in Palmiste. Again, the Auditor General spoke about the decision of these corporations to do works without proper authority.

We heard the Member for Tunapuna talking very glibly about the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation and the allegation that they spent $30,000 on Chinese food; cellular phones were being used and that was not authorized. We also heard him say that Fritz Regis got a contract with the corporation without tendering. It is unfortunate that the Member for Tunapuna consistently makes statements without checking his facts. In the same way that he stood a while ago in the Parliament and tried to give the impression that his ex-wife, who was employed by TIDCO under his watch, in 1997, as a Culinary Consultant, whatever that means, for thousands and thousands of dollars. As I said, he consistently makes inaccurate statements.

The Corporation held a statutory meeting on Thursday, September 20. These minutes list the persons present, including councillors, aldermen and officers of the Corporation. I quote:

“The Chairman of Council highlighted the undermentioned allegations which were made in Parliament by the Honourable Minister of Enterprise, Development and Foreign Affairs, Mr. Mervyn Assam, as follows:

(1) The Corporation has been spending $30,000.00 a month on Chinese food.

(2) Contracts are being issued bypassing the tendering procedures.

(3) It was the Council’s decision to purchase cellular phones for everyone.

7.15 p.m.

(4) Contracts were issued to Councillors: R. Maharaj, I. Pierre, P. Mejias and Mr. L. Achong.”
He then enquired whether these allegations were true. Councillor R. Sookdeo, who is a UNC councillor, confirmed that the allegations are not true.

It goes on, Mr. Speaker,

“Councillor R. Sookdeo stated that such information was news to her and that she knew nothing about it…”

It is unfortunate that Members of Parliament and, particularly, the Member for Tunapuna, stands in the House of Representatives and blatantly tells lies with regard to things that could easily be checked. As I talk about things that can easily be checked, Mr. Speaker, I again return to the report of the Auditor General.

With regard to spending taxpayers’ money without proper authorization, let me refer you again to the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Corporation where it says, under the heading:

“Miscellaneous Expenses

I was noted that an amount of $183,869.17 was of spent from the interest earned for the financial year to cover the cost of goods and services normally purchased from the recurrent expenditure.”

This is what the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Corporation, which I am sure this year will be following, faithfully, the Minister of Finance’s statement that they should “leave no one behind” were doing with this $181,000.

“An amount of $71,116.05 which was utilized to finance overseas travel as follows:

Hartford City Twinning Ceremony $17,233.90
Montreal—purpose not provided $12,368.25
Provision of meals for meetings $14,867.41”

Then, which is so curious, they spent $2,200 on the purchase of tickets for a football match. Mr. Speaker, I do not know if they took the whole of Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Corporation to the football match but they spent $2,200 on the purchase of tickets to a football match. The Auditor General goes on to say:

“Authorizations from the Minister of Finance were not seen for expenditure to be incurred from the Road Improvement Fund on goods and services that were not in keeping with the purposes for which the Fund was established.”
Mr. Speaker, as I refer again to the Member for Tunapuna who consistently gets up in this House, I would like to ask him: Where on Valsayn Avenue, Valsayn, were 14 contracts totalling $348,243 executed? Mr. Speaker, I lived in Valsayn Park and I do not know where on Valsayn Avenue, 14 contracts would have been executed totalling $348,243.

Mr. Speaker, on Mendez Drive, again, in his constituency—because at the time of this he was the Member of Parliament for St. Joseph—eight contracts in the sum of $189,520 were executed. Then it goes on that on Boundary Road, San Juan, 14 contracts totalling $327,796; Arena Road, 13 contracts totalling $275,041.65; Gasparillo Junction to Bonne Aventure, 40 contracts totalling $961,894.50 [Interruption] Yes, they talk about work done because it is of no consequence if it is done outside the pale of the law because for them working outside the pale of the law is their objective.

Indeed, the Auditor General says:

“It was observed that in respect of the following projects, the work of the projects was divided into phases and for each phase an individual contract was issued. However, the cost of the total project was more than the ‘Chief Executive Officer Award’ limit of $25,000.00:”

The subdivision of the contracts falls outside of the rules of the Central Tenders Board. There were agreements for the supply of hot mix and road-building materials and the hire of equipment, where neither formal agreements were made nor were there invoice departmental orders.

When they sit in this House and talk about work being done, Mr. Speaker, we on this side, without even having to bring any evidence from outside, can simply pick up the report of the Auditor General and flip from page to page, regional corporation to regional corporation—which they control—and see how they have squandered the moneys of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and, indeed, how they consistently flout the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

As I talk about flouting the laws of Trinidad and Tobago, I want to bring to the attention of this House a situation where the laws of Trinidad and Tobago were flouted with impunity. As my colleague for Diego Martin West said earlier, the FIFA Under-17 World Championship games were determined in 1994, that they would be held in Trinidad and Tobago and that four stadia would be built. The objective was that the four stadia would belong to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. What is very curious—and this information is not from us but from a FIFA source.
I would like to quote from a survey report commissioned by FIFA and done by one of its former associates, the ISL Productions. This survey report is dated March 12, 2001. I would like to indicate that the report deals with FIFA personnel looking at the various stadia to determine the state of readiness of Trinidad and Tobago for the games to be held. In its introduction it says that the visit took place between February 27 to March 05, 2001. By its report, it says:

“3rd March

Mr. Warner reiterates the desire to use all 5 stadiums.”

“Stadiums” is the word used. I continue to quote:

“It is discovered that RGM, which Mr. Warner has an interest in, will manage and run the 4 new stadiums.”

Mr. Speaker, as far as we know, RGM is the Royal Guardian Mutual Group, the group from which the Minister of Finance hails. It is interesting that the FIFA report says that it is discovered that RGM, in which Mr. Warner has an interest, will manage and run the four “Stadiums”. We ask the question on this side: Is it every transaction that involves this Government must involve one of its friends and financiers? Must every single transaction be of this nature? Is there any transaction that this Government undertakes that is not—[Interruption] I am not giving way.

Mr. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, on a point of clarification.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: I do not need clarification, thank you.

[Minister Ramsaran keeps standing]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Could you please sit? Mr. Speaker, the question that needs to be asked as this Minister of Finance talks about corruption, and more importantly, about transparency, is: Is there any investment that is made by this Government that is not tainted by the spectra of its financiers?

Mr. Speaker: What is your point of order, please?

Mr. Ramsaran: The Member is imputing improper motives.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: To whom?

Mr. Speaker: I will have to overrule that point of order. For the information of the Member, the Member is merely asking a question. The option is available to the Government when they are speaking if they wish to respond to that question. Certainly it is not a violation of the Standing Orders.
Hon. Member, please proceed.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, I ask the question again. Is there any circumstances which exist, where friends and relations of this Government do not have some financial interest in any megaproject that is being undertaken by this administration? It seems as though you have to read your Standing Orders and understand them.

7.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, under another document, which is another FIFA document which deals with what is called “Statement of Work with Regard to the Hosting of the Under-17 Tournament”, we see again the friend of the Government surfacing. It says under the heading “Kiosk Design Development Deployment and Technical Support” that the total fee for this service is US $1,172,000.

Mr. Narine: “Jean Pierre sign dat too?”

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Not signed by Jean Pierre. It also says that the Kiosk Design Development Deployment and Technical Support—all of this will be managed—the entire project will be managed by Daryll Warner who will act as project management and coordinating liaison between Web Initiative Constituents. This service will commence on July 1st and the fee for this service is US $60,000. Mr. Speaker, what is even worse is that whilst Daryll Warner is project managing and getting US $60,000 there are 500 volunteers who are not getting any part of this US $60,000. You talk about volunteer, but the UN representative for volunteers asked whether the volunteers would be paid a stipend. [Interruption] I know it is volunteers but the UN representative for volunteers asked, they refused—US $60,000—but the situation gets worse and worse.

The Member for Chaguanas who is the Minister of Sport is saying that, “That is not Government; that is not Government. That is FIFA”, he cries on the other side. Well, let me tell him what aspect was Government. I quote again from a report, again from FIFA, dated September 09, 2001 and the headline is, “T&T Prepared for Nation’s Largest Ever Sporting Event”. Among other things, this report talks about the entire set-up for this large FIFA event and what needs to be put in place to ensure that things run smoothly. This is how our Government supported the under-17 tournament and I quote:

“In order for the tournament to run smoothly, several obstacles have been cleared.”
This is what they call it:

“…several obstacles have been cleared. Customs duties between the islands have been waived. All incoming television and audio equipment will not require any fees. The anticipated 35 tons of television equipment alone would have required a duty of about US $5 million…”

Mr. Speaker, that is how this Government—[Interruption]—that is how this Government has assisted and he is talking about that is how they help test cricket and this and that. What is unfortunate is that their friends and relations will be getting at least $60,000 for project managing. The person who had to bring in this equipment is doing this for a fee. It is a business transaction—[Desk thumping]—a business transaction.

Mr. Speaker, I will repeat it:

“All incoming television and audio equipment will not require any fees.

In order for the tournament to run smoothly, several obstacles have been cleared.

The anticipated 35 tons of television equipment alone would have required a duty of about US $5 million…”

All of which was waived, Mr. Speaker, in circumstances where—[Interruption]—in circumstances where we have a Government that said, through its Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, that they were helping culture and helping people, and when an entire group of people wanted to go, I think it was to Nigeria, they assisted them with a measly $50,000 and they have waived, through a business transaction, $5 million in customs duties, and it is US $5 million, TT $30 million.

As I talk about waiving customs duties and flouting the law, Mr. Speaker, we have heard in this House that the stadia belong to Trinidad and Tobago, however, in the FIFA report we are hearing that they belong to RGM in which Mr. Warner has an interest. We also understand that the Government has put several millions of dollars into the construction of the stadia and, in the repayment to RGM, it is the taxpayers who will make all repayments. So the question that we on this side must ask: what was the role of—[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker, I do not like to be distracted but, you know, in circumstances where persons who really should know better—they are so petty and they are so small-minded, and they are so pusillanimous, Mr. Speaker, [Desk thumping] [Laughter] that it is difficult to deal with them in—[Interruption]
Mr. Speaker: I think you might have to spell that last word for the Hansard editors.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, might I just point out that the reporter went to the best girls’ school in Trinidad and Tobago, Bishop Anstey High School, [Desk thumping] and I am sure that I do not have to spell that word for her. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker, I am asking the question: in the construction of these four stadia: what was the role of the Central Tenders Board of Trinidad and Tobago? I am asking the question: what was the role of the Ministry of Finance? What was the role of the Ministry of Sport? What was the method of selecting the project managers? What, Mr. Speaker, is the real cost to taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago? What is the real cost to the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago? I say the real cost because it is happening, with almost alarming frequency, that the Members on that side consistently mislead the House of Representatives and that is why I ask the question: what is the real cost to the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago? As I talk about—[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: The speaking time has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Will the Member continue?

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: I am obliged, Mr. Speaker. I ask: what is the real cost in circumstances where, on a consistent basis, we are deceived by this Government? I must, under the heading, corruption and transparency, bring to the attention of this House a situation which has developed which, to me, should be brought to the attention of the Minister of Finance. It is a situation that has already taken place, much like the Caroni rum division sale about which the Minister is now saying that, in his fight against corruption, he will allow the media to go into Caroni and all the books will be opened to the media, in circumstances where what we want is forensic auditors to go in and see what has taken place with regard to the sale of that state asset.

I refer specifically to a situation where cellular licences, which were owned by the Government through TSTT, and which have two types of frequencies, were sold to one of the friends and family of this particular Government. My understanding is that cellular licences in the sum of over TT$400 billion were sold
for a much smaller fraction of that amount to a company called Computers and Control Holdings Limited. What is interesting about that sale is that one of the sets of licences, something called a G3 cellular licence, was sold under the guise that it was to be used by the Ministry of National Security. Note the Ministry, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry that is headed by the Member for Couva North, the US $50,000 man. What is extremely interesting is that Computers and Control Holding Limited is a company owned by the Gillette group of companies. [Interruption]

Hon. Member: “What wrong with dat?”

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Nothing is wrong with that, absolutely nothing, especially under this administration, because everything that you all do is right; every sale that you all make to your friends and family is right. We just stand in this House and talk because we have a mouth, but—[Interruption] No, you all could “t’ief”, but if that is one of the virtues that you want to bring to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, leave that as your legacy because apparently that is the legacy that you want to leave for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We on this side, Mr. Speaker, will consistently reveal the situations in which this administration put the people of Trinidad and Tobago because we on this side recognize that our time here will be short, and eventually the kind of legacy that they would like to leave must be erased from the annals of history of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker: I am advised that dinner is here and they have already laid it out, so can we break for 45 minutes for dinner and we will be back at 8.30? This House is now suspended.

7.46 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

8.30 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. Speaker: The Member for Arouca South has 25 minutes left.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, when we took the break I was making the point that the approval for the G3 cellular licences was given to Computers and Controls Holding Limited, a company owned by the Gillette group of companies. What is interesting is that my understanding is that the note to Cabinet was brought by the then Minister, Sen. The Hon. Gillette, and you would note that it was his company that was to benefit from this approval where the Director of Telecommunications would have given the approval, someone who was under the direct control of this particular Minister, Mr. Speaker.
I would also like to indicate that my information is also that the transaction was stopped and, up to now, the transaction has not actually gone through. However, the point that needs to be made, Mr. Speaker, is that in relation to licences of this nature, which is what is called a natural resource of any country—because it allows for a certain spectrum to be used in terms of connecting to satellites and the like in order for cellular phones to be used to link to the Internet at a higher speed than the current land lines that are used.

What several countries have done in order to raise revenue for their countries is actually auction these licences. Indeed, Nigeria, at its auction of this licence, was able to raise the sum of US $285 million from each person who participated in these bids, Mr. Speaker. So, we have a government where they would be quite willing to allow one group, one of their friends and, indeed, a Member of the Cabinet, to be given this G3 licence. I am trusting that the hon. Minister who talks about corruption and transparency will examine situations like this, because these situations need to be dealt with so that where he is looking in the Inland Revenue for little people, I hope he is also looking in the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping]

As I talk about looking in the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, yesterday the Member for St. Joseph got up in this honourable House and prior to my quoting what he said, let me say that the Member for Diego Martin Central asked the question:

“Mr. Valley: I think that this is a sort of thing we expect from parliamentarians. I wonder in the same vein whether he will inform the House there is another allegation that he is still on the payroll of his former company.”

This is what the Member for St. Joseph had to say, Mr. Speaker, in response to that:

“Hon. C. John: I was coming to that. I also want to state categorically for the Hansard, those on the other side and those on my side, because my colleagues must have confidence in me, that I am on the payroll of no one at this time, except the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. I say that categorically.”

He went on to say:

“I would also say as well that having had directorships with my former employers, having been entitled to stock options, bonuses and commissions, there are certain remuneration levels due to me and being paid to me over a period of time. But absolutely no salary.”
He also said:

“I came into Government for national service. Nothing else. I have never had a Government contract.”

Mr. Speaker, I would like you to bear this in mind where he says that he is receiving stock options, bonuses and commissions from his former company. If I am correct, his former company is CLICO, and on the table of the House today was laid the Operations and Financial affairs of Colonial Life Insurance Company Limited (CLICO) under the Insurance Act, 1980 and the related regulations. It is from this report where it is said that in July 1997, the office of the Supervisor of Insurance submitted a report on the operations of CLICO and amongst the things that are said, the insistence on the part of the company to pay dividends, contrary to the law. That law says a company should not pay a dividend if its funds are in deficit. However, the company paid dividends in each year except 1992.

The same company CLICO is where the Member for St. Joseph is saying that he is being paid stock options, bonuses and commissions. The report also states, Mr. Speaker, that CLICO, by today's standard, is a financial conglomerate being involved directly or indirectly in a diversity of operations and ventures. CLICO is in breach of the law and they have insisted on paying stock options, bonuses and dividends to a member of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago who consistently says that he has no particular interest in any company and is here to work for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I want, with your leave, to read a document which to me belies this statement of the Minister. It is a document from the credit committee of one of our local banks. In fact, it is the Government's bank, and it is a document dated July 21, 2000. With your leave, I would like to quote extensively from this document.

It reads:

“We have a credit proposal in the name of this company to consolidate and take over loans in the names of Messrs. Lawrence Duprey and Carlos John. This company is the main holding company of Mr. Duprey, which in turn owns several operating companies which were acquired over time by Mr. Duprey—these include, Consolidated Appliances Ltd., GTM Fire Insurance Company Ltd. and B&L Insurance Company Ltd.

In 1999 August, at his request, we consolidated loans in Mr. Duprey's personal name up to an amount of $20.2 million with a repayment arrangement over five years with interest to be paid monthly. In 1999 August
we also granted ICD (Trinidad) Ltd. a loan of $11 million to acquire the shareholding of GTM Fire Insurance Co. Ltd. There is also a short term lending in the name of Mr. Carlos John, which was initially used for investment purposes and which was to be liquidated by 2000 March 31. Mr. Duprey has now confided to us that most of this lending…”

The lending to Mr. Carlos John.

“…was utilized by him for a personal land development project in Florida, on which he has obtained foreign funding to complete, said to be worth some US $30m.

He is therefore proposing that we consolidate the above loans in the name of his holding company, as he has utilized his available cash resources in organizing the foreign transaction. It is the case that the cash flow of the company will not show the ability to repay however, this is Mr. Duprey’s holding company and the income flows will change depending on dividends paid by subsidiaries. This in turn can be manipulated. Mr. Duprey has assured that the eventual repayment of our loans will come from the sale of the foreign real estate, which is expected to be completed within three years however he is requesting a five-year pay out, to allow for any unforeseen circumstances.

Mr. Duprey will also subsidize the company to meet any interest payment shortfall. We are aware that he is a man of substantial means…and we are advised that he does not take drawings from CLICO so that from time to time, substantial monies are accumulated.

We will not be advancing new funds. Our security position will be enhanced as we have obtained a full corporate guarantee up to $14 million from C.L. Financial Ltd. for the part of the loan to take out the lending in the name of Mr. John. This loan was previously unsecured.”

Mr. Speaker, $14 million unsecured.

“On the total lending, we will have the personal guarantee of Mr. Duprey which will be supported by a charge over real estate abroad…valued at US $5 million. We will also continue to hold existing securities. The client is requesting a bullet payment at the end of the term with interest to be paid quarterly. We will be provided with a letter from CLICO agreeing to meet all interest payment if not paid by the borrower.”

Remember, the borrower is Mr. Carlos John and, remember the company is CLICO.
“We would mention that we hold securities in excess of present borrowings by the group of $64 million…

We are attempting here to regularize existing borrowings on conditions that we consider better than what presently exist. Mr. Duprey is a very influential client of the Bank and the CLICO group is a significant borrower. On this basis, we support the within proposal and recommend for Board Approval.”

Mr. Speaker, it was approved on July 24, 2000.

As I read that, it was to indicate to you and this honourable House the kind of people that we have in the governance of Trinidad and Tobago. Someone who would stand in the Parliament and say to us that he went into Government for country and, yet, one of the main financiers and someone who is on the board of BWIA and someone who is extremely influential with regard to this Government is guaranteeing his loan personally and is also using CLICO, the largest insurance company in Trinidad and Tobago, to guarantee the personal loan of a Minister of Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, bear that in mind when certain things have taken place in this country—the Caroni rum division sale, the sale of Tanteak, Mr. Speaker, and we could go on and on; but, Mr. Speaker, what needs to be said in addition to this is that apparently this report came out in the media and, the hon. Minister who claims in his Hansard, and if I could be allowed to quote:

“I am not on the payroll of any company or any individual in Trinidad and Tobago, regionally, internationally or otherwise. Categorically and without fear of contradiction, I can swear on my Bible for that.”

I can swear on my Bible for that. Mr. Speaker, if they want to sit there and piddle with words and say that is not being on the payroll of a large company that is extremely influential, then they can sit there and blind themselves but they will not put blinkers on the eyes of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

What I would like to go on to say is that this hon. Minister who said that he could swear on a Bible, that he was talking the truth, when he was asked about this by the media said that Duprey took over this liability before he became a Minister—before he became a Minister! Mr. Speaker, let me just go on to read this document.
Mr. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order; contents of speeches. Standing Order 36(5) says:

“No Member shall impute improper motives to any other Member of either Chamber.”

I am afraid the Member for Arouca South is making allegations that any business person will understand was a strict above board transaction. Trying to make it appear as though there was some corruption involved, that is undecidedly imputing improper motives to the Member for St. Joseph. [Desk thumping] She should not be allowed to continue. She could bring a substantive motion if she wants, if she thinks she has the goods.

Mr. Speaker: Let me see the Standing Orders, please.

8.50 p.m.

As I understand it, my interpretation of what the Member is saying—and this is my interpretation and that is how I will rule—is that yesterday the Member made a categorical statement that he is not on the payroll of CLICO, when the allegation was made by a Member from the Opposition.

The Member is attempting to show that in view of the fact that it was only last year loan guarantees were made by Mr. Cyril Duprey, who she alleges is a close associate of the Government and who has some business transaction with Caroni (1975) Limited, there is some connection and influence there.

Now, the question is: Is the Member making a case that the Member is on the payroll of CLICO? I do not think she has made that allegation, because it is clear, if even someone, in a legitimate business transaction through a loan arrangement, stands security for a Member, that does not—in my interpretation—mean that the person is on the payroll of another person.

If it is interpreted that because Mr. Duprey, in this case, as was said, stood security and, as a result of that, he got concessions from Caroni (1975) Limited in the purchase of the rum bond and other business transactions, then that is imputing improper motives.

I think if the hon. Member for St. Augustine is ruling that the Member is implying by her statement that because Mr. Duprey stood guarantee for the Member for St. Joseph and, as a result of that, Mr. Duprey received certain business concessions then, therefore, she is indeed imputing improper motives. I did not interpret that. However, it can be easily perceived that that is the trend of thought. I think it is logical to perceive that is the nexus. The fact that you
received a loan concession, favours were done, but the Member did not say that favours were done, it was implied. So it is difficult for me to rule that the Member was imputing improper motives on that basis.

However, because it can be perceived that that is implied, I am going to ask the Member to refrain from going in that direction. With the nexus, the fact of loan guarantees, favours, it is easy to interpret it that way. I will ask the Member not to go in that direction. Member for St. Augustine, I cannot rule that she is implying improper motives, but what I will rule is that the Member does not go in that direction and press on with the debate. [Desk thumping]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, in the news item today, the Member for St. Joseph indicated that this transaction took place before he was a Minister. He is one of the Members who consistently insists that he is above board and honest and so forth. I would like to read, with your permission, into the record of the Parliament, when this transaction took place. The question that I would like to ask is: If this information is accurate, why did the Minister say to the national community that the transaction took place before he became a Minister?

In the document, the credit committee insisted that amongst the things they considered was this:

“Mr. Carlos John

Mr. John is currently a Junior Minister in the Ministry of Works and Transport. He previously held the position of Assistant to Mr. Lawrence Duprey, Executive Chairman of the CL Financial group, and was also a member of various boards including—The Tourism and Industrial Development Company Limited (TIDCO), National Carnival Commission (NCC), Tarmac Construction (Trinidad) Limited, and B.W.I.A. West Indies Limited.

The current $14m facility that Mr. John has with this bank represents the refinancing of a previous $11m loan facility (which was repaid as arranged), plus an additional $3m loan to purchase shares (local and foreign). This facility was supposed to be liquidated by the end of May 2000, however, Mr. John was unable to settle at that point in time, and requested an additional six months extension. To date, interest has been serviced on a monthly basis…”

The interest on that is about $100,000. [Interruption] You are not the Speaker, and I am sure you will never be.
“and reports indicate that all accounts are generally handled satisfactorily.”

**Mr. Speaker:** The Member has two minutes to complete her contribution.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I will finish this quotation in that time.

The document continues:

“In recent meetings, the bank requested that the principal either settle the account in full, or provide adequate collateral to cover his outstanding balances. In view of his inability to do either at such short notice, Mr. John made alternative arrangements with his former employers to take over the loan…

With regards to this $14m facility, arrangements are already in place for ICD to take over this loan since we have already received the guarantee from CL Financial for the full amount.”

Mr. Speaker, you just told me that I have two minutes of my allotted time. I think, really, it is unfortunate that these are the kinds of people who are running the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. It is unfortunate because they do not see Trinidad and Tobago as a country to which they belong and as a country which, for now, has entrusted the governance in their hands.

Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate because without being corrupt and without taking the people for granted, they have an excellent opportunity to move Trinidad and Tobago forward, but I repeat, that this is the first budget that had to talk about corruption and transparency, not only because it is a perception in Trinidad and Tobago, but because it is a stark and grim reality.

The corruption pervades the Election and Boundaries Commission. The corruption pervades every Ministry in which they operate. The corruption pervades each and every one of them. There are few who have recognized that their corrupt ways cannot continue and as long as we sit in this House we will continue each and every time we are given the opportunity, to point out where they are [Words Expunged] taking this country for a ride.

**Mr. Speaker:** I realized that you ended, but I cannot allow it to remain on the record. It is sad that you ended on that note, but I will have that part expunged from the record. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Eric Williams (Port of Spain South): Thank you for recognizing me, Mr. Speaker. I want to make a brief intervention in the Budget and say that I continue to learn things that I really did not want to have to learn, but that is life.

I want to comment on the price of oil that has been used by the Minister of Finance. He has predicated the Budget on a particular price of oil and I want to make some comments on that. I want to look at some issues that are taking place in my constituency and, generally, just to make a couple of comments on some other issues that affect us in the country today.

I have to say though that coming after my esteemed colleague, she is a very difficult act to follow. I want to commend her for her courage and insight in her contribution.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has gone on record in this Budget. He told us that he has used the price of US $22 on a barrel of oil. A lot has been said about it, pro and con. A lot is being said about the current global situation in which we find ourselves. Indeed, in the Houston Chronicle of September 17 there is a headline with a byline from New York which says:

“Oil prices fall as OPEC assures stability”

It reads in part:

“Crude oil and petroleum products futures tumbled Monday at the New York Mercantile Exchange as traders returned to their pits for the first time since last week’s terrorist attacks.”

Essentially, the price of oil initially rose about $2 and then it dove.

Another article on September 18 states:

“Recession fears pull oil prices down”

This is also from the Houston Chronicle, again, from their reporter out of New York. Now the price is still above $25, but the trend seems to be heading down.

Indeed, if you look at Enerfax Gold, which is North America’s Free Gas, Oil, Liquids & Derivatives Information Source the headline states:

“Crude Oil Futures Plunge on Recession Worries”

September 20, again the New York reporter of the Houston Chronicles states—it is important we use Houston because Houston is known as the oil capital:

“Energy futures continue to fall

Continued turbulence on Wall Street caused a fourth straight session of declines in energy futures Thursday…
crude oil futures drop as low as $25.90 a barrel before recovering to end the session at $26.59 a barrel, down 13 cents.

Another article in *Enerfax GOLD* states:

“Friday, September 21, 2001

**Low Crude Prices Encourage Storage**

Buyers have begun padding their inventories of crude oil, which can currently be purchased at low prices, stored for a period of time, then resold later for a big profit.

Oil purchasers also want to build a cushion against possible price hikes when the US retaliates for last week’s attacks.”

In essence, what this is speaking to is that there is a fear that there could be shifts in the oil price either up or down. Some people are beginning to speculate that it might go back up versus it might go back down, but the trend is downward.

Indeed, one of their bulletins in this particular publications says:

“Economic Slowdown and Fear of Flying Depress Oil Prices.”

You would recall, Mr. Speaker, that in the press recently we have been hearing about airlines laying off employees because they were already going into a slow period, a recession. Now with the terrorist activities, people have begun to be afraid of flying and, therefore, have cut back their service even more. What that actually translates into is less need for fuel for the aircraft.

Indeed, several of the manufacturers of aircraft fuel in the United States have begun to change around their production capability to take the aircraft fuel which they produce in excess, to turn it into heating oil or heating products for the upcoming winter. There is going to be less need for aircraft fuel. Furthermore, in today's publication of *Enerfax GOLD* it states:

“US Could See Resurgence of Renewable Energy

Companies that produce alternative energy sources could see a boom in business, especially if Middle Eastern oil supplies are disrupted by US reprisals for last week’s deadly terrorist attack. Many believe that the US should decrease its dependence on foreign oil and look more to forms of renewable energy which would give the nation greater independence and security. In addition, smaller energy sources such as solar panels, fuel cells and small generators would be less vulnerable to terrorist attacks than the traditional energy grid.”
In essence, people are starting to say, “Well, you know, we now have to find other forms of energy, because we are not so sure that the oil is going to be as stable as we hoped it could be. That is the current situation.

This situation developed just before the budget was presented and, therefore, it is possible that the Minister may not have had time to react, but is probably considering these things even now and, I hope, considering his price of oil.

Mr. Speaker, what did, in fact, exist prior to those unfortunate activities of last week, was the average price of oil over the past many years. Indeed, I have before me the average price of oil from 1990 through the year 2000. I have several marker crudes here, in particular, the two that are important would be the Brent Crude, which is from the North Sea and West Texas Intermediate, which is a blend of crudes from Texas.

The price of oil in Trinidad is more closely aligned to West Texas, but because the two tend to trap each other, both are used in a complicated formula to try to estimate what the price of East Coast Crude in Trinidad and Tobago ought to be. So that when crude is loaded on a tanker off the east coast, the price is referenced usually to West Texas Intermediate or some combination of West Texas and Brent.

If you were to look at the 10-year trend of oil prices for Brent, in 1990 it was $23.66; 1991, $20.01; 1992, $19.31; 1993, $17.03; 1994, $15.84; 1995, $17.03; in 1996 it spiked to $20.44; 1997, $19.09; in 1998 it fell to $12.77; 1999 it went back up to $17.87, and last year averaged $28.41, a spike in the price.


A spike in the price.


So anyone who seeks to predict the price of oil knows that it is a very volatile commodity that is dependent upon a number of inputs. You would recall that prior
to the Asian crisis which befell us a couple years back, in this Chamber we made the comment that the then Minister had given us a price of oil and a budget which did not take into consideration the current international realities at that time.

If you want to predict the price of oil, many people likened it to looking into a crystal ball, but the reality is that we do have to come up with some kind of estimate. Indeed, if you were to do a statistical analysis, as we have done of the various crudes, if you took the 11-year average analysis of the Brent crude, the mean price is $19.22. There is a standard deviation, which means it can be plus or minus $4.13, which means that the price would be, statistically, in a band between $15.09 and $23.35. Actually, there is a 95 per cent confidence level. In any event, the five-year mean is $19.72, with a standard deviation of $5.66. So there is a band in there. One tends to go with the mean or less than the mean because of the volatility of the product.

West Texas Crude Oil over the 11-year analysis carries a mean of $20.64, with a standard deviation of $4.15. So the band is between $16.29 and $24.79 over the 11-year period. If you are focussing on the five-year period to show the volatility of it, the mean is $21.28 with a standard deviation of $5.76. So there is a band between $15.52 and $27.04.

This tells us that there is a wide band of the price. Indeed, OPEC tries to keep the price of oil above $22 to $25. They are trying to keep it anywhere in that range.

History over the past few years suggests that the mean price that one should consider is closer to $20. Further to that, I am pretty sure that the hon. Minister and his colleagues in the Energy Ministry are aware that the major oil companies’ benchmark is $16. When they go into projects such as drilling wells or any other capital expenditure, they set a benchmark of $16.00 as the price of oil. The reason for that is to hedge against the volatility in the price of oil. They have to report to their shareholders and have a particular rate of return on their investment. They also have to save for a rainy day. So prudence dictates those who are experts in the oil industry work with a number that can reasonably provide a good rate of return, and indeed, ensure their survival in the long run.

In this country, this Government has introduced the Oil Stabilization Fund. The purpose of the Oil Stabilization Fund, as I understand it and as articulated by this Government and this Minister and the previous minister, is to provide the same thing but in the context of Trinidad and Tobago as a country. Indeed, they also predicated some of their initiatives in the areas of human development and
education to savings that could be realized in this same Oil Stabilization Fund. These programmes, they would have us believe, are intended for the long run. As a result, to predicate a price of oil at $22 at this time in our history, in the context of the activities of terrorists and in the context of the worsening, or at best, uncertain international economic climate, is to attempt to be too optimistic.

We would suggest to the hon. Minister that prudence dictates that a slightly more conservative approach should be considered and taken if the Government is serious about safeguarding the human capital and intellectual stock of this nation, and indeed, our long-term viability—just an analysis of the oil price as it exists today.

I have no crystal ball to gaze into, however, our track record in this House shows that every time we pointed out these issues to hon. Members opposite, they have been less than receptive. When the next budget comes around, one or two Members on the other side would come and tell me, “You know, you were correct.”

We are no experts on this. All we did was to look at the numbers and come to a conclusion. We understand that any government has to provide goods and services and they have to use the means that they have at their disposal. Clearly, since we have been endowed with petroleum products, particularly oil, which has been our mainstay thus far, we have to manage them prudently.

So the price of oil that we are setting in this budget appears to be a bit on the optimistic side. We urge caution on the part of the Government that we may very well have to come back to the Parliament to review the budget if the trend goes in the wrong direction. What we would have done is cause a fair amount of frustration of the optimistic plan of projects that this Government has put forward to this nation.

We have heard people questioning the plans as being wishful thinking; we have heard others say they are the best thing since sliced bread, but at the end of the day, people are going to base their lives on these predictions. People are going to base economic investments on these decisions and we would suggest that before it gets out of hand we review the position on this matter.

I just want to turn to another issue that has been of concern to me in past budgets. That has to do with the performance of the Water and Sewerage Authority. We continue to hear the Government trumpeting about its prowess and its initiatives and its advances in providing water for the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago but at the end of the day we have a new minister who is in charge. The
previous one is still in the Cabinet, the Minister of “Water for All” fame. He was also known as the “Minister of Pipe”.

9.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to draw your attention to something. In the PSIP of 1996 at page 40, it speaks here of “Water and Sewerage Rehabilitation Programme”. There is an estimated total cost of a project of TT $50 million and the year of commencement was 1994. The financing arrangement was an IBRD loan of US $8 million and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago loan of $2 million. The projected expenditure for 1996 was $9.5 million. Do you know what this was for? This was for the completion and design of 100 kilometres of distribution pipeline. It was also for consultancies on service reservoirs and rehabilitation of wells and booster stations; consultancies in respect of private sector participation; preparation of water resources management strategy.

We were going to spend $9.5 million to do all of that, and the laying of 100 kilometres of distribution pipeline. In fact, the reason this 100 kilometres was in there was because WASA had the capability—as I have often reminded this House—of laying 100 kilometres of water mains per year. Indeed, that may seem to be a lot, but there are 2,900 kilometres of water mains in the ground in Trinidad and Tobago, many of them in varying stages of decay, as evidenced by the leaks that we are all too familiar with in our roads.

In fact, WASA’s key problem, the main problem, is the stemming of leaks in the water distribution system. It is not the water supply; it is not the demand for water; it is in the distribution system. Indeed, it is estimated that WASA loses upwards of 40 and maybe even 50 per cent of the water that is won and treated and put into the system. So that WASA used to be able—because they knew this was the main problem—to develop a capability of replacing 100 kilometres of distribution pipe per year. That was their capability. With 2,900 kilometres of pipe in the ground, it would take 29 years to replace the water mains, and then you would have to start all over again because of the lifetime of the pipe that you would have put into the ground.

It is with that in mind that we must continue to remind the population that the previous PNM administration went to the World Bank and with open international tendering, obtained a company to come into the country, for which the replacement of 2,900 kilometres of pipe would be a small project. That company was called Severn Trent. That was the objective, after all the frills and everything else.
So WASA's capability was 100 kilometres. What have we seen? Over the past five years, Severn Trent has come and gone. Indeed, many of the consultants intimated to folks that they had a new master, and therefore, there were new rules to the game, and all kinds of things went wrong. There were all kinds of reports talking about nepotism and corruption. These reports came from the World Bank; not from here. We simply repeated them.

We have gone downwards. This Government continues to take us downward. I can say this without fear or favour, because to my amazement, in the PSIP of this year, 2000—and I want to draw your attention to page 14 of the Public Sector Investment Programme, 2002. Paragraph 57 trumpets this Government's achievement in water. Under “Water and Sewerage” it states:

“In order to improve efficiency in the distribution of water, the Water and Sewerage Authority expended $5.0 million, laying approximately 8000 metres of water lines in the following areas...”

Mr. Speaker, 8000 metres is 8 kilometres. WASA’s capability to replace water mains in our country has gone from a capability of 100 kilometres per year to eight under this administration. [Desk thumping] Look at where these 8 kilometres of water main were laid:

• “Moruga Phase 3, between Edward Trace and Baserre;
• Farm Road, St. Joseph;
• Amorville, Phase 2;”

I am not sure where Amorville is. Somebody may be able to tell me. I know Amowville, but I do not know Amorville; but I am not perfect, not by any means. I continue.

• “Toco Main Road, from Balandra to Rampanalgas;”

I think that one is in a PNM constituency.

• “Champ Fleurs;” [Interruption]

Not Amowville. This says “Amorville”. I know where Amowville is. I used to live at Amowville. Maybe it is a typographical error. I continue:

• “Champ Fleurs;
• Madhoo Hill, Tunapuna;
• Belle Eau Road, Belmont; and
• Maingot Road, Tunapuna.”

In other words, we used to replace 100 kilometres of pipe throughout the country, yet in the last fiscal year all that we have been able to do—in fact, we have been able to do so few areas in the country that we are able to list them in barely one paragraph in the Public Sector Investment Programme.

Mr. Speaker, so confident are Members on the other side that it is the PNM that can transform WASA that they are even recommending that Members on this side take on projects.

Mr. Partap: You believe that?

Mr. E. Williams: If I believe that? The Member for Nariva is asking me if I believe that Members on that side have confidence in Members on this side, that we could turn WASA around. Let me bring to his attention something that came to my attention. [Interruption] This is not a Cabinet note; no, no. This is just a little piece of note. The heading on this is: “Minister of Labour and Co-operatives.” It is dated August 9, 2001. It says:

“Dear Mr. Williams,

Please assist Miss Cecily Tudor of Quarry Circular Road, Gonzales, Belmont.
With thanks.”

It is signed, “Harry Partap”.

Mr. Speaker, Miss Cecily Tudor came to my office because she had a problem in receiving water at her home. Instead of sending it to his colleague, who is in charge of WASA, he sent it to the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain South, to arrange for a person to get water. Even worse than that, Quarry Circular Road, Gonzales, Belmont, is in Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. Therefore I can say, without fear, that at least the Member for Nariva has no compunction whatsoever—notwithstanding his ignorance of the geography of our country—in recommending to Members of this side the solution of WASA-related problems. Rather than referring them to his Cabinet colleague, the Member for St. Joseph, who was—and again, maybe he knows something that we do not know, but maybe he knows something that our constituents have been telling us.

9.30 p.m.

I thank the Member for Nariva. Thank you very much for your vote of confidence in me. I want, in the full glare of the House, to pass this to the
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  

[MR. WILLIAMS]

appropriate Member of Parliament, my colleague, the Member for Port of Spain North, and he will then pass it to the appropriate Minister, the Member for St. Joseph.

Before I go, it is very important that I make some comments on some constituency matters. Before that, I will make some comments with regard to the oil industry. We are faced with declining oil production. The comment is being made among members of the petroleum fraternity—of which I am one—of the lack of fiscal stimulus to arrest the decline in oil production.

The Minister of Finance points out in his speech that the Minister of Energy plans to take certain initiatives over the next year. They are offshore. We are going into the ultra deep waters to shoot a two-dimensional seismic survey. We are also focusing more on gas because gas production is outstripping oil production. I have said this before in this honourable Chamber—and the Member for Point-a-Pierre and others know—that the fields onshore require means to improve and arrest the decline of oil production onshore. One technique that has been shown to be of use in this area is the acquisition of three-dimensional seismic surveys, especially onshore Trinidad and Tobago.

There is nothing in the budget; nothing in the discussion that we have heard so far that suggests that we are seeking to employ this technology over Petrotrin’s acreage and to provide the incentive, to provide the same type of coverage over the acreage of the small independents. That is important because the cost of such work is very high and it may be beyond the budget of the independents. However, if a large project were to be undertaken with the economies of scale that go with it, then it is possible that in its aerial coverage the smaller areas could be covered and they could then purchase what is appropriate to them at a price affordable to them.

I have been involved in initiatives to try to get this done in the past and they have come to nought for various reasons. Others have also been trying to get this done. It has been talked about; it has been massaged all around in the oil business. It is clear that there is need for direction at a governmental level to arrest the decline in oil production onshore Trinidad and Tobago. I think Members, particularly those who are representatives of areas in the southern part of the country, indeed, anybody who has his or her eye on the national picture will be aware that the oil industry has the proven potential to provide jobs and the necessary spin-off effects into the remainder of the society. This is one of the areas we find sadly lacking in this year’s budget presentation.
I come to some issues which affect my constituency, Port of Spain South. Before I do that, it would be remiss of me to miss another matter that has to do with WASA. I almost forgot.

In the Medium Term Policy Framework for 2002-2004, at page 67, “Policy Areas And Objectives”, there is an item that is also of interest to anybody who has been looking at WASA’s activities—“Enhance the delivery of wastewater services”.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall our having a discussion in this Parliament over several years about the wastewater treatment plant at Beetham. Here, this Government is now trumpeting that, in the years 2002—2004, the construction of a new waste water facility at Beetham would begin in 2002. They are also speaking about the upgrade of non-WASA sewerage treatment plants, which is an acknowledged problem in our country, and the implementation of a programme to adopt all domestic sewerage treatment plants.

I want us to focus on this wastewater facility at Beetham. That is the plant that treats sewerage from our capital city and, indeed, it sits right next to the Gulf of Paria. I have brought it to the attention of this House as have others before me that that plant has been in a state of disrepair. It was acknowledged that this was a major environmental problem.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that this went from being a WASA problem and—somewhere during the last administration—it became an environmental problem. It was somehow dropped from WASA, but, you see, that was part of the Water and Sewerage Rehabilitation Programme of the PSIP of 1996. There was a study done there to do that.

By the way, in 1996, we were also supposed to install not only 100 kilometres of distribution pipeline for water, we were also to install 90 kilometres of water and rehabilitate 14 water systems. That was the legacy of the PNM in terms of replacing water lines.

Even more so, part of this money that was in the Water and Sewerage Rehabilitation Programme was to go towards the Beetham Sewerage System. Indeed, as I understand it, contracts were awarded. In the PSIP of 1997, we see, in Tranche 1, at page 35, under “Water and Sewerage, Rehabilitation of Beetham Sewerage Facilities”, that we were supposed to spend $30 million that year for the completion and construction of a forcemain rehabilitation of the pump station, and commencement of cleaning and refurbishing of the lagoons. In other words, under the watch of this Government, following the studies done under the previous PNM
administration and the programme that was put in place, in the PSIP of 1997, we were supposed to have had a new sewerage treatment facility at the Beetham Estate. Mr. Speaker, the environmental situation there is so bad, that for years satellite photos have shown a plume of the effluent from that malfunctioning plant four kilometres or so out in the Gulf of Paria.

Some of that sewerage floats up in my constituency in Sea Lots and there are others who have said that it is the people of Sea Lots who are putting their own effluent into the Dry River. This is not so. It is from the malfunctioning of the Beetham plant. Sometime ago there was an outbreak of meningitis in that area as a result of that.

In 1998, lo and behold, Tranche 1 of the PSIP, page 41, Water and Sewerage, heading, “Rehabilitation of Beetham Sewerage Facilities” expenditure of $7 million. Hear this now, Mr. Speaker, details of the activity:

“Conduct of a detailed study of the Greater Port of Spain Sewerage System.”

In essence, with a pressing environmental and sewerage problem out here, we went from a project to which a budget was assigned; we went to the next year where more money was assigned by this Government following on what it inherited; then we went to the next stage where it became a study. Mr. Speaker, how is that possible? It is headed in the wrong direction. There was a study, then a project and then you execute the project. Apparently there was a study, a project in train about to be executed and therefore it became a study. [Interruption] We have had this discussion before.

Mr. Singh: I just want to make some clarification, but if you do not want me to clarify, that is fine. Thank you for giving way. I think that you have your sequence of events wrong. First, the CDB loan in which the previous government of the 1991—1994 period was in the process of accessing was not informed by a study. I recall my first meeting with Mr. Brunton, who is still with the CDB. I asked him what informed the decision to clean out the lagoons on which we were going to spend $90 million, he said it was an emergency. The consultant said that when you are borrowing $95 million, you needed a proper study. That is when the study was taken out.

When the study was done, the effluent discharge from the lagoon ponds did not meet the environmental standards, nor the Bureau of Standards requirements for effluent discharge. Therefore, the method that you were going to embark upon, not being informed by a study, would have led to a recurrence of the same problem after you had spent $95 million.
Mr. Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made, that the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Hon. G. Singh]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. E. Williams: I thank the Member opposite for his intervention and other Members for extending my time. After his wonderful intervention somehow he managed to convince the Minister of Finance, then, to include in the budget of 1997, under his watch, the possible expenditure of $30 million to fix the same emergency that existed there.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it went to be studied. Now, here we are, heading to the year 2000, and we have been living with that environmental problem under the watch of this Government. You know, Mr. Speaker, what is also galling about it is that this is the same government that, as part of its claim of water for all is about to inflict on us this desalination plant at Point Lisas. The premise of the desalination plant is that more water is needed in the system, therefore, you cannot use the treated water that goes to Point Lisas to cool the plant and for other uses. You divert that back into the water system and you have a specific plant that only supplies Point Lisas.

9.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, yes, they have explored the options. My colleagues have gone into great detail to show the guiding light that guides the way in which they have gone about their capital projects. The considerations that they appear to take when they get involved in capital projects, and those considerations, the citizens of this nation are beginning to find increasingly abhorrent in the way this Government is conducting its business. That is the galling part! [Desk thumping]

I want to turn to constituency matters. First of all, the John John Towers—this is a matter I am going to be raising with the current Minister of Housing and Settlements. I must report to the House, Mr. Speaker, that after several representations to him, finally he has agreed, finally—and I want to thank him publicly—to make a tour of my constituency with me next Thursday, to review the housing situation, particularly in East Port of Spain.

The John John Towers, Mr. Speaker, you will recall the debates we had on that. Apparently the land rates that they are being charged, now that there are people living in the towers—[Interruption]
Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are close to the Member speaking and you are even louder than he is. Please continue Member.

Mr. E. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the John John Towers, the land rates that the people are being charged are not the rates that were advertised, when they got into their mortgage situation. It is much higher. Indeed, it then blows the budgets of the individuals who won the right to get an apartment in the towers and we need, as a matter of urgency, to review that.

Mr. Speaker, there is the situation of leaking roofs on all of the NHA properties in Port of Spain. Some of them were built before the PNM came into being. Others were built under the administration of a previous Member of Parliament, my late great namesake, when he was Prime Minister. He saw what existed at the time, what was called the Barrack Yard, with sewage flowing and he said that something had to be done. What is now St. Joseph Road—those of a previous generation, those who are slightly older than I am, even I can remember that to some extent—that whole area was Barrack Yard. When those buildings were built, at that time, they were state-of-the-art and they, indeed, provided significant relief to the living conditions of the citizenry of this nation. The one called Mango Rose, the same thing. The one in Woodbrook, the same thing. The one in St. James, the same thing. No, the one in St. James was built before that. Mr. Speaker, the flat roofs are all leaking. Then there is a Plaisance Terrace where we will go on tour. You would cry, Mr. Speaker, if you see the conditions some of my constituents are living under.

Well, Mr. Speaker, in the last dispensation, and I have to give credit to the Member for St. Augustine for that, when he was Minister. Let me explain what happened. Mr. Speaker, you may recall I came to this House with a motion on the adjournment to get a shed roof put on top of those flat concrete roofs because they were cracked and water was going through. The NHA finally started to build one at a place called Jackson Place, in an area known as Mango Rose.

Several things happened though, Mr. Speaker. The NHA workers drilled holes into the roofs to put the structure. When they put up the frame with no galvanize on the shed, they stopped work just prior to the rainy season and then the rains came. Do you know what happened, Mr. Speaker? The cracks that existed leaked and the holes that they drilled, more water came through those into the apartments. So again, Mr. Speaker, we had to rush back to the NHA, to the then
executive director, who then told me that he was not aware that work had stopped. When he checked, the people down below him said they ran out of money.

They then re-instituted a programme, again under the watch of the Member for St. Augustine, and they completed the work, except for the guttering that was supposed to catch the water as it was coming off the roof. There was one flaw, Mr. Speaker, one significant capital “F-L-A-W”. There were some water tanks on top of the roof and they built the shed roof along the top and they left an indentation for the water tanks. So now, Mr. Speaker, the rain falls on the roof, it slides off the sides, except where the water tanks are; [Laughter] and guess what? It then spreads over the rest of the roof, under the shed and leaks into the apartments. [Laughter]

What is even worse, Mr. Speaker, after this last election, with a new Minister of Housing and Settlements, I opened the newspaper one day and I saw the new Minister going up on the roof of one of the other buildings, in the Mango Rose area—he did not tell me he was going, but then he did not have to. He is the Minister, he could go anywhere he wants, any time he wants. There he was posing, going through the roof on top of one of the buildings and saying: “I will replace all of them, all over Port of Spain.” You know what, Mr. Speaker, they started to build the same kind of roof on another building. [Laughter]

Mr. Speaker, rain is falling on the roof, running off everywhere, except the indentation for the water tanks, spreading under the roofs again on a second one, and leaking into the apartments. He did not consult this Member of Parliament! Mr. Speaker, it was in consultation with the NHA that we came to a potential solution, which was supposed to be the prototype for all of the NHA properties in and around Port of Spain and San Fernando that are built in that way. However, somebody in the NHA may have said to the Minister, “They have votes in that.” What he did, he got the contractor to employ certain elements in the Mango Rose area in a kind of URP—of course he is very familiar with how that works. He employed them in a “10-days” kind of way, literally obtaining favour with them to build a mistake. He repeated a mistake in my constituency. [Laughter] So I look forward to our tour next week Thursday, because we have a lot to talk about. I want to show him the decanting centres that, shamefully, under anybody’s watch, have remained too long. We need to get rid of that! We have to build proper houses. People are there too long. [Desk thumping]

I want to carry the Minister to an area called Beverly Hills, Canada. [Interruption] Beverly Hills where, again, through representations, we were able to refurbish the basketball court and install lights. [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker,
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  

Friday, September 21, 2001

[MR. WILLIAMS]

Beverly Hills, one of the areas of high crime, and I had the pleasure of being there at a function on Boxing Day—after we had the lights put in and we helped to sponsor the bags for the children and so on—to see little children in an orderly manner having a Christmas function. The community came together and they had gifts for everyone and so on. I want to carry the Minister up Beverly Hills to show him some of the drains—which I helped to clean—that really need fixing. We have to change the way we do things, so I look forward to that tour.

With regard to Picton Road and the environment—and this is for the Member for St. Joseph—apparently in the speed to pave roads, which has been well documented and commented on—it seems that we paved the roads higher than the drains on Picton Road. I think that is a situation that occurred in a number of other places throughout the country. What that results in, Mr. Speaker, is that the water now, instead of flowing in the drains, flows off the side of the hill—which is already steep—into the yards of the people who live there in their residences, which are already less than architecturally sound. As a result, it is beginning to undermine foundations and soil is washing away. In general, it is exacerbating an already difficult situation. So the next Minister that I am going to be inviting to tour that area, to see what we can do to fix, is the hon. Member for St. Joseph, my good friend.

I want to thank the Minister of Education. She has assisted me—I have to “give Jack his jacket”—in righting some wrongs that took place in the recent common entrance equivalent examinations. She has been very helpful. She has also been very helpful in assisting me in making representation for one of the schools in my constituency to obtain six computers, which were caught up in a bureaucratic discussion in her ministry.

With respect to flooding, again, I have started talks with the hon. Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government about the flooding on South Quay. Fortunately, we did not have any flooding this year. However, we need a third pump in the pumping station down at the Beetham Highway, opposite the market. There are two pumps there and all the water that flows through the drains, into a sump—a big concrete bunker, a hole in the ground—is pumped into the East Dry River. The problem with that, Mr. Speaker, there is a bay for a third pump—there really ought to be three pumps—but beyond that, the pumps are operated manually. A pump attendant has to be there to watch the water level in the sump, and he then flicks a switch so that the pump begins to work.
10.00 p.m.

There are two problems with that, Mr. Speaker: It is manual, obviously; there are only two instead of three pumps, but the pump attendant is a daily-paid worker who works from 7.00 in the morning to 3.00 in the afternoon, if he goes that long, and, therefore, he does not work at nights and he does not work on weekends. So if we have a torrential downpour of rain after 3 o'clock on an afternoon concentrated in that area, or if we have torrential rain over a weekend, there is no pump attendant to turn on the pump to pump the water out. [Desk thumping] I have discovered this.

All that is required—this has been so again. This situation, maybe it was adequate when it was first put in place, but I remember we had a previous super Minister of Works who was everywhere doing everything all the time, and he had a junior Minister with him or a parliamentary secretary, and so we have lived with this situation. All that is required is a float switch, Mr. Speaker. You know in your toilet tank there is a float—water comes—you flush the thing. Water comes up, the float comes up, up, up, up, up, and it gets to a point where it cuts off the water. [Interruption] You call it a switch, call it “ah valve, call it ah wha’ever you want to call it”—[Interruption]. “Call it what yuh want to call it but yuh understand what ah mean.” [Desk thumping] All that is required to help that part of the flooding problem is to automate the pumping situation there and put the third pump in so that you have—and that is not rocket science, Mr. Speaker. [Interruption] It is not rocket science. [Interruption] It is not rocket science. It was put in, as I understand it, when my late father was the Mayor of Port of Spain, all right? Okay? That then was the solution—technology as I—Mr. Speaker, you know, that reminds me of when this Government first came into being and they accused the PNM, for instance, of never patenting pan, completely forgetting the history and the context in which that cultural—that instrument came into being. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker, look, time is moving on and technology has improved and systems are improving, and therefore the technology of today requires that we automate that and therefore alleviate the flooding problem that occurs on South Quay and, in fact, it is so bad sometimes that it backs up the sewage into the National Housing Authority (NHA) flats that exist at St. Joseph Road.

With regard to—I am running out of time so I want to finish this quickly—a national security issue, Mr. Speaker. You would recall that I made representations in this honourable Chamber on at least two occasions to have a police post put in
at the same Mango Rose area of the NHA. The police post was put in and then it was not put in the correct place, it was not appropriate—it became a hardship duty because it was facing the west. When the sun was going down it would come into there and it was uncomfortable; it was hot. I myself purchased a fan and a radio and donated them to the police to try to help them.

Last year, I believe it was last Carnival, the police post was removed to the savannah for the carnival activities and then it was put in Tunapuna while the Tunapuna station was being refurbished. I came back to the Parliament with another motion on the adjournment and the then Minister of National Security said to me that, “Crime has been alleviated in the area. There are additional patrols in the area and people can now sit openly on their veranda and they can enjoy themselves.”

Mr. Speaker, I had the displeasure of circulating his *Hansard* among the residents of Mango Rose because they know that that is not true. I also have the further displeasure to report to this honourable House that because of—and one of the contributory elements—the lack of security in the area, I have received reports that one of our young ladies was recently attacked and raped in the Mango Rose area and she may have contracted the HIV virus from one of her attackers.

In addition, the day that the police post was being removed, those individuals who are involved in peddling drugs in the area were heard to be laughing and saying, “Well is now our time to spree again,” and indeed, Mr. Speaker, I have the displeasure of reporting to this honourable House that the drug pushers in the area are indeed spreeing again. So I have not seen anything in the budget about providing additional security in the Mango Rose area and it is an area which I have brought to the attention of this honourable Chamber on more than one occasion.

Mr. Speaker, there are—[*Interruption*] They want to know, Mr. Speaker, about the ladies of the night in Woodbrook. The Member for Fyzabad has often boasted to me that he knows my constituents well.

**Hon. Member:** What does that mean?

**Mr. E. Williams:** I do not know what that all means. You see, Mr. Speaker, since they want to know about that, we held a public consultation in the Carlos Street Church of God in Woodbrook—which was donated for that purpose—of the community in Woodbrook. We invited the police and they took action and removed most of them from the streets but again, I want to put this House on notice, they have begun to reappear because, as with everything else, the focus
has been elsewhere and people see an opportunity and, as a result of the
opportunity, it seems that I am beginning to see more and more the Member for
Fyzabad in my constituency. [Interruption] [Laughter]

However, Mr. Speaker I want him to stay in Fyzabad and so I want to ask the
Minister of National Security to re-institute the police patrols that were prevalent
in the Woodbrook area so that we can have a return of decency in the area. [Desk
thumping] I have constituents who would be walking home or just taking a walk
around the block and, because the area is becoming known for a particular thing,
cars are stopping and soliciting them and it is outrageous, Mr. Speaker! Time for
that to stop.

Again, as with other Members on this side—I have another issue before I end.
I almost forgot this one. I saw the waterfront development project coming up—
just one thing about it. [Interruption] That is in my—all in my constituency, all
of it, all of it. [Desk thumping] I keep seeing designs, particularly on the Sea Lots
side—I continue to see that—but I am not seeing what we are going to do to
ameliorate the conditions under which the people live if we move them from
there, where they are currently living, at no real cost to themselves. Indeed, if you
speak to them they will tell you that they have developed the area from what it
was as pure swamp—where they used to walk on—they used to “break bottle”
and put crates to walk on—to where they now have paved roads, electricity and
some measure of running water.

They will tell you that they are proud that they have developed the area from
what it was to what it is now, but what it is now is certainly not desirable. It needs
to be improved. If we are talking waterfront plan and all these grandiose things,
we need to have a plan in there for the people who live in that area, if that is
where we want to go, and we have volumes to say about that because the people
are not being consulted. Their lives will likely be disrupted and we are likely to
create a significant social and socio-economic problem among the people of Sea
Lots with the current plans as they are—[Desk thumping]—a lot to say about that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for telling me I have three minutes.
So again, I think I have covered the key areas that I wish to cover. We are
concerned about the price of oil as pegged in this budget. We are seriously
concerned about our water and sewerage system in the environment, in the
country, and indeed, Mr. Speaker, there are some burning issues in the
constituency of Port of Spain South that need to be addressed. So with those few
words, Mr. Speaker, I thank Members of this honourable Chamber and I thank
you. [Desk thumping]
ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now stand adjourned to tomorrow, Saturday, September 22, 2001 at 10.30 a.m.

That is when we will complete the budget debate. I mentioned to the Opposition Chief Whip that there is a Bill—No. 9, which deals with the Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board of Control, and this delay has kept back—[Interruption] so we will do that tomorrow also. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 10.17 p.m.