

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, February 26, 2010*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**APPOINTMENT OF LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have had sight of correspondence received from His Excellency Prof. George Maxwell Richards, T.C., C.M.T., Ph.D., President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, indicating that the appointment of the hon. Member for Couva North as Leader of the Opposition has been revoked.

I have received further correspondence from His Excellency indicating that he has appointed Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the hon. Member for Siparia, as the Leader of the Opposition.

The Chair notes the service of the former Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Basdeo Panday, and congratulates the distinguished Member for Siparia on being appointed the new Leader of the Opposition and wishes her well in that position.

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Patrick Manning):** Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to add my quota of congratulations to the Member for Siparia on being appointed to the exalted office of the Leader of the Opposition. I think it is the first time we have had a female Leader of the Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago and she ought to be roundly congratulated.

I would like to tell her that there is a major responsibility that devolves on her shoulders and as a result of that we seek to have a Parliament that addresses the attention of the business of the people of Trinidad and Tobago without fear or favour, malice or ill will.

I also pay special thanks to my good friend, the Member for Couva North. He is now occupying a position that I occupied in 1990, following the events of that year and the position of Leader of the Opposition being taken over, I think, by him at that time.

He has had a long and distinguished political career and he is just moving to a new phase in his political service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. In my case, when I occupied those Benches, I looked forward to government and very successfully. I do not know what is in the mind of my good friend, the Member for Couva North but, whatever it is, I wish him well in the rest of his service to the people of this country.

**COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES  
(PRIME MINISTER)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, on the last occasion we met, the hon. Member for Siparia had raised a motion for my consideration on a matter of privilege concerning statements by the hon. Member for San Fernando East during the sitting of the House held on February 19, 2010.

The hon. Member for Siparia alleges that the Member for San Fernando East had committed a breach of parliamentary privilege on two grounds:

- (1) The Member had deliberately misled the House;
- (2) The Member had imputed improper motives to her.

The Member seeks my leave to have this matter referred to the Committee of Privileges.

In my consideration of this application, I have reviewed the principal text on parliamentary procedure, that is, Erskine May's *Parliamentary Practice*, and I have referred extensively to two earlier rulings from this Chair; rulings made on November 28, 2008 and February 13, 2009, both of which are applicable to the matter before me.

The first ground raised by the Member for Siparia is in the realm of contempt can be committed by anyone taking part in parliamentary proceedings. It consists of conveying of information to the House that is inaccurate in a material particular, in which the person conveying the information knew at the time was inaccurate or at least ought to have known was inaccurate.

It is important to remind Members that there are three essential elements in the contempt of deliberately misleading the House. The statement must in fact have been misleading. It must be established that the Member making the statement knew or ought to have known at the time the statement was made that it was incorrect and, in making it, the Member must have intended to mislead the House.

The standard of proof demanded is the civil standard of proof on the balance of probabilities and, given the serious nature of the allegation, proof of a very high nature. The need for such a high measure of proof is emphasized by the fact that there is effectively no right of appeal. Even if a Member was rash or negligent in the use of words in debate, though this is regrettable in itself, it falls short of the required standard to hold a Member responsible for deliberately misleading the House. Therefore, hon. Members, it is not enough that a misleading statement has been made. The privilege of freedom of speech in proceedings enjoyed by Members of this House means that the Member is free to speak his mind. All we ask is that he holds a genuine belief that what he or she is saying is true.

Thus, in considering these grounds, the Speaker is required to ask himself whether there is anything in the nature of the statement that points to a possibility that the Member may have been in possession of information that could have alerted him to the fact that his statement would be misleading. He looks therefore to say whether there is anything that points to an intention to mislead. I have examined the contribution of the hon. Member for San Fernando East and Prime Minister in relation to the complaint and I am not satisfied that a prima facie case of breach of privilege has been made out.

I now turn to the second ground of complaint—that of imputing improper motives. The Standing Orders specifically prohibit imputations of improper motives against a Member, offensive references to a Member's private affairs and all personal reflections. Thus, based on the submission made to me by the hon. Member for Siparia, it may be the case that the hon. Member for San Fernando East had breached a Standing Order of this House in that, during a regular debate, the Member made an allegation which amounts to imputing of improper motives against another Member.

You will recall that I had earlier explained to all of you that a breach of Standing Orders or a failure to follow an established practice would invoke a point of order rather than a question of privilege. Allegations that proper procedures were not followed are by their very nature, matters of order and ought to give rise to an immediate point of order. Hon. Members would therefore be wise to be alert to all breaches of order and seek the immediate interventions of the Chair.

Against this background, I therefore rule that the matter referred to me by the hon. Member for Siparia does not constitute a prima facie case of breach of privilege warranting its referral to the Committee of Privileges.

However, having so ruled, I wish again to remind all Members that the conferring of privileges and immunities on this House and its Members—in this specific case the privilege of freedom of speech—inevitably invokes the imposition of corresponding duties. Indeed, all hon. Members are expected to exercise this privilege responsibly.

**ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL OF SPIRITUAL BAPTIST CHURCHES  
OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

**The Minister of State in the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Hon. Fitzgerald Jeffrey):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to present a petition on behalf of members of the Ecclesiastical Council of Spiritual Baptist Churches of Trinidad and Tobago Incorporated.

*Ecclesiastical Council of T & T*  
[HON.F. JEFFREY]

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I now ask that the Clerk be permitted to read the petition and that the promoters be allowed to proceed.

*Petition read.*

*Question put and agreed to, That the promoters be allowed to proceed.*

**1.45 p.m.**

**PAPERS LAID**

1. Annual administrative report of the National Maintenance Training and Security Company Limited (MTS) for the year ended December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2008. [*The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
2. Annual administrative report of the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the fiscal year 2007/2008. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
3. Annual administrative report of the National Helicopter Services Limited for the fiscal year 2007/2008. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
4. Executive report of the Pilotage Authority for the fiscal year 2007/2008. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
5. Annual administrative report of the Caribbean Airlines for the year ended December 31, 2007. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
6. Annual administrative report of the Caribbean Airlines for the year ended December 31, 2008. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
7. Annual administrative report of the Trinidad Transport Board for the fiscal year 2007/2008. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
8. Administrative report of the Ministry of the Attorney General for the fiscal year 2007/2008. [*The Acting Attorney General and Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Hon. Christine Kangaloo)*]
9. Annual administrative report of the National Enterprises Limited for the year ended December 31, 2005. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira)*]
10. Annual administrative report of the National Enterprises Limited for the year ended December 31, 2006. [*Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira*]
11. Annual administrative report of the National Enterprises Limited for the year ended December 31, 2007. [*Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira*]
12. Annual administrative report of the National Enterprises Limited for the year ended December 31, 2008. [*Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira*]

13. Annual administrative report of the National Enterprises Limited for the year ended December 31, 2009. [*Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira*]
14. Administrative report of the Ministry of Finance for the period October 01, 2007 to September 30, 2008. [*Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira*]
15. Annual administrative report of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the period October 01, 2004 to September 30, 2005. [*The Minister of Public Administration (Hon. Kennedy Swaratsingh)*]
16. Annual administrative report of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the period October 01, 2005 to September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2006. [*Hon. K. Swaratsingh*]
17. Annual administrative report of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the period October 01, 2006 to September 30, 2007. [*Hon. K. Swaratsingh*]
18. Annual administrative report of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the period October 01, 2007 to September 30, 2008. [*Hon. K. Swaratsingh*]

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER  
(LEAVE)**

**Lack of Potable Water Supply  
(Penal and Siparia)**

**Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar** (*Siparia*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 12 of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of this honourable House at today's sitting for the purpose of discussing the following matter as a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely, the lack of a supply of potable water to over 10,000 residents of Penal and Siparia and the resulting threat to health and safety of the men, women and children.

The matter is definite, as it pertains specifically to the lack of access to water by residents of the constituency of and particularly residents of Lachos Road, Bhagarati Trace, Goodman Trace and Solomon Knox Road, forcing the affected residents to source water from ponds, ravines and other ground sources which may be polluted.

The matter is urgent, because this morning the affected residents took a decision to engage in escalating public protest, with the first such protest involving the blocking of the public roadway of Lachos Road, Penal occurring from about 5.00 a.m. this morning.

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The matter is of public importance, because water is vital for life and without the source of clean and purified water, the lives and health of affected men, women and children would be put at risk as they become exposed to contracting diseases.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, this Motion as moved by the Leader of the Opposition does not qualify under the Standing Order. It would have done so under Standing Order 11. Again, let me remind you that when the Chair makes rulings, you should study them because only two weeks ago I made a ruling pertaining to "Definite Matters". If Members would get the rulings from the Chair, it would certainly help you all in bringing forward definite matters and matters of privilege.

#### STATEMENT BY MINISTER

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, as you all know, I had stated on previous occasions that Private Members' Day ought solely to be for the purpose of conducting Private Business, that is business of the Opposition. On this occasion, I have been requested by the Prime Minister to make a statement. I am sure that the statement that he is about to make is of public interest. It is a matter that has been in the public domain within the last week and in the circumstances of that being in the public domain, it is a matter that has generated sufficient public interest to allow me to give the Prime Minister the opportunity to make his statement on this occasion, please.

#### Church in Heights of Guanapo (Allegations of Involvement)

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Patrick Manning):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago begins as follows:

“Whereas the People of Trinidad and Tobago—

- (a) have affirmed that the Nation of Trinidad and Tobago is founded upon principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God...”

It goes on:

- “(d) recognise that men and institutions remain free only when freedom is founded upon respect for moral and spiritual values...”

I hasten to point out, it did not say religious values; spiritual values, very significant distinction. It states "spiritual values"; as an importance of the mix that is required to ensure that men and institutions in this country remain free; spiritual values.

These principles are given effect by way of policy in the way governments conduct their business in this country in a number of ways. The first is that in the Prime Minister's Office, there is a portfolio called Ecclesiastical Affairs and the Prime Minister is the Minister responsible for ecclesiastical affairs. In that capacity, the Prime Minister will meet various religious bodies and religious individuals to deal with matters of a religious nature that affect denominations and so on and so on. In many respects he oversees, as part of the general oversight of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, what takes place, and pays special attention to what takes place, with religious bodies in the conduct of their business with the State in their relations with the State, as it relates to the work of other Ministries: the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs and so on.

The second area in which this policy is given effect is in the area of the Ecclesiastical Grant. For years, there has been an Ecclesiastical Grant, where the State gives subventions to religious organizations. This year, the Ecclesiastical Grant is exactly what it has been for the last 10 years. The Roman Catholic Church was given, over the 10-year period, \$1,157,240; Hindus, \$711,000; and Anglicans, \$515,000. This is over the last 10 years. Muslims, \$403,000; Presbyterians, \$264,400 roughly; Methodists, \$101,000; Seventh Day Adventists, \$176,000; Spiritual Baptists, \$132,000; Orthodox Baptists, \$169,400; the Moravian Church, \$35,000; Pentecostals, \$250,800; Jehovah Witnesses, approximately \$48,000; Church of God, \$32,000; Stewards, this is Christian Brethren, \$8,960 roughly; and Trustees of the Ethiopian Orthodox, \$4,808.

You will notice that the quantities are relatively small and that they are given to a restricted number of denominations, because this is the way it has been traditionally.

Within recent times, when there has been a proliferation of denominations all over the country and particularly the development of a number of independent Ministries in the Full Gospel Movement, it has become exceedingly difficult for the Government to have a fair and equitable allocation under the Ecclesiastical Grant and therefore, rather than expose itself to allegations of discrimination, this Government, and I dare say the government that preceded us in office, took the position that the Ecclesiastical Grant will not be touched; it will not be increased in quantity, it will not be added to. Because of the difficulty in deciding to whom it should be given in a fair manner, the proliferation incidentally not to Full Gospel Churches, but also in the Islamic and Hindu faith. The general proliferation has led to a situation where the Ecclesiastical Grant has to be rethought and pending, that this Government and the Government that preceded us in office and the one before that, took the position that they would freeze the Ecclesiastical Grant in place—the Ecclesiastical Grant

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and a portfolio of Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs, and not the only two areas in the relations between church and state. There are others.

Many of the denominations, as they seek to expand their faith or as they seek to conduct social interventions in the society, or as they seek to undertake a role for the education of the children who are part of their faith, approach the Government for assistance in more ways than one; in many ways. The primary way is by way of land; the approach for land. Over the years, a number of denominations have been the beneficiaries of land from the State.

In 1975, I go back as far as that, Munroe Hindu Cultural Group, which is a branch of the Maha Sabha, got 10,000 square feet of land. On October 11, 2007, Alta Garcia Trace, San Francique, Shri Morgan Foundation Limited got for the erection of a temple, 2 hectares of land. This is approved by the Cabinet, that is about 5 acres.

In January 1991, the Platini Crown Trace, Rochard Road was given land in that area; Clarke Road Jamaat of the An Juman Association for the construction of a mosque, one rood and eight perches. This was 1991.

In 1972, Trinidad Muslim League Incorporated, a parcel of land 4 feet by 7 feet.

**Mr. Peters:** A grave?

**Hon. P. Manning:** On the grounds of the Jina—it is a grave—Memorial Mosque, Eastern Main Road, St. Joseph, licensed as a private burial ground for the interment of the founder and spiritual head of the league, Al Hagim Murvi Amir Ali whenever the occasion presented itself. In other words, they applied for the land to bury the founder of the organization before he died.

Mr. Speaker, 1960, 10,000 square feet at Sisters Road, Savannah Grande, Sunat ul Jamaat, for the erection of a mosque. That is grave. In 1983, lands in California for the erection of a Hindu Temple and cultural building, two acres of land given by the State; Cabinet decision and a host of other applications that have been satisfied, not just from the Hindus and the Muslims, but from the Christian denomination and a lot of, virtually all, the denominations in Trinidad and Tobago.

**2.00 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, everybody, when they required land, had come to the State and, in many instances, most of them got. It goes on that the land came, not only directly from the Cabinet, but from state agencies. Take the case of the National Housing Authority, on October 31, 2002, property situated—the Holy Faith Baptist Tabernacle, property situated in La Horquetta, 893.2 square metres; Shiva

Dharma Sabha, 1,408.8 square metres, and that is April 19, 1998; October 1990, Greater Malabar Christian Centre, 2,856.3 square metres; Holy Ethiopian Spiritual Temple, one acre, at La Horquetta; the New Testament Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, Malabar, Phase 4, 1,537.7 square metres; Corner Stone Christian Centre, 2,398.6 square metres; Bon Air Full Gospel Baptist Church, 0.20 hectares; the Holy Faith Baptist Tabernacle, 893.2 square metres and, Mr. Speaker, I could go on.

The point I am trying to make is that it has become a practice, not just of this Government, but of many governments that preceded us in office, to make lands available from the State for the construction of places of worship. The lands varied in size based on requirements. It was not just the Government, the Cabinet nor the NHA, but there was also Caroni (1975) Limited.

In fact, a government of which I was a part in the past, became concerned about the way Caroni (1975) Limited was distributing lands in Central and South Trinidad, and to be able to rein that in, when we took a loan using Caroni (1975) Limited lands as security, a debenture was placed on the land with a restriction, and if you wanted to transfer lands from Caroni (1975) Limited it needed Cabinet approval. That was the only way that the Cabinet was able to take some kind of control of what was happening with Caroni (1975) Limited in terms of land. The minute the debenture was paid off, the free-for-all began again. It was a virtual free for all with State lands as it related to denominational bodies.

Mr. Speaker, when the Cabinet took a decision that it would make lands available to the Lighthouse of the Lord Jesus Christ, all it was doing was acting in accordance with a tradition of long-standing that had become an essential and integral part of the conduct of government business in its relations between church and State. There is nothing unusual about it. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, area No. 4, in which there is a relationship between the church and state, is in respect of schools. The number of government assisted schools built or under construction over the period 2000 to the present time is 16 in number. These are schools owned by denominational bodies. The Government built 16 schools for denominational bodies at a cost of \$138.1 million with the State putting in \$118.05 million, or 85.5 per cent of the cost of the schools. These are schools under the control of denominational bodies built by the State, in this case, the State funding 85.5 per cent of the cost of the building of the school, amounting to \$118.5 million; 16 government assisted schools are involved in it. This is at the primary level.

Mr. Speaker, over the period 2005 to present, the Government, in partnership with denominational bodies, constructed eight government assisted secondary schools

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at a cost of \$363.64 million. The Government's contribution was \$279.93 million or 76.9 per cent of the cost.

Grants and other financial support provided to—let me also say this. At least, when we were in Government—well, let me go back to 1960. In the year 1960, there was a meeting between the then Roman Catholic Archbishop of Trinidad and Tobago and the then Prime Minister, to come to some kind of arrangement between Church and the State in education, and the Concordat was arrived at. What it did is demarcated the responsibilities of the Church and the State in education, recognizing that historically the Church had taken up a responsibility in education which the state had refused to do under colonial times. So that arrangement was arrived at.

It was based on a premise that the responsibility for the education of the nation's children rested not with the Church, but with the State. In fact, what the Government was saying in 1960—it was the new PNM Government—was that the State recognizes its responsibility in the education of the nation's children, and had decided to take up the responsibility where, in the past, that responsibility was executed by the Church. So they had this Concordat and then subsequently other denominations signed on to it.

Mr. Speaker, when the NAR came into government in 1987, the whole paradigm changed. Whereas the PNM ensured that the lid was kept on it, and introduced systems at the secondary and primary levels to expand the access to education at those levels by way of government schools, the NAR government—the Member for Couva North, the Member for Couva South and the Member for Siparia who was a ranking member and so on—took a slightly different position.

It is very interesting to take note of the fact that in that time, the Early Childhood Care and Education Centres, a decision was taken by the Government to place all Early Childhood Care and Education Centres under the control of Servol. That was the decision they took. In other words, placing it under Servol is an arm of the Catholic Church. I am not casting any aspersions on anybody, but I just want to point out that at that time, Father Jerry Pantin was the head of Servol, the Archbishop of Port of Spain, His Grace, Archbishop Anthony Pantin was the Archbishop of Port of Spain and the Minister of Education was the hon. Clive Pantin. In those circumstances, you had this change. I am not making any comment about the matter. All I am saying is that a miscellany of interpretations has been put on it, but none came from the Member for Couva North, the Member for Couva South or for that matter, the Member for Siparia who was a ranking member of the NAR at that time. I just put that on the Table for the benefit of all. Mr. Speaker, they were not the only ones.

When the UNC came into government in 1995—prior to that, between 1991—1995, in the context of my responsibilities as Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs, I took note of what the full gospel churches had been saying to the Government, and what they had been saying is this: Every denomination in the country has primary and secondary schools and they have none. Even though the Concordat exists, and even though there is a position of the State that the responsibility for the education of the nation's children rests with the State and not with the Church, they were lobbying and making representations, especially for a secondary school to be under the control of the full gospel bodies in the country.

Mr. Speaker, the problem was that there were so many independent Ministers that you did not know with whom you should deal. So I spent a considerable amount of time, between 1991—1995, trying to bring these churches together in an organization which was eventually formed with 150 of the churches called the Association of Independent Ministers (AIM). That was the name of the organization. We were waiting for that body to settle down before we began discussions with them to see what would be the relationship between the church and the State, in respect of the full gospel bodies. They wanted to intervene in the dispensation of social services and so on.

While we went out of government, the government that came in, the UNC, this is what they did. Instead of treating with the association that was formed, the Association of Independent Ministers (AIM), they selected one body, and the body was Miracle Ministries, the leader of which was in loco parentis with the ruling party—they had a close association, that is how the lawyers put it—and, therefore, it was on considerations other than equity, which is clear to anybody who looks at it, that a decision was taken to give a secondary school to Miracle Ministries. That is the reality of it.

Before that, Miracle Ministries negotiated with Caroni (1975) Limited for seven acres of land. The land came from the State, the seven acres, and then the government, headed by the hon. Member for Couva North, built a secondary school for the particular church, not the body of churches, but for the particular church. The school cost \$20.52 million, \$14 million of which was funded by the State. This is how they did it.

Mr. Speaker, they went further. In their relations with the Baptist Church, the Shouter Baptists, they gave 25 acres of land to, not the overall Baptist body, but to an arm of it; one of the archdioceses. It turns out that the person who headed that particular archdiocese, was a Senator in the government at the time, appointed by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister. So it was not a question of dealing with the Baptist Church or the Baptist faith, but it was a question of

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dealing with an individual with whom they had a close association. That is how they conducted their business. What did we try to do?

Mr. Speaker, between 1991—1995, what I sought to do was to bring about Baptist unity. You see, long ago, we had taken a decision to construct a Baptist Cathedral for the Baptists. They had asked for it. The problem was, that following the death of Archbishop Griffith, a certain amount of fragmentation took place in the church, and a number of archdioceses arose which raised the question of equity, and with whom we should deal and treat in trying to implement a commitment of the construction of a Baptist Cathedral. So what I sought to do as Prime Minister and Minister with responsibility for Ecclesiastical Affairs between 1991—1995, was to speak with the various archdioceses in such a way as to try to bring together Baptist unity. I strove for Baptist unity for a long time.

There were eight archdioceses at the time. Regrettably, those efforts were not successful and, therefore, we were unable to carry it out then and are still unable to carry it out, but that did not deter hon. Members when they were in government from taking a different course of action. Instead of seeking to pursue the equitable approach, what they did? Twenty-five acres of land was given to an arm of the Baptists faith, headed by somebody who was a Senator in the government at the time, appointed by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister. In other words, there was no equity in the matter at all. That is how they did it.

Mr. Speaker, coming back to the question of education, repairs and maintenance of government assisted schools: Between the period 2005—2007, the Government repaired and maintained 334 government assisted primary schools at a cost of \$176.2 million; 79 government assisted secondary schools at a cost of \$594.2 million—the relationship between Church and State in education. You see the quantities of money! Large quantities of money have been spent by the State on denominational bodies in the country in a number of important areas. In the instant case, what we are dealing here with is government assisted schools and repairs and maintenance to these schools.

### **2.15 p.m.**

Annual expenditure on grants to government-assisted schools: Mr. Speaker, in fiscal 2008/2009 the Government expended \$32.87 million to provide salaries for ancillary staff and maintenance grants at the government-assisted schools, primary schools and at the secondary school level; the figure was \$44.28 million. That is the story! And this is not the total story you know, this is part of it.

When for example, the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) decided and took the decision that it cannot repair but to completely reconstruct the temple built by Siewdas Sadhu in the sea at Waterloo, nobody quarrelled with that. The URP went and they completely reconstructed the temple in the sea and nobody argued as to where the authority came from; nobody asked the question as to how much cost. It was all right. That was fine.

When, in Carapichaima the Dattatreya Yoga Centre—when the Dattatreya Yoga Centre was building the tallest statue in the Western Hemisphere, an 82-foot statue, of one of the Hindu gods—

**Mr. S. Panday:** The Hanuman Statue.

**Hon. P. Manning:** You see, Hanuman Statue—and they could not pay for works done by Coosal and they came to the Government and the Government paid Coosal \$2.355 million for works to complete a facility, nobody asked any questions. Nothing was wrong with that. That was quite in order. I was invited to go and when I went to that site—

**Dr. Moonilal:** You went?

**Hon. P. Manning:** Yes, I went. I went to the site. It did not make papers. It was not of any significance that the Prime Minister visited the site—the Dattatreya Yoga Centre—where the tallest statue in the Western Hemisphere was built. Nobody asked any questions. Nobody said that he went under the cloak of darkness. Nobody said any such thing, but I went.

**Mr. S. Panday:** We did not know you went.

**Hon. P. Manning:** That is the point I am making. Nobody was interested in knowing. That was not significant; there is no political mileage to be gained from that. What do you get from that?

Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister went, he discovered that the intricate work of the statue had to be conducted by workers from India, nobody said anything about it. They came from India to do it. Nobody argued. That was in order. That was quite fine. But when the Chinese are building a church for the Lighthouse of the Lord Jesus Christ, something is wrong with that, or when the Prime Minister—

**Mr. S. Panday:** A company that has contracts for the Government.

**Hon. P. Manning:** You could say—listen! [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. P. Manning:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I am sorry. When the Prime Minister visits the site of the church for the Lighthouse of the Lord Jesus Christ, he did not go under the cover of darkness you know; he went with a security detail. Everybody knew he went, and contrary to all that we are reading in the newspapers, the Prime Minister visited that site once, during broad daylight in the year 2005. Just once! And all this talk you are hearing about cars with tint on them, that is how they use it. That is the way they put their arguments across to create an impression that is totally incorrect, absolutely no basis in fact, but which is used, of course, to smear the image, the name, and sully the good name of the Prime Minister. That is what they are trying to do. So we put that to bed also.

Mr. Speaker, the relationship between Church and State also continued in the dispensation of social services. Islamic Home for Children, \$280,000. This is spent by the State on it. The Jaya Lakshmi Home, \$375,000; Credo Foundation Roman Catholic, \$1.5 million; Credo Drop-in Centre for Socially Displaced Boys, \$2.6 million; Credo Aylward House, \$1.3 million; another children's home—Furnham Place, I think it is called—\$280,000; the Cyril Ross, \$880,000; Hope Centre, \$175,000; Mothers' Union, \$300,000, et cetera; a total of \$245,828,503 between 2003—2009. This is what the State paid to religious organizations in their social intervention strategies, designed to impact on the social life of the country. The State took up a liability to the extent of \$245 million. Nobody said anything about that. That is fine; it is all on the table.

The NSDP, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs—NSDP being carried out; three agencies, SWMCOL, WASA and T&TEC—question answered in the Parliament in 2003; 27 projects, 11 of which were projects involving places of worship—11 of which were that. When SWAHA was building the temple in Diego Martin—I think it is a four-storey temple—and the Government that preceded us and our own Government made contributions to that temple, and the exact figure is not known at this time, in excess of \$1 million; nobody had any quarrel with it. Nothing was wrong with it. They spoke about the magnificence of the structure. They were not concerned about how much the Government put in, because it was all right. That is quite all right with them, Mr. Speaker. Then they talk about equity.

I could go on and on in the relationship between Church and State. What emerges from all of this is that there is a virtual free for all in this country in the relation between the Church and the State in a number of ways, one of which is land distribution. We have had to discontinue the policy of land distribution to the Church because the demand was reaching the point that the Government could not supply it. There is a proliferation of churches, not just in the Full Gospel

Movement; in Hinduism; in Islam, there is a proliferation of churches and the State is unable to meet the demands that has now emerged in its relations between Church and State to assist churches in the legitimate conduct of their business, remembering that the Constitution talks about the society being founded on the principle of the supremacy of God and on the respect for moral and spiritual values. We had to discontinue because this could no longer be so.

We now take the position that to build a church, is a matter not for the State, but it is a matter for the membership of that church. It is for them to raise money; it is for them to provide the wherewithal, to advance their own faith. It cannot be the responsibility of the State to do that and the State has quietly listened through all from it. It is important that I say that.

Mr. Speaker, let us go to the Lighthouse of the Lord Jesus Christ. [*Interruption*] I want to say from the start—let me get it here. In the year 2005 the Cabinet took a decision to make 0.3 hectares of land at Guanapo Heights available to the Lighthouse of the Lord Jesus Christ Church. The note that came to the Cabinet asked for 1.8 hectares. The Cabinet approved 1.3 hectares. This was in September 2005. The date is important, and it is important for the benefit of the *Express*. [*Desk thumping*]

When the matter went to Town and Country Planning, Town and Country Planning did not agree to the subdivision of the parcel of land and a note came back to the Cabinet, and by decision of December 07, 2006 Cabinet took a second decision—and I want to point out that the Prime Minister was not present at the Cabinet meetings at which either of these decisions were taken. I was out of the country.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Poor thing.

**Hon. P. Manning:** The Prime Minister was not present! But hear the second decision—in the interest of time—it agreed to rescind the decision recorded in subparagraph (b) of Minute No. 2542—that is the decision of 2005:

- (a) pertaining to the grant of an institutional lease of the Lighthouse of the Lord Jesus Christ in respect of a parcel of state land comprising 0.3 hectares known as Lot 104, Heights of Guanapo, Arima, County of St. George;
- (b) to the grant of an institutional lease of the Lighthouse of the Lord Jesus Christ in respect of the entire parcel of state land mandated by Town and Country Planning, comprising three acres, three roods, 16 perches known as Lot No. 4—and it gives the address;
- (c) that a survey order be issued by the Director of Surveys to facilitate the survey of the parcel of land in order to confirm the size thereof. There was a doubt as

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to the exact size of the land, and therefore the Cabinet decision said that a survey should be done to determine what the exact figure was—it goes on;

- (d) upon receipt of the survey plan, the matter be referred to the Valuation Division for determination of an appropriate rental fee;
- (e) that Mrs. Annette Williams whose standard agricultural lease in respect of a portion of state land referred to at (b) above was terminated, and who continues to occupy the said parcel of land, be officially informed of decision at (b) above—in fact, it was not Mrs. Annette Williams, it was a squatter on the land;

**Hon. Member:** What date is that letter?

**Hon. P. Manning:** December 07, 2006.

- (f) In connection with (e) above, a quick notice—Cabinet decision—be issued to the occupants to the effect that failure on their part to comply therewith will result in legal action to have them removed—Cabinet decision, to say a quick note on them—and if they do not want to operate in accordance we will then take legal action to have them removed.

It goes on to say:

“on completion of the matters referred at (c) to (f) above the lease in favour of church be vetted by the Attorney General.”

Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that the church chose not to have a confrontation with the squatter and instead was able to arrange for a friend of the church to make a monetary contribution to the squatter to ensure that things remained on even keel. That is what happened. That is what happened! When I was in Tobago and we were building the Claude Noel Highway, the State had an arrangement, whereby we had to clear the properties so the highway could be constructed.

There were people living on the properties who would not move and they were not prepared to accept what the State was offering, therefore what happened was the contractor went and entered into an arrangement with them privately, paying sums considerably in excess of what the State would have paid, but it had the effect of getting the site cleared and we were able to complete the highway.

What happened in this case was a benefactor approached individuals, paid them a sum of money to have them go. What you are seeing in the newspapers today about this money was paid and they want more money, all it is, Mr. Speaker, is an attempt to extract more money from somebody. That is all it is! They should not have gotten any money in the first place. That was the Cabinet decision. They were illegally on the land

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and the Cabinet said that they should be served a quick notice, and if they do not want to move, let them know that legal action would be taken. That is what it is.

So for being humane and for being a benevolent landlord as it were, paid them a sum of money to try to get them to go in peace—church, it is involved, we do not want any noise—we are now witnessing the spectacle of allegations to suggest that something was improper with that. Nothing was wrong with it! So those were the decisions.

The approvals that were applied for—first of all, because Town and Country Planning objected to the 0.3 hectares and the subdivision of the land, it proves Town and Country Planning had been in discussion on the construction of this church since 2005. When the application was made and the approval was not granted, it was not granted because Town and Country Planning was not aware of the Cabinet decision of 2007 where it was not just 0.3 hectares, but a considerably larger—it was the entire parcel of land and Town and Country Planning taking the position that they were not going to approve construction on land that did not belong to the individual who made the application. That is the position they were taking. So, it was on a false premise. It was made on a false premise and therefore Town and Country Planning took that course of action.

**2.30 p.m.**

As it now turns out, Mr. Speaker, this Cabinet Note has been drawn to the attention of the Town and Country Planning. They are now in a position to conduct the business properly.

Mr. Speaker, I want to point out from the very onset, that the church that is being built is not being built with state funds; [*Desk thumping*] that the building constructed does not belong to the Prime Minister; [*Desk thumping*] that the church is owned by the Lighthouse of the Lord Jesus Christ; that neither the Prime Minister nor any Member of the Government gave any instruction to UDeCott regarding the construction of the church, most importantly. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me deal with the other question of the Head of the Lighthouse of the Lord Jesus Christ going everywhere with the Prime Minister in all of his travels. Mr. Speaker, the gross inaccuracy of that statement has already been dealt with years ago in the Benny Hinn matter, and it need not detain us at this time. Suffice it to say, it is grossly inaccurate, and I do not propose to spend any more time on that.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Let us hear it.

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, where the head of that church goes is her business. It has nothing to do with us. When anybody travels at taxpayers'

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expense, you need a Cabinet decision to do that. There is no Cabinet decision authorizing any payment for the head of the Lighthouse of the Lord Jesus Christ to travel to any part of the world. There is no Cabinet decision, and therefore, as Head of the Cabinet, I am in a position to say that no state funds are involved in the foreign travel of the head of that church. [*Desk thumping*] No state funds are involved.

Mr. Speaker, the Constitution guarantees you freedom of association. The Constitution of this country guarantees you freedom of religious beliefs, and everybody is free to pursue the belief, to which everybody is free, and everybody is free to be advised as he or she sees fit spiritually by whom he or she wishes. [*Desk thumping*]

In the Roman Catholic Church, Roman Catholics consult with their priest for spiritual guidance constantly. Nothing is wrong with that. [*Desk thumping*]

When the Member for Siparia, or the Member for Fyzabad, or the Member for Oropouche East for that matter, consults with their pundit or their guru for spiritual advice, nobody says anything wrong with that.

When the Leader of the Opposition, emeritus, the Member for Couva North, goes to India and consults with his Holiness, Sai Baba, for spiritual guidance, the head of a faith that is different from the faith to which he belongs, nothing is wrong with that. [*Desk thumping*] Nobody says anything wrong about it. Nobody says anything about that. But when the Prime Minister decides that he would seek spiritual advice from whoever he wishes, the first thing they say is obeah—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. S. Panday:** Witchcraft.

**Hon. P. Manning:**—seer woman, prophetess. Prophetess is meant to be a disparaging statement. That is what it was meant to be. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, it is tantamount to religious persecution of the Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*] That is what it is tantamount to, persecution. Not only that, the Prime Minister is consulting somebody who is an ordained pastor in the Full Gospel Movement and who is a born again Christian. [*Desk thumping*] It is time the Full Gospel Movement in this country, the born again Christians in this country, stop accepting this denigration of their faith, [*Desk thumping*] and particularly, by people who know none of the beliefs or have no idea of the premises of which those beliefs were arrived at in the first place. [*Desk thumping*] You get up and say something about the Hindus and you will find out. You make that mistake. You get up and say something about the Muslims.

Some years ago, Mr. Speaker, Salman Rushdie, remember him, he wrote a book called *Satanic Verses*, he said, he made certain statements that certain arms

of Islam found to be offensive. Do you know what they did? They put a price on his head, and Rushdie has not resurfaced since then. He has not seen the light of day since then. I am not advocating that in Trinidad and Tobago. I am not advocating that at all, but this persecution of the Full Gospel Movement has to come to an end. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Maharaj SC:** Amen. [*Laughter*] Amen and amen.

**Mr. B. Panday:** The second crusade has begun.

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, the media in trying to get to the bottom of it was going all over the place. Listen carefully to what I am about to say. Two days ago, two journalists from a media house in this country went up to Guanapo Heights and interviewed a lady whom they met there, who heads an arm of the church that at one time was with the Lighthouse of the Lord Jesus Christ, but there was a split in the church, and after the interview, they had a spiritual experience, the likes of which they never had before—

**Mr. S. Panday:** A spirit lash?

**Hon. P. Manning:** I will say it again, the likes of which they never had before. The media will be the first to tell you that the public has a right to know.

**Mrs. Sinanan Ojah-Maharaj:** Exactly.

**Hon. P. Manning:** And I agree with that. I am calling on those two journalists who I will not name at this time—nor would I name the media house—to report totally, completely, accurately and faithfully, exactly what happened in that experience. I will let them know, I know all about it. [*Desk thumping*] I know all about it, so I am in a position to audit what they say.

Mr. Speaker, I am giving them one week in which to do it. [*Desk thumping*] I am giving them one week in which to do it. I will tell you this much about it. It put the fear of God in their hearts. I am sure that they are now rethinking their position on all of this. I am sure they are now rethinking it, but I would leave that.

**Mr. B. Panday:** That happened to me in some—[*Inaudible*] [*Laughter*]

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, just before I close, I want to refer to the duplicity of the hon. Members opposite and how they conduct their business. I received a letter on February 19, 2010, listen to how the letter goes:

“Hon Prime Minister.

Re: Lower Mc Bean Mandir - Extension of premises.

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I write to you for your intervention because all other avenues have failed to resolve this problem.

For over 15 years the residents of Lower Mc Bean have been occupying about three (3) acres of land adjacent to the Lower Mc Bean Mandir on which they have extended facilities for the residents of the area.”

You know what they are saying here. That the mandir is built here; there is a parcel of land owned by the State next door; the mandir has extended facilities to the people on land that they do not own, so they squat on the land; and a letter is being written to me now, asking me to regularize this. The person writing it says, they have written to every known authority seeking to regularize the occupancy without success or so much as a reply.

“I am appealing to you to use your good offices to have this matter dealt with.”

Mr. Speaker, we might very well do it, but understand what we are being asked to do. The mandir is on a parcel of land, there is a parcel of state land next to it, the mandir has squatted on the State land and used it for community purposes, and now we are being asked not to convert that land for a community purpose, but to make the land available to the mandir. You would not believe who signed this letter? The letter is signed by one, Basdeo Panday, the Member for Couva North. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Member:** What?

**Mr. Speaker:** Unfortunately, this is not permitted, and may I ask you to please—

**Hon. P. Manning:** I am winding up now, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mr. B. Panday:** Anyway, I want to thank you very much.

**Hon. P. Manning:** We will probably regularize it. We will probably do that.

**Mr. B. Panday:** Thank you so much.

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, let me say a few things about myself to this country and to this Parliament. I grew up in a Christian home. My mother used to sing in two choirs: the choir in the St. Clements Anglican Church and the choir in the St. Paul's Anglican Church. We had a piano at home and during the week early on mornings, she would get up and practise the hymns that they would sing on Sunday. So the way our house was laid out, you would have to hear it. I know nearly all the hymns in the hymn book. In that way, she used that method to

impart to us a spiritual environment and to expose us to a spiritual environment, and impart other spiritual values on our lives, and particularly, when she would call the family together for us to pray together. We are a family that prayed together. This is how I grew up. [*Desk thumping*] I grew up with a deep spiritual background. On Sunday, I go to Sunday school. I go to Sunday school on Sunday, [*Desk thumping*] and during the holidays, I will attend two Bible schools: one on Drayton Street in San Fernando, a Baptist Bible school; and the other in the Church of God, which was on a site now occupied by Skiffle Bunch. The pan side has replaced a church. But that is the environment in which I grew up, and my life has been indelibly shaped by all of those experiences.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say to this national community and to this House that I do not drink—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Again!

**Hon. P. Manning:**—I do not smoke and I am taking very careful note, all that you are seeing—when the Member for Chaguanas West gets up and gives an impression that is not correct, all of that is in the context of an election that they see coming, and they see the avalanche coming at them. [*Desk thumping*] They see it. They have campaigned on a platform of change, and the only change that we are seeing—because that is the basis of the allegations—is a greater level of political nastiness. That is what we are seeing. [*Desk thumping*]

I am a man of strong spiritual beliefs.

**Hon. Member:** You are a born again.

**Hon. P. Manning:** I will attend any church of my choice. That is my right. I would pursue the faith of my choice. That is my right, as it is the right of anybody else. [*Desk thumping*] I will consult whom I wish for spiritual advice. That is my right. [*Desk thumping*] And I will not be deterred by the slings and arrows of hon. Members opposite for whatever reason. I will stay strong in my faith, and I will bring to the conduct of the Government of this country exactly the principles on which this Constitution is founded, the moral and spiritual values that guarantee the freedom of Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, this has been very extraordinary in the sense that the Prime Minister did make a statement, and did exceed the permitted time by quite some time. In fact, the Prime Minister spoke for 53 minutes. [*Interruption*] Order!

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I cannot force the Government to give you that extra time, but I am imploring you, I am pleading with you, in order to be fair and equitable, the 53 minutes taken by the Prime Minister to make his statement be added on to the period after tea. I am suggesting that when we come back after tea, the Opposition be given their 53 minutes of time.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** No thanks.

**Mr. Speaker:** If the Opposition so wishes it, I cannot mandate it. All I am saying is that if the leaders can get together, I am imploring the Government to give that extra time.

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, we agree.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon Members, I would like to note, let me announce to you that we have 22 parliamentarians from the Interparliamentary Group visiting with us today. They are from Caribbean Parliaments, and they are here to attend an interparliamentary union meeting and they will be observing our proceedings this afternoon.

**2.45 p.m.**

**SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT  
(PROMOTION OF)**

**Dr. Roodal Moonilal** (*Oropouche East*): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

*Whereas* the recent economic and financial crisis has led to a rise in joblessness and a continuing fear of rising unemployment in the public service and across several industrial sectors;

*And whereas* it is expected that such an unemployment crisis will lead to greater social dislocation, worker exploitation, poverty and economic hardship;

*And whereas* the Government's employment policy has been an utter failure and the Government has further mismanaged the function of labour market planning;

*Be it resolved* that this House condemn the Government on its failure to promote decent, sustainable and productive employment.

Mr. Speaker, I begin at 2.47 p.m. on this day reserved for the business of the Opposition and this Motion before us is critical in what we believe to be a critical time in the economic and social development of Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean and indeed the wider hemisphere.

Before I begin, I just want to say with your leave, as we get one day closer to the removal of the People's National Movement administration, I take this

opportunity being the first speaker, to deliver a contribution in the context of events yesterday, and in the presence of the Member for Siparia in her new position to offer congratulations to her on her elevation to the office of Leader of the Opposition of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It is indeed a historic moment for the Parliament and the wider national community. All I am prepared to say to the Member for San Fernando East is you are next. You can delay, but you cannot deny, 2012 or before, and given events earlier today, it may well be before.

Mr. Speaker, the UNC stands on the verge of answering history's call to remove the People's National Movement. I also want to begin by extending welcome to our dignitaries and visitors from the Caribbean territories who are here with us this afternoon. Welcome and thank you for being here, and may I also on behalf of the Opposition extend an apology to you that you may have been burdened earlier with such a presentation that was unplanned.

Mr. Speaker, the matter before us today speaks to the issue of unemployment in the context of an economic crisis. It was on January 27 that President Barack Obama addressed the Congress in what is known in their system as an address on the state of the Union. President Obama spent a considerable amount of time dealing with what he considered to be the key issues and challenges facing the American people and that is, joblessness—we will call it unemployment—and the impact of the global financial meltdown and the impact of industrial restructuring on employment in the United States of America which President Obama deemed to be the critical issue of the day worthy of considerable time when he addressed the United States Congress.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition filed such a Motion as read earlier because we believe as well that notwithstanding the escalating incidence of crime, problems in the health and education sectors that the crisis of unemployment that is facing Trinidad and Tobago in 2009—2010 is such an important issue that the Parliament should debate it, and allow the Government to respond to the criticisms being faced by the Government inside and outside of Parliament: by the workers' movement, the trade unions, the industry players and civil society on the failure of the Government to provide sustainable, productive and decent work.

Mr. Speaker, may I also note that it was just a couple hours ago that workers at the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation in solidarity with the Public Services Association and workers of the revenue department undertook a protest activity at Rio Claro where hundreds of workers were marching, protesting against the Government's employment policy and its planned restructuring of the Board of Inland Revenue and the Customs and Excise Division.

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We want to congratulate the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation and the PSA for taking such organized protest activity. There can be no doubt that Trinidad and Tobago faces at this moment very serious economic conditions in a changing world and it is no less a person than the Governor of the Central Bank, Ewart Williams, who has been warning us for the last three years or so with increasing frequency of the economic conditions this country faces.

Mr. Speaker, it was in April 2009, less than a year ago, that the Governor of the Central Bank alerted the country to the impending recession—at that time calling it stagnation—that Trinidad and Tobago, and indeed the wider Caricom countries face.

I am reading from a *Trinidad Guardian* article dated April 24, 2009 "Brace for Hard Times":

“T&T will experience increasing unemployment this year as layoffs and job losses continue and the poor outlook for the recovery of energy prices calls for another revision of the country's economic prospects, Central Bank Governor, Ewart Williams said yesterday. Delivering the bank's semi-annual Monetary Policy Report...”

At that time in April 2009, there was widespread debate on whether this was a recession or not, whether stagnation or not. The Governor of the Central Bank continued by stating:

“He said the slowdown was evident in the energy sector where firms had been closing down and laying off workers, as well as the sharp decline in exports of energy products, the significant reduction in retail sales and sales of construction materials and in construction activity.”

Mr. Speaker, just to set the backdrop to the Motion, by July 30, 2009 the Central Bank predicted an increased unemployment rate in Trinidad and Tobago in excess of 5 per cent. The Governor of the Central Bank again predicted that unemployment will increase for the rest of the year as there are significant job shedding, joblessness and voluntary separation packages offered by several companies in Trinidad and Tobago including Mittal Steel, Digicel, Hilton Trinidad, Repsol, Neal & Massy, Home Construction Limited, et cetera. So for the last year or so, we have been hearing from authority of this job crisis. This was in July.

By November, in a headline in the *Daily Express* dated November 13, 2009 the headline screams "T&T officially in recession, says Williams"—Williams being the Governor of the Central Bank.

The Central Bank Governor declared in November 2009 that this country is indeed in a recession. At that time, spokespersons for the Government continued with a debate which at some times became amusing as to what is the definition of recession whether it is the textbook Lipsy or the textbook Milton Keynes, or another economic theorist and they were arguing about definition. They were arguing about economic concepts and not the fact that there had been declines in three consecutive quarters in economic growth which is an elementary estimation of recession.

That was 2009. By January 27, 2010 the Central Bank indicated in a report in the *Daily Express* "Caribbean in Crisis". Continued weakness in the region for Trinidad and Tobago imports because it is very clear that the Caricom countries constitute a very significant market for Trinidad and Tobago products and if there were economic decline within the Caricom region, then it stands to reason that Trinidad and Tobago will experience some kind of economic downslide.

Mr. Speaker, with a growth rate of 0 per cent for 2009 which was 1.4 per cent less than estimated—they had estimated 1.4 per cent for 2009 and it came up to 0 per cent.

This year the Central Bank is predicting another year of decline, another year of hardships. And without reading extensively because I know the patience of listeners would be running thin after that extensive presentation by the Prime Minister, without reading the entire article I just want to highlight that the Governor of the Central Bank is indicating that the key explanatory variables to explain our economic decline would be lower commodity prices, lower export volumes of crude oil and the fall, of course, in regional demand for non-energy products. This is in the context where this country has an increasing budget deficit in the non-energy sector.

Mr. Speaker, official international reserves declined by US \$710 million so the Governor of the Central Bank spoke to the employment crisis but apart from the concepts of unemployment, I want to indicate that the beginning of the Motion is also premised on the failure of Government over a period of time to implement an employment policy that would have seen this country develop productive, sustainable and decent work.

Mr. Speaker, there is a fundamental difference in the approach of the People's National Movement Government and the Opposition United National Congress. The UNC sees as a priority the expansion of jobs that would be linked to the productive sector that is linked to tourism, manufacturing, communications, et cetera. But the productive sector of the economy by definition is private sector led and the role of the Government is to facilitate the creation of those jobs in strategic sectors. That is our vision.

Mr. Speaker, it has been the history of the PNM from 1962 to outline and indeed implement an alternative vision for employment creation. They have seen that their vision involves an expansion in state employment primarily in make-work programmes of one sort or another, non-sustainable, and it is linked to the PNM's second five-year plan in the 1960s where Dr. Williams had outlined—how many of them do not even know it is Eric Williams. They think he is the former Minister of Energy who is now in Nigeria, but they themselves are not schooled in these matters.

**3.00 p.m.**

So it was Dr. Eric Williams who in the second five-year development plan, dealt with this issue of creation of jobs in the public sector, because in the 1960s it was felt that the private sector was so underdeveloped, was so small and negligible in its impact, that you could not leave jobs to be created by the private sector. That was in 1965. Today the PNM pursues a similar policy and what they have done over the years, in a nutshell, is that unlike the United States—in the United States they have a welfare programme; they give welfare money, unemployment allowance and so on, but people who receive welfare money are not counted among people who are employed. So if you receive a welfare cheque in the United States you are not part of the employed labour force. But that is welfare payments.

In Trinidad and Tobago under this Government and its incarnation, what they do is they include persons who are on welfare programmes as part of the employed. So if you are on a welfare programme—and they have admitted that several programmes on which they have spent billions of dollars are welfare programmes. And when they include persons on welfare programmes, they then include them as part of the employed labour force. So the net effect is that the Government has presided over this artificial creation of an unemployment figure which, if you take out their welfare programmes, really could be double or in some cases triple what the unemployment figure in reality is.

That has been a policy position of the PNM for the last 20/30 years or so, because their policies do not change over time that way. So that their welfare programmes create for them sustainable, productive and decent employment which is the furthest thing from the truth. That is the history of their employment programme.

That has led us to a position today, as this Motion is suggesting to you and the national community, where, having spent the oil boom, one, and the oil and gas boom, two; billions of dollars on make-work programmes and without an

infrastructure and a facilitation platform to allow the private sector to create the productive jobs, they have led us to a situation where, today, we have the informalization of the labour market, the high and increasing rate of contract labour, the reduction of productive work to contract informal and exploitative labour, and this is what the Motion speaks to. So they have mismanaged the function of labour market planning.

You see, in other parts of the world when they get the boom from oil, gas or the mineral sector and so on, they engage in what is called labour market planning and it is a simple concept. What you do is, if you have 100 people working and you estimate in 20 years you will have 130 people, you plan that over time where would be the productive sectors and you develop what is called then an industrial policy.

In the 1970s and 1980s, there was actually a concept called industrial policy. It was meant that you would present a plan and tell us which sectors you were developing; what is the social impact of those sectors; what is the revenue impact and so on—industrial policy. That debate on industrial policy changed by the 1980s—1985/1986—when there was a growing concern that industrial policy was not development policy and that became a wider conceptual framework called development policy, and development policy meant, unlike the earlier industrial policy, that they would include issues of poverty, inequality and justice. Those issues came into the mix, so it could not be industrial policy anymore, but development policy and sustainability, because sustainability became a concept not only in environment and so on, but, indeed, in social development. Because it was felt that what is the sense that you give people a job for a week or two and then after a couple weeks they have no job? Then when they are finished from the labour market they have no income security; they cannot take care of themselves and their children. If they are unemployed, they are worse off. So that development policy meant that.

The PNM Government, at no time implemented an employment and development policy for Trinidad and Tobago. They have rooted their approach in the basket of energy, in that they believe, "Look, you can use energy money, spin jobs in several areas and when the energy money is finished, well then we will see what happens after." That is why we are in an employment crisis today and history demonstrates that this is poor planning.

Later in my presentation, I will outline the UNC policy alternative in several budget presentations. I have been hearing the Member for San Fernando East and, you know, if people do not know, you really could believe him. He says those on the other side do not have policy and do not have vision and do not have—I do not know what he means by that, but I want to alert you that in every single

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budget presentation, the Leader of the Opposition on these Benches has outlined a comprehensive policy package for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

When we had the privilege of leading the country and being in government, the UNC developed on those policies. This is why, under the distinguished Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla as Minister of Labour, we had the benefit of serving in the government and the UNC government introduced for the very first time, a minimum wage for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We introduced maternity protection legislation. The United National Congress government brought to this House, Occupational Safety and Health legislation, which they on the other side did not support. Correct? Not my friends here; they came last week, but the people who were there before did not support OSHA when they sat in Opposition. We brought comprehensive legislation to deal with the bill of employment rights for workers, injury and compensation. That was because the United National Congress is rooted in the values of the trade union movement and the labour movement.

Today, four Ministers later—they have had four Ministers of Labour since 2002—they do not have regulations for the Occupational Safety and Health Act. Four Ministers later they have none, because all they are concerned about is taking the money and doling it out to anybody they could get for their political programmes and so on and so forth. That is their vision and if that is their vision, then that is fine. If Members on the other side do not see the need in promoting productive, sustainable employment, that is their business. We do not think like that. So we, on this side of the House, promote a different view.

This Government, over the last five years or so, has promoted the influx of contract labour in Trinidad and Tobago and they have undermined the status of local workers of Trinidad and Tobago. It was a few months ago that in this House a Motion for Urgent Public Importance was approved and it dealt with Chinese migrant labour. This Government has a propensity for bringing workers from outside to do the jobs of locals because they have failed with labour market planning; they have failed to plan. They have brought in the contract labour. Labour migration is an intensive policy of the PNM administration and the face of that is really the Chinese companies like Shanghai Construction.

Today we are told the Shanghai Construction group is building a church. They are building a church in Arima. I am not going to get involved at all with matters raised before, but I want to ask: How they reach there? If you give Shanghai a map, they cannot find the Heights of Guanapo. "How they reach to Arima? Who carry them there? How did they get there?" The question is not the land and the State giving land for church; that is an established policy of every government, to

present lands, and so on, for religious purposes. How did Shanghai Construction Company get there? That is the issue.

The issue is these workers who are there and they are breaching the law. There is an established body of law that deals with the issuance of work permits. If you are constructing a building, you need jobs; you advertise in the newspaper and you indicate, according to the regulations governing work permits under the Ministry of National Security; you advertise and you indicate that, "We do not have carpenters, wire benders, plumbers, masons," et cetera, and if no locals apply, then you go and seek labour outside and when you bring those workers, you bring them under certain principles and certain laws: that they will work for a specific time that is defined and identified; that they will be trained; that at the end of their training they will go back to the country where they come from and that there will be a bond, and so on.

In that construction site in Guanapo, a few nights ago I saw local workers on the television complaining that when they went to the construction site they could not get jobs. So the able-bodied men and women of Arima, Heights of Guanapo, living in a village next to that construction site, cannot get jobs, but the Shanghai Construction group comes in to build the church in Arima.

That is my issue. My issue has nothing to do with the Prime Minister's adviser or his church. I have great respect for all religions and all beliefs and so on; I have great respect for that. That is not my issue. My issue is: How did UDeCott and Shanghai Construction get there? Who sent them? And there is a related issue. Those contract arrangements that are being made with Chinese migrant workers, there is an interesting point about those contracts. They are paid but the money is wired to China, Beijing or wherever, and the moneys go there, but those workers are given housing in Trinidad as part of their employment contract. Under normal circumstances, that housing would append to your salary and be taxable. But it is not taxable. In fact, those workers are not paying taxes, unlike the workers of Trinidad and Tobago who are paying taxes and contributing to revenue.

So that is the next disadvantage. But you see, there is a related issue in that. When Shanghai Construction first came to Trinidad, it was part of the government-to-government arrangement between the Government of China and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to construct certain facilities, whatever they were: Ministry of this tower and NAPA and so on. But the construction company came as part of a loan arrangement between the People's Republic of China and Trinidad and Tobago — \$100 million.

So how could they be building now for private people; a private construction site? How did they reach there? If someone is constructing a house in Chaguanas, could you just go and pick up Shanghai Construction and say, "Build the house in Chaguanas for me"? That was part of a government-to-government arrangement. Those are the deeper issues, not what the Prime Minister spent 53 minutes talking about; absolutely not.

Those issues are not in dispute, whether we give land or not. It is laudable to give lands to religions so that they can pursue their religious activities. It is laudable, commendable. That is not the issue. The issue is how did Shanghai that came to UDeCott get to that site? That is the issue. And the Prime Minister will not answer before or today, the cost of labour. And I want to stick firmly on my Motion dealing with the employment and labour issues. The cost to Shanghai Construction of labour to construct what is really a private project, who is paying that?

When I reflect on who is paying that, I recall sometime ago in this House that the Member for Diego Martin West, in addressing this Parliament on the Appropriation Bill, 2009, gave, on that occasion—it was Monday, September 14—some startling information in which the Member for Diego Martin West indicated that—and he identified three Government projects on that day and he said, for example, with the Chancery Lane project in San Fernando, that project ended up costing \$45 million more than it was budgeted for; he indicated that on September 14, 2009. He said that the Ministry of Legal Affairs tower, that ended up costing \$60 million more; what is called cost overruns. So the Ministry of Legal Affairs towers; \$60 million more than budgeted and that which was tendered; Chancery Lane, the tender that came in and was accepted, was \$45 million more than another contractor.

### **3.15 p.m.**

This is the information that the Member gave and I am left to ask the question: Is it that this \$100 million in cost overruns is now finding expression with the construction of that site in Arima? Are the cost overruns now paying for private construction in Arima? We are also asking the Prime Minister to clarify; nothing about spiritual things and his church and how he grew and where he sings. Tell us how UDeCott and Shanghai Construction Company got to that site and what the cost to Shanghai of the labour they are expending at the site is.

The Government promotes migrant labour. This Government took a policy decision years ago; they have abandoned, given up and completely thrown out the Trinidad and Tobago worker. If you look at what is happening in the public service—and we will get to that in a while—they have abandoned the local

worker. They believe that a Trinidadian worker is lazy; he or she will not work hard; he or she will take an increase and they will abandon them for workers from abroad; not only in construction, but in the government service as well.

Have we noticed that, whether it is OSHA, WASA or the Revenue Authority, all the CEOs coming here, they are now recruiting from abroad their managerial elite? This is a country where we boast about the University of the West Indies, the School of Business—the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education is opening wings every day for different faculties at UWI and business schools and so on and we cannot find a CEO in Trinidad and Tobago. We are going to France to find CEOs when we boast of the quality of human resource and the capital stock in Trinidad and Tobago. That is what they are doing as part of a wider programme of control because they have fear as far as it relates to the independence of local minds. That is their problem.

The contract labour issue has also found expression in their approach to several areas. You recall TTT. They closed TTT; sent workers home; promised to rehire them, but they were not rehired. They opened CNMG that is incurring a loss. They opened NBN. They sent Caroni (1975) Limited workers home and took back a couple hundred to work in the Usine Ste. Madeleine factory under contract without trade union protection.

They closed BWIA and brought in Caribbean Airlines. Probably the biggest of all was when they sent home workers of Caroni (1975) Limited. They had to get maxi-taxis and "pull bull" on the road. The fine has gone up now.

This is unlike Mr. Barack Obama—I listened to him very well a few days ago—who boasted about policies he put in place to create and save jobs. This Government cannot identify one policy or one law they have introduced to create and to save jobs. Every time they come here it is about who is going home; how many people for voluntary separation; the conditions of work; how much money they are getting; and how much money they are paying people to go home.

Mr. Barack Obama is now talking about his strategy for saving jobs. This tells us the level at which this Government is operating. If we leave them alone, they will send home all the public service. They have been removing workers from the establishment.

Just this morning, at a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee—it was live on the television so everybody heard—the Provident Fund will be closed in a year or two. That is another part of the public service that will disappear.

At the Board of Inland Revenue and the Customs and Excise—that is one example that came up in the news recently—employees on the establishments,

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who were previously protected by the service commissions, are now being removed to be rehired on contract. The thing about contract is that it could be short term and long term; but the protection of service commissions will be removed.

In preparation for this Motion, I had the opportunity to look at the service commission model and there is a good volume called *Governance in the Caribbean* edited by Prof. Selwyn Ryan and recently promoted Prof. Annmarie Bissessar. This volume is 2002 and there is a very interesting section that deals with the service commissions.

In this section, several important articles are written by professors of public administration. They caught my attention. I do not want to spend all the time quoting extensively from their documents, but it is instructive that the service commissions were introduced at Chapter 9 of the Constitution, in the 1960s, to promote the public officer. It was a protective device that was agreed to by Dr. Eric Williams and Dr. Rudranath Capildeo at the Marlborough House talks in 1961. Dr. Williams met Dr. Capildeo there; they discussed the public service and they agreed that the service commission concept must be introduced to protect public servants from the whims and fancies of any government of the day. Both Dr. Capildeo and Dr. Williams were in agreement.

There are several articles that speak to some of the problems faced by the service commissions. We know them: problems of delay; problems of staffing; problems of human resource. We know the problems that the service commissions face.

It is not a surprise that the Member for San Fernando East would lead a government that would progressively undermine the coverage of the service commissions. It is public servants who have been carrying them to court: Gangapersad Kisson, Marlene Coudray, the prison officers. It is not instructive and certainly not coincidental that, as high-level public servants take the Prime Minister to court and win under the mechanism of judicial review, the Prime Minister will progressively reduce the power of service commissions to protect workers.

When the TTRA comes into being and takes people on contract; when they go to court, if they believe they have been discriminated against, they will go, but it is not the service commission they will go to. They do not have the service commission to protect them and the Public Service Appeal Board. The Constitution also provides for a Public Service Appeal Board that hears appeals from matters arising where the service commissions have taken decisions in the issue of discipline and dismissal, et cetera, including the teaching service.

For a public servant, the process is free. You go to the Public Service Appeal Board, appeal the decision and free process is provided for in the Constitution. That is being removed so that persons will be unprotected; they are not members of a union, and you are not sure they can take judicial review action because to initiate that it must be a public authority. They may believe that is not a public authority and apart from that they have to pay lawyers. To go to the High Court, they do not go for free; they pay big money. That is why the Government is moving to reduce the coverage of the service commissions and is taking large chunks of the public service outside the umbrella protection of the service commission. While they are doing that at the senior level, at the low-skill level, they are bringing people from outside. That is complete control over the working people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Another issue flagged in the Motion before us is that of job creation and the provision of small business. This Government has announced its commitment to small business development and, under the National Entrepreneurial Development Company (NEDCO), they have promoted the creation of small business; but the national community cannot get an idea of how much money is going to NEDCO and what are the results. What are the payment fees? Files went missing at NEDCO, so we do not know how much money has been distributed and how much has been repaid. We just know millions of dollars have gone. They are not accounting.

The Prime Minister got up today and wasted 53 minutes of parliamentary time and the heart of that issue has absolutely nothing to do with religion, the Hanuman Swami Murti, the imam and the mosque, who he prayed with and what choir he is in. That has to do with transparency and accountability.

He waited for the Member for Chaguanas West to bring a big picture here of a construction site before he told the public he knew about that, was involved in it and that he visited the site. Why did he not say that in the first place? Up to now, 3.26 p.m., we do not know how much money it costs to construct that and who is paying the Shanghai Construction Company. That is the issue; we do not know. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please!

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Mr. Speaker, I am always very happy to wake up Members opposite and get them completely involved in my contribution. That is really the issue. It has nothing to do with all the other matters discussed for 53 long minutes.

The small business development sector is a critical sector identified throughout the world to assist with employment creation. It is identified whether we go to the United States, Europe or the Caribbean. Small scale business

development is a critical pillar of job creation. Today, we are in secrecy as to how much money is given. The entrepreneurs created, have they been able to graduate to the private sector?

There is a valid argument for the State to get involved in small business; in the creation of entrepreneurs. It is clear that there are persons who are small businessmen and businesswomen who will not get access to credit from the established financial institutions for reasons well known. The problem is that we do not know how much money is being spent and to whom it is going. Whose family? With them everything is about family. Everything you read about is about somebody's husband being the CEO; somebody bailing out money for their mother; some relative gone abroad as an ambassador; someone appointed to big office as Solicitor General. That is the culture of the scholarships. We will not know. The Parliament is the location to which we come for answers and you dramatize it as best you could.

A related issue I have to raise in the context of this matter—and it speaks to the social dislocation and worker exploitation—is that this Government has completely collapsed as it relates to the labour movement and to the issue of social dialogue.

It was the Director General of the International Labour Organization, His Excellency Juan Somavia, in addressing a major conference on global job crisis in June 2009, who spoke to the issue of leadership in getting us out of the global, financial and job crisis.

### **3.30 p.m.**

When you are in a crisis, leadership is critical and when leadership becomes critical, cooperation and dialogue are urgent, central and indispensable. That is what the Director General of the ILO had to say. He was making the point that, notwithstanding the economic unemployment crisis, if you do not have social dialogue, co-operation and participation from the various sectors, you cannot solve problems.

The PNM Government, almost by DNA and by history, has a particular view of governance, which they have at several junctures outlined. They believe in a unitary culture that they have participated in election, they have won the election, they have a mandate from the people and they are governing; they will do the thing. "Yes, social dialogue and so on, we would look at that when it happens, but there is no underlying need for social groups and the wider community to participate in policy formulation." That is their ideology. This is why at every

Friday sitting, you would see workers in Port of Spain marching around the Red House. Workers marched in Rio Claro this morning. "People all about de place protesting" because they have no culture and no tradition of social dialogue to promote consensus building in implementing policy.

When it comes to a job crisis by definition, unlike maybe the hard core financial crisis and capital market problems, it involves people; human beings, warm bodies. For you to make policy change and make changes which are uncomfortable, you have to enter into consultation, dialogue and build consensus, so you can get people to go along with your policy. That is a pillar that the Director General of the ILO at this conference alerted us to. He is saying, where you do not have that type of leadership, you cannot get out of the job crisis.

The economic crisis today is fundamentally different from earlier periods of crisis in the 1930s and, indeed, in the 1980s. It is expected that this economic crisis will lead to stagnation in job creation for five to six years. Whereas, before it was possible that within 24 months of coming out of an economic crisis, a government can pick up employment, today, because of the restructuring of industry and the enormous impact of technology, you cannot pick up unemployment like that. It cannot work. You need a plan or programme. You need to target sectors and industries for employment and put the training infrastructure in place. They knew that before. They knew that before and instead of doing anything about it, they created a labour market where, persons in Arima are now quarrelling that they cannot get a job to build a church. That is the labour market they created; where people are crying for jobs that foreigners are doing. Their economic planning led them to a situation where nurses in Trinidad and Tobago migrate and we import nurses to do the job in the hospital, where doctors migrate because the developed countries know the talent that we have and we import now, professional workers to take the jobs when our own migrate. That is where their labour market planning led Trinidad and Tobago.

In due course, I am hoping that this will be a policy debate. We are not here to talk wildly about CEPEP, URP and all of that. We are not here to talk about that. *[Interruption]* "Yuh jump already like red ants." Hold on, we are not here to talk about that. I would hope that this emerges as a policy debate; to debate employment policy and labour issues in the context of a longer term transformation of a labour market. You just say one word, that "C" word and they jump up and they know why. It is sacred to them for their political programme.

Mr. Speaker, do not feel that they are monitoring the landscape of politics in Trinidad and Tobago. The Prime Minister is monitoring it well everyday and when he spoke to his regional managers, as he did a month ago, he told them

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"Fellas the next one would be very difficult; harder and harder for the PNM to be returned." I received my notes from the meeting convened by my friend from San Fernando and from the area managers. I understand. I received my notes. He made the point to tell his area managers that things will be more and more difficult. He is monitoring the pulse of this country and the movement of the electorate, as things move and settle down. Do not think he is not observing that. He knows the difficulty. His chairman said yesterday, a few hours ago: "We have to alter our behaviour." It is very instructive. The chairman of the party indicated to the PNM that they have to change their behaviour, because they are not delivering and they are not appearing to care. He understands developments in the political landscape and is seeking to adjust. It is easy to say, but hard to do.

Let me push on with this matter. The issue is the management of industrial relations. I do not want to go into history, because we do not have time really for that. Unlike the speaker before me, I do not want to detain this House with history and personal matters. I will write all Members and describe my relation to my pundit or whoever.

Let us look at 2009. In 2009 alone, in the *Trinidad Guardian* published in June 2009, it indicated:

“Caribbean Steel Mills to shut down.

Workers to be retrenched

100 workers to be redundant”

The next headline of May 26, 2009 stated:

“Junior Sammy shuts down concrete plant, 32 laid off”

The next one spoke of Alutrint and the smelter plant. They have stopped that now.

“Jobs to go”

There is the next one in the *Trinidad Guardian* of April 08, 2009:

“100 workers fired in two days in south”

One hundred workers employed with IAL Engineering Services were fired one day at Weldfab and 60 people were laid off because of the decline in the energy-related sub-contracting sector. This is 2009. The Head of the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers’ Association, Karen De Montbrun, alerted us about that and indicated that in 2009 alone, almost 10,000 jobs would be lost; it could be more. We were alerted to that fact. What is interesting about that is that the job loss will

come in a significant way in the construction sector. This is an economy, because of the energy sector, where construction related to energy and housing in particular has absorbed a significant part of the labour force. Once the housing projects go on standstill and the energy projects go on standstill, you expect an increase in unemployment in the construction sector.

In the United States, let us just compare for a second, there is an unemployment figure of, I think, around 9 per cent. Their construction sector unemployment rate is 25 per cent, whereas their national rate is 9 per cent. In Trinidad and Tobago, the last piece of data tells us that our unemployment is at 6 per cent. Whether it is artificial or not, that is what it tells us. The unemployment rate in the construction sector in this country could well be in the vicinity of 22 to 23 per cent unemployment, given the impact of the construction sector on overall employment. Whilst that is happening, we have the Government pursuing a labour migration policy that increasingly will bring migrant workers into the labour market and take the jobs of local workers. That cannot be good policy planning; it just cannot be.

While they pursue the layoff, they have been at pains with the labour movement. I am coming to another related matter in the Motion before us, their failure to meet and treat with the labour movement and their failure to enter into social dialogue. Again, I do not want to get into history, I want to deal with contemporary events.

It was just last year that COSTAATT nurses protested over their COSTAATT status and programme. Solid Waste Management Company Limited workers protested in December 2009, over the non-payment of back wages. Just recently, their mismanagement of this issue, we read in the *Trinidad Guardian* of February 24, 2010, that south immigration workers took protest action against deplorable working conditions.

It is very interesting what this Government is doing and it is a deliberate policy. They go to all the areas they want to close and send home persons and they progressively disinvest, meaning they do not give them more money. There is no air-conditioning unit working at the Licensing Division, no tables and chairs at the Immigration Department and they do not have ample staff in several departments. It affects productivity. The Government would then come and say: "Look at this, low productivity." This is the approach. They did it with the Ombudsman for years, the Service Commissions and the Equal Opportunity Commission. They gave them no money, no staff and no tools to do their work and when they do not perform, they said: "Look at this, this is a waste of time. We should disband that." That is the approach. You are in a position.

There is a relationship to what is happening in the wider Government circles. It is not coincidental that immigration workers are protesting working conditions. When they are finished with the Customs and Excise Division, they are going to the Immigration Division. They intend to privatize divisions in the Immigration Division to process and distribute passports. In laying the groundwork for that, they starve the immigration workers of proper staff, resources, money, ensure that their conditions are horrible and frustrate them. They would take protest action and the Government would then say: "This division is unproductive. We need to go to the private sector." Two PNM bigwigs and cronies would become CEO of the Immigration Division the next day. This is their strategy and it is well-known and we are pointing it out.

They are also going to local government. In local government, they intend to embark on a retrenchment exercise. This is why they are starving the local government bodies of funds. Today in a regional body, I think the only power left to do is pick up rubbish. I think that is what they do now; they pick up garbage. Roads are the authority of the central government; street lighting, authority of the central government; and cleaning, authority of the central government. Everything has been centralized. The thing I think the corporation does now is pick up garage. They would look at the corporation and say: "You are doing nothing; you do not need so many people to work there, send home and retrench." That is the strategy. I want to alert the daily-paid and monthly-paid workers in the local government bodies that they are next and they must mobilize and organize to prevent this Government from touching them in that way.

As part of it, they have gone on a deliberate attack on the trade unions, recently, the Public Services Association. Do you recall last September? Last September, there was something of a national crisis when the Government, acting through two state enterprises or entities now, attempted to decertify two major trade unions: the Communication Workers Union and the Transport and Industrial Workers Union. It was left for the unions and the Opposition United National Congress to join hands, protest, raise the issue and threaten legal action and then force the Government to back down on decertifying trade unions. It was left because they have been on an attack; a calculated attack on the labour movement to decertify, throw out and reduce their bargaining power.

**3.45 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, every single year, we call upon this Government to bring the amendments to the Industrial Relations Act. Today, we operate with an Industrial Relations Act of 1972; Chap. 88:01. In 1982, we adopted that piece of legislation

and copied it somewhat, in large parts, from the British Industrial Relations Act of the same time. Since then, the United Kingdom has repealed, reformed and replaced on four occasions, their legislation dealing with industrial relations, but we have not done so once.

Every single year in the budget debate, we call on the Government to deal with this matter and get the reform, get the amendments and come to Parliament with them, but they will not do it, because that is not a priority. It is not a priority to fix the Industrial Relations Act to ensure that trade unions can get recognition quickly for their bargaining units which are before the recognition body.

Mr. Speaker, there are trade unions with applications before the Registration, Recognition and Certification Board, in some cases, for over 10 years, and they cannot resolve the matter. There are issues involving the structure of the Industrial Court, and the mandate by law of the Industrial Court that needs to be addressed in a reformed Industrial Relations Act.

The Industrial Court was set up in 1965, under the Industrial Stabilization Act and later the IRA and, in a fundamental sense, it has not changed and the world has changed—labour, employment, workers, everything has changed—except the Industrial Relations Act.

The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, when he served as Minister of Labour in the UNC administration, he had invested a lot of time and energy in national and social dialogue to come up with a new Industrial Relations Act, with the amendments, after considering the views of industry and labour and the wider society and, to this day, we have heard nothing. Mr. Speaker, their failure to manage the labour market does not only have to do with the IRA, it is not only a lack of policy, but it is a lack of interest; and a lack of political will.

Mr. Speaker, you see, a house for the Prime Minister could be constructed in three months at \$180 million. The Academy of the Performing Arts Centre could be constructed at—I do not know—a quarter of a million dollars or more in record time. It could have been constructed because they have the political will to do that, but they do not have the political will to bring legislation to protect workers and to amend and repeal the Industrial Relations Act.

A related issue which involved health and safety in Trinidad and Tobago, it is no secret—again, it is not my purpose really to get into the details of the data on industrial accidents and so on. We have had enormous data and so on over the years. Mr. Speaker, it is not my intention to get into details on that but, on average—it may be less or it may be more—about 10 to 12 workers are killed

every year at their place of work. We lose lives at the place of work. Every time this happens, life and limb, the Government comes and extends sympathy and indicates that it is investigating, and then nothing happens; absolutely nothing happens.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall last year or the year before, Ramdeo Ramnath Bissoon, a truck driver, was killed on the bridge in Macoya, and we have asked several questions in this Parliament as to what is the outcome of that investigation at the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development and the Ministry of Works and Transport. In fact, we were told there were two enquiries; one from the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development and one from the Ministry of Works and Transport. To this day, we have heard nothing of what has happened; whether or not persons were prosecuted, pursuant to any negligence and so on or criminal acts; or whether or not they have taken up the matter with the OSHA agency. Absolutely nothing!

It is a tragedy today in Trinidad and Tobago that having passed this Act in 2004—you would recall that it was the former Minister from Point Fortin, Mr. Larry Achong, who came to this Parliament and with support from the United National Congress, got in record time, the passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Bill. There was very little debate because we were clear on our support. Since 2004 to present, five years later, we have not had sight of the regulations to support that piece of legislation.

So, in specific sectors, employers tell you from the time you go and talk health and safety that they do not have regulations; we do not know what we are doing and we do not know what to do. We do not have the regulations. Five years, four ministers of labour and there have been no regulations! What could be the problem? The Prime Minister's mansion was built in three months; the Academy for the Performing Arts Centre and the Hyatt at the Waterfront and so on. No problem! They are taking five years before they can bring the regulations to Parliament to approve to protect workers. Mr. Speaker, while that is happening—and this is linked to the point I was making earlier—there is a crisis, and almost a tragic crisis, in the contract labour sector as it relates to health and safety.

Mr. Speaker, a few days ago, I had requested from a particular company in this country—I do not want to call the name—because of poor service to please come and take back whatever dish they put on the house and so on for cable. Because of poor service, I told them to please come and remove it. I do not want the service anymore because I am not paying, and I do not care for it. Lo and behold, a van pulled up in front the house one day and a gentleman came out. He said: "We are here and we are working with the company"—I would not call the

name of the company—"to remove this small dish on the top of the roof of the house." I said, "Well fine, who is removing it?"

The driver came out, and what looked like a young boy 15 or 16 years said: "I am removing." I said: "Okay, well it is on top the building and you have to go up maybe 40 feet or whatever." They then brought out a ladder that was shaking from end to end, missing the spirals, to go up, with an old rope that almost burst, and they put it on the house. The gentleman who was driving, the senior gentleman, told the young boy: "Okay, go up and take off that and bring it down." Mr. Speaker, when he was climbing, you were in mortal fear that anytime he could collapse and fall and break leg, neck, back and everything. Well, he went up there and he was working. When you looked at him, there were no boots; there was no hard helmet and no protective gear. Mr. Speaker, I had to go inside now and bring extra rope and some tools and lend them, because they did not have the tools. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, the point I am making is that in the contract subsector when they work with companies there is no regulation; no law, so what they do is take these construction sites—you wasted 53 minutes of my time and you want my time now! Do not be crazy! So they come and bring contract workers who are unprotected. They can fall and damage themselves.

It is not a secret that the majority of persons who are killed and injured—when you look at the data and the newspaper—they are all working with contractors. They are generally not working with state companies, established private business and so on. These are contract workers. Unlike the United States of America and elsewhere—I know a bit about the United States of America, they have laws in place. So when you bring contract workers to do your subcontracting, it is pursuant to state and federal legislation that provides for very stringent health and safety polices and programmes to implement, even for the person who is going up on the house to pull down the dish. Mr. Speaker, we do not have that here.

I just want to take you back. I do not want history. I could have gone to CSO and the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprises Development and pulled the industrial accidents data for the last 10 years and come here. Mr. Speaker, "Painter dies in 30 feet fall"; September 12, 2009. "Police are investigating the circumstances surrounding the death of 57-year-old Chaguanas painter". I could understand this. If that painter is with a contractor painting a house or a building, he would be in those conditions so you could understand that.

Mr. Speaker, you know, my friends opposite are laughing and so on, and maybe they find it funny and it probably is, but this is a life. This is a father; this

is a brother; and this is a son. You lose your life because you are exposed to such mortal fatal risks, because you do not have legislation policy and administration in place to protect workers.

I would just take you to another issue. I am really dealing with recent issues. I do not want to get too far back. Petrotrin that has a crisis now—I think they are pumping water from the Usine Ste. Madeleine Pond. There is a water crisis at Petrotrin that has now involved the health and safety of workers and an imminent shutdown of operations, because of the water crisis. When we turn to the Government with the water crisis, what do we hear from them? Well, do not water plants at night; water them in the morning; and wash down your car with a bucket of water. And while that is happening, do you know what is the obscene part of that? When you drive on the roads, at Debe Junction, Ste. Madeleine and Port of Spain, there are leaks on the roads by WASA and these leaks go on for days and days. There is also flooding in the road, and then WASA has these obscene kinds of approaches: "Okay, forget the flood on the road, but bathe with one bucket of water and wash down your car once a month. That is where we are! It is almost obscene. I think the Minister came here—and really in all fairness to the Minister with responsibility for WASA—and outlined a policy position where he told us that he was doing a lot of important work and they have a governance manual. I think the population should drink the governance manual now, because that is what they are doing at WASA.

Mr. Speaker, a Petrotrin employee succumbs four months after inhaling toxic gas; Thursday, August 27, 2009. That was just last year. An employee of Petrotrin died after inhaling toxic gas. It says that the union awaits the results of the post mortem. A man employed at Petrotrin, Pointe-a-Pierre operations died months after inhaling a chemical while on the job. That person was Marshall John of Penal. Marshall John of Penal died! He died on Petrotrin compound, and you know the point I am coming to. I do not want to call the name of the contractor. He was employed with a contractor on the premises of Petrotrin. The point I am making again is that the supervision of contract workers is horrible, and that is leading to enormous accidents and, indeed, fatality at the place of work. How many more must die, before we take some action to protect workers?

This Government has presided over this situation. They must take the blame fair and square that they have presided over a situation where there are no regulations for OSHA and they cannot police the Act. Mr. Speaker, the former head of OSHA Authority a Dutch man, made a statement a few months ago in the newspaper where he said that they cannot prosecute at the Industrial Court; they

cannot take up matters at the Industrial Court, pursuant to the OSHA because they do not have staff. They do not have legal persons, lawyers and support staff. So we cannot be serious about protecting workers. It is a fact, while we must put policy in place, we must also punish and bring to book the delinquent employers.

Today we are boasting and, quite rightly, we are looking at the impact of the breathalyser and saying persons would not be drinking heavy alcohol and so on because there is a penalty. Magistrates have already started to implement the full extent of the law, and for smoking as well, I imagine there is a penalty, but for OSHA there is no penalty being implemented. There is no penalty being implemented to save your life at the place of work where you could fall off a ladder and "dead". None! None at all! That speaks to the hypocrisy of the Government that they care. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, anytime I hear them talk about Vision 2020, I get sick. You want to promote a fun-loving society, a fun-loving society that is dying every day from murder or falling off a building. That is the fun-loving society. Why do you not create fun-loving patients who could get a bed in the hospital? They make a joke out of even a vision statement, which is an important statement.

#### **4.00 p.m.**

Do you know why? The word "fun-loving" went into their vision because when they are in Parliament, watch how they laugh and giggle. They are fun-loving in Parliament because they take the people's business for a joke. That is why fun-loving is part of their vision, and that is the crisis that this country faces.

The Government has failed on the matter of OSHA—[*Interruption*] I am so relieved that the Minister of Finance wants to contribute to this debate, albeit, while I am on my feet. [*Interruption*] It is good that the Minister of Finance would like to contribute at a later time on this because there are economic issues involved in labour market planning. Do you want to contribute while I am speaking?

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** [*Inaudible*]

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** No, that is fine; you can do it whilst I am speaking. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, at least nobody could accuse me of not getting the attention of my friends opposite.

I would speak about the UNC achievements—[*Interruption*] there is so much to say on this matter again, so much more and my colleagues on this side of the bench will, I am sure, indicate to you the policy of the UNC government—indeed, our achievements are well known, but let me end by indicating that the Member

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for San Fernando East is leading a Government that is heightening and perpetuating an employment crisis in Trinidad and Tobago. They are doing precious little by the employment policy which promotes contract work.

**Mr. Warner:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the Motion and reserve the right to speak at a later date.

*Question proposed.*

**The Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Hon. Rennie Dumas):** Mr. Speaker, a few things would have struck us in the meandering of the Member for Oropouche East—the first that would have struck us is that sometimes in seeking to lay blame on other people, the old people say you point fingers at yourself.

The Member for Oropouche East purports to be an expert in industrial relations; to have intimate knowledge of the rules and regulations that govern the lives of people at work, yet he confesses that he stood and watched a child climb a ladder under instructions from a person who was abusing that individual, and not taking any responsibility. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

He then goes on to speak of this individual who was working in Petrotrin, who was suffering from inadequate supervision. I think the Member for Oropouche East forgets that his colleague is in fact the person with the responsibility for occupational safety and health in Petrotrin. [*Desk thumping*] He does not know then that he is pointing at the negligence in areas in which individuals on that side have personal responsibility, starting with himself, that they did not contribute to keeping this country's rules and regulations in order.

That is the kind of demonstration in which we had the Member for Oropouche East being lost and losing his way totally as he sought to prosecute a Motion that was so convoluted that he could not understand what he sought to say, where he was going and where he ended. Unfortunately, we had to live through all of that. It almost bears credence to the rumour that some of his preparations are in fact done by very junior students of the University of the West Indies, who he should really not be using to guide him in this way. [*Crosstalk*]

The first mark we had is, as he stood—

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** Nigel write that. [*Laughter*]

**Hon. R. Dumas:**—we saw him struggling to disown Mr. Panday, that is what he did, talking about, in his attempt to draw attention to what he dreams about, in

speaking to the Member for San Fernando East, saying, "Your turn is coming". He does not even understand that what he was doing was negating the contribution and legacy of the Member for Couva North, even as he sought to draw attention to himself.

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** "Judases maximus."

**Hon. R. Dumas:** He does not understand what he is doing. He gets up here and says to us that there is a question of what is appropriate policy in terms of bringing labour into this country, conveniently forgetting or conveniently neglecting to tell us what he hopes we had forgotten, that it was the UNC that first brought Chinese workers here to build schools, when they built the Bamboo Government Primary School. [*Desk thumping*] At that time he neglects to tell us that the unemployment rate in Trinidad and Tobago was 16.7 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** Shame! Traitors do not have to explain "nothing".

**Hon. R. Dumas:** He is so much in a hustle to denigrate his ex-leader. He is so much in a hustle to praise the present leader—[*Laughter*] you know. Today, the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre is the Attorney General for this glorious party that we have and this efficient and serving Government. You know, there is no trumpet, there is no hoopla, because we understand that every serving Member of the Government is a worthy Member of the Government. [*Desk thumping*]

I think it is fair to say that the Member for Oropouche East would have hurt the Member for Couva North one more time. You see, in his hustle to demonstrate his change, his place—three weeks ago we had a different statement. He forgets who trained him. He forgets who "catch" him. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I will relate all that I am saying to the Motion, do not worry, because there is a dislocation in terms of what is the truth. How do you demonstrate your worth, of having spent funds that are available from the State, available by transfers from the State, and, then we are so hopelessly off the mark?

Mr. Speaker, let me just give you some data to demonstrate how much the Member for Oropouche East has lost his way. He is saying to us that we are in a job crisis.

**Hon. Member:** Crisis, that is the word he used.

**Hon. R. Dumas:** The Member for Oropouche East, like some of his colleagues, would like to get into power in this country by telling this country that we are so badly off that we are suffering and get the country to believe that we are suffering. Even as he condemns the discussions we have with people we hire from abroad, he is lauding this Obama, this great speech we have from Obama, talking about the state of the nation.

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But then the Member for Oropouche East has a responsibility to examine the state of Trinidad and Tobago. What is the state of Trinidad and Tobago? Let us look at some of the economic indicators we have. The nominal GDP of Trinidad and Tobago has moved from US \$19 billion in 2006; to US \$22 billion in 2007; to US \$24 billion in 2008; to US \$25 billion in 2009 and it is expected in 2010 to give us, US \$27 billion. [*Desk thumping*] That is a crisis? Where is the crisis?

He is talking about employment and employees suffering for loss of income. What is the information? The GDP per capita is US \$14.6 thousand in 2006; \$16.3 thousand in 2007; \$18.1 thousand in 2008; ending with \$20.1 thousand in 2010. Is that a crisis for the working man in Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the GDP growth rate in real dollars—2006, 13.5 per cent change; 2007, 4.6 per cent; 2008, 2.3 per cent; in 2009, he tells us is 0 per cent, but the projection from the think-tank of the Deutsche Bank group—he tell us—is 2 per cent. Is that job crisis in this country? That is not the state of the American economy. Growth change is totally absent from the United States economy, therefore one could understand why Mr. Obama would want to spend so much time lamenting the result of the crisis on the American economy. Of course, they have a crisis at 9.6 per cent unemployment and growing. It is not a similar structure, a similar impact on the Trinidad and Tobago economy, and this is not what we would have expected, from a man who spends our money to get a PhD. The Member for Couva North, I am sure this is not the kind of analysis you would have expected. Total disappointment!

He wants to come to power by telling untruths to the people about the state of their lives and the state of their economy. That is what he is trying to do.

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** Conditioning the mind of the people.

**Hon. R. Dumas:** Attempting to negatively condition the minds of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

He tells us that our industry is failing and has fallen. [*Interruption*] What is the count in terms of our exports? [*Interruption*] We have changed. Yes, we had exports falling in 2009, but understand that the change is 17 per cent growth in 2010. That is what the figures tell us. [*Desk thumping*] Is that a failing economy where you have a job crisis?

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** And no rotten rice.

**Hon. R. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, while we have been doing that, we have been financing a growth in import. But that still leaves us—we are looking at international reserves, and when you look at the constant growth point that you have from \$6.7 billion to US \$7 billion you cannot suggest that there is a crisis here.

Our total public debt is constant over the last period; our exchange rate constant over the longest period, and therefore making sure that workers' earnings are protected, because we do not have any drastic change in the relationship between the Trinidad and Tobago dollar and the international exchange rate. Therefore we have workers who are earning more in industry, which is earning more in an economy which is growing, and certainly with the wage and the pay packet being protected by value in the real exchange rate to the rest of the world. That is our situation. The Member for Oropouche East is seeking to tell us something different.

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** "Judases maximus."

**4.15 p.m.**

**Hon. R. Dumas:** The Member for Oropouche East is seeking to tell us something different in terms of the unemployment rate. That is what he says. The unemployment rate is escalating because of the crisis. We have moved the unemployment rate in Trinidad and Tobago from, in 1998, a high of 14.2 per cent, to a low of 4.5 in 2008. [*Desk thumping*] That is where we are. And you have a gradual growth that has re-emerged to 5.8 per cent in the third quarter of 2009.

Mr. Speaker, that is the truth. What the Member for Oropouche East was seeking to paint—well, I cannot use that word—was of total falsehood. Therefore, one has to examine what he said from that perspective. Do you know what we are really facing? The Member for Oropouche East is demonstrating that really very little has changed on that side. He gets up to celebrate a protest in Rio Claro. He forgets to tell us that for three years civil disobedience has been the mantra of the Opposition. He forgets to tell us that in looking at the state of the union, that this industrial relations hiatus that is arising now in Rio Claro is organized by the Opposition. He forgets to tell us that if you are organizing the PSA as a political instrument, and you are organizing the workers of Rio Claro as a political instrument under one hand, then all we are seeing is the result of your organization.

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** It is the water truck drivers that are protesting.

**Hon. R. Dumas:** Well, I know. I used to be there, and we know who the owners of the water trucks in Rio Claro are. Do we not?

**Hon. Member:** Who?

**Hon. R. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, I want to suggest to you, that this matter that has been brought by the Member for Oropouche East—he wrote it at a different time—came today—

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I heard the Member for Oropouche East speaking of starvation of funds for Rio Claro, and every time I come to that argument, starvation of funds to local government, starvation of funds to institutions that you want to destroy—in other words, that is what he is saying. That is what he puts out there—I remember, because I always have to remember, having had to examine the books of local government for quite a large piece of time, there were many times when the Opposition was in Government, had the opportunity to treat with the funding for local government, and there were institutions in local government that were given no dollars for development, in which the whole denigration and destruction of those regional corporations would have been taken into account.

I would like to ask the Member for Oropouche East to apologize for those years, before he can dare say, that today, [*Desk thumping*] when the allocations to local government have been constantly increasing over the last six to seven years, that Rio Claro or any of these corporations is being starved for funds. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** "You aint see where he sitting down. He has no shame."

**Hon. R. Dumas:** If we have problems, the unspent balances that they are accumulating, is what they should be accounting for and bringing to book.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** Look where he sits, he has no shame.

**Hon. R. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, the Member for Oropouche East seeks to tell us that we are having a problem—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please! You are all crosstalking, and you have lost the Member for Tobago East. [*Laughter*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** That is what he is doing, deliberately.

**Hon. R. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to continue. We are talking about jobs, and again, the Member for Oropouche East tried to tell us that we are losing jobs, and the rate at which we are losing jobs creates a crisis for us. What is our reality?

Between 1998 and 2008, the contribution of services jobs, unlike what he is saying. You see, they like to get up and say, make jobs. But the reality is that people pay for service directly, and when you have growth in the sector of the economy which contributes to the creation of jobs in services, you are speaking about jobs that people pay directly for, that you cannot hide and you cannot lie about. Therefore, if the contribution of services moves from 70 per cent of the jobs we have, to a situation in

which we have 83 per cent of our jobs in services, then that cannot be fake jobs. Those are real jobs. When the number, not just the ratio, but the number, the absolute number, moves from 403,000 jobs in services to 497,000 jobs in services, those are real jobs created by a government that has an active occupational policy and job policy. That is our reality. When we have jobs in the industry, 6,000 jobs more than we had in that time, with a net gain of 83,500 jobs, then that is a positive.

What is the loss we have had reported? We have lost 3,500 jobs. We have a situation where the argument made by the Member for Oropouche East is totally unsupported. We have a labour force that has been relatively constant because our population growth has been constant. What you have had is an ageing population, so therefore, the proportion of the population that is moving into the retired section of the population is growing faster than any other group, and in that context, our labour force that is employed, is remaining more or less constant if not growing. In that situation, we have had a continued growth of the number of people employed. The Member for Oropouche, therefore, has not been able to demonstrate that the persons without jobs are increasing. That has moved from 39,000 jobs in 2006, to 30,300. Those are the absolute figures. They are available to any research. If again I say that he has been using people who are not credited to do this kind of job, then that is the truth.

He comes and says to us that there are these massive losses of jobs in various sectors of the population, various sectors of the economy. The reality is that we have a reported number of 3,881 jobs lost. Now, of course, we know that there is some level to which there would have been jobs lost that are not reported, but we can take what we know and extrapolate from that and know, that with quite a degree of confidence of what has been said to us is being grossly exaggerated. We must know that we have a job force with about 689,000, 690,000, 700,000 people, and in that situation, we know from the number lost from the petroleum sector, these are generally formal jobs in the formal sector, and therefore, you can in fact depend on those figures. You would be less able to depend on those figures in the informal sector, but certainly from the formal sector you could depend on those figures, especially where you have a high level of unionization.

Our record shows 941 jobs lost in petroleum, 648 in finance, 618 in transport, giving us a number that we could know is 3,881, or very near there. We also know that there is a frequency in which people are getting back into jobs, and if you know that people are getting back into jobs within three months, then, is that a crisis? It cannot be a crisis. If you know that people are getting back into jobs within four months or as a larger count, or a whole year will pass and a person does not get back a job, then you will have to be careful. But as usual, the Member for Oropouche East tells us that

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what we are doing here is of no use and we should depend on the pattern set by the USA, even as he condemns using managers from that economy. We want to suggest that our figures are dependable, our system gives us the information, and contrary to his argument, we in fact have a labour management information system that is working and informs us very well of what we are doing.

The Member for Oropouche East makes an argument that says to us, that because the Industrial Relations Act was passed in 1971 and the Industrial Court was set up at that time, then we have a responsibility to turn it over. I wonder what he would tell us about our High Court and our Court of Appeal. Should we be treating them the way he cavalierly says that we should just change them for change sake?

Mr. Speaker, there is a fundamental problem with what the Member for Oropouche East tried to do to us. He came and sought to close his presentation in his argument about decent work, and he suggested that the Government was neither aware or able to manage its activities according to best principles of decent work; that we were not able to ensure that there were high quality jobs; that we were not able to ensure that the young population can access the high quality jobs in our economy. He wanted to suggest that there were no systems to treat with people who may fall off that system, so therefore, social protection was a little low. I want to tell the Member for Oropouche East, that any analysis you do, point for point, factor for factor, with just about any country in the world, Trinidad and Tobago stands head and shoulder over most countries and side by side with any. [*Desk thumping*]

What have we been doing about making sure that our workforce can access the best jobs in our economy? That is normally a feature of the training programme that we do, the access to tertiary education, et cetera. Let us look at some of the figures that we can put on the Table. Our figure showed that the access to tertiary education in Trinidad and Tobago has improved and continues to improve. Last year, we had a total number of 5,353 graduates from our tertiary education programmes. From COSTAATT we had 818; from UTT we had 769; from UWI we had 3,481; and from the University of the Southern Caribbean we had 285; all enjoying access assisted by the Government, provided for by the Government, and with supporting features as the health programme.

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** That does not include private.

**Hon. R. Dumas:** That does not include the private universities. Our total enrolment at this point in time is 35,500 people. Again, we are dealing with guaranteed access to these people into the future, making sure that they are equipped to come into employment.

So the present enrolment would go: COSTAATT, 7,400 students; UTT, 6,900; the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, 16,000; and the University of the Southern Caribbean, 5,000. This is significant in the working population of the size we have, because we are treating here with graduates coming into the system, replacing workers who are moving out. If last year we had 5,300 graduates and we can assume that some of them went back into the system, a loss of 300 people, we are talking here about new people, into new systems, treating with new organizations. Our projection graduation rate would have also changed to a situation where in a year or two, we can expect a flow out of the universities of 10,500.

You see, unlike the argument of the Member for Oropouche East, the numbers are known, the factors are going, the flow is understood and preparation for them is there. All we can ask you is to support the drive for development that is going on in Trinidad and Tobago, and support the efforts of the Government. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for tea, and we will resume at 5.00 p.m.

**4.31 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5.00 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Hon. R. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, having established the rate at which our students are graduating from the universities, I think we just need to complete that picture, the inclusion of the fact that other skills training by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education will include 150,000 of our young workers.

We need to identify the fact that over the last eight years or so, the graduations from YTEPP would number just over 223,000 graduates and, of course, the Multi-Sector Skills Training Programme (MuST) would have given us 26,000 persons. In other words, in our 700,000 workforce, just about 50 per cent of the individuals have gone through some type of training or programming giving us a total of 399,000 members of our workforce and working age people having benefited from the programmes by the State.

That by no means could be a non-preparation and non-provision of capacity and, therefore, when we speak to the concept of decent work that speaks to pride in oneself, capacity, meaningful employment, and believe that you are contributing to the institution you are in, I think we are well on the way to satisfying those requirements as laid out in the charter for decent work.

Mr. Speaker, one of the travesties again brought to the Table by the Member for Oropouche East is the concept when he says that coming out of the proud

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tradition of the People's National Movement, the whole concept of what should be the driving philosophy of the development of the industry in Trinidad and Tobago, the People's National Movement has held to the view that the economy is for the people and, therefore, strong earning points and development points in the economy must redound and be maintained in the ownership of the country.

I heard the Member for Oropouche East deriding that concept. I am not aware that he is aware that what he is in fact saying to us may be—if that is the philosophy of the UNC today, then they should let the population know. Is the UNC telling us through the Member for Oropouche East that we must sell Petrotrin, sell our shares in TSTT, we must sell out all the government-owned participation in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago?

To carry his purported vision—because I know they have none—his argument of policy, contradictory as it is, is he saying to the population of Trinidad and Tobago that has derived so much benefit from Government and public ownership of sectors of the economy, or firms in various sectors of the economy, high earning sectors of the economy like National Gas, Petrotrin, TSTT and all the agencies, that they should be sold and get out of economic activity? Is that what the Member for Oropouche East is saying to us?

When he says to us that we are using the earnings from the state sector and the energy sector to create welfare jobs, I thought the whole concept of a State is to seek the welfare of the citizenry of that State and, therefore, if the earnings of the State are redounding to the welfare of the individuals, the families and the communities of Trinidad and Tobago, is the Member for Oropouche East saying that is a philosophy which the UNC rejects? I suggest that we need to make our position clear.

What was paramount in the argument of the Member for Oropouche is a number of "ifa, woulda, coulda, shoulda". If they had more time they would have passed the legislation, they "coulda" passed this thing and somebody "shoulda" bring to the Parliament the legislation they left behind.

Mr. Speaker, I want to suggest that if there are regrets as to what the UNC should have done in its term in office, then they have to keep that to themselves. They have to rewrite the policy, bring it as a programme, propose it to the population and, hopefully, convince the population that they deserve the opportunity to do it.

The Member for Oropouche East also took some time to speak to NEDCO. I think we want to answer that, I want to say thanks to the Member for at last, after eight years having someone from the UNC agree that there is merit and, therefore, there was merit in the formation of NEDCO in making sure that small people in

this country could have had the opportunity to have their business ventures and ideas financed by a provision of the State. I say thanks to the Member for at last having that come from the Opposition Benches.

For eight years they derided the idea, the operation and beneficiaries of that programme. Today, we can stand and tell you those 9,000-plus members of the Trinidad and Tobago population; indigenous people, leaders of families, members of communities were able to have their business ventures financed. [*Desk thumping*] If he wants to know how much money was spent, I would advise him that NEDCO has been saying that up and down the country.

Right now, NEDCO is engaged in a series of public consultations and conversations with their clients starting in City Hall and you can get the questions answered. Individuals can say how they want to carry this organization to the next stage to ensure that it continues to be a viable organization to the satisfaction of the entrepreneurial dreams of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, NEDCO is a success born out of the philosophy and policy of the People's National Movement giving the people of Trinidad and Tobago a chance to be full economic citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the reality. And, therefore, any attempt by the Member for Oropouche East or his Members to smear and denigrate the NEDCO model using the protection of Parliament, I suggest that you try a different attack. After eight years, that institution has demonstrated its worth by contributing to the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Every firm has at least two or three persons employed in there, so we can multiply the number of firms supported, created and sustained by two or three persons in terms of contribution to employment and that is more than the job loss we would have received from any fallout that you have. Again, the reality of NEDCO defeats the postulate that the Member for Oropouche East came to the Parliament with in this Motion.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Oropouche East does not understand the concept of decent work, he does not understand that decent work rests firmly on the conception of the 2020 vision. The pillars of the vision carry the conception that we are speaking to the population; it speaks to individuals in the population of our 1,000,000-plus people, 700,000 of them being workers are fully a part of our thrust to building better infrastructure, competitive businesses, a caring society and certainly taking care of our environment and, most of all, our government system.

Therefore, whether we are speaking of local government reform, constitutional reform or in fact, building roads, electrical infrastructure and water infrastructure,

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we are speaking of the livelihood of people as they earn a living and as they contribute to the development of the society in doing so. When the Member for Oropouche East makes the argument that he makes and, in fact, has it refuted by the reality of the development of the country, by the reality of the fact that we are in a growth period when the rest of the world is seeing significant problems; when the fact is that we can maintain in the main, our employment level; when the figures tell us that our per capita earnings are staying steady, if not growing; that when we can say to ourselves—because the figures show us that—that we can maintain the earnings that will support the quality and standard of living of our people, I want to suggest to you that this Government has demonstrated that it understands the concept of decent work and is able to carry it forward.

Mr. Speaker, we operate from the perspective that we are into a tripartite system: business, labour and Government working together for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. In that context, we are fully a member and partner of the international ILO system. We have ratified every critical convention of the ILO; we have ratified 19 of them, eight being the core conventions. In every single case, we have satisfied and met the criteria for joining best practices in terms of the employment system of Trinidad and Tobago and the rest of the world.

Whether we are speaking of the future—the Member for Oropouche East tells us that whatever they left behind was of some use and we say yes. Everything you left behind is useful data, but the structure in which you would have put the proposed bills may not have been adequate. Even if we were to take the last debate we had here when we were speaking of the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority, the UNC was telling us to ignore the concepts of the right to freedom of collective association.

They were telling us that we could entrench an organization to represent people without the benefits of the actions of those people and so forth. Those are the kinds of falsehoods, the kinds of breaches of principle that litter the Bills that were left behind. The concept that you can go into people's money, whether they are individual workers or employers, that you can dip your hand into the coffers and transfer it to uses that you determine without the required constitutional review as was left in the Compensation Bill which was in draft in the ministry, we are suggesting that these are not principles to which we adhere.

We are also suggesting that all can come under review under the ILO committees. We have in fact put those tripartite committees in place. There are at least seven of them in place in situations in which the Government, labour and business are in fact collaborating on issues that have to do with employment and equality and, therefore, we have no hesitation in the strengthening of this social dialogue. It is

easy to say social dialogue, but it requires certain distance of attitude, a certain hesitation to intrude into other people's face and when the UNC urges the kind of intervention that they do, it breaches the concept of social dialogue.

You cannot bully people into this so-called social dialogue of yours, they have to be encouraged, fully participant and be committed to the process. You cannot go in there and say, "I am the strongman, therefore, you must join me". We see some of it being displayed even now, but the point is that is what we must deal with.

We understand that social dialogue is a central pillar of good governance and, therefore, we work and continue to work in that concept from the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development and we encourage other people to participate in that. The tripartite committees on boards operating under the social dialogue purview would include the International Labour Organization No. 144 Tripartite Committee.

#### **5.15 p.m.**

At present, it is being led by a Mr. Cabrera from the labour unions and, of course, a representative, Mr. Hilton Clarke, of the Employers' Consultative Association is the chairman. The Minimum Wages Board is again another tripartite committee; the National Productivity Council in which we take responsibility for the measurement and development of a productive culture for work in Trinidad and Tobago; we treat with the Occupational Safety and Health Authority, which, again, is another tripartite authority; we treat with the Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies board of directors, again participating in a beautiful tripartite meeting this morning, demonstrating that this is alive and well.

We have the HIV/AIDS Project Advisory Board which treats with HIV at the workplace, the management of that HIV being so debilitating in our country. The whole question of Decent Work Policy, again, a tripartite activity that maybe the Member for Oropouche heard us announce and therefore thought that he should pen this note and bring it here, being inadequately prepared; unfortunately, not understanding that what he was seeing when we were speaking on the television, we were seeing a considered paper having gone to Cabinet, having won the support of my colleagues and making sure that this Decent Work Policy pervades the Government and the country. You came to accuse us of something that you knew not, that we were treating with.

What we were doing, in fact, was pulling together all the policies that treat with exposition of work, protection of workers, social protection under that ministry, development of our opportunities under the Ministry of Trade and Industry, development of the capacity of our people in science and technology. In

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other words, all of this being one network of opportunity, one network of contribution that contributes to the quality of life of the population of Trinidad and Tobago. That is, in effect, what you mean by decent work.

When, in fact, the Member for Oropouche refers to the ILO statement, what he does not understand, taking out that one sentence out of the matrix of policies which ILO supports and which was, in fact, being put to the world by the director-general, that he was being false to the concept; false to the policy; false of the perpetuation and exposition of the policy and, therefore, he was doing the policy a disservice. We want to suggest—

**Mr. Speaker:** Sorry to interrupt you. Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. J. Ross*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. R. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, I was hoping to be able to finish quickly, but I thank my colleagues for allowing me to continue.

I will end by saying that the decent work concept recognizes that it is a mainstreaming of an integrated and sectoral approach to be adopted by all stakeholders in the country to ensure that the policies for development; the strategies for development; the programmes for development and activities target all workers, including the disadvantaged or marginalized groups, seen as young workers, persons with disabilities, workers in the informal sector, workers in the rural areas and all understanding that the global crisis which fortunately this Government has been able to manage so that its impact in this country is less than in most countries around the world, that this requires a clear policy framework which promotes policy coherence, sustainable enterprises and work while securing decent working conditions.

It is also important that we understand that the framework is built on a platform of continuous dialogue. I inform you that the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, the Government, has agreed that a Decent Work Policy framework be developed for Trinidad and Tobago, incorporating all the things we do well and identifying those that we can make better for the people of Trinidad and Tobago as we seek continuous improvement on the five pillars of the 2020 programme.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

**Mr. Jack Warner** (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the last 45-plus minutes we have been, in a sense, told all kinds of matters by the hon. Member for Tobago East except the Motion itself. Every single thing we have been told except the Motion and if ever it was difficult to listen to a contribution by a Member in this Chamber, the last speaker was it.

The hon. Member began by saying that the Member for Oropouche East must not tell the country that we are badly off to frighten the country and he gives the impression that the Member for Oropouche East, in his presentation, was talking about doom and gloom to terrorize the country; to frighten the country because that is the style on this side. I am saying, at no point in time I got that impression. But, more importantly, the Member for Oropouche East does not have to frighten the country by telling the country anything; the country is already frightened. When four persons can be murdered in a home in broad daylight, the country is frightened; when the country gets water in homes once every fortnight or once per week, the country is frightened; when there are no beds in the hospital, the country is frightened; when murders and mayhem pervade the land, the country is frightened. Why should the Member for Oropouche East have to come here to frighten the country? He does not have to come to do your job for you. You guys are doing a very good job on that side; very good.

All the problems that bedevil this country, you think we have time to come here to frighten the country? We have to come here to give the country solace, comfort, consolation. That is what we are coming here to do. [*Interruption*] I am coming to you just now; do not worry. Therefore, I am amazed that the first 10/15/20 minutes, the last speaker totally wasted our time; spent his contribution interfering in the business of the UNC—

**Dr. Moonilal:** Shame on you, man.

**Mr. J. Warner:**—and not on the Motion. I want to make this point, that we in the UNC have the capacity to fix our own business and we, of course, do not want help from the last speaker or anybody else.

The hon. Member for Tobago East says that the Member for Oropouche East wants to come into power by telling untruths.

**Dr. Moonilal:** He said that?

**Mr. J. Warner:** He said so—by telling untruths. But I say to you, you want to stay in power by being a stranger to the truth. Otherwise, how do you explain your \$2 million flag that began from \$18,000 and reached \$2 million? Was that not untruth? How do you explain the UDeCott enquiry? Was that not untruth?

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How do you explain, of course, the carnival centre that never started? Was that not untruth? How do you compare your question: where the \$10 million gone, when you know where it went? Was that not untruth?

So why do we have to come here to talk untruth? Why do we have to do that? I spent the first 53 minutes listening to all the explanations for a simple question that was asked a week ago—simple question.

**Dr. Moonilal:** What about the \$30 million?

**Mr. J. Warner:** I do not know about the \$30 million, but if you could tell me, I will be happy. But begin by telling me about the flag money and I will tell you about the \$30 million. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mr. J. Warner:** The manager of the Sport Company resigned his job in protest against the flag money. Right? Because that was untruth. So he resigned his job. Tell this House why he left his job.

**Mr. Hunt:** Soca Warriors money—

**Mr. J. Warner:** Soca Warriors money? That is all you know about? Anyhow, I am saying, at the end of the day, we do not have to do that. Even job creation, the hon. Member for Tobago East talks about job creation and he says that persons without jobs are not increasing. I want to tell the Member for Tobago East, that if he looks at the CSO Labour Bulletin in November 2009, he will see in that bulletin there were three consecutive increases in the unemployment rate in this country in the last three quarters. He will also see that the unemployment rate moved from 5.1 per cent in the second quarter to 5.8 per cent. He will see that the job loss suffered were basically paid employees in the government service and, moreover, he will see that at the end of the third quarter, 2009, the labour force stood at 616,000, a decrease of 8,200. He will see a decline in the female labour force of 3.5 percent, from 256,000 to 247,400. He will see, of course, in the first six months alone that 5,000 jobs were lost. He will see also that the greatest job loss has been in the age category of 18 to 29.

Therefore, to talk about job creation and to tell us here that persons without jobs are not increasing is an untruth. In 2008, Trinidad and Tobago ranked 59<sup>th</sup> in the world in terms of providing jobs. We were 59<sup>th</sup> in 2008. Today we are ranked 66 and you can get those figures from the CIA, World Fact Book online. So to come here and to posture and to give the impression, as if there are no job losses, is an untruth. More importantly, I want to make the point to you—

**Mr. Dumas:** Member for Chaguanas West—

**Mr. J. Warner:** Sure.

**Mr. Dumas:** I am sure that in my statement you heard me say that—thanks for giving way. I am sure that in my statement you have heard me say that there were losses through retrenchment. [*Interruption*] I did say that. I did say there were job losses through retrenchment. I never said there were no job losses.

**Mr. J. Warner:** I am not indulging in semantics, you know.

**Mr. Dumas:** No, no. You are saying that I am saying untruths.

**Mr. J. Warner:** I am, of course, telling you that you said that there were. I quote you. You said that "persons without jobs are not increasing". You said that. I have it here and I am telling you that is not true and I am giving you facts and figures to dispute that.

I go further to tell you that in "Poverty" for the year 2007, this country was ranked 12 in the world behind Nigeria, West Bank, Ghana, Iran and so on. We were ranked 12 in the world. You will see, of course—and while all this is going on, we are coming here to talk about church; we are coming here to talk for 53 minutes about a church and questions which were asked a week ago—three simple questions; that is all—we are concerned here about job creation, not, of course, 53 minutes to talk about a church.

I want to make the point that the Member for Tobago East said, and I quote again: "People are getting back into jobs within three months; there is no crisis." There is no crisis. I want to tell you that that, again, is not true. People are losing their jobs day and night and they began to lose their jobs the day this Government adopted the skyscraper approach to governance.

### **5.30 p.m.**

This Government went on a wild and obscene spree of spending money; littered the town with massive buildings at the expense of local workers. It is not correct. Listen to some of the figures you have spent so far: CHOGM, \$500 million; Summit of the Americas, another \$500 million; the Diplomatic Centre, \$500 million plus; the incomplete Brian Lara Stadium, \$1.4 billion; the National Academy of the Performing Arts (NAPA), \$478 million; to find a Commissioner of Police that you have not yet found, \$4.6 million; culture scholarships, \$51 million; high commission buildings in Canada and Washington, \$114 million, and the list goes on—millions of dollars. You are spending money like chillibibi and we are paying the price for that today. I am saying that is not correct.

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In all of this, we have that famous flag at the Hasely Crawford Stadium for \$2 million. Instead of providing jobs, you continue with this skyscraper philosophy. Your philosophy is to build skyscrapers and monuments. I, therefore, dispute the fact that what you are saying here is true. Even those in this country who are lucky to have a job are forced to live on the minimum wage of \$10 an hour.

Let us do the math: eight hours per day at \$10 per hour is \$80 per day. If that breadwinner works five days per week, that is \$400. If he is the sole breadwinner in a family of four, it means that each person survives on \$20 per day; about US \$3 per day. All of this is happening because of the skyscraper philosophy.

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, March 05, 2009 at 1.30 p.m. On that day, we will start Motion No. 1, by the Minister of Finance: *Be it resolved* that this honourable House take note of the economic situation in the country and the Government's efforts in that regard.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 5.33 p.m.*