Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members requesting leave of absence from the sitting of the House: Hon. Prakash Ramadhar, Member of Parliament for St. Augustine, for the—

Mr. Ramadhar: Mr. Speaker, I am here.

Mr. Speaker: You are here?

Mr. Ramadhar: It is from tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker: Oh, I am very sorry.

Mr. Ramadhar: I made arrangements to leave on Saturday.

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry. My apologies, Members. Withdrawn. Let me just look again [Laughter] to make sure that I do not have more surprises. I will pause for the time being and allow the Clerk to continue.

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2011) BILL

[Fourth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [September 08, 2010]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

The Minister of Justice (Hon. Herbert Volney): May it please you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in order to support the budgetary measures introduced by the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna, our Minister of Finance. Let me, on behalf of all the constituents of St. Joseph, thank the hon. Minister for his steady hand in budgetary measures. It will bring some comfort to most as it says, to return responsible fiscal and monetary policy to an economy in grave difficulty.

My constituents are also deeply honoured and proud to have one of us from our midst elevated to the Chair of Speaker, and have authorized me to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, and wish you wisdom and good judgment in this very esteemed office of the Legislature. [Desk thumping]
We in the great constituency of Real Street and Maitajual in the North, St. Joseph and Farm Road/Bangladesh in the East, Bamboo No. 1 and Valsayn/Jamboree in the South, Aranguez in the West, bring greetings to this august Chamber, as together we celebrate the emergence of greatness in humility of our first lady Prime Minister, the Member for Siparia, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [Desk thumping]

We thank the Almighty for her leadership, both of the People's Partnership and of this nation, and for emancipating the neglected and forgotten, the marginalized, the poor, from the oppression of the People's National Movement. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, as I rise on this third day of this historic debate, it would be remiss of me if I did not for the moment thank all those who offered prayers and their support for me in my recent period of health challenges. If I may say so, I would recommend the services of our hospital here in Trinidad and Tobago to all men over 55 for bypass surgery. [Desk thumping] They can rest assured that they will work well after it. [Laughter and desk thumping]

As I rise on this third day of this historic debate, I feel emboldened and energized by the speaker in whose footsteps I follow. In my judgment and from my count, the Opposition lies on the canvas of defeat, having offered nothing to respond. [Desk thumping] As I walked into the wicket, well padded, willow in hand, with the score already at 401 without loss [Desk thumping] and all the Sad Sacks, the 12th man from San Fernando East, the hon. Member included, scattered all along the boundary, the keeper included. There is, Mr. Speaker, no longer a need for me to "voops" as the single will win the match for us on this side.

Mr. Speaker, there is no match at this stage of the debate, which is all but over. There is just O'Halloran from Diego Martin North/East. I beg your pardon. The hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, still to come in, as well as the Members from Port of Spain South, Point Fortin, Laventille West, Diego Martin Central and, finally, the hon. Member for San Fernando East who sit opposite, who may well be sent in to use what is left of his debating skill to propup what has been at best, a very disappointing performance from the Members opposite. [Desk thumping]

I can find little to counter in the offerings, but I do take offence to the cheap attempt by the Member for Laventille East/Morvant to make the news yesterday, by trying to make members of the police service believe that there is any seriousness in her presentation to the CPO earlier this year, when they knew they were about to be trounced at the polls of 39 per cent increases and more proposed
for at least one level of that service by the then PNM government. This is cheap politics and I truly deprecate it as a junior Member of this august Chamber. It was a new low in the debate.

I fear that the proximity of the Member to the rot of the PNM has lifted the fleas of mischief from the merchant. I hope that this is not endemic, for we shall have diatribe of dihorrific proportions in that which is to follow. [Desk thumping] I do not wish to add to the misery of the Opposition any future by rubbing their noses into the sand or adding salt to their obvious wounds. They are dead and dead beyond redemption. It will not then be my remit to focus on the ineptitude and neglect of the people by the People's National Movement between 2001 and 2010. My parliamentary colleagues have done that for me, and on May 24, let me remind us all and the national community, the national community spoke at the polls.

My brief then is to share with the national community the plans of the Ministry of Justice for the fiscal year 2010/2011. My brief is also to give the national community an insight of where I expect my Ministry to be, when we return to the polls in 2015 after a successful first term in office. [Desk thumping] Any look into where my Ministry shall lead requires firstly a synopsis of where we presently are as a result of years of neglect by those opposite.

Our prisons are bursting at the seams; crime is rampant; levels of detection are low and criminals walk the streets with impunity. The culture of homicidal death remains largely unchecked and unabated, notwithstanding some recent trends. Gangland activity has not been addressed. Criminal courts are overwhelmed by backlog and the timely delivery of justice is stymied by cerebral ineptitude and neglect. [Desk thumping] Criminal justice is not on time; criminal justice delivery remains a problem child of governance; systemic overhaul has been avoided; laws from the date of her Britannic Majesty Victoria continued to fail to deliver.

Given the snapshot, Mr. Speaker, there can be no doubt that our criminal justice system is in shambles and that there is a clear correlation between the emergence of a culture of criminal activity and the breakdown of the criminal justice system.

The levels of criminal activity are wholly unacceptable to this Government, the People's Partnership Government. To deal with this, our Government will move shortly to lead the attack on all acts of misfeasance spawned by gang warfare and the emerging culture of killing. Measures are already on the floor of this Chamber to outlaw gang activity. These measures will address the problem of unlawful associations and provide a net acceptable to the vast majority of the
citizens into which miscreants who terrorize us and sully the good name of our country will inevitably fall to be hunted down like prey, by our protective services and locked up behind bars, not to be released until due process is served.

Let the population be surely told, as I do, that the medicine will be bitter. It will be bitter like Buckley’s, but it will work. It has worked before and it will work again.

1.45 p.m.

Let our parents be warned. Teach your sons and daughters that they must not associate with a gangster, one who looks like a gangster or one who lives the life of a gangster. Choosing the gang way, associating with a gangster, loving up with a gangster or driving in a car with the gangster will lead to your detention. This measure will, as it has done before in different parts of the world, rid this country in a very short while of gangland, of gangsters and of gangster behaviour. It is one, Mr. Speaker, that will serve the end of returning sanity to the hot spots of our nation and with it a feeling of comfort and normalcy and it will ensure that the cancer of this scourge does not spread beyond.

The measures are guardedly draconian and the medicine bitter, Mr. Speaker, but they will work. The national community need not be alarmed. Due process will be respected but the rule of law and public order will prevail. [Desk thumping] It will adversely affect the miscreants, the bad Johns, those who bear arms without licence and those who associate with them. There will be safeguards in these measures to safeguard against abuse of power and there will be protection for the innocent. At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, this gang law will clean up the streets and distil them of guns and ammunition.

The fear of the law, the fear of the law, Mr. Speaker, will return to this country during the period the first term of governance of this People’s Partnership Government, and, street by street, community by community, the protective services will be empowered and emboldened to clean up the mess left by the PNM government whose failure to act has fed this foreign culture to our country. [Desk thumping] Those, Mr. Speaker, who expose their boxer shorts in public places as if to display a culture of offence foreign to our cultural values, I say, beware. Get your act together, for the law will not be kind to you.

May it please you, Mr. Speaker, I now address the subject of the near collapse of our criminal justice system. Those who pontificate in royal trappings that the statistics are good have a skewed sense of perspective. Statistics are just that, correctible and manipulable to serve narrow interests. I have not disrobed and
shorn myself of judicial trappings for any reason other than to make the point, Mr. Speaker, that to stay would be to continue in a system that is patently corruptible, irrelevant to the times in which we live and in dire need of far-reaching changes that no PNM government in the past would make.

I did not give up my $55,000 per month tax-free emolument package, generous tax-free grant and great status because I love politics, Mr. Speaker. I did not give up my chance of living in an opulent mansion at an indecent rental plus VAT in which the lofted one now resides at taxpayers’ expense because I was mad like Crazy. I gave it up to serve the people [Desk thumping] in a way—I gave it up to serve the people in a way that is fulfilling to my human spirit. I did it in answer to the call of my conscience, to avoid the hypocrisy of remaining. I made that giant leap of faith into the unknown in the sure knowledge that God is great, God is great, and God always is there for those who serve the poor and the oppressed. [Desk thumping] That is why we are here, Mr. Speaker, and they are there. [Desk thumping]

For those who remain, I shall, as Minister of Justice, carry the fight for needed change, some of which will come painfully but change, as it must, will surely come, much as the day follows the night. As I speak, some will cringe. Be not afraid for my certain exposure of your misdeeds and favour peddling will be surely exposed if, after being given the chance you do not now repent and atone for your misgivings. Fear me not, for, as your Minister of Justice, the mandate of my Ministry is not to persecute the innocent but work towards bringing those who unjustly enrich themselves to justice in a timely fashion, and bring to the altar of retribution those who break the law. The progressive, systemic transformation of the criminal justice laws, Mr. Speaker, avoided by the former government will see to it that those who shed the blood will pay the ultimate price while the pain of loss and suffering thereby inflicted on the survivor is still fresh and in want of the sweet taste that is justice.

This is why the honourable Prime Minister appointed me to this position which I accept in all humility. Return justice to the land. That was my clear injunction from the Prime Minister. Return justice to the land and the national community can be assured that I will work assiduously to do just that, return justice to the land. Your Minister has laboured long in the trenches of the criminal justice system. I can get the job done but it would help if, when the time comes, my friends opposite will see it in their purview to treat with crime and justice not as a political matter from which to gain points but one the solution of which requires, bipartisan collaboration, Mr. Speaker, which I shall seek to engender in the national interest.
I am confident that the measures to transform the criminal justice system will receive consensus on the floor of this Chamber. Very shortly, Mr. Speaker, my Ministry will hold a consultative assembly of stakeholders to hear the views offered on a ministerial White Paper on the way forward. The views offered will be considered before proposals for change are engendered. The short purpose of the consultation is to seek the views on the best way to bring matters to trial at the Criminal Assizes within one year of charge—one year of charge, Mr. Speaker. As it now stands, nothing is brought to trial before four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten years, Mr. Speaker. That was acceptable to the PNM but will not be acceptable to the People’s Partnership. [Desk thumping]

This ministerial White Paper is being prepared by the legal unit of my Ministry as I speak and this consultation is planned for a date to be fixed in November 2010. It is my ministerial wish to have a bill for this honourable House by the first quarter of 2011. I know that criminal trials within one year of arrest and charge is achievable, and all obstacles in this path will be confronted head-on in the sure knowledge, Mr. Speaker, that the people of Trinidad and Tobago have already spoken. On May the 24th, 2010 which I shall forever fondly recall as "Kamla Day", the people gave us the mandate to change the law, to confront crime with full force and swiftly to bring the miscreants, the infidels, the rogues and the vagabonds to justice.

When the transformation comes, though, there will be logistic problems to be confronted. Not a single new assize court building has been constructed in the 25 years preceding this day, the last one being in Scarborough. The number of active criminal Assize courts has remained stuck at nine in Trinidad and one in Tobago since 1994. With the escalation of crime in the last nine years of the PNM government, the volume of cases being added to the criminal cause list in the assizes has more than doubled during the period of remit.

There are hundreds of cases stacked up, literally, hundreds of cases stacked up and stacking up for trial at the criminal assizes, at the same time that the output at that level has progressively declined in the last eight years. I speak not from statistics, Mr. Speaker, which can always be manipulated in the way in which they are read, but I speak as one who is battle-scarred in the trenches long enough to speak with a voice and with moral authority few can match and certainly none on that side of the House can match.

I have been there, Mr. Speaker—[Desk thumping]—I have been there, Mr. Speaker and this situation could well have been avoided. The clear and unquestionable cause, wanton neglect of the Judiciary and the administration of justice by the former
People’s National Movement administration and in particular by a series of Attorneys General who were clearly out of their depth when it came to criminal justice administration and partnering with the Judiciary. Theirs was a clear lack of interest and focus in partnering with the Judiciary and the Law Association to effect systemic and other pointed measures in addressing the problems.

Mr. Speaker, the problem has been identified much as is coronary blockage and requires coronary bypass. [Desk thumping] In this regard, Mr. Speaker, those and their families who suffer long years of wait, necessary legal costs and uncertainty in their lives in the line for criminal justice are in the debt of the people for effecting the first required bypass on Kamla Day, May 24th, 2010 when, with a pencil with the precision of the surgeon’s scalpel, they excised and rid us of this first clot in the artery, cog in the wheel, fly in the ointment of progress, by decidedly removing the PNM from the corridors of government. That was a cerebral act of an educated, mature and progressive people to whom I say well done, well done, well done.

So, having had the PNM removed, Mr. Speaker, there remains systemic blockage to progress, logistic blockage to progress and finally the reactionary forces against change.

2.00 p.m.

Such is the mess in which the PNM, those on the other side, have left the criminal justice system of our beloved country. Once we, as a Government, and collectively, we, as a Parliament, equally bypass systemic and logistic blockage to the arterial system of criminal justice delivery, there is left only the forces of reaction to be dealt with. In this latter group will be the interest groups. Those who prosper on the inadequacies of the present failed ways of administering the criminal justice. Those who make a living in orchestrating a plethora of adjournments in the way of bringing closure, in order to collect, collect, collect.

I am very sorry, but enough is enough, as the young people say. And change must be embraced or you will be left behind. There will be those who are afraid of change, Mr. Speaker. There will be those in positions of authority who may feel that change must come from their own initiatives. As the Minister of Justice, I welcome any such initiative, but the Ministry of Justice is mandated by the people—by the people—to effect the change, and the change in criminal legislation will come from the new Ministry of Justice with a presidential warrant for just that.

In the last eight years, Mr. Speaker, the PNM, led by the hon. Member for San Fernando East, inept and corrupt as it had been, did precious little to partner with stakeholders to effect a desperately needed transformation of a criminal justice
system that clearly could not continue along its path of underperformance and non-delivery. From the bench of the Supreme Court, your Minister made a cry for help, known first to his boss, and then to the Government by way of *ex cathedra* statements and other intercessions. The message, "The laws governing criminal justice are Victorian, and by then, had clearly outlived their usefulness."

Mr. Speaker, I am here today for the reason that I grew to discover that speaking to the one in the exalted office was akin to speaking to John Jeremie; the then Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, it seemed to me as though the two were the same. During the period leading up to "Kamla day"—that day of redemption for the nation, May 24th, 2010—it became clear to me that the then Attorney General was involving himself more and more in the business of the Judiciary, in a way straddling the line of the Montesquieun concept of the separation of powers, and covertly undermining the independence of the Judiciary.

All I wish to add on this occasion of pleasantries is that the occupation of the mansion at Goodwood Park became the quiet subject within the Judiciary of discontent, given its cost to taxpayers, that the preceding Chief Justices had the great humility to live in their own residences, thereby saving taxpayers the cost of supporting opulence in hundreds of thousands of dollars each year at a time of thrift for the nation, and the rest of the pack grumbled at the housing pittance allowed them. That was a sweetheart deal, Mr. Speaker, between the then Attorney General—and do not tell me that Members opposite, including the Member for San Fernando East, was unaware of the sharing of opulent ways at a time of thrift in the nation.

In the meanwhile, this very important arm of governance has grown into a mini state, with departments planning construction of courthouses, but not delivering; and rapidly losing sight of its remit, which is to administer justice. To administer justice, I repeat, Mr. Speaker. Their remit—their constitutional remit—is to sit in Court; sit in Court, and deliver justice. Get the people’s appeals done. Get the people’s judgments. That is the remit of that very important part of our constitutional stricture, Mr. Speaker.

Make *Pratt & Morgan* worthless by hearing the appeals and delivering the judgments without undue delays. As I speak, Mr. Speaker, plans are emerging from the Ministry of Justice to address the issue of construction and delivery of courthouses to the Judiciary in the midterm. It is no use transforming the laws to enable swift readiness for trial of a criminal cause to place the matter at the end of, and into a list of backlog.

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry will shortly undertake a consultation with the Honourable Chief Justice, to obtain his blessings for the construction of criminal
courts in principle, along the East-West Corridor. To bring the criminal justice to the people, in the shortest possible time. It is envisaged that the construction of such plan will bring to an end the "ol’ talk" of the past by bringing the High Court finally—finally out of Port of Spain, out of San Fernando, into the eastern borough of Arima, and the municipalities along the way. And I will not forget Princes Town and central areas of this country as well.

How will the expansion of the Court to the eastern counties help the crime situation, Mr. Speaker? The answer is obvious to all but those on the other side. By providing new courthouses for trial at the assizes, rather than build tall buildings in Port of Spain, it will be possible to have a parallel system of criminal justice delivery. One court of two in each district for present day prosecutions, and the other to deal with the older matters still in backlog.

It is imperative to have this approach so that those who terrorize the population today will be taken off the streets, kept without bail depending on their criminal record, and/or their antecedents, and tried within one calendar year. The value of swift justice is to send a live and clear message to would-be criminals that should they cross that line, they will be locked up, tried swiftly and jailed. No more liming outside on bail. No bail, Mr. Speaker. It is jail. I repeat, no bail. [Desk thumping] It is jail.

It can be done, and while no provision has been made in the Public Sector Investment Programme at this time to that end, my Ministry is working assiduously to ensure that of immediate public sector investment review, our Minister of Finance will make it happen. Rome was not built overnight, but there is surely the laying of the first brick in the process of construction. Over all these years, there has been no preparation for this day. Just tall buildings, as I said before. Not a single new courthouse.

I shall work hard, Mr. Speaker, to bring the upper Judiciary decidedly to outside of Port of Spain and San Fernando; into the royal borough of Arima, St. Joseph, Trincity. Why not Trincity? Princes Town and Couva, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Sharma: Nothing in Fyzabad?

Hon. H. Volney: Whether or not I am met with obstacles, we shall rise over whatever obstacles are placed in our path, and we shall surely rise. [Laughter] At the end of this programme for the reconstruction of the criminal justice system, by providing much needed plan for the administration of justice, those of us who live outside of Port of Spain and San Fernando will not add to the congestion of the nation’s roadways in order to do jury service; to give evidence as witnesses, attend in the pursuit of justice, or just simply attend the Court to witness the proceedings.
With systemic changes that will entirely eliminate the old-time preliminary enquiry, and bring on simple sufficiency hearings before a judge of the High Court, in a structured way, the criminal justice system will be able to breathe once more. By freeing up the workload of our Magistrates, at the same time of introducing smart administrative measures and the Remand Court hearing, summary trials will now proceed unhindered by long lists to be adjourned by the presiding officer. In other words, Mr. Speaker, the plan is that when a magistrate comes to Court, he will spend the day trying matters and not in adjourning them.

Police complainants will not waste their day waiting on inevitable adjournments. As it now obtains, Mr. Speaker, magistrates spend almost a whole of a productive day adjourning their trial lists. These are matters that the former regime was aware of all these years and did nothing—I repeat, nothing to alleviate and to bring any measure of hope to those involved in the criminal justice system.

Mr. Speaker, we can neither afford nor continue in this way; the PNM way. And why is it the PNM way? Because the PNM was given the privilege of governing this country for all but 11 years since 1956, and did precious little to help the justice system along the way. We in the People’s Partnership Government will change all of that in our very first term in office. [Desk thumping]

And you better believe, Mr. Speaker, when we are through with our first term, it is said a good term deserves another. [Desk thumping] The people will speak again. By the end of the third term, all those who enjoyed nice black hair on the side opposite will be all grey, or bald-headed. [Laughter] There are some who will have retired by then, after perhaps 35 years in this august Chamber, having taken the opportunity to ride out into the west in the sunshine, in the setting sun. [Laughter] The sun sets in the west.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the criminal cause list at both levels of the administration of justice is overburdened with cold cases and dead wood; smart and cerebral ways will be found to address this issue. My own experience on the Bench has taught me that more people will throw themselves at the mercy of the court if assured that there will be no jail term for them. Sentencing reform is an important element of the portfolio of the Ministry of Justice. My Ministry has already begun an initiative to address this whole issue of plea bargaining, community service as an alternative to incarceration and, finally, a more enlightened type of incarceration, in keeping with the international movement of the day to attend to punishment issues in a more relevant and holistic way.
This by no means signals that the needed reforms would result in us going easy on criminals and letting them off the hook; by no means; but it will mean that in any sentence involving incarceration, that element of it will run secondary to parole, visitation, and even generous restoration of conjugal rights to those in our correctional facilities, as it now stands. When a man goes into prison his entire family is destroyed; his wife without any conjugal partner goes elsewhere, so when he comes out his family is all over the country. That will change under the People's Partnership Government.

One can even imagine that well before the sentence of the court is served out, a barnacled may enjoy time out for good behaviour, when he or she can progressively be released back in society without the stigma of having made a jail attached. Unlike what the Member for Arouca/Maloney rudely suggested, we have a plan; yes we do. Member for Arouca/Maloney, if you have not heard what the plan is, it may mean that you need to get a hearing aid like your leader from San Fernando East.

Mr. Speaker, this approach to enlightened sentencing will reduce significantly the incidents of recidivism as it now obtains in the PNM way, which is a very serious concern of the prison authorities and the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of National Security.

Our correctional facilities will be restorative homes and not universities of deviant behaviour, where young men who were in the wrong place, at the wrong time or who may not have had the benefit of a father figure in their lives, notwithstanding the best efforts of their single mothers, have found themselves on the wrong side of the law. Yes, we have a plan. Those who have to go in will come out the better for it; they will learn and they will work.
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  
Thursday, September 16, 2010  

[Hon. H. Volney]

colonial methods of dealing with the natives, but decidedly we shall restore our citizens in correctional facilities to good health.

It would be symbolic in this regard if we were to level the Royal Gaol on Frederick Street, where so many have been hanged by the neck and where inhumane conditions destroy the dignity of the human spirit and replace it with an appropriate monument to signal the emergence of a more enlightened nation. [Interruption]

Hon. Member: You said to hang them in Woodford Square.

Hon. H. Volney: The Ministry of Justice has begun an initiative to introduce in short measure an entirely new criminal procedure that will govern the conduct of criminal trials at the High Court. Trials in this new initiative need not be with a jury. While such an initiative might resemble one spoken of by my friends opposite in the last Parliament, you can rest assured that the dynamics here are not superficial as they then were, but far-reaching and progressive.

The time is coming when murder will be categorized depending on the circumstances. Trials will be without a jury, with a special jury or with a common jury, as now obtains. Progressive legislation is coming. No longer will attorneys speak for hours in order to justify exorbitant and sinful fees. Good sense will be made to return to the streams of the criminal justice system under my watch, from this side of it.

The lifeline of the courts, the Legal Aid system will be replaced in the fullness of time by a public defender system, whereby persons who cannot afford it will be afforded timely legal representation, at every stage of the process, leading to conviction or acquittal. The Judges’ Rules in force since 1965 will be replaced with new rules embodying the principles of fairness enunciated by our judges over the years. These new judges’ rules will enjoy the statutory force of law and will govern the conduct of police officers at all stages of their investigative work, so that there can be no doubt upon which line they may not cross and the citizen will know well of his rights guaranteed under the Constitution.

The law as it relates to alibi notice will be amended in short measure to ensure that if you were not at the scene of the crime and for that reason not culpable for it, your alibi must be made known together with all those who can support it, without one day of arrest and not years down the road as now obtains. If it is that you were not there and for that reason it was not you, then say right away where you were, with whom you were and forever keep your peace. [Laughter] This measure will aid police officers with precharge information, which may inform their decision as to whether a charge should be preferred or not. It may also serve to negate false alibis at the later date of trial.
Mr. Speaker, the law as it relates to tracking persons convicted of sexual offences and maintaining a registry of and for rapists both online and in hard copy, will be made effective by the introduction of regulations in this regard. Tracking devices will be attached to convicted persons allowed out on parole, on convicted persons released into society and persons allowed out on bail. We shall be smart about this and we will make those who are on the fringe surely cringe at the likely prospect that should they cross the line and do the crime, they will in short measure be caught, convicted and sent to do the time. The deterrence will be found in an enlightened criminal justice system that delivers, delivers and delivers on time. These are but some of the measures that my Ministry shall embark upon in fiscal year 2010/2011.

The Minister of Finance has been generous in his allocation of funds to support my Ministry's initiatives and we are grateful to him. I pray that our nation will support the fiscal measures by paying the income and corporation taxes, by not avoiding the imposition of VAT by avoiding the issuance of a receipt upon purchase of materials. Help your Government to succeed. Help your nation to rise; pay your taxes; give your time to worthy causes and help the poor. In this way God's blessings are assured to you and to our nation. The Treasury will be funded and your Ministry of Justice will have the resources to introduce, like never before, progressive measures that you will also wish to be part of.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh): Mr. Speaker, I consider myself very privileged in rising to contribute to this historic first People's Partnership budget debate in this our Tenth Parliament.

I consider myself privileged to be under the stewardship of a Prime Minister who was recently elected; a Prime Minister with extreme brilliance and charisma, of tremendous integrity, zeal and enthusiasm and a capacity for smart work; a Prime Minister who exhibits humility, caring, with strength of character and who is steadfast in purpose. Indeed, all of us on this side, I am sure, share those sentiments of being under the stewardship of a distinguished lady.

It would be very remiss of me as well, if I did not sincerely congratulate you on your position as Speaker of the House of Representatives. I remember sharing many years of struggles with you while in Opposition, in the other place; in the Seventh and the Eighth Parliament of 2004, when I was there in 2004, 2007 in the Ninth Parliament and now the Tenth Parliament. I remember your struggles for social justice, equality and equity and your struggles to keep democracy alive and
for transparency and accountability. My sincere congratulations to you, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure you will ensure in this Parliament that you keep us steadfast and purposeful and you will be watchful over us.

I also take this opportunity, being the first time I am speaking in this Tenth Parliament, to thank the constituents of Caroni East for re-electing me as their Member of Parliament. I also want to sincerely congratulate my colleagues who preceded me in their noble and tremendous contributions here in the Parliament.

My afternoon budget contribution will focus mainly on the education system. I thank the Prime Minister for the confidence she reposed in me to appoint me as the Education Minister, supported by my distinguished colleague, Hon. Clifton De Coteau, the Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Regarding our progress as a nation, I want to refer to the words of the late great American President, John F. Kennedy. What comes to mind is one of his quotes. He said:

“Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. The human mind is our fundamental resource.”

This budget statement by the distinguished economist, the Member for Tunapuna, has laid the framework for human and capital development, which will redound to sustainable development for all our people. He has reiterated the commitment of our People's Partnership Government to promote people centred development and leadership.

2.30 p.m.

In the theme of this budget which is "Facing the Issues – Turning the Economy Around", I am pleased to say the theme of my contribution in this budget debate is extremely similar: "Facing the Reality and Turning the Education Sector Around".

It was, after all, the great Chinese philosopher, which I am sure all my colleagues here have read, Confucius, who said: "If you think in terms of a year, plant a seed; if in terms of 10 years, plant trees; if in terms of 100 years, teach the people". And it is the intention of this Government to do so. Let us put ourselves in the situation of the reality at the moment in the education sector. It is my belief that we have had failed policies of the previous administrations which have severely compromised our educational system.

I want to take this opportunity to thank my two predecessors between 2001—2010: Minister Manning and Minister Esther Le Gendre, for the work that they
have done in the Ministry of Education. [Desk thumping] But I cannot congratulate them the way that I would have wanted to because of certain things that are in reality in the education system. Because every Minister goes in to do purposeful work and sincere work, but sometimes the system defeats them or sometimes they are unable to do what they want. But whether it has been so or not, the system is not right at the moment.

There have been questionable allocations in many areas in the education system over the period of nine years which require some degree of official probe by the Auditor General. The reality of nine years is one of wastage and lost opportunities—and I will elaborate on that—for the education system under the previous administration. The sad reality is that under the former Manning regime—the Member for San Fernando East—our education school system worsened to the point where it is at a level of near crisis that it is in today. It is crucial that we recognize the fallacies and failures of the previous regime so as to ensure that never again do we have a repeat of them.

Because, you see, the ones who pay and have paid the dearest price for this maladministration are the children of our nation. So even though I reflect on the sad realities, the People’s Partnership Government will be steering the course for a new path and a new destination in education. Our solutions and policies will, above all, reflect the fact that the significant problems we face in our education system cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them. We have to come out of the box. We cannot continue the same old way to change the education system.

Let me assure all of us in this House and the general public, that under the People’s Partnership Government we will ensure that the education sector and education system of Trinidad and Tobago will once more be restored to being the means of developing our greatest abilities, because it is said that in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, if fulfilled, can be translated into benefits for everyone and greater strength for our nation.

Three of the Members on the other side spoke to some extent on the issue of the laptop and I want to address that this afternoon. You know, the hon. Member for Diego Martin West continues to amaze me. This is the same gentleman who, on the one hand, was accused by his own Prime Minister, the Member for San Fernando East, one night when the Member for San Fernando East went beyond his time allocated for him, to accuse the Member for Diego Martin West of being a magician, of the disappearance of $10 million. We remember that night very well, Mr. Speaker; the Prime Minister there and the Member for Diego Martin
West out there. The Prime Minister accused the Member for Diego Martin West of a $10 million disappearance. He asked, "Where the money gone?" He stood with his hands open and stood from there and asked, "Where the money gone?" And later the same gentleman, the Member for Diego Martin West, blew the whistle on his own administration in the matter of Calder Hart and UDeCott, leading to an expensive enquiry and the most painful experience for his own party. In fact, his own people say that it led to the PNM's loss of the last general election and the subsequent local government elections.

We know, of course, this the People's Partnership would have beaten them without that, but nevertheless, if you score a goal on yourself, as the Member for Diego Martin West did, and it helped us to win the match, we have no problem thanking him for that. [Desk thumping]

But having done all of that, having been a person accused by his own party and a person accusing others of corruption, he seems to be becoming like a one-song calypsonian. All he knows is corruption. He is so obsessed with corruption that he is seeing it everywhere and in everybody and in everything.

There is the old saying that for a man whose only tool is a hammer, every problem is a nail. [Laughter] I feel sorry for him that he has only one tool. And do not pick up the People's Partnership laptop project as if it is a nail for him to pound on, except, of course, the proverbial nail might be in the political casket of this Rowley's PNM.

It certainly amazes me that they find, on that side, difficulty in accepting the fact that we are providing $83 million for our children of Trinidad and Tobago at an approximate cost of $800 per child for a five-year period to keep that laptop. They on that side find difficulty with it. They had not found difficulty in spending $300 billion over a nine-year period and wasting corruptly $30 billion under their portfolio. They stand accused of raiding the Treasury; stealing from the Treasury—[Desk thumping]—and they want to fight us on providing $83 million for laptops?

Mr. Speaker, you know the facts: UDeCott with 78 projects and UDeCott would have spent close to $30 billion alone; you have the Brian Lara stadium, $1.2 billion; you have the Waterfront Project, $4.4 billion; you have NAPA, $1.2 billion; you have the South Academy, another $1.2 billion and not concluded; you have the Prime Minister's residence, $230 million; you have $500-odd million spent on the Rapid Rail, just a feasibility project; you have Vanguard Holdings Limited being bought for $340 million; you are spending $725 million on the Hilton Hotel in Trinidad and Tobago; you spent nearly $1 billion on CHOGM. More
than $30 billion corruptly spent by the Patrick Manning administration and now Rowley's PNM finds difficulty in giving the children $800 per year for their laptops.

**Hon. Members:** Shame!

**Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** That is a shame! And what is worse, he goes on to call them "duncy". That is the calibre of the People's National Movement.

They have a history of widespread corruption. It started in the '50s; it continued in the '60s with the Lock Joint; in the '70s with John O'Halloran and Francis Prevatt; in the '80s with the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex; in the '90s with the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Twin Towers; with the overrun in the Hall of Justice, and then all that we called between 2001 to 2010, and they want to find difficulty in providing for the children—$83 million? They should be ashamed of themselves. Ashamed of yourselves!

This whole question of the laptop, a lot of questions have been asked and I want to take this opportunity to answer them one by one. The first one that came up: the policy of establishing and maintaining modern computer labs in schools for access by all students was far better. Now, we are doing both. This People's Partnership Government is doing both. We are maintaining the computer labs which are in every government school. We have 134 government schools and we have computer labs in every government school. We have 70 schools with two computer labs and the rest with one computer lab, but we are introducing the lab as an additional resource that some students will have. [Desk thumping] All students can get to use the labs we have in schools. So the students now in Forms 2 to 5 can use the labs already there, and in some schools there are two labs.

The second question they asked: Entry level students and seniors have no access and that is downright foolhardy. That was stated by the Member for Diego Martin West. Well, I just answered that. Seniors have their own and, indeed, every student has access to computers in the schools' computer labs. Seniors are not doing without because the Form 1s have laptops and Forms 2 to 5 have their computer labs. Everybody will have a laptop, from Form 1 to 5; from juniors to seniors over a period of time. [Desk thumping]

Three: it is logistically—whatever that means—burdensome on students and parents; it puts some students at risk; it is overly expensive. The hon. Member for Diego Martin West should never be so patronizing to the people of this country. Come on! Who told him that it was burdensome? Which students and parents told him so? Who would not acquire a laptop if they can afford it? Who will refuse it when we start giving them out to the students?
I see the expectations on the young children when they come and they meet me, many of whom I delivered—hundreds of them whom I delivered—[Desk thumping]—and hundreds of those whom I delivered 25 and 30 years ago, I am now delivering their babies.

They come to you and they say, "Sir, are we getting our laptops?" And you could see the expectation in their eyes. If you make a promise to a child and you do not fulfil that promise, do you know what happens to you? They are getting the laptops. [Desk thumping] All the children who have gone from SEA to secondary schools are getting the laptops. Our Government and your government is buying the laptops for the students.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: When?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: We will tell you.

2.45 p.m.

The next question that he asked—I jotted them down and I thought I would answer them—he said that the Minister said nothing about the purpose of providing the computers. This laptop initiative was born out of a vision of the hon. Prime Minister who once held this post of Minister of Education and who goes down in history as the best education Minister Trinidad and Tobago has ever seen.

That vision of our hon. Prime Minister was to ensure that all children are guaranteed equality in our school system. It was this belief which led to this policy, since we believe that education, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance wheel of the social machinery.

We believe that while education has opened many doors, there are still innumerable doors shut tight, unopened as yet. These laptops are the doors of the future and in implementing this promise; we believe that with them perhaps the children of this generation shall one day open the doors to a new era of technological development in our country.

By giving them the laptops, we have given them the key to this possibility. So to those who ask why the laptop policy, I say, quite simply, that it is because of the genuine socio-political principles in which our People's Partnership administration is anchored. We saw it fit to choose as one of our very first initiatives upon assuming office to be ensuring our country's destiny by providing the finest for our school children, our future leaders.

Computerization undoubtedly has improved the quality of our lives at all levels of today and tomorrow. The computer is now as predominant and
commonplace as the slate and the copybook of yesteryear. The computer serves the triple function of:

1. arming each individual student to succeed in a knowledge-based world;
2. closing the gaps in our national community; levelling the playing field for all our social sectors and giving each child, no matter their circumstance, an equal opportunity;
3. equipping the developing Trinidad and Tobago to hold its own in the already developed world.

To paraphrase the familiar test question, if not computers, then what? If not now, then when? As our policy definition says, our commitment is to impart 21st Century skills, creativity and innovation, communication and collaboration, research and information, critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making, digital citizenship and technology operations and concepts. That is our policy.

Our administration is determined to offer the nation's children an opportunity that most have never had before and possibly never have in the future if we do this for them now. This all leads to securing our country's cyber well-being growing from under 40 per cent Internet penetration as we are doing at the moment—we are almost last in the ladder within the Caribbean—to some 75 per cent in a short time. Even Jamaica is 60 per cent Internet penetration and Barbados is 75 per cent. We will be left behind.

Eventually, we shall secure connectivity within homes and amongst families achieving computer literacy across the land. This is the desire and the work that the People’s Partnership will ensure.

Mr. Speaker, they spoke about the procurement process. I can assure this nation—I can put my head on a block and you can chop it off—that this procurement process that we went through for this computer purchase has been the most transparent and accountable and you can exercise any probity whatever in this. You can chop my head off if you find this to be wrong.

Cabinet agreed that in accordance with section 20A(1)(c) of the Central Tenders Board Ordinance, 1961, that the services of the National Information and Communications Technology Company Limited, igov.tt, as the executing agency will have responsibility for the implementation of this initiative, including the procurement and distribution of the laptops. [Interruption] [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I would like to suspend the sitting for at least 10 minutes. This House is now suspended for 10 minutes.
2.51 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

3.10 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before the suspension, you would have been aware that a limited accident took place and we understand that the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs sustained slight injuries as a result of the mishap. We understand it is not serious. We have taken precautionary measures to have her medically attended to and I will be updating hon. Members later in the proceedings as to her well-being. In the meantime, we shall continue.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before the unfortunate incident, I was discussing the whole question of procurement which needs to be given in this Parliament and to the national population. I indicated that igov.tt, which is the executing agency of the computer system within Trinidad and Tobago under the Ministry of Public Administration was founded by the People's National Movement (PNM) in 2007. That was their executing agency for all the computers within the ministries and government departments of Trinidad and Tobago.

That was the agency that started the whole process of procurement. On July 03, 2010, a public notice was released by igov.tt via newspaper advertisements that a bid package for an invitation to bid ITB for the manufacture, supply and delivery of computer hardware, laptops and peripherals was available for collection.

The notice for the ITB appeared in three daily newspapers. The date of closures was initially set for July 15, 2010. ITB was also simultaneously provided to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for circulation to all foreign embassies and consulates of Trinidad and Tobago.

On the initial closing date, igov.tt extended the deadline for submission by way of public notice and via email to all potential bidders, that is, persons who had collected bid packages. The extension was granted based on written requests received from several major manufacturers.

It should be noted that at the time of granting the extension, no bids had been received. The extended date of submission was July 29, 2010 so that pushed the whole process back by a further two weeks, but we ensured that the potential manufacturers were satisfied in their wanting a two-week extension.

The tender boxes for the ITB were sealed promptly at 12.00 noon on July 29, 2010 and witnessed by KPMG, the external auditors of igov.tt. The tender boxes were publicly opened at 1.00 p.m. on July 29, 2010 in the presence of officials of igov.tt, a representative from the Ministry of Education and KPMG.
Subsequent to that, an evaluation team was appointed by the tenders committee of igov.tt and this team comprised representatives of igov.tt and the Ministry of Education as well as a director of Central Tenders Board. They sequestered themselves for four days to deliberate on this and based on the results of points awarded to each bidder, the evaluation committee of igov.tt recommended that negotiations be entered into with the highest ranked bidder, which was Hewlett Packard and Company. It should also be noted that Hewlett Packard's proposal was also the lowest price.

The negotiations committee of igov.tt consisted of representatives of igov.tt, the Ministry of Education, the Central Tenders Board, the Chief State Solicitor's Department, the Attorney General's Department and the Permanent Secretaries of the Ministries of Finance, Public Administration and Education. That is the negotiating committee.

Subsequent to the negotiations and all the deliberations and the award of the contract to Hewlett Packard, a seven-member inter-ministerial team appointed by Cabinet undertook to ensure that the programmes for igov.tt would be kept.

I want to just read some of the specifications and what we have gotten from HP based on the requirements and specifications. We are purchasing 17,300 laptops for the students; 3,000 teacher laptops. The peripherals are a carry case for the laptops, mouse pad, optical mouse, McAfee antivirus software and web filter; Computrace Bios configuration, spares and accessories, additional cell batteries, 1,000.

Specifications for the student laptop: the memory is 2 gig RAM; display size, 14 inch; hard drive size is HDD 320f; operating system type is Microsoft Windows 7; the battery life is 9-cell, 993 WHR up to eight hours. Once a computer is charged overnight, the child is able to use the laptop for the entire day without going to a portal to have it recharged. Each laptop is tagged with an acid tag as a unique identifier.

What is the preinstalled software, Mr. Speaker? The student classroom productivity and educational software which is going to be used are Microsoft Windows 7 Professional, Microsoft Office 2010 Home and Student; Microsoft digital literacy; Adobe Acrobat Reader; Windows Live essential; Ding Maps; CMAP tools and scratch tool. Education: Additional content to be provided by the Ministry.

3.20 p.m.

It has a remote shutdown software. They are worried if the laptop is stolen. Computrace is involved in this. If a laptop is stolen and it is immediately reported to Computrace, Computrace shuts down that entire laptop and therefore, the laptop cannot be connected to any Internet website whatsoever. The person who intends to steal that would be dissuaded from that because Computrace will be
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able to trace them immediately. We are not using the police to deal with anything if a laptop is stolen. Computrace would be able to determine that. The laptops for the teachers are slightly upgraded. These are the specifications.

In terms of the programmes for use of the computers in the schools, every week on a Thursday morning, between 8.00 a.m. and 9.00 a.m. this seven-member Inter-Ministerial team meets with this team to understand what is going on, as far as the laptop issue is concerned. There are a number of people responsible, looking at the whole question of the laptop rollout, the marketing and communications issue, the expansion of secondary schools connectivity, teacher training, infusion of ICT into the curriculum delivery, digital resources and content, digital portal, policy and guidelines, monitor and evaluation. I have with me a copy of the report that was given up to Thursday, September 09, 2010, which contains all the information of where we are, as far as the computer issue is concerned. All these are answered on a weekly basis. The seven-member Inter-Ministerial team comprises Members of Cabinet who are looking after this. It is not a one-man show with the Minister of Education. The seven Members—I want to thank all the Members of this team who have been working assiduously on a weekly basis before we go to Cabinet at 9.30 a.m.

We even have a Gantt chart. Those who did management will understand what a Gantt chart is. A Gantt chart gives you a description, day-to-day, as to where we are going with the project. The first set of computers is expected to arrive on September 20, 2010. During that week, more will come in and subsequent to that, over a two-to three-week period, the rest of the computers will be in the country. We have an area for distribution of all the computers; where we would take the computers when they arrive by air freight.

They asked the question. The Minister has said nothing about the purpose of providing the computers. For three days straight, we had an advertisement in all the newspapers. It seems as though the Members on the other side are really "dunce". They said that the Form I students are. The Form I students are extremely brilliant. The Form I students will be the scholarship winners of tomorrow. But it seems as though "dem on de other side" failed to see this advertisement or the Member for Diego Martin West alone saw HP, HP all over it, and he is concerned about HP but he did not see any of this newspaper advertisement; a two-page advertisement which we put out for three days, answering nine to 10 of the questions. They are still coming back with their infantry and ridicule type of questions, asking for answers in Parliament.

“1. Why this project now?”—answered.
“2. How will the computers be used, by students and teachers?”—answered.

“3. What is the expected impact on our education responsibility?”—answered.

“4. How has the Ministry gone about managing this project?”—answered.

“5. Is the project getting 'value for money', and is it 'free of shadows'?—answered.

“6. Can you list some of what we’ll get in the HP contract?”—answered.

“7. Should we have focused on 'school labs' instead?”

That is the same question they are asking today, yesterday and the day before. The same question is answered. They are right here, but they cannot read. We have to send them to a literacy programme. This is typical of the PNM. They seem to be lacking literacy skills, far less numeracy. We have to send them back in the classroom and we are putting them below the Form I students. All the questions have been answered. Permit me to lay this in Parliament for their consideration if they want to look at it. I would lay this in the Parliament and leave that for them. I think we have answered all the questions for them on this issue and I want to indicate that we look forward with expectancy to provision of this laptop. We hope that the laptops will come in this country at the beginning of the week of the 20th. That is how I intend to deal with that.

I want to deal with some of the situations now as we found them when we went into the Ministry of Education. The past government had been saying that they built so many schools. I want to give a history of how this last administration, over the nine years, filibustered, mismanaged, corruptly spent and overspent money in the infrastructure development of these schools in this country. Just listen to this. In the 2003 budget, the Minister of Finance said:

“We will increase the number of ECCE centres in every district.”

In 2004:

“Plan to achieve universal pre-school education before the end of the decade. We shall build a total of 200 centres over the next four years, throughout the country and train the leaders.”

That is the early childhood care education centre. In 2003 they said it; 2004. It is 2005 now.

“In the new year, we shall construct 43 ECCE centres as we pursue our objective of universal access to pre-school education by 2010…”
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In 2006:

“to achieve universal ECCE centres by 2010.”

They came with a—I think it is madness—statement.

“This calls for the construction of 600 Early Childhood Care and Education Centres to cater for 30,000 three to four-year-olds. Fifty of these centres will be completed and established during the fiscal year.”

“Dey eh build any in 2003, 2004 or 2005. Dey come in 2006 and say dey want 600 centres.” What sort of thinking is that? Have these people—were they—I do not know whether some of them on the other side, when they sit and analyze themselves, are beginning to think to themselves: “Do I have some psychological deficit within my system to make those types of?” Something is sadly wrong. You did not provide anything for four years, but “yuh come in 2006 and yuh say yuh want to build 600?”

In 2007, they came back again:

“The programme should develop full steam.”

It was not going on; nothing all the time. Clog, clog, clog, they did nothing and they said that they are going on full steam. It is expected that 80 additional centres will be constructed. There was no business case, no type of development process or development programme for any initiative like this. It was similar to the stadium, NAPA the UDeCott projects, the Waterfront project and Petrotrin.

“Doh ask bout Petrotrin?” Do you know about Petrotrin? They are owing $18 billion in Petrotrin to be paid up to 2021. That is what the Patrick Manning administration; the last administration from 2001—2010. This country owes $18 billion. Petrotrin owes $18 billion to be repaid up to 2021. Do you know what we are paying for this Waterfront Project? It is $256 million every six months for 17 years. This is what that administration committed us to do and they are talking about $83 billion per year for laptops. The sum of $256 million every six months for 17 years, that is the cost of the Waterfront Project; $4.4 billion. Where is it? It is empty. The Ministry now has to take it over, because it was going to remain empty. They wanted to build an international financial centre. It is empty. There is the Hyatt Hotel, which is most times empty; $700 million for Hilton Hotel; $314 million for Vanguard Holdings Limited and they are worried about the $800 we are
giving per laptop for the poor child to use in the school. Three months, and look at what they have reached to.

Do you know what is ironic about this? I forgot to mention it, but I have it here. When we said that we are going to provide a laptop per child when the Prime Minister, the Member for Siparia—in our election run-up we promised these students the laptop. They had some bright idea after that and said that they were going to do it too. They are following "we". Do you know what they said? *Sunday Express* May 23, 2010:

“Free laptop for every school child”

That is the PNM. They come here today to ask about the laptops. That must be a misprint.

“The PNM government announced the approval of a free laptop project since September 2009, and laptops will be distributed in schools this year.

PNM, we love you, we take good care of you.”

They come here now questioning the laptop in the schools? How hypocritical of them! I would pass this on for them. [Interruption] It is in the *Sunday Express* of May 23, 2010. Look it here. That is it. They are questioning our laptop and the day before election, they said that they were giving laptops too. They said since 2009, they wanted to do it. I think you all should be really ashamed of yourselves. One of my colleagues told me that I should ask for a psychiatric evaluation of all of them on that side.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member of Parliament for Port of Spain South, there is a Standing Order that says whenever the Speaker is on his legs, there is silence. I ask you to help me uphold that Standing Order.

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Mr. Speaker, if they seem not to know about it, I would read the ad.

“Free laptop for every school child
Increase old age pension, PNM policy
Security cameras at traffic lights, PNM policy
$100 million for children's health, PNM policy
If they steal ideas from the PNM, what else?”
We came up with the idea long before them and the day before the election "dey say that we steal their idea". Something is really wrong.

I was speaking about the Early Childhood Care and Education Centres when I went back there. Do you know what we met when we went to the Ministry? They said that they would build 600 Early Childhood Care and Education Centres by 2012. Do you know how many they have built? They have built 22. They gave a contract to Haji Construction, the North Korean company, and they gave them a contract to build 50 Early Childhood Care and Education Centres. Haji Construction built three and "dey take de money and dey gone, $60 million gone with Haji Construction." Haji construction now owes as well $22 million to local contractors and they cannot find them.

3.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, they cannot even get the $15 million on the performance bonds that was supposed to be given to them, and they cannot even get the money on the first payment that was made to them; $60 million. Haji Construction built three schools and they were supposed to build 50. They got $60 million and they gone! So, Mr. Speaker, that project had US $438 million, close to $300 million, for those Early Childhood Education Centres, and they took another $400 million in a bond to build more Early Childhood Education Centres. Not one cent of that $400 million has been spent! Today, this Government is faced with paying interest on that $400 million bond. Haji gone with all the money and they built three schools.

Mr. Speaker, you will remember in the other place, we asked the previous Minister of Education, how many secondary schools and primary schools they were building in this country. They used to imagine and say they are building 17 secondary schools and 20 primary schools, and we used to ask if these schools were being built in space. We are not seeing them!

I have gone to the Ministry now, and do you know what I have found? Mr. Speaker, four secondary schools and four primary schools were built. Do you know how much money was spent? More than $2 billion has been spent on these schools, and they are talking about us not building schools. It is a real shame and disgrace!

Mr. Speaker, do you know how much money a secondary school is costing? Mr. Speaker, $170 million for a secondary school. Do you know how much money to build a primary school? Mr. Speaker, $40 million. Are we building hotels or is it massive corruption?
One of their former members of government got a contract to build schools for $1 billion. They know the name of the company. They know the two names. They know who it is. What massive corruption in the school construction programmes! A massive shame and disgrace!

Do you know what we have been saddled with now? They have gone through with designs for 15 more schools and the design cost for each school is approximately $10 million.

**Hon Member:** Design?

**Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Design! So we are now going to be saddled with a bill of almost $500 million for the designs of the same schools that they said they were going to build. Mr. Speaker, where are we going? That former government has any authority to speak about anything on education or anything against this Government? They have no moral fortitude to say anything whatsoever. I think they should hide themselves in shame, and really sit and ponder and see what they have done to the people of this country. They have taken the money that was supposed to be given to education for the children, and they are grudgingly saying now that they do not want to give this $83 million to the children and, most of all, you said that they are "duncy". What disgraceful behaviour in this place!

Mr. Speaker, there is not only where the corruption in the education system is. I want to talk about the School Feeding Programme. In 2001—2010, nine years under the School Feeding Programme, they have spent $1.56 billion and they have not changed one caterer. There have been 75 caterers in the system for nine years. Do you know on average, how much money one of these caterers makes? Mr. Speaker, approximately $20 million—all their friends; all their party supporters; and all their party financiers.

These are the same persons who cooked food and gave it to CEPEP and URP workers in Woodford Square when we had the no confidence Motion against the Prime Minister, when they wanted to attack us coming into Parliament. That is the same school nutrition company. Mr. Speaker, millionaire! One person earned between $15 million to $20 million over the nine-year period—an average rate of return of 15 per cent to 20 per cent on that is $4 million profit. Mr. Speaker, I have the names here.

**Hon Member:** Call the names!

**Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I would not call the names, but I would call the companies.

**Mr. Peters:** Call the companies!
Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Avocado Restaurant, 2009/2010; $3.59 million; Colours for Lovers Company Limited; $3.57 million; D Best Bakery Company, $3.6 million; F & M Caterers, $3.864 million; Food Express, $3.5 million; Hibiscus Catering, $3.55 million; and Jodels Baking Service Limited, $4.125 million. PNM say that they are going to make some of their friends, families, their party supporters and financiers millionaires. All the money they received for election came from this; all the food for election and all their functions came from this. I have the list here. Year after year, these same people will get contracts for catering. Mr. Speaker, is that fair to this population and also the children?

Do you know how many meals one caterer provides? One kitchen is providing 40,000 meals. Could you imagine the mass production of meals and what nutrition is going into it for the school children? Mr. Speaker, under this Government, the People’s Partnership Government is going to break up that into at least 500 and make sure that every person in this country who has a good catering firm with good specific standards and nutritional standards that could withstand the scrutiny of good environmental standards, be entitled to be a caterer in this country; not 75 millionaires who have made almost close to $20 million over a nine-year period. What a shame and disgrace!

Security in schools: They spent $300 million for school security systems, and they gave all their partners and friends with a security company millions of dollars. When I look at the contracts, one of the last contracts that was given to a security company was in 2004, and they are operating. They are getting $150 million and every day schools are broken into—the fence is cut; the principal’s office is broken into; $50,000 gone in laptops and $100,000 gone in laptops. Mr. Speaker, how long can we continue with this? They are robbing the poor children of what is rightly theirs.

I move now to the textbook industry. Under the stewardship of the former Minister of Education, our present Prime Minister, between 1997—2000, she rid this country of the corruption in the textbook industry which was over $200 million to $300 million. [Desk thumping] Children had to carry five textbooks per subject in their bags, because there was wide collusion between the printers and the manufacturers of these textbooks and others. There were five textbooks per subject, and the poor children did not know which textbook to buy, and that is continuing today. We had stopped this in 2000 and it started back in 2001—2010. The widespread corruption in the textbook industry continues unabatedly.

We understand that one bookseller supplies almost 80 per cent of the textbooks to the schools and children in this country; and that person—you want
to talk about financing for political parties—was a major financier of the PNM for the last election. They all know that. They know who is the person! Mr. Speaker, 80 per cent of the textbooks in the schools; one person! [Interruption] Call the name!

**Hon Member:** Who is it?

**Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I am not going to call name.

Mr. Speaker, the other issues we met in the Ministry of Education are real issues. I mentioned a few of the corruption issues, but there is much more, and I would not have the time to deal with them in my limited time.

I want to talk about some other things that will improve the education system and which they found difficulty in doing. Vacancies in schools: What have they been doing? Vacancies in primary schools: principals, 33 missing; vice-principals, 15; heads of department, 52; deans, which are senior teachers, 86; and teachers 29. These are vacancies in the primary school.

Vacancies in secondary schools: principals, 20; vice-principals, 37; heads of department, 210; deans, 201; and teachers 284. There are 284 vacant positions for teachers, and every day people are meeting me and saying: Minister I have applied for a job in the Ministry of Education since 2005. I was interviewed by the Ministry of Education and they sent me to the Teaching Service Commission. I was interviewed by them and, to date, I did not hear anything. I have a BSc, I have a masters degree and I have a bachelors in education and they do not have any jobs.

Mr. Speaker, there are 284 vacancies in the schools for teachers and they have no jobs. What did the last Ministers do with all those vacancies? Did they have a meeting with the Teaching Service Commission and say that they need their assistance in filling those vacancies?

Mr. Speaker, there are 16,000 teachers in this country and there are 800-something schools—forget the Early Childhood Education Centres; there are 152 secondary schools and not one of the teachers’ record is computerized. Their payroll record is computerized. So you cannot find the information about a particular teacher or what year a teacher joined the service; what is the teacher's qualification; the career path development; what degrees they have attained on the way; which school they are teaching; who is the principal; who is the school supervisor; and in which district. None of that information is computerized. How could you manage an education system when you do not know where the 16,000 teachers are and when is their time for retirement? Mr. Speaker, that is a basic thing. That is management. The human resource area is weak.
Appropriation Bill (Budget) Thursday, September 16, 2010

[HON. DR. T. GOPEESINGH]

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the Biche High School. [Desk thumping] In keeping with our campaign promise, this administration has begun to explore the possibility of opening the Biche High School within this new fiscal year. [Desk thumping] At present, we have begun to investigate structural, geotechnical and environmental issues; investigate the emission of gas fumes, which we are doing during the rainy season and the dry season; undertake repairs to foundation, roof, ceiling and general maintenance and refitting of all laboratories.

Mr. Speaker, let me go a little further, as it relates to the Biche High School. Hon. Members, how can we as a Government and a country see a part of this country where students have to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to travel far from their homes to go to a secondary school miles away and they have to pass a building constructed for millions of dollars and which was abandoned because of PNM's political spite and vindictiveness? [Desk thumping] PNM's spite and vindictiveness has kept this school closed for 10 years. They suffered the children of Biche and their parents who are also associated with this. How can we accept that? What message that is sending to the people of this country?

Mr. Speaker, there was a Commission of Enquiry into the Biche High School and it was not made public at all. When I asked for a report, they gave me a report with pages 69 and 70 missing. I eventually got the pages. Somebody gave them to me. I do not know where they found them. Pages 69 and 70 had only recommendations and nothing significant. I am sorry I did not bring them here, but I would not have had enough time. There are only recommendations and there is no recommendation that is significant that would have allowed for the closure of that school. They should be ashamed of how they have suffered the people of that area.

My colleague, the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, this People’s Partnership Government pledges, the Minister of Education and I am sure my Prime Minister will join me in letting you know that we will open the Biche High School this year. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, my Prime Minister has a special love for children. She is so caring, humble and loving; you can see it in her deportment on a daily basis. She has instructed me, as the Minister of Education, to ensure that we have an urgent stakeholder consultation for students with disabilities in schools.

Mr. Speaker, I have a book here: Achieving Inclusion: Transforming the Education System of Trinidad and Tobago Final Report, dated March 31, 2008 by Miske Witt and Associates, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA.
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  Thursday, September 16, 2010

3.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, this book has important summaries in it. It has important information of students with disabilities in the school population, and I just want to read some parts of it here.

“Throughout this study, strategies for inclusive education encompass all students with special education needs. Specifically, these students include dropouts, students with learning or other disabilities, students who are gifted and talented”—which is 2 per cent of the population—“students infected or affected with HIV, students with social, emotional, or behavioural difficulties, and ESL students (English for speakers of other languages).”

Mr. Speaker, the incidence of disability in Trinidad and Tobago; and I just want to read from one paragraph.

“Children and youth who experience difficulties due to sensory problems, such as vision and hearing impairments, estimated at 50 per cent of the primary school population.”

This is the study done by Miske Witt and Associates. The Ministry of Education has this from since 2008 and has done nothing with it so far. They hid it. We had to find it. I had to beg for it because I heard it was there.

“Children and youths who are learning challenged, either due to intellectual problems or a failed education system, estimated at 25 per cent of the primary school population;

Children and youth who may be considered gifted and/or talented, for whom no services are being offered, estimated at 2 per cent of the primary school population;

Children and youth who are behaviourally challenged due to emotional distress, estimated at 15—20 per cent of the school population…underachievers, based on Caribbean Examinations Council results. These students are perceived as having the ability to achieve but are poorly motivated because of domestic, social and school related problems. This group is estimated at 40—50 per cent of the school population.”

This is the crux of the failures within the education system because we are unable to diagnose and manage students with disabilities. When you look at the education system, when you are looking for psychologists and good student councillors and so on, do you know the clinical psychologist we have in the entire school population of Trinidad and Tobago? One! We have one clinical psychologist. This is what the last
PNM administration did over the last nine years. They knew that this was existing. As soon as it came to the attention of the hon. Prime Minister she said, "We want to have an urgent stakeholder’s consultation, national consultation on this, so that we could begin to look at this problem and correct it as early as possible". [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West spoke about what is the vision for a child in this country? She asked the question: What is our vision for a child? What do we want to do for a child in the education system? I want to pass this on to her, but I will read a few parts. During the election period we created this and we are running with it right away. The following are five policy objectives defined with expected outcomes:

1. Children who will achieve their potential.
2. Children who are adequately prepared educationally—means academic achievement.
3. Children who are adequately developed socially and culturally.
4. Children who are healthy and growing up normally.
5. Children who are emotionally mature and happy.

Mr. Speaker, in all of these, we have a number of subset areas. For instance:

Children who will achieve their potential, that is—

Children will function with a purpose based on love, value, family life, service and aesthetic expression;

Will understand and participate constructively in their career and vocational pathway;

Are able to cope with daily challenges, set healthy boundaries and make wise social choices.

We have nine points there.

Objective Two:

Age specifically prepared to participate in society;

Academically balanced to be productive;

I am sure you all will agree that these are noble objectives and noble issues which we will want to make right here.

In the next few minutes, Mr. Speaker, I want to show you what we will do. I understand I have eight minutes more.
The Prime Minister indicated to us before we came into government, that we must develop a one-year plan of action first, and then we will move on to a five-year plan of action. Within the first 120 days, all Ministries developed their one-year plan of action. I am proud to indicate that our one-year plan of action is here. We have an operational plan. It consists of developmental pillars, policy areas, strategic objectives, principal strategies, programmes and measures, performance indicators, responsible agency or department of unit within the Ministry of Education, and a time frame—a target date. These are the areas, basically.

We will focus on literacy development. You know that one out of every three children writing SEA examination failed to get more than 50 per cent in their SEA examination.

Similarly, three out of 10 students writing the CXC and CSEC examination in government schools fail to get five full passes at CXC. Now, what have you all been doing for nine years? What have you corrected? When you look at the trends of failures over the last few years, you could identify the schools; you could identify the principals—[Interruption]

**Mrs. McIntosh:** Check St. Francois.

**Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:**—you could identify the supervisors, you could identify the districts. Why were these things not taken care of? What did you all do over the period of time?

**Mrs. McIntosh:** Check St. Francois.

**Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Sure! I am sure you did well. I congratulate you on the fact that when your computers were lost or stolen, you went hard and you worked to regain your computers for yourself. So I find it strange that you were criticizing the computer issue.

**Mrs. McIntosh:** Not the computers issue.

**Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Mr. Speaker, the people-centred development: Focus on Literacy Development:

Education and Human Development-Building the Foundation for an Intelligent Nation and a Creative Economy—

To rework the curricula for the ECCE;

To reform the curriculum at the secondary level.
We are going to have stakeholder consultation at both the primary school and the secondary school curriculum because the primary school curriculum is now 13 years outdated.

To create an environment that provides the appropriate services to meet the learning needs of a diverse student body;

To provide increased government funding to NGOs working on literacy programmes;

To expand the meaning of literacy to include Spanish as the first language in the curriculum at primary and secondary levels;

Establish a safe, nurturing, learning environment for every student in the education system.

We have the programmes to go with it; we have the performance indicators; we have responsible units within the Ministry; and a time frame. Mr. Speaker, it goes on:

To develop an effective special education;

To establish a system for the early detection and treatment of learning disorders, medical, psychological, social and other problems;

To encourage and partner with all schools to facilitate access for the differently-abled students;

To reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS on the education system addressing the needs of both the infected and affected population;

To expand the public transport system dedicated to the education system;

To link food and nutrition strategies, and health strategies to human development strategies through the school system;

To guarantee access to quality educational opportunities to every child;

To strengthen the quality in teaching and learning by ensuring that teachers are trained, educated and certified at all levels—and we will be partnering with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education to ensure that the training programme for teachers continue very strong;

To strengthen the system, work with union on professional upgrade and professional standards.

We have about 12 partners in the education system: TTUTA, NTPA, Primary School Principals Association, Secondary School Principals Association, Denominational
We have met with them already once, and we are going to meet with them frequently.

So in closing, I want to say we have a few things that we are considering at the moment to get. The SEA examination is held in March and it has been going so for years. Barbados and Jamaica have gone beyond that. They have the examination in June. So we are going to be working with our partners to determine whether we should move that process forward, to move the examination from March to June. The students will have an extra three months to study and their performance, of course, will be lifted. [Desk thumping] All of us, who have been through the university system, have been through a system where the course work gives you 40 per cent of the marks, and the final marks are about 60 per cent in an examination. We are thinking and we are going to be discussing this with our partners about introducing a system whereby you can achieve 40 per cent of your marks before that do or die SEA examination, and it will contribute towards your final marking. This is on the way. We have discussed this with Dr. Didacus Jules of the CXC Centre in Barbados, he has preferred to go with it and we will be working with him on that.

Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of work to be done in the education system, and through Mr. De Coteau, myself and the team from the Ministry of Education, we pledge our total dedication to improving the conditions for the child, for the teachers.

Mr. Speaker, 461 primary schools need to be cleaned up. We are starting a clean-up programme to move out all the derelict things from around the school, to make the environment of the school very nice and soothing for teaching. We are going to make sure that the teachers’ staff rooms are taken care of. The teachers will be comfortable in their schools.

There are many other things which we have to do. We are going to make sure that we clean the school desk and chairs. If we have 136,000 students in primary schools, a desk and chair cost $500, how much that costs? Sixty-five million dollars to provide new desks and chairs for the children in primary schools. You mean to say you have spent $2 billion, and then somebody had the effrontery to ask about Oropouche RC which has termite ridden desks and chairs. Termite desks and chairs do not start overnight. It did not come within the last three months since we have been there. It has been there for the last few years before, and they would not find a few hundred dollars to provide the chairs and the desks for the students. To provide new desks and chairs for the entire primary school education system is about $65 million. But they could spend $2 billion and waste it. One hundred and seventy million dollars for one secondary school, and they could not build four of what they promised.
Mr. Speaker, it is unsatisfactory. We have a lot of work to do. We have a tremendous amount of work to do. I want to close by thanking my colleague, Minister De Coteau; thanking the hon. Prime Minister for her confidence reposed in me to do the job, both Minister De Coteau and myself, and we promised that we will do our best for all our children of Trinidad and Tobago. We want to thank all the teachers, the vice principals, the principals, school supervisors for their tremendous work they have been doing, and all those within the Ministry of Education who have been supporting during the last three months.

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

Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon (Point Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to contribute to the 2010/2011 budget debate. Let me begin my applauding my Leader, for his reply in the budget.

Mr. Roberts: Which one?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Speaker, I know that the other side is concerned about who is my Leader. The Member for Tabaquite in his very riveting but political discussion was concerned about who is the Leader of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs. I want to say that the Leader of the Opposition is Dr. Keith Rowley; the Leader of the People's National Movement is Dr. Keith Rowley [Desk thumping] Dr. Keith Rowley is in fact my Leader. [Desk thumping] I think it is a question that they should perhaps ask themselves because—[Desk thumping] and, Mr. Speaker, they are going to have to do it by secret ballot to get the true results, because it will be a number of names that will emerge and perhaps you will have to help in the adjudication of the results. Certainly, it will not be one leader.

Mr. Speaker, there are a few concerns as they relate to the energy agenda, as it relates to the budget that we are discussing. I am so very sorry that the Member of Parliament for San Fernando West is not with us this afternoon for this segment of my contribution. But I wish her a speedy recovery. I know that she will be all right.

Mr. Speaker, in the 2010/2011 budget, the Minister of Finance has said, "will result in a $7.7 million deficit", but this assumes a gas price of US $2.75 per mmbtu netback to well head. This is the first of my concerns because in the budget, the hon. Minister of Finance was not clear as to whether that was in fact the Henry Hub price or the netback price.

4.05 p.m.

I want to make reference to an article by David Renwick in the—it is on September 8th, 2010 in the Trinidad Guardian where the Parliamentary Secretary
in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, who has a background in petroleum engineering, made the following statements and I want to quote this Senator.

“…‘my research shows that for us to realise US $2.75 per mmbtu, the Henry Hub price…has to be somewhere in the region of US $5.30.’”

Those were the words of the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs. He went on to say, this is on budget day, huh:

“The Henry Hub price has averaged US $4.76 for the last nine months. So, based on that assumption alone, we begin to see where the budget deficit…is coming from.”

He was referring to the 2009—2010 budget.

Mr. Speaker, if we assume that he is correct, and that we are planning on a Henry Hub price of—what we are, in fact, doing now is planning on a Henry Hub price of $5.30 to get US $2.75 and it makes no sense. [Desk thumping] But worse, Mr. Speaker, the US is forecasting not a price anywhere in the vicinity of US $5.30 but rather within a range of US $3.50 per mmbtu to US $4.75 per mmbtu [Desk thumping] averaging just perhaps US $4 average per mmbtu. So that the Parliamentary Secretary is right and this means, Mr. Speaker, that based on current data we can predict, in fact, a shortfall of about US $1.30. This means that the revenue projection will not be achieved and this will, in fact, add billions of dollars to the deficit which the Minister of Finance is already predicting.

Why then, did the People’s Partnership, this Government, not have a more realistic price than they did and, let us say, the equivalent of a Henry Hub price of $4 instead of $5.30? It could not be that there is disagreement on the predicted price because the rationale behind that prediction has been clearly stated and it includes the effect of shale gas in the US and therefore changes in the US market, the fact that the world economy is still stuttering, and, of course, there is still discussion, and I hope to God that that is not so, that there might be a second recession in the US and that is going to affect us all. A second recession, there is the possibility of that as well.

Mr. Speaker, when that budgeted figure is overstated by US $1 it actually results in a shortfall in revenue of TT $4 billion. That is the figure, TT $4 billion. So with, therefore, a shortfall of about US $1.30 and I am using that ballpark figure, with a shortfall of US $1.30, that is the $5.30 Henry Hub equivalent as against the more realistic price of US $4, a deficit of close to $13 billion is expected. That is the figure, Mr. Speaker, [Desk thumping] your already established $7 billion deficit which was quoted by the Minister of Finance, plus the new figure of $5.2 billion.
Mr. Speaker, what we could expect is a deficit more in the vicinity of TT $13 billion [Desk thumping] and this is in addition to the significant reservations ably expressed by the distinguished Leader of the Opposition, my leader, and the ability of the Government to realize the overly optimistic estimates of non-energy revenues. This means, Mr. Speaker, that with recurrent expenditure and direct charges on the Consolidated Fund, there will be no space for wage and salary negotiations and then you will realize why the negotiations for the minimum wage are in abeyance and the ability to expand on even our current programmes. That will be in jeopardy, Mr. Speaker. There will be no money for that—more protests outside like we had this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, based on this most likely scenario, we are cautioning this Government that it is taking our country down a difficult road, and add this to the difficulties that poor people will suffer with that Clico proposal that they have put forward. [Desk thumping] We, in fact, see, Mr. Speaker, a different result from what the Government has said. This was not a budget, Mr. Speaker. If you do not know what your revenues are, you do not have a budget. This was not a budget, Mr. Speaker, but rather it was a wish list and it was—[Desk thumping]—it is very, very irresponsible on the part of those who proposed new politics. New politics is what they say it is about. So, Mr. Speaker, I ask you to tell me when the real budget is going to be read. Let us have the date and perhaps we could suspend and let the different factions go home to roost and come back with one agenda in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, when the international credit agencies look at what was presented under the guise of realistic financial expectations of this country, this country will be taking a beating. This country will be taking a beating, Mr. Speaker. Now, what we run the risk of is a downgrade of a very highly commendable investment grade credit rating and its implications of higher costs of financing on the international market, and this is damaging, Mr. Speaker. These are damaging, very damaging consequences and very injurious to every Trinidadian and Tobagonian.

On account of this very, very surreptitious budget—and that is all I can call it, Mr. Speaker, very surreptitious budget—yes, it is surreptitious, a budget which was presented in this day and age of communication, it is a budget that was presented to the world at large and, as a result, confidence in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago as a whole is eroded and, quite naturally, there would be less investment interest leading to a significant rise in unemployment and all of the attendant difficulties one could expect with that.
However, that is not the first time that this Government had attempted to do that to this country. I am talking about having our credit rating downgraded and then blame it on the PNM. This time it falls directly on this coalition Government. They were responsible [Desk thumping] for the downgrading of our credit rating. So I leave you with that, Member for Tunapuna, that this is an unrealistic budget that is based on an unfeasible gas price. It is reckless on your behalf. [Desk thumping]

I add also that non-oil revenues are also in jeopardy on account of the Government’s lack of spending in the first three and a half months whilst they were in office. The economy, in other words, is flat as we speak and this budget is a farce. [Desk thumping] The gas price of US $2.75 per mmbtu is far too high and, Minister of Finance I call on you, Sir, to review this now. It is the right thing to do instead of coming back to us, as planned, very soon.

Mr. Speaker, when this Government came into power, there seems—since they have been in power there seems to be a lot of spouting and spewing on energy matters and the hon. Minister for Pointe-a-Pierre, I am sorry she is not here, she has been talking at length, almost to lay claim to the development of a significant part of the energy sector in Trinidad and Tobago and, Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. So permit me to demonstrate that, notwithstanding their recent statement, that it is the PNM government that has created and it is the PNM government that has managed the growth of the energy sector. [Desk thumping]

Sometime between 1962 and 1964 the then Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, the late Dr. Eric Williams, called three Commissions of Enquiry to deal with the energy industry and these were in fact very, very successful events out of which came the Petroleum Act of 1969, out of which the Ministry of Energy was created, and, of course, then there was the buyout of the BP in 1969 and ESSO in 1971 and Shell in 1974 and for the sake of history I would mention that there was one oddity at the time, where the government went to Parliament and legislated on a company called—it was to be a state company, the Trinidad and Tobago Petroleum Company Limited which was a state-owned organization as I had said, but Dr. Eric Williams appointed George Weekes as its first Chairman and I want you to know then, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, that you were not the initiator of the involvement of the voice of labour into matters of the state. That is just an aside. [Desk thumping]

But then George Weekes went on to say to the Prime Minister and accused him that he was selling him out and selling out workers and that was the end of that. So that piece of legislation is still on the books but you never know what may happen later on with that. But I want to go back to the evolution of the industry and the evidence of the PNM’s claim to the energy industry.
In 1975, Dr. Williams called a conference at Chaguaramas and it was called the Best Use of our Energy Resources and it was basically an oil and food conference to speak principally on two major shortages which the world faced at that time. Those shortages were energy and food and folks were asking, "Well, what does food have to do with oil?" Dr. Williams went on to voice that, yes, we are a small producer and we could do little to save the world, but we have natural gas which we could convert to ammonia and fertilizers as urea which we could sell to the rest of the world and therefore contribute indirectly to the expansion of food production. And this, Mr. Speaker, is how Point Lisas developed. It had nothing to do with the UNC, it had nothing to do with the COP and it had nothing to do with the Coalition, Mr. Speaker. It was the PNM all the way. [Desk thumping]

This, Mr. Speaker, brings me to another claim which the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs is making and this Government is making, and that concerns the recent signature of the unitization agreement. I want to agree that the signature by the energy Ministers of Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela in Caracas in August 2010 was a significant achievement, a significant achievement for both our countries and of course it opens up possibilities for joint operations to develop in the fields which we share across the borders, and I am talking about the Loran-Manatee fields.

The Minister, however, has been publicly taking the position that these developments began with discussions under the Basdeo Panday UNC government sometime 1996 when she was the Chairman of National Petroleum. I wish to categorically state that this was not so. In fact, Minister Ramirez, the Minister of Energy in Venezuela at that signing ceremony which took place in Caracas, he was quoted as saying that the visit started with their Minister in 2003 when he came to Trinidad. It was not at all in 1996 under the Basdeo Panday government. [Desk thumping] I will give you the background as to where and when and the circumstances under which this Venezuela/TT relationship was strengthened and out of which arose discussion towards where we are now.

4.20 p.m.

It is that in 2002, President Chavez was elected to office and he ran into some difficulties with PDVSA. PDVSA is the state-owned oil company of Venezuela. There was an eventual strike and PDVSA ended up with no gas. Venezuela had absolutely no gas at all and they needed gasoline badly. They had one tanker, Mr. Speaker, and they were planning to go to the US to get gasoline and come back, but that would have taken 10 days. Ten days, a large country like Venezuela without gas.
An alternative was that it came to Trinidad, and that would have been an eight-hour trip. An agreement was arrived at by both of the heads at that time; President Chavez, and it was a Patrick Manning-led Government at that time, and it resulted in arrangements by barter. So it is that Trinidad and Tobago purchased two shipments of crude oil. Crude oil came from Puerto la Cruz to Pointe-a-Pierre in exchange for two tankers of gasoline.

There was no gasoline in Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago was responsible for what took place. Politically, it meant a lot to the people of Venezuela and to President Chavez, and obviously, there was a very high regard for Prime Minister Manning, and it was not too long after that that President Chavez paid a visit to Trinidad and Tobago.

That, Mr. Speaker, is what stimulated the relationship between these two countries, and that was the genesis of discussions toward development of gas reserves within our borders. It was post-2002, under a PNM regime. Not 1996.

[Desk thumping] In fact, negotiations heightened during the last administration when the Ministries of Finance, Foreign Affairs and Energy did most of the work. The framework agreement had been signed by our Prime Minister, Prime Minister Manning, paving the way for the unitization agreement. The Cabinet approval for the unitization agreement, Mr. Speaker, was from a PNM Cabinet.

The fact is that the process in Venezuela was very bureaucratic. The process there was bureaucratic. It had to go before the Venezuelan Congress for approval, and that is what took some time, and I will tell you that it was sheer luck that this Government was able to simply sign on the dotted line while our Government had done all of the work. [Desk thumping]

Let me clear up, Mr. Speaker, what this agreement is about. It is no monetization agreement, as they want to claim. It is not a monetization agreement. It is simply a unitization agreement, and all that says is what is mine and what is yours. Mr. Speaker, 7.3 trillion cubic feet belong to Venezuela and 2.7 trillion cubic feet belong to Trinidad and Tobago of the Loran-Manatee field. That is it. But you know, Mr. Speaker, it was quoted in The Guardian newspaper of 16th August, 2010, that the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, at a function of the Congress of the People, said that the gas field offered tremendous prospects, and that is true. We will agree with her. It really presents tremendous prospects.

But then, the Minister went on, in front of her people—the COP people—to speak of discussions of 1996 and to say that there was not aggressive follow-up activity. She is blaming that on the PNM, obviously. I found, Mr. Speaker, that
given the Member of Parliament for San Fernando West, that was unkind of her; it was untrue, and certainly, not becoming of the Minister. [Desk thumping] But this is the length to which the politicians go towards fooling the public.

The Member of Parliament went on, and was quoted as saying that whilst there was no exact time-span for extraction to begin, she expected that this would take place within a reasonable period of time. So, what is the basis of these forecasts, that this will, in fact, take place within a reasonable space of time when, in fact, it is known that our Venezuelan neighbours are known not to be ready to move forward with monetization?

Mr. Speaker, even where it is very wise for us to do so, because we have the experience, we have the expertise, we have four trains, we have the human resource capacity; the fact is the Venezuelans are not ready yet to move on with monetization. So why, then, is the goodly Minister giving the impression that we are making significant progress and this is under the coalition Government with regard to monetization when this is, in fact, not so?

In fact, at the ceremony, Minister Ramirez, the Venezuelan Energy Minister, took pains to explain that this unitization means that it is aimed at avoiding and resolving conflicts about how much belongs to each side, and the division of revenues, and so forth. He spoke nothing about monetization, so therefore, it is irresponsible to create impressions that are not true. Not true, Mr. Speaker.

And needless to say, let me say in the end, I do not want anyone to have any misconceptions about how the PNM feels about monetization. I say that having paved the way fully, the PNM remains optimistic, very positive, and very hopeful of reaching agreement of monetization of these gas fields which will redound to the benefit of the people of Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] This Government has our wholehearted support on this.

Let me very quickly seek to correct the matter of the new energy tax regime. The Member for Tunapuna and Minister of Finance had this to say; that the first bid round done by the previous administration had collapsed, and that it is under the new administration that they reverted to the 1995/1996 type of production sharing contract. Mr. Speaker, this is a falsification. [Desk thumping] It is a falsification that is meant to dupe—and I want to change that to "Dook"—referring to the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna, to the public. It is mere fiction.

I go back to 2003/2004, when the oil price was $33 per barrel, and rising rapidly. The Ministry of Finance, at that time, found that the petroleum tax applied was too low, and we were, therefore, not maximizing our gains and that we owed it to the country to be more competitive and in line with the international order.
We brought in Prof. Van Meurs, an expert on taxation in the oil industry, to give us some direction on how to secure greater taxation. But as fate will have it, Mr. Speaker, as we came to the end of the exercise, oil prices began to drop; and at the same time, drilling costs and production costs were increasing. The dip in the US economy as well impacted, adding to an overall changed circumstances; the reality of which we were forced to take into account if we were to remain competitive and attractive to investors.

So that under the original production servicing contract of 1995, if I may explain, the contractor/producer gets a share of production to cover cost, and then he gets a second share; and then the Government gets a share to cover royalty, and then a further share; a profit, out of which taxation is paid, included in that profit. It is the Ministry of Finance which gives the producer a certificate as if he had paid the tax, so it is not at all onerous on the producer. And that, Mr. Speaker, is how it works. It is certainly more competitive and attractive to the investor, and that is what the PNM Government reverted to before leaving office.

And before getting that far, we engaged in consultation with all of our stakeholders—BP, Repsol, and so forth. They were called in for discussion and the proposal for the new tax structure went before the Standing Committee of Energy, and then before Cabinet. At that time, in April 2010, the then PNM administration, by Legal Notice No. 114, invited tenders for seven blocks in north, east, west coast marine areas of Trinidad and Tobago; all of which details the Member for San Fernando West gave us in the House earlier. And that, Mr. Speaker, is where we are.

I think I want to stop here, instead of elaborating further. I think you are going to stop me very soon. But this is where we are, Mr. Speaker. It was, in fact, a price that was agreed on by the PNM Government, and all it is that the Member for San Fernando West did was to extend the date by which those submissions were due. The date was sometime in August, 2011, and the goodly Minister then extended it. It was the political thing to do, extending it to September. And that is where it is at this stage.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is now 4.30 p.m. This sitting is now suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

5.00 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Speaker, just for those who are joining us, we were speaking to the matter of the new tax regime in the petroleum industry. We were
saying that all the putting together of this new tax regime and the rudiments of it are on account of the PNM administration, and for that we take 100 per cent credit.

I move on to another point on the energy agenda. The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, speaking with the media after an energy chamber meeting at Paria Suites, was quoted as saying that the Government gas subsidy bill was very high at that point in time. Then Sen. Prof. Patrick Watson, Minister in the Ministry of Finance, alluded to this as well at the post-budget Chamber of Commerce meeting, the morning after the budget presentation, saying that the gas subsidy was not at all sustainable and that sooner or later the Government would have to review its position on it. That is a totally different perspective from what the Government presented in the budget.

That is the reality of a coalition government; it is dangerous, such as the vagaries of different grouping having their own agenda; it is transparency diminished, accountability undermined and it is incapable of a long-term view; there is no unifying policy; there is a lack of stability, a compromising of ethics and morals, all to the sacrifice of the public purse and the nation's security. The population suffers as a result of these coalition governments and their differing views.

I go back to the question of the subsidy. We are, in fact, predicting a worsening position, as it is unlikely that prices would drop below $75 a barrel. It is a fact that the volume of sales would continue increasing, as there are more and more cars and trucks on the road and, therefore, subsidies are increasing everywhere. It is $2 billion now, it will be $2.5 billion next year and it is going to continue to increase.

It is not that the PNM disagrees that the subsidy needs to be reduced. In fact, in 2008 when we were dealing with the matter of the CNG, we agreed that we would have to increase petroleum prices, but we also said at the same time that we must not do so until we could offer the country a cheaper alternative, an affordable alternative, CNG and that we must only do so when we had sufficient gas stations. So that what we were proposing was a number of stations; 45 CNG stations to be built over a three-year period at a cost of $1.5 billion, PSIP funded. Just do the maths and look at the results; $1.5 billion as against $2.5 billion this year and $2.5 billion the next year and $3 billion the next year; it makes economic sense to go that way.

We are aware of all the pitfalls of this programme, the way in which the Government is proposing it. We believe that it is not carefully thought out and that all the requirements are not being fulfilled. We are saying that the Government would make a very grave error if it raises gasoline prices without an alternative being in
place. In fact, the result would be devastating; it is going to be a major mistake resulting in significant inflation and hardship on the people of this country.

Madam Minister and Member for San Fernando West, I urge you to take a comprehensive review of the very detailed study; of the programme which the PNM left for you, prepared by the last administration. The work has already been done; take it, implement it, so that our people would not have to suffer, because you did not act.

In 1992, after doing some 4,200 conversions, it was clear that we needed more stations. When the UNC came into power, they dropped it and we lost momentum. We were under the IMF then and the money was hard to come by; if you do not review this and do the right thing the people will suffer.

I just want to briefly refer to what is going on in the energy industry, in the NGC and NEC. We are very happy that all of the PNM programmes are continuing, except for the Alutrint smelter plant at this time. My friend and colleague, the MP for La Brea, has dealt with it comprehensively, but I join in solidarity with my brother and the people of La Brea in opposing most strongly the decision to cancel the Alutrint smelter plant. It is a most shameful act on your part; it is disdainful and it is political. If you go back to the 2001 Budget presented by the UNC, you would see, in fact, where you all supported the aluminum smelter plant and you spoke of all the jobs that would be created during construction, some 4,000 jobs and another sustainable 600 jobs. That was what you were about in 2001, very cavalier behaviour on your part. [Crosstalk]

With regard to Petrotrin, I speak on behalf of the people of the South; we are very pleased that all the programmes are continuing: the gasoline optimization programme, the isomerization programme and the ultra low sulphur diesel programme. I remain concerned but optimistic about Trinmar and its future. I am concerned about the SWS fixed process platform project that has been deferred and I want to be updated on the drilling programme. [Crosstalk] There was a one-year drilling programme in place and I believe you have cut it down to three months, so I want to know where we are with that. [Crosstalk]

I also want to be updated on the joint venture programmes, [Crosstalk] which we expect the Government would continue to arrange for the benefit of Trinmar.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: I wish now to turn attention to the foreign policy of this country. [Interruption] I am sorry you were not there for the beginning of my brief.
Very simply, a country’s foreign policy is designed to maximize its domestic interests. It is domestic policy that is transmitted to the rest of the world through public diplomacy, meaning reaching your audiences abroad. Indeed, a Government is always attempting to influence the public’s opinion of itself in other nations. It is about getting the message out there and protecting our image worldwide; that is what public diplomacy is about. So central to all this is the building and nurturing of political relationships, building linkages and, in some cases, building some very functional relationships.

I go back to the domestic interests; these would be energy, trade and investments, science and technology, et cetera. Trade is important to us because it creates jobs at home and it is also an excellent foreign exchange earner. We can see from the pattern of trade with the US that they are the largest foreign direct investor in Trinidad and Tobago. They are our largest trading partner in both imports and exports, so that our relationship with the US is extremely important. After the US it is Caricom that is important to this country. It is both for our energy products and our non-energy products as well. What is noteworthy is that Trinidad and Tobago companies do hold substantial investments in Caricom countries, which are headquartered at home.

I want to look at our export figures to Caricom. In 2005, TT $13 billion; $15 billion in 2006; $11 billion in 2007; $21 billion in 2008 and $9 billion in 2009, and there is a reason for the drop. Our non-petroleum exports for the same period have been in the vicinity of TT $3 billion to TT $4 billion; that is the range they have been in. When one closely examines the figures, it is easy to conclude that Caricom is the basis of the success of our manufacturing sector. [Desk thumping] It is that our manufacturing sector really developed its competitive edge based on Caricom. It is the first region that we started marketing to and doing business with; it is very, very important to the business people and manufacturers in Trinidad and Tobago.

A bit of a subdued performance, as the Minister had outlined; relatively flat, but that is because of declining consumer demand in Caricom countries now, on account of the severe hardships in the region where recovery is slow and difficult. But it is very clear to understand, and anybody could, that when something goes wrong in Caricom, when they suffer economically, we see that it affects Trinidad and Tobago. We see, not just a reduction of our non-oil exports, but it results in massive unemployment at home. That is the effect of our relationship with Caricom; very, very important in terms of employment at home; so it has been very important to Trinidad and Tobago.

Successive PNM Governments have known that and, therefore, we have always been careful with how we treat with Caricom. We have been tailoring our
Caricom policy in such a way to reflect the importance of Caricom to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and our well-being and welfare.

It is against this background that the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago attended the 31st general meeting of Heads of Government in Montego Bay, Jamaica, from July 04—July 07, 2010. Everybody was quite anxious as to the kind of impact the hon. Prime Minister would have on the meeting. It was her first Caricom meeting since being elected to office and she was also the only female Caricom Head of State in attendance; the first for Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] I like my Prime Minister; woman to woman, I appreciate having a female Prime Minister; no problem with that.

In congratulating the Prime Minister on her election to office, the hon. Bruce Golding, the Prime Minister of Jamaica, said and I quote:

“...My colleague Heads and I look forward to the wisdom which she would bring to our deliberations. Trinidad and Tobago has always played a significant role in Caricom and we have every confidence that it will continue to do so under her leadership.”

Little did the Heads know what would follow.

On the matter of the referendum in the Caribbean Court of Justice being the final appellate court for the region, the Prime Minister declined to do so and did not consider any referendum at all. This is what she said:

“There are much more important issues that will engage our time and our money than to determine to remove the Privy Council today or tomorrow. It is a matter which can wait.”

Very abrupt; that was said by the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago; very callous, very rude, considering the relationship of Caricom to Trinidad and Tobago; no wisdom there at all. [Crosstalk]

When two Caricom leaders pushed for Trinidad and Tobago to fulfil the promises made to the region by the last PNM administration, the Prime Minister made it clear that Trinidad and Tobago was not an ATM card.

Hon. Member: Oooh! [Crosstalk]

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: I wish the member for Tabaquite was here with us, because I want to ask him if that was the kind of advice he would give to the Prime Minister in dealing with Caricom that is so very important to Trinidad and Tobago and important for employment sustainability levels in Trinidad and Tobago; if that was the kind
of advice that should have been given by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Trade and Industry, who was also there. [Crosstalk] That comment was made to the media, but it was for her colleagues, the Heads of Governments.

5.15 p.m.

Our view on this side is that those comments were inappropriate, they were uncalled for, and they were unforced.

Mr. Imbert: Uncouth.

Mrs. P. Goppee-Scoon: Unforced, absolutely unnecessary, and downright rude. [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, you can consider for a moment what the effect would have been, and I have a form of words, if she had said it this way. [Interruption] All right? I have a bit of experience, Mr. Speaker, and I want to offer a form of words.

“Caricom colleagues, I am pleased to have this opportunity to interface with you all for the very first time. Trinidad and Tobago considers Caricom a very important trading partner and we understand our responsibilities to our Caricom partners, in the same way that we understand the importance of Caricom to us and the coexistence which we have.”

It could have gone like that.

“We also recognize that because our financial situation may be a bit better than yours and we have some sort of responsibility to ensure that all of us survive. And so, Trinidad and Tobago has embarked on a policy of assistance to Caricom in a number of ways; the Petroleum Fund and the security agenda, and so forth.”

And it probably could go on like this:

“So there has been an economic downturn around the world which has affected everyone, including Trinidad and Tobago; and as much as we would have liked to, our financial situation does not allow us to assist Caricom to the full extent as we have been doing in the past; and in the circumstances, we are forced to cut back. But we want to assure you that we will try as best as we can, with the little resources available to us now; and whenever the situation changes, we will consider returning to the level of support which we gave in the past. But for the time being, we ask you to bear with us while we focus on our domestic issues which have become a major challenge for Trinidad and Tobago.” [Desk thumping]

Now, Mr. Speaker, suppose she had said something like that? Not just, "We are not an ATM." Just suppose she had said something like that, Mr. Speaker? Diplomacy.
Nobody would have been able to quarrel with a statement like that. Nobody. [Desk thumping] Because, Mr. Speaker, the upshot of those statements was not only that the heads were aggravated, but our jobs in the manufacturing sector of Trinidad and Tobago are threatened at the basis of the level and kind of diplomacy displayed by the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] Very irresponsible. Just look at it, Mr. Speaker; the effect of a little statement on the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and that was enough.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. P. Goopee-Scoon: Mr. Speaker, that was bad enough, but then the hon. Prime Minister went on to unveil a new foreign policy initiative whilst in Jamaica. You know what that was? Dancing. And that was not cute. [Desk thumping] Our Prime Minister made the front page of every newspaper in the Caribbean and here at home, and nothing is wrong with that, you know. Nothing is wrong with that, Mr. Speaker, but it must be done in moderation. Right? And with dignity and decorum. Just look at the picture which flashed across.

Mr. Roberts: How it look?

Mrs. P. Goopee-Scoon: I would not do it, Mr. Prime Minister. [ Interruption] [Laughter]

5.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want you all to look at that photograph, you know, because there is another Prime Minister in that photo and, surely, he is having a good time, but look at his posture. This is the hon. Prime Minister of Jamaica, in moderation, having a good time.

I am very proud of our Prime Minister being a woman and so on, but I would like to see her in the mould of other female Prime Ministers in the world, other female greats. And at the end of her tenure, which may be soon, this is how I would like to think of her: Have you ever seen Margaret Thatcher in a position like that? Or Golda Meir of Israel? Indira Gandhi? Benazir Bhutto? Not Michelle Bachelet of Chile? No! And that is because they understood their position as leaders; they understood their responsibilities to their people; it was one of grace and decorum. [Desk thumping]
Imagine if I had done that as Minister of Foreign Affairs at one of my meetings; imagine if I had done that and I was accountable to the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, what would have been my position? But Madam Prime Minister has to understand that she is responsible to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and, therefore, when you behave like that, you will get a political tongue lashing from your people. Right? Very, very disappointing!

I want to take us back before I speak about another diplomatic initiative to the—another very important development in the international community. Following the Second World War, the then colonial powers sought to give way to the decolonization movement by giving independence to India and then some years later to Nigeria, Ghana and others. But there were two countries which stood out then: South Africa—South Africa was already independent—and then the other one was Rhodesia. The British government gave independence to Northern Rhodesia which they called Zambia, but Southern Rhodesia they chose not to give independence to because of the apartheid system. And when Ian Smith could not negotiate it he decided to take a position unilaterally and so, there was a unilateral declaration of independence. The upshot of this is that a guerilla movement broke out and Robert Mugabe emerged. Ian Smith finally came to an agreement with the British government and their terms of independence were established. It was a very, very important event, because therein began the demise of the apartheid system. So that it was Zimbabwe first and then everyone looked forward to South Africa next and I believe that came some 10 years later.

So that when Zimbabwe got their independence, it was a world event; it was a grand event, so important it was in terms of the breakdown of the apartheid system, and so on, and top leaders from around the world attended; all of the top leaders; big businessmen; technocrats, et cetera; they all came to Zimbabwe because of the significance of the event. The Caribbean was represented. I believe the hon. Member for San Fernando East, in his capacity as Minister, attended on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Government of Jamaica, indeed, recognized Zimbabwe's independence and they were represented by two people. One of them was an up-and-coming leader, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of International Trade, PJ Patterson and the other person who represented Jamaica was Bob Marley. The Jamaicans chose Bob Marley to represent their interest.

Bob Marley had, at the time, grown in international prominence and reggae itself had become accepted worldwide and the Jamaicans were, in fact, using Jamaican culture to advance their interests. That is why Bob Marley was sent there.
was key to Jamaica then as reggae music is key to Jamaica now. And today Bob Marley still stands out as a symbol of Jamaican supremacy in the world. Cultural diplomacy, Mr. Speaker, that is what it is called; cultural diplomacy.

So fast forward to this other foreign policy initiative I am speaking about, displayed by the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and that recent curious visit—the curious visit I am talking about to New York and the event at the Maracas nightclub. Imagine the Prime Minister leaves this country at the State's expense to exercise cultural diplomacy by singing Jamaican music.

Miss Hospedales: My God! No!

Mrs. P. Gopie-Scoon: Jamaican music, by the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. I am wondering if the Prime Minister had any idea of what she was doing. Bob Marley? Reggae? Three little birds? [Crosstalk] So we have no music here that is indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago? And the Member of Parliament for Mayaro was there; the Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism. He could not have advised the Prime Minister on what—

[Mr. Peters stands].

I am not giving him a chance. He could not have advised the Minister on what she should have done; what was the right thing to do?

Mr. Speaker: Member for Point Fortin—could we have some cooperation, Members? Everyone who has not spoken will be given the opportunity to speak. I would like to hear the Member for Point Fortin. Continue, Member. [Desk thumping]

Mrs. P. Gopie-Scoon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that intervention. So can you imagine what the Prime Minister of Jamaica must be saying now. He is a shrewd man and he must be laughing. All of Jamaica must be laughing and saying, "There goes Trinidad and Tobago, advancing the interest of Jamaica. Them people must have plenty dollars and absolutely no sense." [Desk thumping]

I expect better from the Member of Parliament for Mayaro. I mean, he has a large repertoire of music. We could think of a number of things that he could have advised the Prime Minister to sing, you know. What comes to mind is "Little Black Boy", one of those. She could have sung that. Or in as much as they were there attending a celebration of Indian independence in New York, why could they have probably not done some rendition that would be synonymous with India and Trinidad and Tobago?

I am saying why did they not go for some chutney.
Ms. Hospedales: That's right. [Desk thumping]

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Promote Trinidad and Tobago. That is cultural diplomacy and I would say some chutney. They could have done something like, I mean I do not know a lot of chutney songs, but they could have done something like, "Bar man, give me a Guinness and a puncheon," [Crosstalk] Or the PNM could have advised them on something like Talle Vasete, something like that they could have sung. But at least there would have been some connection with Indian culture and Trinidad and Tobago music. Chutney is unique to the world. But the better thing is that they do not sing and they do not dance and they keep the dignity of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, many of them were on the stage, you know. I have the picture here. Many of them were on the stage. And what was the purpose of that trip, Minister? I want to go back to that trip. What was the purpose of that trip? The Prime Minister and six Ministers and then more of an entourage were on that trip. Can you imagine if we had done that instead, what this country would have said?

When we travelled to South America to promote the Fifth Summit of the Americas, we did five countries in four days and then back to work—five countries in four days and back to work. This curious trip, what was it about? This curious trip: guest of an Indian Day Parade; a fundraiser and a Ramayan; a meeting with GOPIO and after a number of days a reception in Queens. At the State's expense, Mr. Speaker? And also to collect a Brooklyn Bridge from Marty Markowitz. Every year you go there you are getting a Brooklyn Bridge from him. Next week when she goes, she is getting another Brooklyn Bridge—a complete waste of time.

Mr. Roberts: Who is "she?"

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: I am sorry. I do apologize; the Member for Siparia.

The point about it is, the details of this upcoming UN trip; the dates and so on, would have been known months ago. As soon as the Member for Siparia came into office, she would have known those dates. Why did she then not do all these fringe things on the side of next week's UN's trip, instead of wasting all this time? And you talk about wastage and profligate spending? Profligate spending, Mr. Speaker? What was the reason for the large ministerial presence? Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, what were you doing there?

Mr. Roberts: Looking for you.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Minister of Local Government, there was tremendous flooding in Trinidad and Tobago to be attended to. Minister of Housing and the
Environment, what did the Minister do? The Minister attended a meeting with the Ambassadors of—I think it must have been St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Grenada to talk about clean and beautify. That is what the Minister went there for. The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, that meeting was hatched.

You look at the photograph; you would think that if two Ministers are going to a meeting, to have a meeting with the university that they would be meeting with the President or the Vice Chancellor or somebody. It was hatched. They were meeting with a professor there. For what?

They have put UTT under enquiry, under probe, what are they doing discussing—what came out of that meeting? The Minister of Public Administration will have to tell us whether that was a private visit or whether that was a State visit.

The questions which we put on the Order Paper are insufficient. We are going to be putting questions to all of the various Ministers about this. [Desk thumping] I am concerned about the lengthy travel. In the first instance you had the trip to Jamaica which was extended then to Miami and then, of course, there was the 10 days in New York; now there is another trip to New York next week—

Hon. Member: "Yuh want to go."

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: That one is with good reason, because this is an annual event with the UN General Assembly. But I am saying that that visit should not extend beyond five days. That is what we are saying. The visit next week must not extend beyond five days and we are holding you to that.

They hinted at it being an investment mission, you know; that 10 days in New York. But that is rubbish; that is nonsense, because how could you have an investment mission when the Minister of Foreign Affairs was not there; the Minister of Trade and Industry was not there; the Minister of Finance was not there; the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries—well, you would not put yourself in that; I know you better than that. None of them were there. What was the reason for this trip?

It is either that it was a joyride—but then again they said something about the illness of the Prime Minister—something about the illness of the Prime Minister, and I feel so, you know. Just look at this picture, Mr. Speaker; this picture captioned "Kamla and the Stars". It should have been captioned that "Oh where, oh where has my little dove gone?" Because in that picture, there are the two very beautiful Indian ladies on either side holding their doves, getting ready to release their doves and they are holding them like that.
Then there are two gentlemen in the picture as well. They are releasing their doves too but they are—

Mr. Roberts: Mr. Speaker, 36(1). “Ah” trying hard, Mr. Speaker; 36(1), please, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: I am continuing.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I get the impression that you are referring or you are responding to the Minister of Foreign Affairs' statement?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Pardon me, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: I say I have the impression that in your contribution now, you are referring to the Minister of Foreign Affairs’ contribution?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Yes, but I am speaking about foreign policy and representation of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am simply saying that if you can link—when you are making your contribution, if you are making reference to a contribution made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, you can then refer to what he said. I understand what the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara is advancing. But I am saying that if you can link your contribution. Continue.

5.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to continue. I was saying that there were two persons in that photograph as well, and their hands were like this [Demonstrates] because they had released the doves already; so they went from this to that. [Demonstrates] And there was the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, with her hands like this, but with no dove in her hand. The dove had already gone and she was like this with no dove in her hand.

I wondered; there was a look of puzzlement on her face and then I saw this on the Express newspaper of the same day: "Kamla Persad-Bissessar falls ill in New York and skips events". I questioned: Is the Prime Minister ill or was that just a joyride? If the Prime Minister is ill, why is she away for—

Mr. Roberts: Mr. Speaker, please!

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Speaker, I am going to try to finish. The point is that the Prime Minister's health is the business of the country. When the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East was ill in December 2008, he came to the nation and he gave us the circumstances surrounding his illness. This is what we
expect now. All those extended trips; I am putting, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Government: Is the Prime Minister ill? Explain to us!

The $400,000, the price I saw in the newspaper as the cost of that trip; no way could it have been $400,000; not for all the seats in first class; not for all the people who went; not for all the people who stayed in suites at the Marriott Marquis. We want the full details. The sum of $400,000 is not the correct figure. We ask the Minister to be straight with us. We will be putting questions on this expenditure.

I want very quickly to go to the matter of the—

Mr. Peters: Mr. Speaker, I am raising a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Point Fortin, I notice you keep standing when I am on my legs. In addition, when a point of order is called, you take your seat and I will make a decision whether or not there is a point to be sustained.

You said you have a point of order?

Mr. Peters: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Point Fortin—Standing Order 36(5), imputing improper motives.

Mr. Speaker: Member, as you know, the conduct of any Member of Parliament cannot be discussed in the Parliament unless there is a substantive motion before us. I wish to advise you to be very careful when you are dealing with the conduct or behaviour of any Member of Parliament, including the Prime Minister. Tread very carefully!

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for your advice, which I will take.

I go to another matter of foreign policy, that of the Caribbean Court of Justice, which is the final leg of our journey to self-determination and independence.

I congratulate the UNC government, at that time—some of them are still on the other side—they showed great wisdom and good sense when, as members of the UNC Cabinet of 2001, they agreed that their leader, Mr. Basdeo Panday, should sign the agreement establishing the Caribbean Court of Justice and the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas.

Not only that, they also took a decision that the Trinidad and Tobago Government should make a bid and lobby for Trinidad and Tobago to be seat of the court. They assured their Caribbean colleagues then of the dedication of Trinidad and Tobago to the court and to the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME). That is the relevance of it. It was not just about the establishment of the court, but about the success of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME). The Government of the day, 2001, did well. Congratulations for that.
They were right at that time. They were right because they knew that Trinidad businessmen and our people would benefit from CSME; that Trinidad and Tobago lawyers would benefit the most from the court having its headquarters in Trinidad and Tobago and, indeed, the Attorney General had appeared before the court as well.

We know that the court has been active. There was a matter brought before the court by a company here in Trinidad and Tobago against the Government of Guyana. That company produces cement, which we all have to buy; that this Government will have to use for its infrastructural work. It goes as far as that in the importance of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) and having a court to decide on matters relating to it.

Mr. Speaker, the relevance of this is that when you go to a grocery in Jamaica or Barbados or anywhere in the Caricom and look at where the goods were made, you will see that there is pepper sauce, seasoning from Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaican curried goat made with Trinidad and Tobago curry. You go to Barbados and you see flour there to make fritters, et cetera. Even the groceries in Barbados would have been built with Trinidad and Tobago cement.

So Mr. Panday and his UNC Cabinet agreed to be in the CSME because they knew that Trinidad and Tobago was the country that had the most to be gained by the Caribbean Single Market and Economy. What does that have to do with the CCJ? Time is against me, but I want to tie it in. You cannot have the CSME without the Caribbean Court of Justice.

There is a document here which was signed by the then hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Basdeo Panday, on Valentine's Day on February 14, 2001, agreeing to the Caribbean Court of Justice. At that time, the Member for Siparia and a couple other Members on that side were also members of the Cabinet which took that decision. The Prime Minister could not have taken that decision on his own.

The point is that it was made by the UNC government, which then turned cold turkey on the PNM government and decided to go against the very decision which they took in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, that is very important for this country and also to another jurisdiction of the court, which is the appellate jurisdiction. We can understand why they are used to London and London things and having their decisions taken there and that they would not appreciate a singular court in Trinidad and Tobago to decide on Caricom matters.

Lord Brougham and also Lord Hoffman had stated very clearly that the matters of the Caribbean should be discussed within the Caribbean. They have
also said, very recently, that they do not have the time to deal with Caribbean matters and, therefore, those matters will be relegated to a lower court in London.

Mr. Speaker, I would have you know that there are only three independent countries outside the Caribbean which still retain a right of appeal to the Privy Council. Those are Tuvalu with 10,000 people; Kiribati with 103,000 and Mauritius. I do not know the problem; it could not be a question of cost because all we are doing is paying for the headquarters, the very headquarters which the last Member for Tabaquite lobbied for along with the then government.

Before the PNM could have agreed on the present location, they had found a building, the Windsor Building, and had placed a sign on it, Caribbean Court of Justice. That was the UNC government.

What are they afraid of? We have committed to that already. There is no turning back on it. It is right for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Every country in the Caribbean has taken responsibility for Caribbean institutions being headquartered in its country. I can tell you about the CDB in Barbados and I can go on and on.

There is no problem with the court being here. The way it is set up, there will be no politicizing of the court. Caribbean countries do not pay for the court; they pay the money to the CDB, those were the funding arrangements. It is run out of the interest from the Trust Fund that has been established by Caribbean countries. There is no politicizing of this at all. This Opposition is calling on the Government to institute the Caribbean Court of Justice, whatever is required now, and to bring justice home to the Caribbean.

I thank Members on that side for the hospital which they intend to give to the people of Point Fortin. I do not know where they will get the funds, but I thank them for it. I apologize that I was not able to turn the sod during my tenure, but they have said they will complete it and we look forward to that along with all the other matters which they have promised Point Fortin as well.

I do not know where they will get the funds for the highway to Point Fortin, but I am just acknowledging what they said. There is also the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) campus, which Atlantic Energy is prepared to do with us as a public/private sector arrangement.

I thank the Government for its intentions. As I said, I do not know where they will get the money. There is absolutely no revenue to come from this budget.

Mr. Speaker, I think my time is out. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for bearing with me. Two more minutes, Mr. Speaker!
I also make the plea for the people in the Gulf; the people of Cedros; from Chatham to Icacos. There was nothing in this budget for them; absolutely nothing, after they gave all of the votes to the UNC coalition and that is very sad. I had spoken with the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs on the transformation of Cedros and they did nothing at all for the people out there. They proposed nothing.

As a matter of fact, when in a meeting recently with the technocrats in the Ministry of Health, I asked for extended hours for the health facilities, they said it was not cost effective. They took their votes and then they brought it down to cost; that it is not cost effective at all.

We know what is going to happen. Those votes will be restored to the PNM and that will be the end of any hope of a victory in Point Fortin. The people of Point Fortin, the people of La Brea: once again, I reiterate the position of the aluminium smelter plant. We are calling for it. This is what we expect from the government of the day. Review it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of the People and Social Development (Hon. Dr. Glenn Ramadharsingh): Thank you very much for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. As I start here today, I first of all thank the staff of the Ministry of the People and Social Development who, over the last three months, have been at the frontline of national service, proudly working long hours, way beyond the call of duty, to answer the new mandate that has been assigned to them; throughout the outreach programmes, working in field assessments after the terrible floods that have hit the country; and working long hours into the night.

Not only have they been charged with the responsibility for social development; but the Ministry gives them a whole new vision; a whole new aspiration to work on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I wish also to put into the record of this Parliament my congratulations to one of the finest minds in this part of the world in finance and economics. I congratulate the Minister of Finance for a phenomenal budget presentation. He has responded to the challenges, faced the realities and he is beginning to turn it all around.

5.50 p.m.

Let me also notice the first official budget presentation by the Leader of the Opposition in his new post. His task was a difficult one. To criticize such a great and well thought out budget was a very difficult task, so not much was expected. I must add that his comments about the Form 1 students being "duncy heads";
statement in which he sadly linked you, I found would be recorded as an unfortunate reference in a debate filled with such high quality contributions.

My colleagues have distinguished themselves in the competence and ability to come to terms quickly with their national responsibility and in the national interest and I stand in awe of their respective contributions and shudder to think of the impact of the big guns who have not yet come.

I must also agree with my colleague from D’Abadie/O’Meara for clarifying some of the mischief that they seek to perpetrate in this House. I hope the entire country has read his lips: "In this budget, there are no new taxes for the people of Trinidad and Tobago."

As you would have realized, we were taken to Jamaica, New York, basically all over the world, by the last Speaker. In fact, we are still in a bit of confusion as to what took place in the last hour or so. We are not alone; it seems as if the senior Members of the PNM’s Bench are also in utter confusion as to what has been said over the last hour or so.

By and large, the contributions that have gone before—it seems that some of my Members have asked for psychiatric evaluations of the other side. I think it is becoming pretty clear that they suffer from a bipolar condition. In government, they tend to be arrogant and in opposition, they tend to become depressed to the extent that we must feel sorry for them.

The population has now, from their contribution, been able to unmask the hapless bunch that was running this country. No wonder we went down the road of poor economic management, runaway crime, increasing levels of poverty and disaster and mayhem, which were spread across the land.

I join also the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara in thanking the advisors, if even it were a prophetess, for giving us an early date and a fresh chance at democracy in Trinidad and Tobago.

We in the People’s Partnership Government affirm the words emboldened in our Constitution at:

“Whereas the people of Trinidad and Tobago—

(b) respect the principles of social justice and therefore believe that the operation of the economic system should result in the material resources of the community being so distributed as to serve the common good, that there should be adequate means of livelihood for all…"
This has been the spirit of our manifesto, the spirit of our contributions in this debate and the spirit of the way we run the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, my contribution today hinges on a more than capable declaration taken from the budget document itself. Our people’s well-being and future prosperity are greater than the Arithmetic of revenues and expenditures. They are measured by much more than economic indices and incomes. The people’s well-being and future prosperity embody development. The development of our people is our primary focus in the service that we give to Trinidad and Tobago.

There certainly could not be a more fitting theme for this year’s budget presentation. The time has come for us to face the issues and turn the economy around.

Coming out of eight years of opposition, on this side, we have a wealth of experience and expertise, but in particular, over the last eight years we have enjoyed a clear advantage in crafting this budget. We have seen how the past administration has failed to deliver to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, despite an astonishing growth in the national income levels from oil and gas. We have seen substantial resources wasted.

As a former regional councillor, I have been especially privileged and borne witness firsthand to the tremendous disparities in the way our citizens are treated. I refer to the way in which they are able to access services if and when they are available. At the ground level, I have been able to listen to the complaints of the people who are treated differently and feel as if they are treated accordingly as to whether they were a supporter or a non-supporter. It is no secret that inequity was rampant and in some cases evident in geographical terms. There is and was the perception that grants and disbursements were given in an urban-centric manner, leaving out segments of the population that reside in rural areas. Such conditions escalated until the population was given the opportunity, on May 24, and the rest is history. The people spoke loudly and clearly and fumigated them out of the state rooms of government.

Mr. Speaker, if we were to review the performance of the Ministry of Social Development between 2003—2009, we would have seen a total failure in the delivery of services. The hon. colleagues on the other side would undoubtedly claim that the money was well spent. Over the last few years, they have come up with a litany of rehashed achievements. Their own leader calls it a clichéd proposal of previous budgets. They had become accustomed to cut and paste speeches and now they cannot know the difference between their speeches and what we on this side are proposing.
A scrutiny of the social sector would reveal—[Continuous interruption and crosstalk] Mr. Speaker, would you help me?

**Mr. Speaker:** You have my protection, continue.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** A scrutiny of the social sector has revealed some disturbing facts. In 2007, the old age pension was repealed and the Senior Citizens’ Grant was introduced. This created severe confusion and mass hysteria among the population and resulted in several blunders resulting in the MP for Diego Martin Central apologizing to this honourable House and to the public itself.

On Friday, January 09, 2009, the hon. Dr. Amery Browne said:

“Mr. Speaker, I wish to offer a sincere apology to Members of this honourable House and again I apologize to the nation at large for the recent confusion regarding the disbursement of social safety grants for our senior citizens.”

He had to go down to his knees and apologize to this country for changing from a pension to a grant. This Government has been able to undo that. In that period, there were allegations of abuse in children’s home that surfaced; an unfortunate circumstance of no proper monitoring of the wards. You know only too well of the allegations of misuse of the TCCTP 'Smart Card for Smart men’. Today, every day we continue to correct that situation.

- Allegations of inequity in accessing social services: alleged accessed mostly by political affiliates and socio-political networks.
- The sticking point with the package of children legislation: although it exists, the legislation has been applied piecemeal to such an extent that the operations of the Children’s Authority has been severely hampered; piece, piece, piecemeal syndrome. That is a global scandal and international shame when it comes to the protection of the children’s life in this country.
- The issue of the socially displaced: tremendous action was taken for the Summit and CHOGM, but that did not result in a substantial treatment of the problem, nor the rehabilitation of the citizens who were filched from the streets hurriedly and put, God knows where.
- Rampant poverty: 21 per cent according to the 2009 UNDP Human Development Report.

This poverty enraged the society and engulfed the society, because the governance structure was more concerned about big building when there were empty pots. They were concerned about fancy cocktail sessions, when there were broken down huts.
They were searching for great executive power, when the poor had no water and no flour. These are a few examples, but there are more, to show that despite their best efforts, the previous administration failed in the delivery of social services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

We are now transforming from public servants to Ministers and public servants together serving the people, serving the people, serving the people. This begs the question: How are we different now and how are we going to be different in the future? The answer is simply that the Government believes in an embodied and entirely different approach to governance. We embrace the ideals of integrity, transparency and accountability. Unlike the previous administration, our focus is not on the glories of power, rather we focus on the energies of being in service and of service to the people.

As we know, a plane is not a plane if it cannot fly, a horse is not a true horse with a lame foot and a balloon is of little use without air. A plan is just a piece of paper, unless it is acted upon. With this in mind, a particular vision would remain known as the most elaborate piece of paper that this country has ever seen. I have listened in amazement at how the Members on the other side have decided to use their time in this debate. Some of them cannot be called contributions, because that word implies that something of value has been added.

We have further distinguished ourselves by immediate performance. We have hit the ground running. Over the last three months, we have been through the length and breadth of this country serving the people like never before. The one which is most relevant to the mandate of this Ministry and the social sector, is the launch and establishment of a Ministry that goes to the heart of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. It connects like no other Ministry; the Ministry of the People and Social Development. While the country is happy for a Ministry finally that they can go to and they can see as their own, I wish to quote Dr. Amery Browne, the Member for Diego Martin Central in the pension debate of this parliamentary term.

6.05 p.m.

He said:

“…I do not want to say that is lunacy, but that cannot work. That is…exactly what countries are avoiding at this time; restricting financial resources targeted to those who need it most. Do not strain the staff. Do not strain the offices with dealing with all of these various problems. ‘Somebody thief my chicken last night. I am calling the staff.’ That is what is happening. Do not saddle the Ministry with that.”
Mr. Speaker, that is the conception of the Member for Diego Martin Central. It is symptomatic of a petty and shallow last stage of a hubristic meltdown. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, another achievement of the Ministry of the People and Social Development is that we have obtained Cabinet's approval for the establishment of an inter-ministerial working committee to review all poverty alleviation and social support programmes. This committee will look at all the ministries. As you know, 49 per cent of the budget is spent on social infrastructure, but it is distributed to all the ministries. What this committee will do is pull from all the ministries and see how it can synergize and strengthen the programmes and increase the impact of these programmes through rationalization and integration. [Desk thumping]

By doing so, we will assist the household to step up to prosperity and reduce the number of persons classified as poor by 2 per cent every year we come to this Parliament. Mr. Speaker, to make the point, shooting tennis balls here, rubber bullets on the other side and a bouncing ball in the middle will not do it. We will garner the forces, summon the energy and strike with laser-like precision at poverty eradication in this country. [Desk thumping] We have also prepared a one-year action plan and a five-year strategic plan for the ministry.

Mr. Speaker, what further sets us apart is that we recognize the value of involving our citizens. There are only gains to be enjoyed by allowing everyone to participate in addressing issues that directly impact on their daily lives. We affirm our commitment to promoting the tenets of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, particularly Article 6 which advocates:

“It is the right and responsibility of all citizens to participate in decisions relating to their own development.

This is also a necessary condition for the full and effective exercise of democracy. Promoting and fostering diverse forms of participation strengthens democracy.”

The Ministry of the People and Social Development will radically change the delivery of social services by facilitating a bottom-up approach to governance. We are not interested in blindly steering our nation into the future. Instead, we are actively encouraging a participative approach to governance. The Ministry of the People and Social Development will ensure that our citizens' needs are properly analyzed and catered for, reinforcing our commitment to our democracy. We guarantee, never again, our citizens will experience the tyranny and malfeasance with which they were faced in the past. [Desk thumping]
Additionally, we will chip away at the wall that has been built between the Government and the citizens while they try to access social services. The functions of this new Ministry will include:

- Efficient customer service.
- Encouraging the receipt of proposals from the citizenry regarding good governance and development.
- Sustained liaison with the relevant ministries, government agencies and other stakeholders.

Most importantly, we have found from the research that 40 per cent of the calls that come into the Ministry of the People and Social Development and in other countries—there are like ministries in the Far East—40 per cent of those calls are people calling for information on how to access services or which government agency they should go to. Therefore, the dissemination of information and sanitization of the public on the progress on key initiatives of the Government is another important feature.

The Ministry will also report to Cabinet, the needs of communities and measures formulated to address citizens’ complaints. It will also involve intelligence gathering in the community as a means of being proactive in anticipating problems and responding to the needs of the people in the communities. So far, we have established two major groups to operationalize the people’s arms of the Ministry. These are the Cabinet-appointed committees, comprising selected Government Ministers as well as an inter-ministerial people issues resolution committee.

I wish to inform this honourable House that within three months, on Monday, September 13, 2010, at 11.30 a.m. the first meeting of the inter-ministerial people issues resolution committee was held at the Ministry of the People and Social Development. [Desk thumping] After several Cabinet notes that were done with efficiency and effectiveness, we have placed in the newspapers within three months, advertisements to fill vacancies within the Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, a review of the social sector allocation for 2011. In his budget presentation, the Hon Minister of Finance has generously identified that a total of $10.7 billion is to be devoted to the social sector. This will be spread across:

- the Ministry of the People and Social Development;
- the Ministry of Education;
- the Ministry of Housing and the Environment;
the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs;
- the Ministry of Health;
- the Ministry of Community Development;
- the Office of the Prime Minister;
- the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education; and
- the Tobago House of Assembly.

Of this total sum, approximately $3.6 billion is to be invested in capital infrastructure, and approximately $7.1 billion is budgeted for social programmes. This is an absolute increase from last year in which approximately $9.5 billion was spent on the social sector. Mr. Speaker, overall, this means that the Government has increased the amount spent directly on impacting the well being of our citizens from $9.5 billion to $10.7 billion, which translates to a difference of a 13.7 per cent increase in social spending.

This fiscal year has seen a substantial 20.5 per cent of the entire national budget being allocated to social service delivery. We are, therefore, sending a strong statement that the quality of life enjoyed by our people is of utmost importance to this Government.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER in the Chair]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, allow me to compare this budget with the most recent PNM budgets. I must point out that there is a sharp difference from what the past regime had been doing in the social sector. During fiscal 2008/2009, the total sum allocated to the social sector decreased by more than $18.6 million.

Between fiscal 2009/2010, the total sum allocated to the social sector decreased by more than $431.25 million. Of course, we require no stretch of memory to recall those years that saw the hosting of lavish and over-priced hemispheric and international conferences.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, though we are happy for those large increases in social infrastructural spending, the Ministry would like to think that we have gone beyond the budget and I wish to explain this. This Government came into power on the basis of a partnership, brought together by the need to protect the people from what was perceived to be an emerging dictatorship and a failed State.

The spirit of the partnership is not only a partnership or parties. That partnership was a breath of fresh air that led to a renewed respiration generated in our democracy
that gave life to a new government. The partnership is a continuing partnership. It is a partnering of the Government, communities, business and international agencies.

The budget itself sets out a road map for my Ministry but, in no way, it will be an end in itself. The kind of work that we have engaged in has inspired players and partners in local business, for example, Mario's, the corporate world organization, Rotary International, Lions International and voluntary organizations such as the Red Cross and Missions International. Through these assisting agencies, we will be able to partner to do more with those who have less.

Through this, recently, we have been able to build a house through the help of a private contractor in Couva South at Basta Hall in collaboration with the MP. This is for a family of four, all of whom are mentally challenged and whose home was demolished by the floods. In fact, it is because of the floods that we found them, because no one was paying attention to them. When the assessors try to get information from them as to how they can access the grants, they could not communicate effectively, and this was picked up by the Family Services Division of the Ministry of the People and Social Development. That home will be built in the next two weeks. [Desk thumping]

We have exciting partnerships that will light up the social landscape of Trinidad and Tobago. In this direction, we have already distributed 45 wheelchairs; school supplies and hygiene kits for flood victims by partnering with Missions International. Next week, we shall distribute 250 more wheelchairs. This is the continuing partnership of the People's Partnership Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is said that where there is a will there is a way. This Government has within the first 120 days delivered to our senior citizens by changing the word "grant" and returning the word "pension" thus ensuring that no one in this country over the age of 65 receives less than $3,000 in pension. This does not come alone and it will not be alone. It will come with a series of senior citizens friendly measures.

Historically, this has been the role of Government; to develop mechanisms to provide income security for older persons, to reduce poverty and vulnerability. The social security landscape is, however, changing with an emphasis of improving the quality of life. The challenge is to provide adequate income security to older persons. However, it is manifested differently in different parts of the world and has a mixture of contributory and non-contributory programmes.

The projected changes in the population structure over the medium to long term will cause Trinidad and Tobago to experience a demographic transition since the population of older persons is projected to increase rapidly.
With the growing average lifespan and rapid changes in vision, provision of adequate income support to older persons is becoming increasingly important. As of September 2010, a total of 52,790 senior citizens are benefiting from the $3,000 per month. This advanced payment structure also allows a number of our senior citizens to enjoy a combined income of $4,000. This is because persons who already have an income will receive a senior citizens pension which makes their total monthly income a total of $4,000 per month.

6.20 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, 20,717 senior citizens now benefit from a combined monthly income of $4,000. We are committed to ensuring the highest quality of life for our senior citizens to ensure their protection under the Government of the People's Partnership. A person wishing to access senior citizens' pension must be living in Trinidad and Tobago for 20 years preceding the date of application, or must have been residing in Trinidad and Tobago for 60 years. We will reduce this to 50 years.

We have removed the period spent out of this country whilst on official government business, as well as in the employ of local company when looking at residential qualification. This applies to persons who are required to be out of the country, and also their dependents. We will come to Parliament with sweeping changes that will bring relief and comfort to our senior citizens.

In keeping with the United Nations principles for older persons, respect for rights and dignity of the individual, the UN principles advocated are independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity. The first step is to mainstream ageing and the concerns of older persons into a national development framework by working together with local authorities, civil society, private sector, volunteers, and voluntary organizations. In order to do so effectively, the Ministry of the People and Social Development, through the division of ageing, recently conducted five annual public open fora for older persons in Rio Claro, St. Joseph, Palo Seco and Diego Martin. Each of these fora, including the one I attended at Rio Claro, had an excess of 400 older persons who receive information on Government's social services and grants, National Insurance retirement benefits and the basic tenets of elder law, and tips on healthy and active ageing.

As part of the institutional arrangements and listening to the voice of senior citizens [Desk thumping] from those fora, we will establish an enabling environment for our senior citizens. As enunciated in the budget, the Ministry of the People and Social Development promises to provide transport shuttle services for the elderly in the cities of Port of Spain, San Fernando, Arima, Chaguanas and Scarborough. [Desk thumping]
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[HON. E. MC LEOD]

With advance ageing, research studies have shown social activities are made more difficult through physiological wear and tear, through societal discrimination and social and physical demands placed on the elderly. As such, mobility becomes a critical prerequisite for socialization, leisure, shopping for items, for productive and active participation in the society. To this end, the elderly mobile shuttle programme is intended to assist older persons in conducting their everyday activities.

We also envision a very ambitious project to get into the area of assisted living facilities, which are synonymous with retirement communities and residential care facilities designed for older persons. Assisted living is appropriate for someone who is too frail to live at home or in an independent setting, but does need skilled nursing care. Most facilities provide personal care assistance with bathing, dressing, grooming, hygiene, ambulating, medications, meals, transportation, laundry, housekeeping, all of which are provided on a 24/7 basis. This project, ambitious as it is, will be looked at in partnership with the Ministry of Housing and the Environment—[Interruption]

Dr. Moonilal: Yes.

Hon. G. Ramadharsingh:—with a view to accessing the Green Fund and the possibility of engaging in green housing. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will notice that some on the other side are not very interested in this service. Some of them do not seem inspired and motivated. It does not surprise me because in the 2008/2009 budget presentation, the former Minister of Social Development during his contribution said, and I quote:

“I had the privilege of going to South this morning, to launch some quality customer service training for staff of the Ministry of Social Development. I was quite struck on that journey in seeing so many newly paved and asphalted black roads crisscrossing South and Central Trinidad.”

Note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that he said, "Some…customer service training", as if it really did not matter. It would have been a launch where one launches a programme—[Interruption]

Dr. Browne: What?

Hon. G. Ramadharsingh:—no follow-up, no dedication, no continuity, no results.

Dr. Moonilal: That sound like him.

Hon. G. Ramadharsingh: You will also notice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the word "privilege". He says that it was a privilege to go South. For many of us this journey is a way of life, but for him it is a privilege exercised at his regal discretion.
And if we were to extrapolate from the arrogance that existed at that time, the privilege he meant is probably for the people of South to be graced with his presence.

You will also notice the use of the word, "struck". He said he was struck to see the paved roads, almost to suggest that he expected dirt roads, dirt tracks and earthen tracks. Maybe he was privy to information as to where the resources of state were going. Mr. Deputy Speaker, hence you will notice the disinterest when I speak about mobility for elder persons in the society, in rural communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

It is no secret that social development and social work is linked in some way with national security, and it is also no secret that crime is the largest and most critical issue facing the beauteous land of Trinidad and Tobago. Under their reign—and you would have listened to the deafening silence on the issue of crime—thousands died at the hands of kidnappers and criminals.

Many were traumatized and their tear dropping and bloodletting was sometimes mercilessly referred to as collateral damage. Under the PNM, the police force morale was at its lowest as they wined and dined known criminal disguised as community leaders, and their expensive Mastrofski and other programmes failed in the area of implementation. Under the Opposition's rule, a trip to the mall, going to buy a doubles or to take a walk in the park, were not casual activities, they were risks that you took at the expense of your very life. They had this country, under their reign, held to ransom. It was as if certain communities across Trinidad and Tobago were imprisoned themselves.

To motivate the police, the People's Partnership Government has given to the police a $1,000 special duty tax free allowance—$47 billion for National Security—national recognition programmes for the police; a special operation centre with a comprehensive electronic database that will feed mobile officers to access data on individuals through licensed plates and permit numbers; newly approved commissioner and deputy commissioner. The police service now has autonomy over their finances. Prison reform as a programme for inmates to do community work; partnership with the mediation board to prevent crime before it occurs; increased joint police and army patrols; 75 vehicles donated.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I bring this to your attention because it is Ambassador Makandal Daaga, a People's Partnership leader, who said, happy people do not commit crime. [Desk thumping] And there is known to exist an undeniable relationship between social challenges, poverty and crime. The Ministry of the People and Social Development stands with the Ministry of National Security, as
a partner to go into the communities, at-risk communities, to listen to dialogue of the vulnerable youths to inspire them to motivate and to uplift them. We have not only rolled at a full-time and comprehensive war against crime, but at the same time, a similar and yet concerted attack on the scourge of poverty.

What therefore is the way forward? When it comes to the future, there are three kinds of people: those who let it happen, those who make it happen and those who wonder what happened. From May 24, those on the other side are still wondering what happened, and that is the truth. But we will not allow ourselves to be mired by this negativity. We will make it happen: in keeping with the People's Partnership manifesto, prosperity for all.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these interventions that we will make will create an enabling environment that will facilitate continuous improvement in the well-being of our population. These activities are closely linked to the developmental priorities for the achievement of the seven interconnected pillars for sustainable development, and are aligned with the administration's fundamental principles to partner with the people and to ensure the well-being of the disadvantaged in the society. How will we do it; and how will we do it differently? One of the crucial ways in which we will seek to improve our performance and our effectiveness, is through the sensible use of our technology. The Government recognizes the unnecessary burden placed on our senior citizens to renew their life certificate, given their age, health and geographical location. We will use technology; we will institute biometrics into the system so as to ease the burden of travel of these persons to the social development offices.

We will decentralize the delivery of social services by putting all the services of the Social Development Ministry together in one environment. We have budgeted for the decentralization effort an amount of $5 million and this effort will be re-engineered so as to achieve maximum benefit.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are two areas that we will concentrate on, the first being customer service. Under my tenure, we have engaged the services of a consultant to go to the offices and to remodel the way that the staff operates. There has been a perception—

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

Motion made. That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Hon. C. Sharma]

Question put and agreed to.
Hon. G. Ramadharsingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What I was saying is that under my tenure we have engaged the services of a consultant to do customer service training to the offices. Usually what happens in these offices is that the person who is put to deal with the public is usually someone who is not busy in the office or so, and usually not the highest level member of staff.

We are advocating that the persons at the front line of the Ministry, be high calibre, high knowledge persons who will attend to the public in a very warm and cordial manner, and in this regard we have been having motivation sessions with the staff. We have had staff appreciation day in different parts of the country. In Central we called all the staff together, and in South we visited the staff; I, myself, and the Minister in the Ministry of the People and I want to pay homage to him, Dr. Lincoln Douglas, who has been very instrumental in this regard. [Desk thumping] Not only the customer service appreciation at the front desk is important because the client, the citizen, the person who needs help is the most important person, but also it is our ambition—we will begin the process and we will continue as we go along as the financial resources become available—is to remodel the social development offices, make them more friendly, make them more approachable.

6.35 p.m.

It must no longer be a secret as to what—it must not—the social services must not be given out in a little pamphlet like this. [Holding up documents and showing to Members] Our citizens are needy and we must tell them where the offices are and we must tell them what the services are. We must bring out the secret from under the desk and the files and tell the citizens of this country what is available for the poor and the indigent. [Holding up documents and showing to Members] We must therefore remodel the offices so that a person who comes in there with two elderly persons in a wheelchair will have a place to park the wheelchair. Someone who has to wait on an officer will have a place to sit. They can have a biscuit, they can have some juice. Treat our citizens, our—washroom facilities, Mr. Deputy Speaker—treat our citizens in the way that they are supposed to be treated, with dignity. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have realized that government resources are spent mainly on recurrent, staff and there are some development projects that inch along the way. What we have done is huddle together, my staff, my advisors, my Minister in the Ministry, and we have decided to do some flagship projects that will redound to the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

We will assist in preventing return to crime of young criminals. Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the most difficult undertakings for a person who has been
incarcerated is his journey towards reintegration into mainstream society. Due to stigma an ex-prisoner may encounter difficulty in trying to live a new life in securing permanent employment and finding a place among his fellow citizens. The Ministry of the People and Social Development will go into a deepened partnership with Vision on a Mission seeking to facilitate rehabilitation and reintegration and we will give to Vision on a Mission an additional $1.2 million to be granted for the establishment of a halfway house for inmates at Champs Fleurs. [Desk thumping]

As you would recognize, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the area of protection of children’s rights—and I had gone to pains to describe the piecemeal way the legislation was laid in the Parliament. In all of these homes, all of the homes, we are beginning a process where we will partner with the Ministry of Education which will make available the services of guidance officers from its student support services department to track the progress of these children who come from children’s homes. The Ministry of the People will assign social workers from its family services division to provide counselling to children and staff as required.

The Ministry of the People and Social Development through the Children’s Authority has begun to take the necessary steps to develop the appropriate standards—standards, Mr. Deputy Speaker—to ensure that all children’s homes are properly managed by instituting regulations and standards pursuant to the provisions of the Children’s Authority Act. A tender notice under my tenure has already gone out for consulting services, issued on August 15th, inviting potential consultants to submit proposals for the development of regulation and standards for community residences which include children’s homes in Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

In keeping with the recommendations of the Children’s Committee, we have already started to release additional funds to improve the infrastructure of children’s homes throughout the country. In cases where there are problems at homes or allegations, we have met with the boards and the statutory authorities management of homes in this regard.

With regard to the issue of abuse at homes, we have noted that anyone having reasonable grounds to believe that a sexual offence has been committed against a minor has a duty to report this to the police in accordance with section 18 of the Sexual Offences Act 31 of 2000 as it is a criminal offence not to report such incidents. It must be understood that anyone against whom allegations are made must have an opportunity to be heard. In this regard, I intend to have a children’s activist resource group advise me consisting of those who are concerned about children’s rights and I open this up to all those who are interested in the protection of the rights of children.
The Ministry of the People and Social Development is committed to the governing principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to operate in the best interest of the child and to protect the child from abuse of all kinds. In this regard the Ministry of the People and Social Development will take the lead and we have allocated for a model children’s home, that the Ministry will run, $2 million in this fiscal year. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is one thing to be differently abled physically and another to be intellectually or mentally challenged, but there is a disease called cerebral palsy which is a disorder that affects muscle tone, movement and motor skills. It also affects vision, hearing, speech and engenders learning disabilities. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have met with societies of cerebral palsy—there are many. I have asked them to form one body and we will donate for a cerebral palsy resource group $2 million to the people who [Desk thumping] are suffering with cerebral palsy.

That is not all, Mr. Deputy Speaker. According to the 2000 census, there are approximately 50,000 persons with disabilities living in Trinidad and Tobago. Within this population of persons there resides a reservoir of skills and talent that is left untapped and underdeveloped. This Government will make a signal mark in helping the disabled to become equal partners in the society by advocating and ensuring that as a line item in the budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have put a centre for the development of persons with challenges for $10 million [Desk thumping] in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I end, I wish to recall that as I walked through the length and breadth of the Caroni Central constituency during the last election and the recently concluded local government election, I was appalled and pained to see the rural neglect and wanton disregard for the people and communities of Central Trinidad. I was taken aback on a recent trip on behalf of the Ministry to Colombia when I read a document from ECLAT, which is the Economic Commission of Latin America that had a conference in Brazil and it was pointed out that an emerging and new concept in regional and global economics is that equity is a sine qua non for the progress and development of societies. [Desk thumping]

It must be a well-known fact that if we develop certain sections of our society at the expense of others, it is obvious that those who become advantaged and weak, who do not benefit from the society, will become disenchanted and disengaged from the society and eventually they will put a strain on the medical, social and security resources of the country. It is wisest therefore to help all manner of men and women no matter what their station, therefore, equity in
economics is a most important concept for us in Trinidad here as the People’s Partnership will take the lead to demonstrate same.

Therefore, when I walked through Fireburn and Gran Couva and Indian Trail and I saw the lack of roads and the absence of drains and no pavements, and bridges breaking down and people travelling over them at the risk of their lives to take their children to school, I was sure that they went wrong and that is why we are suffering today in Trinidad and Tobago. When I looked at the living conditions of the people of Carlsen Field in the old base, it would break your heart, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to see people living in plywood houses, living in gross squalor in this nation. Whilst others in other parts of the country can discuss esoteric issues, these people are preoccupied with such for roads, drains, water and lights.

While for the last eight years there was chest pounding about the preponderance of natural resources in oil and gas, people were sleeping in plywood houses that were literally soaked away by the rains and floods while their children had to walk to school in the mud. In Chickland people did not have water to cook, bathe or eat. In fact, a lady held on to me and she said, "Get water for me because I have not had water for 48 days and if you do not get water for me tomorrow will be 49."

This was going on while people were trying to buy private planes and extending the skyline in Port of Spain while rural communities had to do without. They were lost and forgotten while my brother Minister of Trade and Industry told us that $1.33 billion was overspent in Tamana, Hilton and Vanguard. Mr. Deputy Speaker, where was the cry for water, food, drains, roads, school books, wheelchairs and much needed surgery?

It was a peopleless agenda, a peopleless government but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is said that where there is injustice, hope always breathes alive in the chest of the faithful. [Desk thumping] It is said that where there is injustice, hope always breathes alive in the chest of the faithful [Desk thumping] and on May 24th they were fumigated out of the staterooms [Desk thumping] of SS Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] The people continue to abandon them day and hour and minute. It will not be long before they are alone. In fact, they are separated already. There are cheering groups within their Opposition benches.

It is a framework of decline, a hubris borne of success but overestimated against capabilities leading to arrogance, an undisciplined pursuit of more growth, more acclaim, overreaching, loss of discipline, less capacity building, ignoring warning signs, blaming external factors, looking for quick fixes with an eventual
capitulation, irrelevance and death, the erosion of the entrepreneurial spirit. They sing out repeatedly, "Nothing new", but they cannot answer why they stayed silent when they saw the priorities going berserk.

Why did they stay quiet when they saw the people lying on the hospital floors? Why did they stay quiet when people had to wait three days to see a doctor in casualty? Why did they stay quiet when we did not have roads and bridges in the rural communities? While the megaprojects were being run and the money was running out and while they were going after environmentally repugnant and human health risky industrial projects that were literally shoved down the throats of residents of Chatham, Vessigny, Roussilac, La Brea and Point Fortin? But the voice of the people came from the ground and triumphed. They did not raise theirs but people raised their voice and eradicated them from office. [Desk thumping]

Leadership, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a state of seeing, thinking, acting, mobilizing self towards a purpose, in stark contrast to the hubris complex. I wish to quote from a book from the *Harvard Business Press* at page 33 that says:

“As leaders get farther away from the in-the-trenches responsibilities, it’s easy for them to become removed from the people for whom they are responsible.

Leaders should always be willing to walk in the shoes of those they lead and should never ask anyone to do something they would be unwilling to do themselves.”

We on this side have a facilitative leader who provides a tremendous source of inspiration for us all. She has guiding vision, passion, integrity and determination. Instead of searching for private planes she sets up a Children’s Life Fund, sets up the Ministry of Justice to deal with crime and injustice. She does not run away or divert course so as to avoid the smelter protesters in Otaheite but dons a pair of boots to walk through the flood-ravaged areas throughout the country. She establishes a Ministry of the People to deepen the democracy. She does not build a massive mansion at a phenomenal development and maintenance cost but establishes a milk money initiative for vulnerable groups in the society [Desk thumping] especially low-income, pregnant mothers.

6.50 p.m.

She is at the frontline supporting the national football team; touching the lives of the differently-abled; motivating the youth and women, and telling them that they will rise. Empowering every SEA student in the north, south, east and west of all economic backgrounds with a laptop for their future, irrespective of where they come from. This is a people’s Government, brought together by a People’s
Partnership; and in this Government, we are committed on her exhortation to serve the people, serve the people, serve the people.

As I wind up, Mr. Speaker, as we move towards a brave new land, with a brighter and greater future, I wish that we continue to have the vision for a better Trinidad and Tobago where we will be among the best in the world. I enjoin in the vision of Tagore in Geetangali when he says:

“Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls
Where words come from the depths of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arm towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sands of dead habit.
Where the mind is led forward by thee, into that ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my father
Let my country awake.”

I thank you.

The Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprises Development (Hon. Errol Mc Leod): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I consider it a privilege and distinct pleasure—

Dr. Browne: Twenty dollars.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: You have some respect. You hear? [Desk thumping] I consider it a privilege and distinct pleasure to once again address this honourable House, first as a Member of Parliament representing the constituency of Pointe-a-Pierre, and second, as the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development. And I do so with humility, which I would like to recommend to those sitting opposite, [Desk thumping] and respect for the constitution and the laws of our Republic.

I wish to begin, Mr. Speaker, by expressing my deepest appreciation to, first of all, my family. On the 26th of June, 2008—two years ago—after leading, perhaps the Caribbean’s most fearless people’s representative and conscious workers’ organizations, the Oilfield Workers Trade Union, for 21 years, at the helm of that organization, I had begun, actually, to enjoy my retirement when I was re-summoned to duty on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.
I needed to, first of all, get the concurrence of my family: Kurt, Sharon, Ian, Nikkiesha and Jason, my children; and Kofi, Kafi, Isaiah, Cheyenne, Noah and Theo, my grandchildren. [Desk thumping] Seven grandchildren; and they are such good grandchildren that I often say to them that I wish I had them before I had my own children. [Laughter] That is not to say that I have not been blessed with good children, you know.

These days in Trinidad and Tobago, when the police do not come in the middle of the night, shaking down your door, tell the world that God has blessed you with good children, as he has blessed me.

**Dr. Browne:** Minimum wage.

**Hon. E. McLeod:** And they have all done well, so that they do not have to depend on a minimum wage. [Desk thumping] And this Government, over time, is going to do so well in Trinidad and Tobago that we will not any longer have a problem with a minimum wage. [Desk thumping]

**Mrs. McIntosh:** They did well under the PNM.

**Hon. E. McLeod:** They did well because of the labours of the Oilfield Workers Trade Union. [Desk thumping] I will give particular people in particular periods of this country’s history the accolades that they deserve. Be assured that Manning will get none. [Desk thumping] And depending on how the leader of your opposition walks, he might be considered later on, but it will take him some time. Okay? All you ain’t want nothing with me, you know. [Laughter]

**Mrs. McIntosh:** Neither me, you know. [Laughter]

**Hon. E. McLeod:** So, it is with deepest appreciation that I recognize the comrades in the struggle over the years; friends, and the Pointe-a-Pierre constituents whose support and understanding have made it possible for me to balance the responsibilities between constituency representation and ministerial duties.

I also wish to thank the indomitable hon. Prime Minister and the People’s Partnership of the United National Congress, the Congress of the People, the Tobago Organization of the People, the NJAC, and the Movement for Social Justice for affording me the opportunity to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago as Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development.

You might know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I was here before. I was here from 1976 to 1981; when in 1978, we were told in this House that money was no problem and that planning had lost its mystique. Wild spending and an abandonment of
planning sent us into the jaws of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in the mid-1980s. Profligacy such as has been conducted by the two Members who have conveniently absented themselves—the Member for Point Fortin allowed herself to be set up by her failed leader, and then they both left.

Recklessness again featured in our financial and economic dealings in very recent times, threatening again to take us into the valley of unbearable indebtedness. The Minister of Finance sought to address this situation in his budget presentation. I hope that our People’s Partnership Government has effected a timely rescue; and, therefore, it is against this background that I record my deep appreciation for my distinguished colleague here, the Minister of Finance, for his fiscal package which offers hope again, and promises change for Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

The package offers hope and change in the way this Government will work together with the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to overcome the hurdles in the path of our social, economic, and environmental development, and which will do so in the interest of all of our citizens; whether in Caroni, or in the East-West Corridor; wherever. All of our citizens, and I shall address them again when I come to those who need most, the benefits of the many social programmes that this country offers; some of which you would have inaugurated, but which you have abused over the years.

We will work together, Mr. Speaker; we will live together and grow together, ultimately leading more prosperous lives; and we will, of course, rise together. All of us. [Desk thumping] This first budget presentation by the People’s Partnership Government, is undoubtedly one of change and choice, Mr. Speaker. It offers hope for a better life to the people who had become disillusioned with empty promises. It affords the people of Trinidad and Tobago the opportunity to make choices that would improve the quality of their lives. It demonstrates that this Government is willing to walk the talk.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Point Fortin, let me deal with and dismiss her first. [Laughter] The Member for Point Fortin raised the question of former President General, my immediate predecessor in the leadership of the OWTU, George Weekes, being invited by Dr. Eric Williams to take the chairmanship of the National Oil Company, as Dr. Williams sought to inaugurate what had been Shell Trinidad Limited; and which later on became TRINTOC.

7.05 p.m.

George Weekes, may the Lord bless his soul, was not a man of personal enrichment; he was not about self-aggrandizement; he was about the recognition of people and the people's organization. George Weekes, after consulting with the General Council of the Oilfield Workers Trade Union (OWTU), responded to Dr.
Eric Williams' invitation, suggesting—[Interruption] That is why you would get absolutely nowhere. [Laughter] [Crosstalk]

**Hon. Members:** Put him in the back of the class.

**Hon. E. McLeod**—that he might have, perhaps, invited the Oilfield Workers Trade Union to nominate a representative for consideration of appointment to the National Oil Company of Trinidad and Tobago. Dr. Williams never responded to George Weekes. Williams could not deal with that principled approach by George Weekes.

I should like to have everybody know that there has been absolutely no challenge, by anybody that I know, in the Oilfield Workers Trade Union, indeed, in the trade union movement in Trinidad and Tobago, to the position that George Weekes occupies in the history of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as they struggled for peace, bread and justice. [Desk thumping] Let us put the record straight, Mr. Speaker.

They came here and tried to engineer and provoke what in Pointe-a-Pierre we would call "kuchur"; you know what that means, Mr. Deputy Speaker, "confusion". It is confusion that has them where they are. [Desk thumping]

The Member for La Brea yesterday brought six persons outside with placards which they did not write themselves and which they could not read.

**Mr. Jeffrey:** Mr. Speaker, I raise objection to this thing.

**Hon. E. McLeod:** I am not giving way; sit down. [Desk thumping] Sit down and be taught! Behave yourself!

**Mr. Jeffrey:** Stranger to the truth! You lie again! You promised people $20 minimum wage and you cannot pay it. [Crosstalk] [Laughter]

**Hon. E. McLeod:** Mr. Speaker, having spent all the years I have spent in struggle, I will not ask you for protection. I could take care of myself. [Desk thumping]

**Mr. Jeffrey:** I too.

**Hon. E. McLeod:** One thing I know you do not do well enough; you might resemble him, but you cannot break dance like Brigo. [Laughter] [Desk thumping]

**Mr. Jeffrey:** I do not lie; I do not tell untruths; $20 minimum wage; I do not tell untruths. You are a stranger to the truth.

**Hon. E. McLeod:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I have offended the Standing Orders, I wish to apologize to you and the Member for La Brea.

**Mr. Jeffrey:** I am good, man; in the spirit.
Mrs. Mc Intosh: That is not godlike.

Hon. E. McLeod: What did you say? [Crosstalk]

Mr. Roberts: Was Calder Hart godlike? The Guanapo church was godlike? "Allyuh give we a chance." Do not bring God in this.

Hon. E. McLeod: Yesterday the Member for La Brea suggested that we should call elections now. He said that if we called elections and they were defeated, he would resign his seat. Resign from where, from what? You would have lost. I cannot understand. [Laughter]

Mr. Jeffrey: Call elections if you are brave!

Hon. E. McLeod: He said if we won more than 29 seats, he would resign; but one of more than the 29 would be La Brea. [Laughter] [Crosstalk]

Mr. Jeffrey: Call the election; if you are brave call it.

Hon. E. McLeod: I was about to suggest in response to the call for election and the number of seats we might have, that side and this side after election—Mr. Deputy Speaker, on May 25, three months ago, eight-year-old Isaiah—he tells everybody I am his best friend and I tell people he too is my best friend, my grandson—he said, "Grandpa, what is the difference between the PNM and a small maxi?" I said, "I doh know." He said," PNM have 12 seats."

Dr. Rowley: You cannot lie on your grandson. That is an old joke. [Crosstalk] [Laughter]

Hon. E. McLeod: I am not telling lies on him. I gave that joke in Penal. It is that same little boy who after you spoke on Tuesday, hon. Leader of the Opposition, Member for Diego Martin West, and identified our first year secondary school students as "dunces"—[Interruption]

Dr. Rowley: I did not do that.

Hon. E. McLeod: I thought it was a slip of the tongue; you made a mistake. You know what I said to my grandson, because he was unhappy about that? I said, "Grandson, listen to this," and he is an extremely intelligent little boy; you should hear the discussions he and I have.

Dr. Rowley: You misled him.

Hon. E. McLeod: I said, "Do not kill Dr. Rowley for that; we are engaged politically and the Leader of the Opposition in his enthusiasm to discredit the proposals of the Government, idly allowed himself to regress into the realms of serious indiscretion." [Crosstalk]
Dr. Moonilal: "Dat mean yuh talked rubbish."

Mr. Roberts: Apologize one time and squash it.

Hon. Member: Apologize to the lady in Tobago.

Hon. E. McLeod: When you went on to say that the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, with responsibility for URP—and remember I talked that with you—was discriminating against PNM URP people—[Interruption]

Dr. Rowley: I referred to a report in the newspapers.

Hon. E. McLeod: I am challenging that you did not see that in the newspapers. What you read in the newspapers—and I read the story 100 times since then—was a response to a question posed by the reporter: "Mr. McLeod what are you going to do to the report that PNM people are still monopolizing the programme, are you going to send them away?" That there are still those whom some might identify as PNM people in the programme, has to do with my position that I do not see PNM worker and People's Partnership worker, UNC worker and COP worker; I see workers in Trinidad and Tobago. For years I have fought for them. [Desk thumping]

The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West called me. The Member for Laventille West called me too; hear their complaints: Laventille West said that there used to be some 300 gangs—I call them "crews"; I do not like the terminology "gang", it connotes something that I find offensive—and they had been dismissed. What did I say to you? I said to talk to the programme manager. This was what I was told. [Crosstalk] Okay, 300 in the region; it was suggested that the programme was shut down. I said, "I did not shut down any programme."

The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West spoke with me two or three days ago and I said that I would look into it. You must understand and I wish to put on the record that they want the rotational system that ought to exist in the Unemployment Relief Programme to continue to employ only those whom they have had on the programme.

Hon. Members: No! [Crosstalk]

Hon. E. McLeod: Listen; listen. I could understand you, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, not knowing, but the Member for Laventille West used to be Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Works and Transport with responsibility for URP. The Member for San Fernando East, the then Prime Minister, unceremoniously removed him from overseeing that programme. That is the truth,
but that is not the point I wish to make here now. I will come back to that after, about elected politicians wanting to work in the programme.

Hon. Members: Umm!

Hon. E. McLeod: It is not only you, but there are those who want to continue that. I am going to take a very principled position on that. [Desk thumping]

I am informed that after the elections which the PNM won in 2002, the next day all the URP people in the office and in the fields were given marching orders. "Get out!" [Crosstalk] "The PNM is here, get out." I must condemn that, else I would not be true to the struggles of Tubal Uriah "Buzz" Butler, Adrian Cola Rienzi, George Weekes and all those who have gone before, after making so many years of important selfless contributions.

7.20 p.m.

I have colleagues who feel that the same thing should happen with a People's Partnership victory and I said I am not for that. Now, the URP people themselves expected to be sent home. Those who had been on month-to-month contracts, deputy programme manager; regional manager and so on, on month-to-month contracts, were abused by their very party. Do you know why they were put on month-to-month contracts? So that they could be used against their own party members and vice versa. You are told, "Organize your gangs"—I prefer to call them crews—"and be at the meeting at Piggott's Corner and if you do not go to the meeting it 'ain't' have no 10-days for you again."

Mrs. Mc Intosh: No, that is not true.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: That is not true?

Mr. Roberts: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, "yuh really doh know. Doh do dat." [Crosstalk]

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Mr. Deputy Speaker, not all of them; not all of you. I expect the Member for Diego Martin West to be dealing in a more principled manner. [Crosstalk] "You ha nutten to do with URP?" [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know what we have done? The programme has been without a programme manager for a long time. No fewer than 125 people approached me. They want to be programme manager. "I vote for People's Partnership, yuh know; I vote for you in Pointe-a-Pierre, yuh know." If all of the people who have since met me had really voted for me—

Mr. Warner: You pass me.
Hon. E. Mc Leod: I "ain't only pass yuh", I decided I going to the EBC to find out who is cheating on my tally of votes. I "woulda" get about 60,000 and I do not think we have any constituency with so many.

And I said, "I cannot give you "no" programme manager work. There is going to be decency in this thing." Now, it is like pulling teeth to get decency in the programme you know, because of so many years of bad habits, bad practices. [Interruption] Whoever it started with, I condemn it! There will be transparency in this thing. We advertised for two weeks in the newspapers and there was an interview process and a programme manager was hired. [Desk thumping]

That did not end our worries. We advertised again for deputy programme manager and regional manager and it was determined that everybody could apply and go through the process. Next week some time there will be the interview process for deputy programme manager and regional manager. Trinidad and Tobago is too small for us to be constantly looking at each other as PNM hack and People's Partnership member, and so on.

Mr. Roberts: You cannot become a hack in three months. [Crosstalk]

Hon. E. Mc Leod: "But all yuh is hack; you know that. All yuh is hack."

Mr. Roberts: "All yuh is 54 years."

Dr. Rowley: Treat me decently. I always treat you decently. You know that.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: I will give that to you and to your Whip, Laventille East.

Mr. Warner: What about Diego Martin Central?

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Who? "Nah." He only looking like an acolyte, "yuh know"—devil incarnate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will come back to the URP. I know that the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs and the Minister of Finance, will respond to a number of issues raised about the price of gas, oil and how they impact the fiscal measures that have been proposed in the budget and our relationship with the Venezuelans, and so on, and the Member for Point Fortin suggested that the former government was responsible for advancing the cross-border gas deal that was signed with the Venezuelans. I do not know that we ought to be ashamed of that.

The last administration also started, unwisely, the programmes in the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery that have brought Petrotrin literally to its knees. This Government must see the completion of the optimization programme. We are not happy about how it was approached but as we have already spent so much money—and the
Member for Caroni East, the Minister of Education, identified some numbers—we have to see it completed, because so much in Trinidad and Tobago, indeed, all of Trinidad and Tobago is dependent on what happens in Petrotrin.

And when the Minister of Finance was misunderstood and wrongly blamed for identifying oil and gas as a curse, it seems to me that people did not understand what was being suggested by the use of the "curse of oil" and gas. I do not know if they are aware of perhaps a corollary to that: blessings abused; curse abounds. The PNM abused our oil and gas resources.

In 1973 we were still completely in the hands of the multinational corporations. In 1974, the Venezuelans nationalized their industry and the Venezuelans, oil workers' unions and the OWTU led by George Weekes, had as close a relationship as the OWTU still has with the Cubans.

We have always identified with people wherever they are in the world, who, after the teachings at the Bandung Conference in Indonesia in 1955, when people were identifying with real independence and condemning the flag independence that so many of us were running for, and started to talk about being in the ownership and control of the commanding heights of your economy so that you can move your people to the different stages of development and so on. That energized people like Dr. Williams and William Demas and Frank Rampersad—and there is a name—Eugenio Moore, Dodridge Alleyne and those people; Barsotti, and they authored our development programmes: first, second, third—I am more familiar with the third Five-Year Development Programme that identified the aspirations of the people of Trinidad and Tobago being advanced on the basis of our having some control over those essential parts of our economy that will fire our development.

So that one must not come here and speak idly about our achievements. And if the PNM had made any contribution to this country's development, as indeed it made, then we must identify Eric Williams and those names that I called a while ago, and popular among the people—the working people—George Weekes, Adrian Cola Rienzi, to some extent—

Dr. Rowley: ANR Robinson.

Hon. E. McLeod: ANR Robinson? I am not putting him in that brew. We could disagree on that, you know. I am not putting him in that brew. Not that he has not made an important contribution, you know.

Mr. Warner: He appointed Patrick Manning on moral and spiritual values.
7.35 p.m.

Hon. E. McLeod: Mr. Deputy Speaker, these folks were also informed, indeed, to some extent, also inspired by the early labour leaders of the 1920s before important workers' organizations were officially registered.

In 1926, Buzz Butler, Clement Payne of Barbados, Hubert Nathaniel Crichlow of Guyana and others—some parts of the history have slipped me. They came together at the first meeting of the early labour leaders of the Caribbean and identified independence in the form of, not single island states, but of West Indian nationhood; and that we must carve our own niche; our own economic and political space. They identified essential pillars on which we would build that West Indian nationhood.

They saw Trinidad's oil—at that time gas was a wasting asset; we were flaring our gas; we did not have any commercial use for it. They identified Guyana's land mass as to where we would plant our food to feed the rest of the Caribbean.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. E. McLeod: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you. They identified Trinidad's oil as the engine that would fire this thing; Guyana's land mass for the purposes of food. [Interruption] It seems that I am disturbing the Member for Diego West.

Dr. Rowley: My humblest apologies.

Hon. E. McLeod: Oh, you are disturbing me, then. You walked into that one. They saw Jamaica's bauxite and all the little clothing factories we were setting up all over the islands using Sea Island cotton. They had a sense of the kind of industries we would set up in different locations. We were talking trade, organization, economic space and all that and up to today we seem unable to bring that to fruition.

That was 1926. Twenty-six and how much makes 58? Thirty-two? Thirty two years after those from whom we often claim to have gained our independence established the European Common Market; 32 years after the brilliance of our early labour leaders; and today in 2010 that has been solidified and our interests in the Caribbean have been spat out and we have to be struggling and, rather than combine forces and struggle, we are fighting one against the other. That we are not openly and publicly criticizing each other does not suggest an absence of
hostility and fight amongst ourselves in the Caribbean. While other parts of the world see the development of their own people and their nation states as intrinsic with the organization of their people, we are choosing to go in other ways. That perhaps is a lecture which I will continue at another time.

Mr. Speaker, the budget provides the platform for moving toward a strong economy that will give us the opportunity to live less stressful and more productive lives. However, we know that people make an economy strong. On one side of the spectrum, we in the People's Partnership will encourage entrepreneurs to take risks; and on the other side, we have workers who perform with commitment and with distinction and whose contributions we must never forget to value and appreciate.

Our problems had been with past governments not involving workers and their organizations in the business of development and nation-building; not appreciating the contributions that workers have the potential to make. The combination that these two groups will bring together, including creativity, innovation, knowledge, skills and risk taking, is what will propel our economy.

The transition to a genuinely sustainable economy can only be achieved through the inclusion of all sectors in society and moreso with the full participation of our labour force in the development process. None must be left behind! None whatsoever! This requires that everyone must have a fair chance of working and participating in the society, including our youth, our women and the differently-abled, too.

Participatory governance, a key tenet of this Government, calls for meaningful dialogue with the social partners and, if you have read our manifesto, you will see where we have identified that labour within Trinidad and Tobago should be organized as a positive force for economic development. We will partner with labour unions to work beyond the frontiers of traditional collective bargaining for higher wages and better working conditions, et cetera. It will take time because we must share the information that we have rather than manage that information in a manner that excludes those persons on whose efforts we must depend to bring around a change that is so necessary.

On this note, I wish to inform this House that, in my capacity as Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise, I have commenced a process of engagement with the social partners with a view to better appreciating the needs of the labour movement and to obtain their input into the development of a decent work policy and programme of action for Trinidad and Tobago. I will elaborate on this policy and programme of action a little later.

To date I have met with representatives of workers' organizations and I will be hosting discussions with employers and government representatives too, in due
course. The issues raised in these conversations will be factored into the development of my Ministry's five-year strategic plan and the reorganization of its operations to better serve our stakeholders.

To this end, I have been meeting with staff at the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development to understand the challenges faced by them in the delivery of high quality and timely services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

In keeping with the PPG's approach to confronting issues and avoiding time-wasting rhetoric, I will proceed to address some of the major issues arising from the budget presentation within my portfolio. I begin with the minimum wage and the Unemployment Relief Programme.

I have been very keenly listening to the comments and debates on the minimum wage from all sectors of the economy, including those sitting on the Benches opposite. The Leader of the Opposition pointed out that the issue of the minimum wage was given less than five minutes mention in the Finance Minister's presentation. I wish to point out that this was an extremely valuable five minutes.

I have a keen sense of the expectations outside there in the national community and we would have fuelled some of those expectations on both sides of the House, but we never promised anybody any $20 minimum wage.

[Interrupt] You are saying that is not true.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: I heard you all say that.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: You heard which "you all" say that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issue of a minimum wage in an economy such as ours is a very delicate issue. It is an issue that one does not just, out of the hat, pull a number; and I said, on a number of occasions, that you would not find $20 minimum wage in the book. You will see us saying that we shall review the minimum wage and increase it appropriately; something to that effect.

We would have been doing a disservice to the very people whom we want to help if we had just pulled a number out of a hat. There are unions who have signed collective agreements with employers, in which collective agreements there are wages of $16 an hour and $18 an hour.

7.50 p.m.

How do you then peg a minimum wage at $20 an hour or above that? We could not so irresponsibly deal with as delicate a matter as a minimum wage. The Member for La Brea used to listen to the "OWTU Speaks" when I did it. He was
telling the truth when he said that he heard in 2006 that I was proposing $14 an hour. That is true, but in this campaign that has just gone I would have stuck to what the manifesto said. There is a thing called growing and developing responsibly; something I want to recommend to certain Members on the other side.

To have dealt with the thing flippantly would have been a disservice to the very people whom we are seeking to protect. I want to share with this honourable House and the national community the process by which the minimum wage is determined and some of the complexities involved in deriving at an appropriate rate. As we might all know, the national minimum wage came into prominence in April 1998. There was something that existed before. I remember when it was $3 and then it went to $5. Then in 1998, the UNC government carried it to $7 per hour. This rate was subsequently increased in January 2003, to $8 per hour and then to $9 per hour in March 2005.

People are talking about promises? In 2003, at page 32 of the PNM manifesto of 2002, hear what they said:

“We also intend to increase the minimum wage to $10 per hour within the next five years. We will in tripartite discussions…”

blah, blah, blah. The workers never got it. They did not get it. "Dey say we does promise thing?" The Minimum Wages Board very diligently did its work and it submitted its report and recommendations to the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development in August 2008. And it is anybody’s guess what the last government did with that report and the recommendations. Indeed, a Member of the Minimum Wages Board, at that time, now sits on the Opposition Benches in the Senate, Dr. Lester Henry. All the Members of that board signed the report; a report from the employers’ representatives, the unions’ representative, Central Bank representatives and the Ministry of Finance representatives. The government said and did nothing about it.

In 2010, as people, some of them misguided by the other side, planning protest demonstrations: "We want we money. We want we minimum wage now.” A former—[Dr. Rowley departs Chamber] "Doh go far”—Minister of Labour said that he demands that if Mc Leod is the Minister of Labour and could not give the people their minimum wage, he should resign. [Interruption]

Hon. Member: "Who say dat?"

Hon. E. Mc Leod: You do not have to 'stretch' your imagination too far to understand. Well, I could understand. But let me cut to the chase. Section 14 of
the Minimum Wages Act, Chap. 88:04, identifies some of the factors to be considered in the determination of the minimum wage. It includes the general level of wages in Trinidad and Tobago, the cost of living, contributions payable and benefits provided under the system of NIS, established by the National Insurance Act. In practice, some of the other considerations include stages of economic development, levels of productivity and the maintenance of high levels of employment and so on.

In 2008—the Member for Point Fortin might enlighten us as to what was the price of oil, what was the state of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, what was our balance of trade level, how much money we were putting in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, and the state of our indebtedness.

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

On a cursory examination of all of that, I have found that we were in a better position then, by far, to give the minimum wage earners more than was recommended by the Minimum Wages Board. But they did not care anything about those people; the same people who they are agitating today to march and to demonstrate. They did nothing about it. But today, they want to cry and they cry very hypocritically.

Mr. Speaker, the setting of the minimum wage is a delicate balancing act which requires detailed analysis. It is an action that requires, on the one hand, a minimum wage that needs to be high enough to secure a socially accepted standard of living and, on the other hand, not to be so high as to risk the creation of unemployment among low-income workers and keep any effects on inflation under control. A moderately set minimum wage will impact more on the earnings of low wage workers than on the levels of employment, as it tends to reduce inequalities of earnings and not reduce abject poverty. The intention of this Government is to set a minimum wage that constitutes a decent wage and balances for both the needs of employees and employers too. In practice, the level at which the minimum wage is set is about fairness, decent work, the value of work and the opportunities that work provides.

There are some in particular other sectors, who look at competitiveness on the basis of low wages. We will never be able to compete with China, if we were to have people work for free. We do not have the systems. We do not have the management and we are now developing a direction, because all along we have been directionless with those on that side in the leadership. Things have changed as of now. Things have changed.

The People’s Partnership gave a commitment to begin a review process for the minimum wage within its 120 days plan. It ends on Saturday. We have held true
to that promise to date. We must remember that in light of the current economic uncertainties at the national and international levels arising from the global, economic and financial crisis, the review needs to be meticulous and comprehensive. Hence, the Minister’s expression in the budget presentation that "the provisions for a new minimum wage will continue to be reviewed" holds good. Indeed, the Minimum Wages Board established, pursuant to the provisions of section 4 of the Minimum Wages Act, is part of this mechanism for review.

I am pleased to inform that Cabinet has approved the reconstitution of this board, the members of which would be appointed before the end of this month. In the meantime, and consistent with our Decent Work Programme that we are still developing, and consistent with our manifesto promise, a Minimum Wages Order will soon come to this House in accordance with the Minimum Wages Act, Chap. 88:04 and we, as of now, indicate that the minimum wage will be increased from $72 per day to $100 per day. [Desk thumping] I have 10 more minutes?

Mr. Speaker: Six minutes more.

Hon. E. McLeod: Thank you. I will see how quickly I can get through this. Back to the URP for a moment. As we go on, I will be bringing particular bits of information, because we will be constantly reviewing and measuring the progress that we will make in the URP. The Unemployment Relief Programme has been a point of much discussion and controversy over the years; PNM-organized controversy. It has been shrouded with serious criticisms. The challenges include real life and ghost issues too. I want the Member for Laventille West to hear this. The challenges include real life and ghost issues too. If this social programme must serve its objective, it must be transformed away from the cesspool of corruption and political patronage that have been cultivated over the years by the PNM and its abuse of those who depend on the programme for “ah food” as they will say; "tuh eat ah food."

When we were sworn in at the reception organized by yourself and the President of Senate, the Member for Laventille West, at the reception downstairs, that was June 14—do you remember?—told me: "McLeod, you in charge ah URP?" I said: "Well His Excellency’s warrant to me suggests that URP is under my portfolio." He said: "Be careful wid dat yuh know. Depending on how yuh treat wid dat, blood could flow, yuh know." I was told that.

Now, I do not know the full import of what he meant. Now, I tell myself: "Errol McLeod, it ain’t go be your blood".
8.05 p.m.

One of my first tasks has been to gain a better understanding of the operations of the programme and obtain firsthand information on the challenges through discussions with the URP management team, and we have been talking. It is going to take some time. It is a slow process. There are people who are resistant to change, but change will take place in the URP. We must get value for the money that we spend on URP! URP must have an image change, and to effect that image change, there are certain characters in URP who we have to get out of URP. [Desk thumping]

Finally, I had said on the campaign trail most of what I reported here, and that the URP can be reorganized into doing really productive work. There are people in the URP who work and who want to work, and there are others who are not interested in work. URP can be contributing to food development in the country and people heard that.

I have been having discussions with the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs, after we have been approached. The Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development has been approached by the Tableland Pineapple Farmers Association. They cultivate some 800 acres of pineapples. They can hardly get workers to do the kind of work that is attendant to that kind of process, and they heard us. They asked whether they can strike a deal with us so that we can produce labour for their planting and so on, and we will share the labour cost. It is too expensive for them, if they are to make anything with this. We have begun some discussions with them. They require about 480 workers and we are going to have an MOU shortly that will identify what they pay and what we pay. So that a URP worker in agriculture is going to receive a rate of pay that is better than that which now exists. It will be attractive and it will ease the burden on both the farmer and the URP programme.

Stay tuned, Mr. Speaker, and Members of this House. We shall have a lot more to say as this programme develops to assist people in being relieved from the levels of poverty under which they now exist.

Thank you very much. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Nileung Hypolite (Laventille West): Mr. Speaker, thank you kindly. It is an honour and a privilege for me to take part in this debate on the Appropriation Bill for the financial year 2011.

First of all, may I extend my sincere congratulations to you on your ascension to the position of Speaker in this Parliament. I also wish to extend congratulations to all Members of this honourable House, especially our Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister.
Mr. Speaker, may I also extend my sincere gratitude to all my constituents of Laventille West who have, once again, showed their confidence in me and, as such, came out in their numbers to have, once again, elected me for yet another term to represent them as their Member of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, our role as MPs is very important. We do not only represent our constituencies, but we have a responsibility to this nation to manage its affairs. The quality of our management will ultimately affect the lives of our citizens, the economy, the health of the nation and the security and safety of our citizens. The profile of this nation must be of responsible management—nationally, regionally and internationally. We on this side recognize this responsibility, and I trust that my fellow Members, on the other side, also subscribe to this view.

Mr. Speaker, the UNC-led Government is now steering the ship of the State and, as the Opposition, we have a duty to work in this democratic system of Parliament for what is best for this nation and our citizens. Today, my contribution will raise questions; analyze the substantive issues which require discussion and await the honest answers, details or explanations from the Government Benches which is owed to the people of this nation.

Like the rest of the nation, we on this side have waited with great anticipation to hear the first budget presentation by this new Government. Mr. Speaker, so much was said on the political campaign. There were so many promises of life-changing plans of grandeur and a sweeping policy shift away from that which was in progress under the planning stages of the PNM administration. So, naturally, our expectations were high.

We had hoped to hear a budget that would inspire the population; we had hoped to hear of plans that would motivate the working class; we had hoped to hear of polices that would signal a new direction for national development but, instead, we had to endure approximately two and a half hours of what was easily the most uninspiring, unimaginative of budgets ever delivered in this honourable Chamber for many a year.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but take notice, as I am sure most of the national population has also observed, how a shift in the geography of the seating arrangements in this honourable House has brought a whole new approach to the manner in which utterances are made by Members opposite.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Tabaquite stood in this honourable House and spoke about the property tax. He said if everyone were to really pay their lands and buildings taxes in accordance with the Cabinet decision, we would collect much more taxes in this country. He went on and on with respect to that. All that we have been asking for is an explanation in terms of the property taxes and its collection.
The explanation that we have been asking for is a very simple one. In 2007, the taxes on property collected which is the actual amount, was $83.7 million. That was in 2007. In 2008, $83.7 million was also collected. In 2009, $71 million was the amount collected. So, in 2007, you had $83 million; 2008, $83 million; 2009, $71 million; in 2010 they have waived the collection; and in 2011 they expect to collect some $173 million which is $100 million more in taxes. All we have been asking for is for the Government to tell this nation—the people of Laventille; the people of Pointe-a-Pierre—Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, you know, as a little boy growing up, I used to really and truly admire you, but you have disappointed me. You have disappointed me. I used to really admire you. Growing up as a little boy, I used to look up to you—

**Mr. Mc Leod:** "I was a lil boy when you was a lil boy."

**Mr. N. Hypolite:** All we have been asking for is: What are the plans? We are moving now from $83 million to $173 million, and we are using the same rates and old values. If you are at the same rates and same values, then somewhere inside there for 2011, the figure should be just around $83 million. If it is that the corporations and the boroughs—Mr. Speaker, please note the Member for Tabaquite was once the mayor of Chaguanas, and if they were doing their jobs and collecting taxes then, who is to be blamed? He is one of them to be blamed, because he was one of the mayors who was responsible for the collection of taxes. All we are asking for is an explanation for them to explain to this nation what is really taking place there. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Clico and the Hindu Credit Union bailout, we are asking the Government to reconsider that whole measure. Why are we asking for that? This will affect many senior citizens. In fact, a letter has reached us from one of the credit unions saying that measure will affect many of its pensioners. I am certain that the Member for Port of Spain South is going to deal more with that particular issue. Madam Prime Minister, you need to reconsider this. This is affecting people. They have already started writing and crying. [Interuption]

**Dr. Douglas:** What is your position?

**Mr. N. Hypolite:** Shut up my dear friend! Calm down! Calm down! You are disturbing me, calm down! Mr. Speaker, you see, when we are speaking—

8.20 p.m.

**Mr. Speaker:** I know that we have been engaging a lot of crosstalk, but I just want to appeal to Members, all Members are hon. Members of this House, so you cannot tell another Member in even a crosstalk, to shut up. So I want you to be very careful as we seek to uphold the dignity of the House. That is all. Continue.
Mr. N. Hypolite: I am so guided, Mr. Speaker, but it is a normal thing that when we on this side stand up in this House to speak, you get a lot of rumbling, a lot of talk and a lot of unnecessary noise coming from some of the Members on the other side. Maybe what needs to take place is that they should follow in the footsteps of the Member for Arima and the Member for Naparima, and even the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre who will sit down and smile ever so often, rather than those who sit there and talk a lot of garbage about a lot of things.

Mr. Mc Leod: A lot of what? I told you to have respect.

Mr. N. Hypolite: No, you told him to have respect.

Mr. Mc Leod: I am telling you now.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Caroni East stood up earlier in the House and presented an ad, and the ad read: "Read their manifesto and you shall see there is nothing new under the sun." And it went on to say, "Free laptop for every school child?" Mr. Speaker, I would agree, yes. But he also went on to say—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes to what?

Mr. N. Hypolite: Yes, to your ad—that this was put out the day before election and that we what, stole the idea?

Hon. Member: You tell us.

Mr. N. Hypolite: But Mr. Speaker, the Member on that side, really and truly, I know he usually will give information that is not quite accurate. Since August 2009, the PNM administration then, approved in principle, to give laptops to every student over a two to three-year period. There was a Cabinet Note to that effect, and there was a reason for doing that.

Mr. Roberts: Why are you against it now?

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, it was because—[Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, you would realize why sometimes you have to very nicely ask people to be quiet, because when you are speaking the truth, they make a lot of noise because they feel offended. So it has nothing to do with looking to see what the UNC is putting out and then we are going after that. Since 2009, we agreed to give every student a laptop, but it was supposed to be done over a two to three-year period and put in the schools.
Mr. Speaker, I want to read one part of the Cabinet Note, Item 6, which says:

“In order to meet the aforementioned objectives:

The procurement, customization and deployment of functional low cost laptops to all students in primary and secondary school levels have been identified as key components of an overall strategy to augment ICT accessibility and usage among students, and increase ICT enabled learning as a complement to this strategy. It is proposed that initiatives focusing on wireless connectivity, technical support, ICT curriculum development, feature training and public private partnerships within the national education system be included.”

Yet, another PNM initiative that our colleagues on the other side want to take praises for.

Mr. Speaker, I can understand why it is that they want to take praise, because they have no policy. They have no policy, they have no plan, and what they are doing is just following the policies of what the People's National Movement had put in place.

Mr. Speaker, pension. Life begins at 60 was part of the COP’s manifesto in 2007, and that is what was rolled over into 2010.

Hon. Member: When was that published?

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, on November 01, 2007, the Political Leader of the COP made mention and he said:

“The second proposal is that we will establish a universal pension plan under which every citizen will be entitled to a minimum pension on reaching the age of 60 and will include enhanced benefits for public servants.”

That was in 2007. It was rolled over in 2010 and was placed in the COP/UNC manifesto. He came back with the same ageing population "life begins at 60". So when we come and make mention that the UNC-led government deceived our senior citizens by not living up to the pension payment of $3,000 to all senior citizens reaching the age of 60, you can see exactly what took place there.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the Member for Couva South, also stood in the House and spoke about traffic wardens. In 1993, the conceptualization of traffic wardens was done. In 1995—2000 under the then Minister, Sadiq Baksh, absolutely nothing was done. In 2009, the Ministry of Works and Transport started the whole process of making sure that the traffic management system was reorganized and, as such, we looked at the traffic wardens, so much to state that the legislation was put in place, so much to state that a project manager was hired, so much to state that we reached as far as to look at the uniforms for those traffic wardens. Unfortunately, May 24 came.
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  
Thursday, September 16, 2010

[MR. HYPOLITE]

It was not too long ago when the cries and condemnation for just about every plan or programme brought to this Parliament by the PNM, were heard coming from the then UNC Opposition. Now we are asked to sit here for approximately two hours and a half and hear the very same plans and programmes first proposed by the PNM, now being adopted wholesale; sometimes unashamedly without new clothes and, as such, we have to wonder. We must ask: What specifically are the original new plans, programmes or policies of the UNC-led Government? This is the first time that we have ever heard that the policy position of a new government in office is to adopt the policies of the previous administration.

Mr. Speaker, they have no plan. None! Absolutely none! In fact, they are now planning to come up with a plan. However, the lack of details in this budget of implementation, assessment reports, new initiatives or realigned programmes, hampers effective analysis. I want us to look a bit at draft estimates of the Recurrent Expenditure. I wish to turn to page 220:

North West Regional Health Authority: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. In 2010, $38.7 million; in 2011, $28 million. A decrease of $10.7 million.

All we are asking for are the explanations to some of these issues. That is one. Why the decrease?

North Central Regional Health Authority: A decrease of $1.6 million in salaries and Cost of Living Allowance.

Eastern Regional Health Authority: $1 million decrease.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Trinidad and Tobago—the people of Laventille, the people of D’Abadie/O’Meara want to know.

8.35 p.m.

Laventille Technology and Continuing Education Centre, page 357. In 2010—$13 million; in 2011—$8 million, a decrease of $4.7 million. Again, we are asking, Mr. Speaker, why. Is it because it is Laventille?

Mr. Roberts: Awwwww!

Mr. N. Hypolite: I do not know. Is it because it is Laventille. We are just asking. We just want the explanations. That is all.

Servol, Mr. Speaker, High-Tech Advanced Skills and Training Programme—2010, $6.5 million; 2011, $5.5 million—a decrease of $1 million. Again, Servol falls within the Laventille constituency.

Mr. Peters: That is the only place?
Mr. N. Hypolite: Yes. [ Interruption] Page 359, Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme. Is it YTEPP they call it? One of the social programmes, $90 million down to $81 million, a decrease of $8.6 million. COSTAATT, College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts, a decrease, Mr. Speaker, of $6.8 million. [ Interruption] Mr. Speaker, all we are asking is why. Mr. Speaker, that is not all. Servol also in 2010 had $16.4 million allocated. In 2011, it is decreased by $16.4 million. It means, therefore, that Servol is getting zero. Zero. Mr. Speaker, that is all that we are asking for, explanations, explanations. All right? [ Interruption]

My dear friend from Tobago East, Mr. Speaker, spoke at length and made mention of that fighting that is taking place between herself and the THA, [ Interruption] fighting between them and the THA and that she has so many plans for across there and stuff like that. [ Interruption] For now, all right? And all I am saying, Ma’am, is, there is no need to fight with the THA but the THA Secretaries will deal with the whole issue. If the advisors are receiving $60,000, I do not know if that is the amount that they are receiving, then I am certain they may have an explanation, but, I am also certain that the Auditor General goes in there and does what he or she has to do. Am I right or wrong? [ Interruption]

If not, if that is not taking place then, again, you all are the Government, all right? You all are the Government. [ Interruption] Mr. Speaker, we fully understand that, you know. We on this side fully understand that you all are the Government [ Interruption] and we are the Opposition. We understand that.

Mr. Peters: You are?

Mr. N. Hypolite: Yes, we are, all right, but for some strange reason you all are acting as if you all are the Opposition. That is how you all are acting, okay? You all came to the House [ Interruption] and instead of telling the people what are the plans, explaining the budget, explaining what the various Ministries are doing, what you all actually did were to stand there and, “Oh this is an opportunity to bash the PNM because we are on this side” and that is what you all did and we accept it [ Interruption] because nothing is wrong with that. Absolutely nothing is wrong with that, all right?

But, Madam Member for Tobago East—[ Interruption]—I am not bashing myself. We accept the fact that we are here, it is just that you all need to accept the fact that you all are there and do the people’s work. That is all we are saying. [ Desk thumping] Do the people’s work and do it honestly.

Mr. Peters: And do it what?

Mr. N. Hypolite: Do it honestly [ Interruption] honestly. [ Interruption] Do it honestly. That is what we are saying. All right? [ Interruption]
The Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, advised that he will be introducing a community coach programme. Is that true? [Interrupt] Yes, a community coaching programme.

Mr. Roberts: No, I did not say that.

Mr. N. Hypolite: You did not say that? [Crosstalk]

Mr. Roberts: No, no, no, no, no, I will not be introducing. I was responding to a question from the hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant who said she had been informed that I stopped community programmes and I went to great pains to explain to her that I would do no such thing because community sport is what I am about and what the PNM was about was Tarouba and overspending and corruption, so that is what I said. [Desk thumping]

Mr. N. Hypolite: Thank you for your explanation so therefore I can look forward to the recreation grounds in Laventille, [Interrupt] you know, all the recreation grounds in Laventille—

Mr. Roberts: Not all. [Crosstalk]

Mr. N. Hypolite:—and the recreation grounds in Port of Spain North and in Diego Martin West and in Diego Martin North East and in Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Roberts: "In fact, Diego Martin West/Bagatelle go get the first one, the first one." [Crosstalk]

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, allow me to move into some other matters. Mr. Speaker, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre stood and indicated that he never made mention of PNM URP workers being reviewed and not get job opportunities and stuff like that. I also read the same article, or I want to believe it is the same article of Saturday, September 11th, 2010 in the Trinidad Guardian and it stated:

“I don’t see people as PNM or PP…”

He said that:

“…or such thing. I see people as persons who may be out of work and who ought to be treated as people and there will be transparency in the programme as never seen before.”

[Desk thumping] He said that, all right? [Interrupt] [Holding up paper and showing to Members] [Interrupt] No, it is here. That is what is said here, okay? That is what is said here.
Mr. Speaker, he also said:

“One has to look at the question of questionable employment…”

What is questionable employment?

“…people who were known to be PNM who seem to have been having the lion’s share all the time—that will have to be reviewed.”

Mr. Speaker, how do you know who is PNM from who is UNC from who is COP? [Interruption] When you walk around, Mr. Speaker, do you have a big sign on your forehead marked "PNM"? I do not know. [Interruption] We, the legislators, wear our balisier ties. Our supporters do not wear balisier ties. [Interruption] How do we know who is who?

Further to that, Mr. Speaker, is it a matter of discrimination? [Interruption] Is it a matter of discrimination? [Interruption] All right? Because they say that it is a party for all the people—

Mr. Roberts: All.

Mr. N. Hypolite: All of the people. If it is a party for all of the people then, as the Chaguanas West Member would say—[Interruption] Checker? Yes I am checker. I am checking because I checked [Interruption] to see whether or not the programme is continuing with—

Mr. Warner: Which programme?

Mr. N. Hypolite: The URP programme is continuing within the Laventille West constituency. Why, Mr. Speaker, is because I was told that the programme was ceased, that people had stopped working. Further to that, Mr. Speaker, or should I say prior to that—prior to that, prior to that, I was also told that the day before the local election, it was a Sunday, there was a mad rush to collect their cheques, workers, mad rush, to collect cheques.

Mr. Speaker, I was also told that [Interruption] some 50 to 100 new gangs were placed—

Mr. Roberts: Crews.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Gangs, crews, [Interruption] were placed within the programme just around that same period of the local government election. Now there is a problem. There is a problem in the programme. The problem in the programme, Mr. Speaker, is that you have what is called double rostering taking place and it is taking place simply because people just want to know exactly what is taking place in the programme and some kind of sanity to be brought to the programme.
Mr. Speaker, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre indicated also that he embraced his brothers and sisters from the trade unions outside there but earlier on today you had members from at least two trade unions marching around the Red House, in less than four months, marching around the Red House. Mr. Speaker, they were shouting they want their money. Some of them were even saying we voted for the UNC-led Government, they want their money. That has no dealings with us on this side, Mr. Speaker, none whatsoever, none.

Mr. Speaker, I want to look into the public utilities area [Interruption] and I ask the question, Mr. Speaker, in closure of the Alutrint industrial site in La Brea, what will happen with the 720 megawatts of power generation down there, which is a lot of money? [Desk thumping] What will happen with that? What will be the position with respect to WASA and the whole management restructuring of WASA? You see, Mr. Speaker, these are issues that people out there want answers for, just answers and explanations, because this is millions and billions of dollars that have been invested in those projects and when we close those projects that puts many a people out of jobs as well as money gone awaste.

8.50 p.m.

With respect to agriculture, you see, Mr. Speaker, they said the PNM is anti-agriculture, but yet still, let us go back to the Estimates? Page 202:

“Fertilizer support for registered farmers.”

Very important, would you say?

Mr. Roberts: What page?

Mr. N. Hypolite: Two hundred and two. Nine million dollars in 2010 allocated. Mr. Speaker, that was decreased by $8.2 million. Fertilization; that would have assisted the farmers a great deal. Explain to the farmers. Again, that is all we are asking for. Explanations. Mr. Speaker, we speak of transformation—

Mr. Roberts: You too on this again?

Mr. N. Hypolite: Yes. Mr. Speaker, under the People’s National Movement, we had a transformation plan for the agricultural sector. [Laughter] It is the same plan, Mr. Speaker, that this present administration is using. Why so? Within that plan, we spoke about something called TABA; Trinidad and Tobago Agri-Business Association. TABA is one of the most relevant agencies within this country for the development of our food basket, and all TABA is asking for, Mr. Speaker, is a small quantity of some $55.8 million to assist them with their capital investment and operating expenses for this year.
I am only asking through you all—because the Minister is in the other place—that you all assist this organization. Why? It is because, Mr. Speaker, they are responsible for the development of a number of different associations. They pool a number of associations together, such as farmers; agro-processors; fresh produce exporters; hotel and restaurant associations; Supermarket Association; input suppliers association; Agricultural Development Bank Association; and a number of these other associations. All in the interest of assisting in the development of the food basket here in Trinidad and Tobago.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker, and I say thanks to my colleagues on both sides; even my colleague for Chaguanas West. He does not want to hear, because, Mr. Speaker, the facts are things that people cannot take at times; especially when it is true.

Mr. Roberts: They have false lies.

Mr. N. Hypolite: The facts, Mr. Speaker. When you have facts, you see—[ Interruption] When the facts are there in your face, Mr. Speaker, and they are true, they cannot take it. Nevertheless, the UNC-led Government, because they do not have a plan to move the country forward, what they are actually doing is using our policies. The policies that the People’s National Movement left are what they are using to carry this country forward.

Mr. Speaker, they say that that is not so. That is what they said. That is not so, and they bashed us and they said all kinds of things, but here it is, “Facing the Issues, Turning the Economy Around”:

“221. The sum of $15 million has been provided for the Water Management and Flood Control Programme to continue work in several areas.”

Mr. De Coteau: To continue.

Mr. N. Hypolite: To continue. Which means, Mr. Speaker, that it is the PNM’s plan that they are continuing on.

“223. Development of the Fisheries Sub-Sector Programme will continue with an overall allocation of $9.8 million.”
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  

Thursday, September 16, 2010

[MR. HYPOLITE]

Again, PNM plan that they are moving forward with.

"● continuation of training and extension services under the Community-based Aquaculture Programme"

To continue.

“224. In fiscal year 2011, the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA) will continue…”

But, of course, they decrease on its allocation.

“● continuation of efforts to eradicate the Giant African Snail…”

Again, Mr. Speaker, to continue. So what we are seeing and hearing is the continuation of our policies. So, Mr. Speaker, you see for yourself what is happening there.

While they say that absolutely nothing—it comes across that way, as if the PNM did absolutely nothing in this country, Mr. Speaker, I beg to differ. I beg to differ because, again, under agriculture, we promised lease land at cheaper rent. Mr. Speaker, we delivered on that, and rents are now down from what used to be $2,000 per hectare to $200.

We promised to remove stamp duties, Mr. Speaker, and other fees on leases. We delivered on that. We promised water for small farmers. We also delivered on that. We promised more food from these farmers, and we also delivered on that; which is the mega farms. We promised to stimulate the development of the agro-processing and food manufacturing industries. We also delivered on that. And we can go on and on, Mr. Speaker, on some of the issues, some of the programmes under the agricultural sector of which the People’s National Movement delivered on.

Mr. Speaker, as I close, allow me to tell you—[Interruption] You see, Mr. Speaker, we do not need 30 minutes; we do not need 45 minutes; we do not need an hour to stand in this House and talk over and over. What I realize that took place, Mr. Speaker, on that side, is a number of persons stood up and spoke; and they spoke for 90 minutes.

**Mr. Roberts:** It is 75.

**Mr. N. Hypolite:** No? Well it seems like 90, because all that they did, Mr. Speaker, was to stand in this House and bash us on this side, and they spent 10 minutes on the policies and measures of the economy. That is what they did. But nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, as I close, allow me to tell the UNC-led Government of the day—[Interruption]

**Mr. Roberts:** People’s Partnership.
Mr. N. Hypolite: The UNC-led Government of the day—the same thing, right—that they owe it to the people of this country to explain the various measures to be taken by the individual ministries. Mr. Speaker, the people outside there are still waiting to hear what the various ministries have to offer.

Mr. Speaker, I say so because in Laventille, we need to get our roads fixed; and over some 114 roads that I would have submitted to the Ministry of Works and Transport. I sat here, also, and heard about roads being fixed all over; and what I am saying is, yes, I got roads fixed in Laventille, and now, I have submitted over 114 roads to the Minister of Works and Transport, and I hope we can get those fixed. I am also asking for drainage within the Ministry of Works and Transport. There is a letter with some 56 drains. One hundred and fourteen roads and 56 drains to be fixed.

I am also asking the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs not to forget the recreation grounds and hard courts in Laventille, such as Soogrim Trace, such as Mahogany, such as Erica Street, such as St. Barbs; and I am also asking for those recreation grounds and community centres to be fixed. I am asking the Minister.

Mr. Roberts: What Laventille wants, Laventille gets.

Mr. N. Hypolite: I will hold you to that. Mr. Speaker, the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara said that what Laventille wants, Laventille gets. As such, I will provide him with a list of goodies, because I believe what Laventille wants is just $1 billion for the time being to start some of the infrastructure works.

Mr. Roberts: Can you give way to me, Sir?

Mr. N. Hypolite: I will give way.

Mr. Roberts: Thank you. Just to correct the Hansard, because you feel you are bright, in the crosstalk, I did say what Laventille wants, Laventille gets; just making fun of his former leader, the Member for San Fernando East. But, of course, Sir, just like any other Member of Parliament, any request that you make will be dealt with in an equitable and fair fashion because we are the Government of all the people, my brother. [Desk thumping]

9.05 p.m.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Thank you so kindly, Member. Mr. Speaker, as the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara indicated, whatever Laventille wants, Laventille will get and as such I will be talking with him. [Laughter]

There are a number of community centres: Mapp Lands, St. Barb’s Community Centre; the Beetham Community Centre is to be completed; the Pelican Extension
Community Centre is also to be completed. [Crosstalk] I am certain that the Member for Port of Spain South would go deeper into those, all I am doing is asking on behalf of the people of Laventille West to have some of those issues dealt with.

If there is a plan by the UNC-led Government, let us know what it is. The people of Trinidad and Tobago do not want to hear a budget that is just broad and vague; they want to hear a budget with explanations coming from various Ministers, so they could understand the position they are in. If you do not do that or if you do like the Member for Caroni East, you would come across as untruthful to the people; you will come across as not to be trusted and as if you are only committed to dishonesty.

Hon. Member: "Who write that speech?"

Mr. N. Hypolite: That is the way they would come across to the people, rather than a party about service to the people, with honourable principles and, of course, at the end of the day, we all will be in a position to prevail.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

The Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism (Hon. Winston Peters): Mr. Speaker, my honourable colleagues, it really was not even my intention to speak tonight, but after listening to my colleague from Laventille West I believe that people who are not within the precincts of this august House must need some kind of relief and some kind of direction as to where we are going, because I think that without the aid of a map or some GPS system, he really did not know where he was going. Let me see if I could bring some kind of semblance of direction to the whole thing. [Laughter]

Firstly, please permit me to thank the people of the constituency of Mayaro for reposing the confidence in this simple calypsonian, for yet another time, to represent them in a proper way. [Desk thumping] I also thank our distinguished Prime Minister for the faith she has reposed in me as well, to select me as the candidate to run for the constituency of Mayaro. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Diego Martin West on his ascension to the high office of Leader of the other party and also Leader of the Opposition. It is a position I hope he would have and hold on to for a very long time.

Today, as our country faces, along with the rest of the world, some of its most economically challenged times, I must congratulate the former Governor of the Central Bank, now Member of Parliament for Tunapuna and, indeed, our esteemed Finance Minister, for presenting a budget which I would call the "people's budget". [Desk thumping]
While I am in this congratulatory mood, may I compliment the young people of my constituency, Rio Claro, the Rio Claro East Secondary School. They just won best overall short film in that competition. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Sharma: Tell us what you won in New York.

Hon. W. Peters: My award that I got in New York? I will come to that if it is necessary. I do not want to talk very, very long; I just want to get my point across, because I know it is kind of late and I do not want people to be bored. I want to just correct a few things.

Member of Parliament for Point Fortin—[ Interruption]

Hon. Member: You have to forgive her.

Hon. W. Peters: I have forgiven her, believe me, and that is the reason I am going to give her a short lesson in the cultural happenings of Trinidad and Tobago. She accused my Prime Minister of going to New York, getting on stage and instead of singing a song from Trinidad and Tobago, as she put it, she sang a song from Bob Marley. Let me please tell you, and it is for your edification, that there was a man called Nolan Taitt who just died in Canada, a Trinidadian from San Fernando, who was instrumental in creating the music that you call reggae today. [Desk thumping]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: The world does not know that.

Hon. W. Peters: If the world does not know, I am telling them now so they would know and, at least, you would know as well, so the next time you would not think that my Prime Minister—Quite apart from that, I want to say to you that Bob Marley was one of this world's most esteemed artistes of all times. His songs have broken all barriers, race, class, creed and everything else. We are proud that he is a son of the Caribbean, because at the end of the day, we are one Caribbean people. When our Prime Minister chose to sing a song like "One Love", it is the same like singing "How Great Thou Art" in church. That was not created in Trinidad and Tobago either, but we sing it throughout the world. [Crosstalk]

Hon. Member: She was doing it to impress her leader.

Hon. W. Peters: I do not think he was impressed, because he walked out and left her there. I think your leader really did not even want to hear you.

While I correct you on the mistake you made when you talked about how many of us went to New York, let me say that there were those of us who went to New York at no expense to the Government or the people of Trinidad and Tobago.
Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Answer the question.

Hon. W. Peters: I am answering it now. I bought my first-class ticket with my money. [Desk thumping] I stayed in America at my home, at my cost. Yes, I have a house in America, just in case you want to know, and I declared it too, so they know that.

Not only that, I want to go further to tell you that they said we were driving around in limousines in America. [Interruption] Not you, I have heard it said and I am making it clear in this House so it would be in the Hansard. I drove my own car that I have in America. I took a lot of people around with me, so it cost the Government of Trinidad and Tobago nothing.

Now that I believe I have gotten the mischief you were trying to create in the minds of the people of Trinidad and Tobago out of the way, I would get down to the substantive contribution that I am here to make. [Crosstalk]

Before I say that, let me say that my colleagues on the other side are getting on like it was 10 years ago they were in Government; talking about how they want drains and roads in Laventille, it was only four months ago that you spent in excess of $300 billion in this country. If we do not have any roads here, it falls squarely on your shoulders. You cannot tell a Government in power for four months that you want us to give you this and you want us to give you that. We have a manifesto and it spells out exactly what we are going to do. [Desk thumping] I think that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are intelligent enough to understand that.

You are trying to poison people’s minds by telling them that we are not doing this and we are not doing that, but we have been here for four months, and the people understand.

Those of you who want an election—I heard the Member for La Brea say that we should call an election. We called two elections in less than three months and you lost both of them. [Laughter] I want to tell you that a third one is going to be called, the Tobago election, and you are going to lose that too. [Crosstalk] So you are going to get elections.

Mr. Jeffrey: We want a general.

Hon. W. Peters: You want a general? [Crosstalk] It look like you want a brigadier, so we are going to give you Brigadier Sandy to make sure crime is down in this country. [Crosstalk] He just likes the statistics. [Laughter]
Mr. Speaker, in my maiden speech as Minister of the Arts and Multiculturalism, I must say that the People's Partnership Government has recognized that a large portion of our citizenry has felt alienated from sharing in the development of the nation. I must, therefore, congratulate the hon. Prime Minister for her vision and foresight in forming the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism.

A lot of people in Trinidad and Tobago, since my Ministry is such a new one, do not even understand what the Ministry is all about, so I would have to take a little time, hence the reason I am reading from these things; it is not something I like to do.

The first time that the multiculturalism idea was introduced, it was in Canada. It worked there because of the make up of the society and the number of different types of cultures, people from all over the world that they had to deal with, so they put a Ministry of Multiculturalism together and it worked well. That is the reason when anything works well, we like to hold on to it. So when you over there talk about "PNM do this" and "This idea is PNM own", so what if the PNM has an idea and the idea is good and we want to continue it? What is wrong with that? That is what a developed country is all about. A developed country is not to dismantle everything that somebody put in, because you did not do it. Like when we said that we were going to put the overpass by the Uriah Butler Highway and instead of taking the moneys and doing the right thing, you put a bridge over the highway, just because you want to say that it is a "PNM bridge". So today we have to come back now to do something else about it. No, that is not what it is. This is a model from Canada that works.

9.20 p.m.

The multiculturalism addresses the diversity in all its forms and it is the underpinning philosophy for the formulating of this Ministry. One of the underlying principles of the framework for sustainable development is the embracing of the richness and beauty of the nation's diversity to nurture a more humane and cohesive society. That is the reason it took us so long. Instead of getting into power and kicking out everybody like you all did when we were there from the URP and the CEPEP and after four months we still have PNM people running the CEPEP, it is because we want to have a humane society and things must be done in a certain way, because we understand it. That is the reason we have a Ministry of Multiculturalism.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: In other words, do not kick them out today; kick them out tomorrow.

Hon. W. Peters: Well, we would kick you out. The fact remains, we are going to move you. It would be foolhardy to think that we are going to get in
power and allow PNM people to stay at the helm of anything to frustrate us. That is not the system. But the fact remains that we are a humane set of people. So we are going to remove you. The Trinidad and Tobago people, at one time had you at the helm and they believed that you were doing good, and then when they realized that you all allowed Calder Hart and Uthara Rao and "them" to go with the money, they removed you. So I am saying to you, we are going to remove you, but we will do it in a humane manner.

I am saying multiculturalism is there for the strategic underpinning of this Ministry. This is reflected in the watchwords: Unity in diversity, where the arts, culture and access to information relative to our history and heritage, would play a key role in developing and strengthening our identity. And in anything you are doing you know that you must have policy development.

Good governance is one of the key pillars on which a nation's democracy should be established. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to have policies that ensure an equitable distribution of state resources and a climate by inclusion, underpinned by strong, well-structured and resource organizations.

In developing a solid foundation for the implementation of the Ministry's mandate, key policies are to be prepared. These policies will be formulated to facilitate the creation of an enabling environment for the manifestation of diversity of cultural expressions and the safeguarding of our cultural heritage.

To this end, therefore, in July of this year we ratified the International Convention of Underwater Culture Heritage, the Convention of Intangible Heritage and the Convention for Diversity of Cultural Expressions. The reason this Ministry came into being—and it is not just the Ministry of Culture—is because we want an equitable distribution of all that belongs to us in Trinidad and Tobago. Permit me to just say to you, that what obtained in the past is not going to be happening under my watch as the Minister of Multiculturalism.

When I go through some of the papers in my Ministry, I want to say to you that there are some calypso tents in Trinidad and Tobago, privately-owned calypso tents, that have been getting over the years, $700,000 and $800,000 to operate these tents. They have been getting $700,000 and $800,000 to operate their privately-owned calypso tents, while there are other entities in the country that want to put on the same kind of shows, and you would be surprised to know that all they were given to do that was $50,000; treated as second-class and third class citizens of the country.

The overarching and most critical policy would be related to the multiculturalism. The objectives of this policy would be fostering of the climate of inclusion; equitable
distribution of resources and recognition and celebrations of cultural diversities. Emanating from this policy would be the national cultural policy and the current policy on grants and subventions, which means that if you are going to be getting any grant, then she would have to get some grant; and he would have to get some grant; not you give him some grant based on his political affiliation and because of mine, I do not.

I am a victim of that so I can tell you, so I am proud to be the Minister. I am happy that the Prime Minister has reposed this confidence in me that I can be the one to administer this. I could beat my drum because a lot of people would tell you I am one of the best calypsonians in the world [Desk thumping] and because of the fact that I became affiliated with the United National Congress, I was victimized; I was vilified and I was prevented from performing in a calypso tent in Trinidad and Tobago that was funded by my taxpaying dollars. You know, of the calypsonians in Trinidad and Tobago, I pay more taxes than all of them collectively. I was debarred, discriminated against, because I chose to exercise my franchise by associating with a party that was other than the PNM, and I am saying to you that never again would that be allowed in our country as long as this People's Partnership is here. [Desk thumping] Never again!

These policies would be the springboard for the creation of an enabling environment for the manifestation of the diversity of cultural expressions. Policies related to the arts and in particular the museums and the collections and preservations of material culture would also be developed.

At the initial step in developing the multiculturalism policy, the Ministry proposes to host a symposium in October with both international and local participation in order to develop awareness in, and soliciting input from, citizens on multiculturalism. Because you know in Trinidad and Tobago, even though you explain to people what multiculturalism is about, because we are such a unique society, we would have our own way of tweaking the whole thing. So there is no sense in taking something wholesale and just bringing it to us. So we are going to have this symposium where every Tom, Dick, Harrylal and Jane Doe, would be able to have a say as to what they believe multiculturalism is all about.

Institutional strengthening: To further facilitate good governance, institutional strengthening of the Ministry and its agencies is proposed. Strengthening would focus on:

- Modernization of policies relating to the business models and organizational structure;
- Review and preparation of supporting legislation related to the policies which would be established;
Provision of a working environment conducive to production.

I want to repeat this: Provision of a working environment conducive to production.

The time is also here in Trinidad and Tobago when we can no longer sustain everybody's whim and fancy without production. Discipline, tolerance and—what is the other watchword? Production. And it seems that we have a breakdown in all of them. Well, we want to bring back production in this whole thing, because you cannot be coming to the Government for every single thing that you want. "I want to have Monday a day for jumping up", you come to the Government; no production. Tuesday, a day for bottling water and pouring it on people’s head; no production. We need to have production. Governments are facilitators but when the Government facilitates something, it must be meaningful to the people of the country. So it is that we have to have production.

Provision of a working environment conducive to production: In this regard a head office for the Ministry is to be established and improved facilities would be provided for housing the archives. On this note, I recently visited the National Archives and was concerned at the conditions that exist there. When I went to what is deemed our National Archives, I could not even believe it. I saw some hardworking people there, but the conditions under which they work are appalling. Heaven knows how they can preserve our archival works in this country under those conditions. Hence the reason in Trinidad and Tobago one year we celebrated 100 years of Carnival and the next year we celebrated 150. [Laughter] We did that in this country. That happened in this country, because we have no sense of our history because it is not preserved. If it is preserved the way that our archives look, then our history must be in shambles. So we cannot continue this; we cannot continue this. It is important that our archival records should be properly stored.

As it seeks viable alternatives to diversity of the economy, Government recognizes that development does not rest exclusively on economics and political matters. We believe in this country that everything has to have some kind of political connotation. Arts and culture offer great potential as avenues for diversification. In its sustainable framework for development, the Government has committed to fostering an environment that would allow for creative expression and would also allow for the generation of sustainable livelihood for persons involved in the arts and culture, meaning that if you are involved in the arts and the culture you should be able to make a comfortable living out of what you are doing.

The projects and programmes to be implemented in fiscal 2011 have been conceptualized in recognition of the fact that an enabling environment must be
developed to facilitate the nurturing of artistic endeavours. I am saying that these artistic endeavours must be nurtured because I am sure that if we had an environment existing in the country a long time ago, we would have many more Machel Montanos and Faye-Ann Lyons. We would have a lot more. These people do these things on their own because they do not have any place to go. I, for one, did not have anything. I learnt to sing on the beach in Mayaro. Do you know how I learnt to sing?

**Dr. Browne:** Raw talent.

**Hon. W. Peters:** It is raw talent. When we were pulling seine we used to say: "One, two, no boy; one three, no boy", then we pulled the seine. I learnt to sing that way. So that was my classroom. But that is not what we want. We want a freedom of cultural expression and respect for diversity.

**Dr. Browne:** Raw talent.

**Hon. W. Peters:** Raw talent.

For too long we have allowed the cultural expressions of our country to fall by the way and sometimes we allow them to go out of the country and have to export them back into the country in order to recognize them.

I know that almost everybody in here knows about the Little Carib Theatre. The Little Carib Theatre is a landmark; it is a monument and moreso it is a monument to somebody whom I believe we should have the greatest amount of respect for in this country, the late Dr. Beryl McBurnie. [Desk thumping]

**9.35 p.m.**

That place where the Little Carib now stands is not just a place that an edifice was built on; that was where she grew up; that was her parents' house and she was mindful enough to turn it into something so that the people of Trinidad and Tobago could be proud.

In July, I paid a visit to view the ongoing renovation of the Little Carib Theatre and gave an undertaking that funds would be made available for its speedy completion. It has been going on for a long time, while we built tall buildings, big palaces, boats that would not float and did all kinds of craziness; the Little Carib Theatre that was supposed to be finished in, I think, 12 months, to date is still not finished.

I took it upon myself through my Ministry to ensure that the funds necessary would be given to them. In September, we gave them $1 million and a further $1.5 million would be provided in fiscal 2011.
This project is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2010 and I am sure that the community would be delighted once again to have this space for them to be able to perform. I promised that I would go down there and be one of the first persons to do a show free. I will do it; I can still perform.

Continued renovation on the Naparima Bowl and Queen's Hall: Funding has already been provided for these continuations and we will do it. The arts mean a lot to me. The arts have made me everything that I am and hope to be. Had it not been for the arts, I would not be here today. It is because of what I did as an artiste that I am in these hallowed halls today; that has me representing the people.

You must understand that when it comes to the arts, it means something to me. It irks me when you see things that you know could and should be done and things that must be done. It is the same furore I feel when I see it is being mismanaged in a certain way. You must understand.

Primary work on the TUCO Convalescent Home will begin shortly. This home has gotten all kinds of money and I make no apology for this. I am saying to you, from where I sit here today—that this is the fraternity from which I came: I am a founding member of TUCO; I was its first president.

What TUCO has allowed itself to become is shameful and disgraceful. It has allowed itself to become a political football. That is the reason it is the way it is. Nevertheless, it is said that sometimes when your own flea bites, you still have to take it more than others. This was conceptualized by me so that we would continue to provide such a facility, which would facilitate the nation saying thanks and acknowledging the contribution of those who went before us; those who have set the foundation and are the stepping stones for us today and in the future.

I remember when we had to find places for people like Lord Terror to stay—God rest their souls—in some little two-by-four and beg people for moneys to help maintain them. This should not happen in a country like ours. TUCO should not allow anything like that to happen because they get a substantial subvention from the Government. I am putting it on the table now so that they would listen to what I am saying. I will be monitoring every single cent that is given to TUCO.

Mr. Sharma: What about Mr. Ramdhanie Sharma and Jermaine Toussaint?

Hon. W. Peters: I do not know who they are. I can only speak—I do not know who Mr. Ramdhanie Sharma and Mr. Jermaine Toussaint are. Whoever they are, if they are artistic people, they fall within the ambit of the artistes of Trinidad and Tobago and would be protected in the same way.
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  

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The Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism understands the importance of looking into the past to secure the future existence and development of human beings and is pleased to join with TUCO in this venture to ensure that the convalescent home is finally built as promised.

It is an acknowledged fact that many members of our cultural fraternity live in poverty at the end of their career. The unfortunate trend cannot continue. If we are serious about building culture as a sector, we must ensure that persons directly involved in it do not only generate a sustainable livelihood, but are able to enter their retirement phase on a financial footing which can sustain a proper way of life.

This is what the Ministry has the responsibility for. The Ministry recognizes that it is important that people who engage in artistic cultural endeavours have the ability to generate sustainable livelihoods. One of the major goals, therefore, is development and capacity building in this sector. A baseline survey of the local cultural industry is to be undertaken to facilitate monitoring and evaluation of industry growth.

I say to you, with this in mind, I have employed one of the greatest cultural minds in Trinidad and Tobago, Dennis "Sprangalang" Hall, and all that I have outlined here today will be achieved with us working in tandem and my working along with my colleagues here.

This is a unit with a plan; this is not a vaille-que-vaille, fly-by-night, not-well-thought-about thing. It is something that we sat and thought about. Some people say: "You take so long to put this and that board together." The reason you took so long to put it together is that you want to make it right and you do not get a second chance to do things right the first time. That is a reason it is taking so long. We do not want the wanton waste that went on before to continue.

A gap analysis and needs assessment of the cultural sector will also be undertaken. This will provide data on the current state of cultural industries and what would have been the desired future state to enable sustainability.

A national registry of artistes and cultural workers is also to be established, meaning that we want to know. I heard my colleague when he spoke about the teachers. If you do not know who your teachers are; where they are and what they are doing; how in the world will you monitor them to know where they are going wrong and what needs to be corrected? That is not rocket science.

It is the same thing that is happening here. We want a register of all artistic people in Trinidad and Tobago so that we could know where they are, who they are and their needs. This is not like America where you have seven million or
eight million people. We have 1.3 million people and I am sure out of all of them, we do not have 10,000 artistic performers. So why can we not monitor them and see what their needs are and work in tandem with them. This is what we are doing here.

This would facilitate the implementation of the requirements of the Finance Act, No. 91 of 2000, which mandates that such a registry be established to facilitate the philanthropy from the private sector. It would also facilitate free movement within the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME).

I must be one of the few calypsonians who can go to any one of the countries free. That should not be.

**Hon. Member:** Free?

**Hon. W. Peters:** When I say free, I mean free movement. I am not questioned and detained, and cannot go to this country or that country. That should not be.

**Hon. Member:** What passport do you use?

**Hon. W. Peters:** I use my regular Trinidad and Tobago passport, but I have also developed an international persona that gives me the right to do that. That is what that is all about.

The thing about that is that if a human being lives in this world for himself alone and his accomplishments, then he has wasted a life. I believe that whatever you do—that is the reason I am here, you know—I am not in politics to thief. I am not in politics to want anything from them. I am in politics because I care and that is the reason I give of myself and whatever I have. I believe that whatever I can achieve should be given to other people as well.

As a matter of fact, while I am at this, I want to thank all the doctors at the Surgi-Med Clinic in San Fernando.

**Hon. Member:** Why did not you go to the General Hospital?

**Hon. W. Peters:** Why did not Mr. Manning go to the general hospital and have a heart—? [ Interruption] All I am saying is that I take the opportunity to thank them. Do you know what they said happened to me? They said I was running myself ragged because I am trying to do everything for everybody, so I have to cut back a bit. That sent my blood pressure way up. I take the opportunity while I am at it to thank them and it is all because they care.

As was indicated by the Minister of Finance in his budget presentation, the tax facility has now been increased from 100 per cent on funding support up to $1 million to 100 per cent of funding support up to $2 million for individuals and corporations.
that support the work of our artistes. This is to encourage the corporate citizens and people of means; to let them know that they can utilize their moneys to help the artistic fraternity and there would not only be self-satisfaction in knowing that you have done this or that.

Let me also take the opportunity to send my personal condolences to the family of my dear friend and colleague, Lord Arrow, who passed away. We worked together for a long time. Many people do not know, but we produced Hot, Hot, Hot. My wife and I are the producers of that. He was my friend.

I just want to say that when you spend your money on the artistic fraternity, it is not throwing it away; it is like you are getting it back; and now it has been increased so you are getting back 100 per cent on $2 million. For this, we are extremely thankful. That is why I said in my opening statement I want to thank the Minister for, in these hard times, presenting such a budget of such great generosity.

9.50 p.m.

The Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism is committed to building on the pillars identified for the cultural sector, as set out in the framework for sustainable development in the work towards generating sustainable livelihood for persons directly involved in the arts.

The Minister would launch a project in music literacy, which will contribute significantly to increase music literacy among our thousands of pan men, as well as youths in our communities. Our Cultural Tutor Performance Workshop will expand to provide training in musical arrangement, especially as it relates to the development of beats. To those who do not understand what that means, today what we have are not musicians. We do not have musicians.

There are persons who get on a synthesizer, hit some notes and a set of beats. They would sit and make up something. When you listen on the radio, all you hear is one sound all the time. All the sounds have that one thing at the back of it. What we are doing is creating an atmosphere where, in 10 years from now, the Roy Capes and all these people would have disappeared from the scene and we would have more people coming on; people who would be able to play music and not just play with those electronic gadgets.

In our work to build on the use of our heritage and the arts into strengthening our national identity and fostering the spirit of unity in diversity, we would establish a cultural archive which will be a national repository for all of our memories and recordings, thus preserving and making available to the public the cultural work of our elders. A lot of our
icons are gone. Today you cannot find their work anywhere. We want to bring a halt to that. What is remaining of it, we want to keep and make sure we have it in place.

Our dance, Beryl McBurnie—do you know today, when we want to have an exhibition in Trinidad and Tobago with our own historical past, do you know where it resides? It resides in Alaska. We had to bring down a dear friend of mine called Ray Funk—\[\text{Interuption}\]

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

*Motion made*, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Hon. E. Mc Leod]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. W. Peters:** Thank you very much. I thank my colleagues. I would thank you all on the other side as well. I know in times gone by, there would have been one person who would have said no and that no would have stood, but time changes. I am not calling any names.

We have to continue to preserve the works of our icons, our dances, song and sayings. We have some of the best sayings in this country: "Yuh cyah mamaguy meh, yuh too tool bay". It is like how we have them across there. We have to preserve these things and make sure that they are not lost.

The Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism will also work with the community groups involved in the management of festivals such as Ramleela, Guaya Fest, Moruga Fest, Toco Season and Phagwa, among others, towards the development of these festivals for the greater participation by the general public and to create more interest in potential visitors to our shores.

I have plans for Tobago. That plan, I do not want to bring public as yet. Privately, we would discuss and then it will come to the Parliament. I know it is a workable one. It is one that I have had since I was the President of TUCO. I have a plan for us. Let me get it on the *Hansard* now, because I have had this plan since I was 18 years old. I brought it up and nobody took me on. I have the opportunity to do it now and I will do it. My plan is to get our steel pan in the *Guinness Book of Records* once and for all. I will tell you how I am going to do that. We are going to tell all the steelbands in Trinidad and Tobago, give it one name, call it maybe the Trinidad Steel Symphony or whatever you want to call it, have them play one common song and put them in the Savannah and allow them to play that one song and we would have the largest orchestra to ever play a song in the entire world, because me must have 50,000 players. That is my plan and we are going to do that.
While we are at this, I want to say too that in preserving our art form, starting this year, in the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism, we are going to be recording all the junior calypsonians from Trinidad and Tobago. We would be recording all their songs. They do not have to pay for it; the Minister would pay for it. It is something that I wanted to do for a long time. I have the opportunity to do it now, because too often we have these great songs by our young people and they have never been heard and will never be heard again. We are going to record them. We are not going to do like TUCO and pretend to build a recording studio up in Jerningham Avenue, "rent ah building fuh 10 years from somebody and never even put in as much as ah tape recorder inside there." This is going to be done. All you junior calypsonians out there get all your songs ready and uncle Gypsy is going to record them for you.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Chan say to do it for Mastana as well.

**Hon. W. Peters:** Well if Mastana has—when I say all the junior people—this is the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism. I am not discriminating against anybody. This is the reason the Prime Minister chose me, because she knows the kind of person that I am. So, nobody have to tell me about Mastana Bahar. If Mastana Bahar has young people who have songs, as long as the songs are theirs, we would record all of them. But you have to be a junior. We are going to continue.

For years and years, Pan Trinbago has been trying to build its headquarters. I remember, I was the junior Minister of Culture. As the junior Minister of Culture; I too was responsible for giving Pan Trinbago their land on the highway. I chaired the meeting and from then to now, they have been trying to build some kind of edifice. I do not know what it is. Since they said that it is their headquarters, as stated in the People’s Partnership policy document, the Government will continue to support the development of the steel pan and will, in 2010, complete the construction of Pan Trinbago headquarters as a critical step in achieving the objective outlined for the development of the steel pan in the framework of sustainable development.

I want to tell Pan Trinbago, as indeed, I have told and continue to tell all the other interest groups, the Government’s money that is given to you is given to you for the development of the cultural aspect of what you are doing and not for your personal "aggrandization". I am saying to them, as I have said to everybody, we are going to be giving you Government’s money with certain conditionalities attached to it.

I remember TUCO having an organization; I cannot remember what the name was. I want to recall its motto. They had enough gall and gumption to put it on a banner that said: "Business unusual, as usual." I want to say to them now that the business as usual unusual stops here. It is not going to be business as usual.
I can go on and on. At the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism, we are in the business of developing the arts and the culture in Trinidad and Tobago. A lot of people have been clamouring for their mas. People want to play their mas. I alluded to the fact that the biggest export to come out of Trinidad and Tobago is carnival. While oil and gas are finite commodities, the only thing that would stay with us, when these things run out, is our culture. So, we must nurture it. We must not just nurture it in a selfish way because we believe that we must do this. We must listen to the people because the people are the ones who make the culture what it is.

For years people have been saying that the Savannah is our place to play. The people have been saying that the Savannah is the big yard. The people have been saying that they would like to be on the big stage. Somebody found it prudent to break down our Grand Stand and put a big picture of something, "like if people could go in the picture and play." For years they promised to build back the Grand Stand for them in one and one-half years. They relegated us to having carnival in the centre of the street, where we are not accustomed to. Trinidad and Tobago is the Mecca of Carnival. I am not going into who did it. Who did it knows that they did it. It is not going to be done again. I am not here to go through, because my colleagues have done a good job with respect to telling all the things that you have done. I am not going to regurgitate anything. But who did it knows who they are. It would not be done again. The people have been rejoicing and they are saying that they are happy, because I have said that I am going to take carnival back to the Savannah where it belongs.

More than that, in short order, we are going to be having a competition in Trinidad and Tobago, whereby we would have all the architects of Trinidad and Tobago come up with some kind of drawings and some kind of plan as to what they would like to see as they design for our Carnival Village in the Savannah. When that competition is finished and whoever wins, we would then discuss the moneys. We would pay them for the competition, of course. They would get an opportunity to have that building erected in the Savannah, so that Trinidadians and Tobagonians can feel proud when they pass in the Savannah and say: "This building was conceptualized by us; it was built by and for us and it is ours." We have a few Chinese working on it.

I want to touch a little on that. We would have to continue, unfortunately with the construction of the San Fernando Performing Arts Centre. These things were given all kinds of dubious names like "NAPA", "SAPA", "RAPA". I say is "ah set ah crapa." The unfortunate thing about it is that we have spent so much money on it.
already, that we would have to continue to spend money so that it could be finished and we can quickly put it to some kind of use. I want to put people on notice that those buildings are overpriced and were never built for the use they said they were built for. I think what it was used for was exactly what it was built for. [Desk thumping]  

10.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in our lifetime, we will continue to pay for it—they closed down Caroni (1975) Limited because they thought it was a drain on the Treasury. Somebody thought that it was. I am saying to you that we cannot close down that thing that they have built there, we have to find a use for it, but it is equally a drain on the Treasury and it would be for a long time to come, because we will never be able to find enough use for that thing in order for it to make money so that it could maintain itself. Having said all of that, we have it, it is ours and it should have been built, but we are going to find as much use as possible for it. Maybe we may turn it into a hospital, it might work. Mr. Speaker, I really did not mean that. I just said that. I was being facetious. I want the record to reflect that I was being facetious.

In closing, I would like to tell the people of Couva that they are going to get their library. [Desk thumping] I would like to tell the people of Rio Claro—I was told that the drawings are completed; the library is ready; and it is a prefab one, well I am in a position where I can tell you exactly what is happening. The people of Rio Claro will get their library [Desk thumping]; the people of Toco will get their library [Desk thumping]—unfortunately, I do not have Tobago. [Desk thumping] We do not have enough money now to build all of them. We have $21 million set aside to do this, and I would use it the best way I can, and if there is anything left, I will try to build one somewhere else. We are not going to have any cost overruns.

Mr. Warner: Goocharan Trace!

Hon. W. Peters: Goocharan Trace, Chaguanas. I am really trying to abbreviate my speech because of the constraint of time, but I want to say that we are going to have the libraries. We are going to have libraries upgraded, and the books that are so needed in them, we are going to have them.

Let me take the opportunity to tell the people of Mayaro that I promised them a fire station. I am sure that they heard from the esteemed Minister of National Security that the fire station in Mayaro will be built.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: How many things Mayaro getting?
Hon. W. Peters: Whatever Mayaro is getting, they deserve it. There is where all the wealth of Trinidad and Tobago came from. [Desk thumping] Whatever we get in Mayaro, we deserve it. You all starved Mayaro for a long time and ensured that Mayaro got absolutely nothing but promises.

I did not want to bash this Government, but in parting, I must hit them a shot. That government was so incompetent that not only did it deprive Mayaro, but also the people in Belmont and Laventille were protesting because of bad roads. I would not even say that they were vindictive, but they were totally incompetent. [Desk thumping] It is great to see that the people of Trinidad and Tobago have the intelligence to recognize incompetence when they see it. They have seen their incompetence over the years, and that is why they have chosen the People's Partnership with all the good intentions and representation that they know that they are going to get.

For my good friend, the Member for Diego Martin North/East—

Mr. Imbert: We are not friends.

Hon. W. Peters: Well for my "friendemy" I want to tell him, as I wanted to tell him for a long time—Mr. Speaker, in parting, I want to say to my good friend, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, that is why you are there and we are here—[Desk thumping]—no no, I am not finished. He has a word that he always used—"because yuh dotish". [Desk thumping]

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

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Legal Affairs (Mr. Jairam Seemungal): Mr. Speaker, thank you. Let me on this, my inaugural speech to this honourable House, start by expressing congratulation to you for your natural assent to the most treasured seat of this honourable House. I dare say, you are doing a magnificent job. [Desk thumping]

Let me also express my congratulation to our beloved Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, who has led the most dynamic party this country has ever seen to victory at the polls, and not just on one occasion, but on two occasions in the past three months. [Desk thumping] Let me also congratulate our Minister of Finance for delivering the finest budget this country has been yearning for, for a very long time. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, the population of Trinidad and Tobago has placed a tremendous responsibility on the shoulders of the Government of the People's Partnership by placing their trust in us. They have contracted this Government to build a strong,
robust and dynamic economy where their children and grandchildren cannot only survive, but can prosper.

More than that, they have contracted this Government to remodel the society and to do everything necessary within reason to effect social changes so that we can re-establish respect for each other; respect for ourselves; and respect for our institutions. The population has contracted us to provide them with cheaper food; better health care; and to make them feel safe again. These are some of the legitimate expectations of the people we serve—the ones who have made the decision in their overwhelming numbers on May 24, 2010 to give us a mandate, not for two or three years, but for five years, and we will be here for another five years.

Mr. Speaker, this budget presented on September 08, 2010 by the Minister of Finance seeks to satisfy all these expectations. This document that we have the privilege to debate is the first of many pieces of legislation which the People's Partnership will pilot with a goal of fulfilling the responsibilities with which we have been entrusted. It is, therefore, my honour and pledge to contribute today to this debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2011, as we in this august House face the issues that affect us as a society and to begin the process of turning around the economy and, by extension, the society of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, please permit me a moment to thank the constituents of my constituency, La Horquetta/Talparo, for overwhelmingly placing their trust in me on May 24, 2010. Mr. Speaker, La Horquetta/Talparo has always been a PNM stronghold and it is the first time in 40 years that the people have spoken and have spoken so overwhelmingly.

Mr. Speaker, just to touch on a couple of issues that the people of La Horquetta/Talparo are facing—that is why they have turned their backs on the PNM and La Horquetta/Talparo would never be PNM county ever again in Trinidad. [Desk thumping] La Horquetta/Talparo boasts of the largest dam in Trinidad; the Arena Dam. Mr. Speaker, when you look outside your window in Talparo you can see the dam and sometimes you can smell the waters of the dam, but for six months, prior to the People's Partnership coming into Government, not one drop of water flowed through the pipes of that entire constituency.

Hon. Member: Shame!

Mr. J. Seemungal: That is the lack of care; the lack of vision; the lack of interest; and the lack of urgency with which the PNM Government has neglected the people of La Horquetta/Talparo. On May 25, 2010, for the first time, many of the taps in La Horquetta/Talparo have seen water for a very, very, long time. That
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[MR. SEEMUNGAL]

is not because the dam was dry, as was alluded to by the PNM. As a matter of fact, I had cause to visit the dam and the water is not even one inch more than it is now, but they have water in La Horquetta/Talparo now, in some instances, up to seven days a week. That is because of the intervention of the People's Partnership and the hon. Minister of Public Utilities and his hardworking staff. They have turned around the water distribution in my constituency and, today, everyone can boast of having water throughout the length and breadth of the constituency. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, La Horquetta/Talparo can also boast of taking PM 1 where PM 1 has never visited before in its life in this country. For the record, PM 1 is the official vehicle of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. During his very short tenure as acting Prime Minister, the hon. Jack Warner, the Member for Chaguanas West, visited the constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo, and I took him to the very end of La Horquetta/Talparo into a village called Mundo Nuevo and Mamoral.

Mr. Speaker, Mamoral is a village with over 3,000 persons living there and for 40 years they have not seen a dust of asphalt placed on the roads. The potholes are so big in that area that PM 1 can fit inside the potholes. It is so bad. The hon. Minister has promised the people that during his reign, he will fix Mamoral Road—from Mundo Nuevo to Mamoral. [Desk thumping] That is just an example of the lack of care, of the careless government that we had under the People's National Movement.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to representing the people of La Horquetta/Talparo, I have the added privilege of serving in the Ministry of Legal Affairs alongside my hon. Colleague, the Member for St. Augustine. At our Ministry, we have a mammoth task of providing various services for all our countrymen as my senior Minister had so eloquently expounded on yesterday. The services we provide are not glamorous, but they are very essential. They do not attract the attention of the headlines as many other ministries, but they are very essential.

10.20 p.m.

I give this assurance, Mr. Speaker, that there is not another Ministry in Trinidad and Tobago, whose work is more important, whose offices are more committed and whose impact on people's lives are more lasting. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Legal Affairs, I want to acknowledge the hundreds of fearless, nameless service providers at the Ministry of Legal Affairs, who work tirelessly under sometimes difficult, long and often frustrating conditions in the service of their fellow citizens. [Desk thumping] Without them, Sir, and were it not for their dedication and professionalism, life in this country would come to screeching halt.
Let me give an example. The Ministry of Legal Affairs is the first Ministry your parents would visit when you are born. At birth they are required to obtain your birth certificate, so they are required to visit the Ministry of Legal Affairs. Your birth certificate is essential for your schooling and passport, et cetera. After school, if a person decides to get married, start a business or purchase a property, it is the Ministry of Legal Affairs that would provide the essential supporting documents that are necessary. At death it is the only time that you would not be able to access the Ministry of Legal Affairs. [Laughter] However, your family will be required to access the Ministry of Legal Affairs to obtain a death certificate in order to carry on your estate.

I am pointing out these things, Mr. Speaker, to make the point that from the start of your life to the end of your life, the Ministry of Legal Affairs has that important role to play in the lives of our citizens. I make this point to lament on the horror our citizens have to endure in attempting to access these services. It is beyond comprehension that with hundreds of billions of dollars that passed through this economy under the previous administration and with the talk of Vision 2020 developed national status, little has been done to improve the delivery with respect to these services that I have just described.

In 2010, with all the technology available in the world, our citizens still have to show up at 5.00 a.m. at the Registration House, both Port of Spain and San Fernando in order to access these services. Even showing up at 5.00 a.m. do not guarantee these services are available. Sometimes they are told that they have to come back another day.

Imagine an elderly lady with arthritis, diabetes, hypertension and perhaps other ailments leaving Cedros to arrive in Port of Spain at 5.00 a.m. and being told she has to come back another day. If the arthritis, diabetes and hypertension do not kill her, being told to come back another day will surely do the job. If this does not kill her—[Interruption]

Mr. Warner: PNM will. [Laughter]

Mr. J. Seemungal: They have to sit underneath two tents in the car park of the Ministry of Legal Affairs building, South Quay, Port of Spain. The caring PNM government has these old people sitting under two tents through water, flood, et cetera, to access their legal documents, a Ministry which they have to access for life.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Shame!

Mr. J. Seemungal: Shame on them, Mr. Speaker. Now, compare this with the palace in St. Ann’s that the PNM built with over hundreds of millions of dollars
and only when the People's Partnership came into office, that some of the taxpayers got the opportunity to see the inside of this palace. Over the last ten years, money flowed through this country like a dose of salts, but it is the poor planning, poor management and poor governance of the PNM government that has thrown us into this position that we are in today.

Mr. Speaker, when I was assigned to the Ministry of Legal Affairs, I received my briefing from the staffers. I was impressed with the scope, range and quality of work done at the Ministry. However, I was also "scandalized" by the fact that the Ministry is housed at six different locations in and around Port of Spain, at a cost to taxpayers of $9 million per year.

Hon. Ministers: Ooooh!

Mr. Seemungal: Mr. Speaker, in an effort, maybe, by the previous government to alleviate this heavy burden on the taxpayers of $9 million, they went they constructed very beautiful buildings, filling up the landscape of Port of Spain in the MLA Towers at a cost of $300 million. I must give them credit. It is really a beautiful building.

Mr. Speaker, you and the Members of this honourable House must take some time and have a look at the inside of this building. You will be horrified to observe—as the hon. Minister of Minister of Legal Affairs and I were horrified to observe—that after spending $300 million, the building is nothing but an empty shell. The gut of the building is nothing more than bare concrete and pillar. What is more saddening is the design of the building. One would think that in Port of Spain, we have limited space so that we would maximize the floor space for our staffing. But the inside of this building is designed with what is known in engineering as a hollow core or core design. What this means is that the entire core of that building takes up 30 per cent of the floor space. It means that 30 per cent of the building is really wasted. That is the area where they will put a few elevators and nothing else.

Mr. Speaker, it means that for a 24-storey building they could have built a 15-storey building at half cost than what is being spent now, and we would have had much more use. Probably the building could have been finished by now and the people would not have to sit under the tents to access the services of the Ministry of Legal Affairs. Shame on them! Shame on them! This is typical of the PNM. It is the way that they think in spending taxpayers' money. Because the money probably does not belong to them, they can spend it anyhow they want. This bad spending or spending carelessly has been going on for years and it is not just limited to the MLA Towers.
Mr. Speaker, this is a map of a highway to Manzanilla Beach [Map displayed] and instead of thinking of the route as our hon. Member for Chaguanas West considered, merely bypassing the town of Valencia and tracking along the Eastern Main Road where there are a lot of empty lush vegetation we can cut and pass a road, they passed the entire road in and around through Cumuto, passing through private land and not state land. I have no difficulty in the highway reaching Sangre Grande, but what I have a difficulty with is the highway from Sangre Grande to Manzanilla. This is not a highway. This is a freeway to Manzanilla over 300 metres wide, passing through some of the most lush cocoa estates in the Fishing Pond area. Do you know what is sad about this? The people were never consulted on this highway. Similar to that, of all the other buildings, the NAPA, the SAPA and the towers, no consultation prior to entering into any agreement, or entering into any contractual obligation into building these structures.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what is sad about this highway as well? I have been traversing to Manzanilla Beach on a very regular basis sometimes, and I have never seen traffic jam on that stretch. I have never seen traffic jam on the stretch from Sangre Grande to Manzanilla, so what is the point in putting a highway? It takes 25 minutes to reach to the beach, take a bath and come back. But yet, you are passing a highway through lots of cocoa estates, land-locking thousands of acres of land when you are passing through the highway through private estates.

The planners of this highway also did not have a clue of what is domestic tourism in this country. By passing a highway there they would have been killing hundreds of businesses along the Eastern Main Road into Manzanilla, and the hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla had agreed with me that it would have been destroying the livelihood of all these people. That is the thinking of the People's National Movement. They just do things without thinking or decided that they have a lot of money and spend it lavishly. It is not theirs to spend lavishly.

Mr. Speaker, a similar exercise was done with the rapid rail project, and it was only by God's intervention and the timely intervention of the People's Partnership Government, who intervene in the correct time to stop that rapid rail project. That project—I will show you one piece of it—was passing through the heartland of Central. Hundreds of people of Mount Plaisir, Ramgoolie Trace, Chin Chin Road, Esmeralda, Welcome, Ragoonanan Road and Longdenville would have been displaced. Villages which were there for hundreds of years would have disappeared out of this world and prime agriculture land—I have seen melongene plants, bhaigan, where you have to literally pick these vegetables with a cocoa knife. That is the fertility of the lands in that area and they would have just closed
their eyes to that and passed this railway through that entire area. Shame on them! That is the type of caring government, the People's National Movement is. It is God's intervention that the People's Partnership came and put a stop to all those projects, and put a stop to all those nonsensical spending, a waste of money that the PNM government was allowing to run away. This country would have been destroyed and, it is we, the People's Partnership, who have put a stop to that.

Mr. Speaker, as I am on highways, I listened very carefully to the Member for Diego Martin West as he chastised the Member for St. Augustine on the proposed tunnel to Maracas. He said that the tunnel is to rush and buy bake and shark. I want to let you know that the People's National Movement has been buying up all the bakes, and is only waiting for the tunnel to be completed to buy the shark, (map displayed).

10.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the last display I have in front of me is the map displaying the highways by phases that the People’s National Movement was deciding to build throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad, and Phase II of this highway, Mr. Speaker, was a tunnel from St. Joseph to Maracas—[Laughter] from St. Joseph to Maracas, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, so as I said they bought all the bake and they are waiting on this tunnel to buy all the shark in Maracas Bay, [Laughter] and then they want to come here in this House and tell us that we are putting a tunnel. But they have claimed everything else so I am giving them this one. Mr. Speaker, I am giving them this because this is their document. It came from one of their documents, Mr. Speaker. I am very sorry that the Member for Diego Martin West who had called the standard one students duncy heads—and had not seen this—[Interruption]

So, Mr. Speaker, coming back to the tent and the little old ladies, I really sympathize with the Member for St. Augustine when he had to prepare the budget and make decisions—[Interruption] the Member for Tunapuna, sorry, had to make decisions on how to spend money because, on the one hand, he will be looking at the tents where the little old ladies will be sitting. (Picture displayed) On the other hand he will be looking at wasted moneys spent by the People’s National Movement, however, he still has to make a decision to finish these mega structures and he is left in a dilemma and that is what this budget is about. Our backs are against the wall and we now have to finish these mega structures that were started under the People’s National Movement.

So, Mr. Speaker, this Government is required to exercise restraint in its spending but I thank my colleagues opposite. We are now required to spend millions of dollars to finish projects started by them in the lavish spending that they have started over the
last years. Mr. Speaker, the scandal continues to leave us trying to determine how best to make the bitter pills a little sweeter for our citizens to swallow. They spent and spent and spent, Mr. Speaker, and now the poor people have to pay the price.

The hon. Minister of Finance spoke about turning the economy around. Mr. Speaker, the People’s Partnership with the help of God and with the help of the beautiful peoples of this land will rise and we will turn the economy around. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Community Development (Hon. Nizam Baksh): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First I take this opportunity to congratulate you on attaining that exalted position of Speaker of the House. I am sure that you are going to do a wonderful job and bring credit to the position there.

I also take the opportunity to recall that very important date in our lives, the 24th of May, which would be remembered in the annals of our history as very historic when we would have seen the first woman Prime Minister in the history of Trinidad and Tobago on that particular day. Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is one of international repute and ranking and this would have been seen over the last couple weeks.

Mr. Speaker, let me also take the opportunity to thank the constituents of Naparima for giving me the third highest number of votes in this country. [Desk thumping] I also want to thank the citizens of this country for the confidence they reposed in the People’s Partnership in changing our seating position from on that side of the House to this side of the House. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, I embrace this opportunity to contribute to the debate on the national budget for the new fiscal year 2010—2011. The budget presented by the hon. Minister of Finance is a significant document in the context of national development. It allows Government to share with the national population its policies, programmes and priorities as well as the resource allocation for its plan of action. This debate also provides the Members of Parliament with the opportunity to highlight issues and concerns relating to their constituencies and the nation as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance for presenting a budget which was so comprehensive and incisive in keeping with the fundamental policy perspectives and pledges of the People’s Partnership Government. The document provides a framework for sustainable development and outlines initiatives for a secure, prosperous and sustainable nation. I also commend my colleagues for the tremendous and effective support given by way of their contributions in the debate to the hon. Minister of Finance and the People’s Partnership Government.
Mr. Speaker, my contribution to this debate will focus on the initiatives of the Ministry of Community Development. The change of government as the outcome of the election resulted in the physical separation of the three core units of the then Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs and the convergence of a distinct people-centred philosophy. Mr. Speaker, in the post election period transitional activities predominated. I must applaud the foresight and vision of the hon. Prime Minister in establishing a stand-alone Ministry for the first time, Ministry with the responsibility for community development.

The new Ministry of Community Development has been facilitating the establishment of the new Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism and the integration of the gender division into the Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring and Gender Affairs. Under this new administration, the initial focus of the Ministry of Community Development has been on the reassessment of existing programmes and projects and the development of the one-year plan of work in line with our new mandate.

Fundamental to the Government’s achievement of its mission to promote a process of people-centred development are the seven interconnected pillars for sustainable development. Six of the seven, excluding that of foreign policy, have direct relevance to my new Ministry. These are the people-centred development, poverty eradication and social justice, national and personal security, information and communication technologies, a more diversified knowledge intensive economy, good governance through effective representation, transparency and accountability. These developmental pillars, Mr. Speaker, can have a positive impact on the socio-economic fabric of the society and assist the Government in promoting a process of people-centred development.

Mr. Speaker, a key part of this new Ministry’s programme of work will be mobilization and engagement of communities throughout the country so that everyone can make a positive contribution to our nation’s sustainable development and success, thus allowing everyone to benefit. This will establish strong relationships within this new administration and our communities which will be responsible for implementation of many community initiated social projects. We in the People’s Partnership recognize that as a government we cannot function effectively in isolation of the people whom we are elected to serve.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Community Development is ideally situated to be the key driver of this mission of community mobilization and engagement. It interfaces directly with members of the public in the course of their daily lives and it has an intimate knowledge of the socio-economic conditions that characterize communities across the country. The programmes and measures in
the action agenda of the ministry for fiscal 2011 therefore speak in large measure
to the mobilization and engagement of communities in identifying and addressing
issues of relevance to their development, maintaining the social safety net for the
more vulnerable and skills acquisition and human development interventions in
consultation, in collaboration with communities.

Mr. Speaker, the People’s Partnership Government is people-oriented and seeks to
ensure the participation of everyone in this society thus creating the avenue for and
promotion of volunteerism. This will allow for the effective governance of community
facilities, private sector engagement in local communities and creativity from all strata
of the society.

Mr. Speaker, the People’s Partnership Government would also engender the
promotion of environmental awareness going green and maintaining the vision of
the Prime Minister when she introduced the C & B T&T, Clean and Beautify
Trinidad and Tobago, and this initiative will be year-round via the environmental
sanitation component of the annual Prime Minister’s Best Village Competition.
This will be pursued with vigour. I invite—-I take this opportunity to invite all MPs
to identify areas in their constituency for beautification. My Ministry will provide
the necessary plans in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, emphasis will also be placed on promoting a culture of self-help,
self reliance and ownership and empowerment in communities. This will involve
the provision of assistance in project design for communities with funding from
the Community Development Fund (CDF), National Commission for Self-Help
Company Limited and the National Social Development Programme that have full
poverty alleviation value. This will also combine the efforts of Government,
NGOs, CBOs and the private sector of programmes and projects that will remove
socio-economic barriers and transcend the poverty trap.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry, therefore, is of the view that the broad range of
programmes and measures aligned to the development pillars will positively
impact the socio-economic fabric of the society and assist the Government in
promoting the process of people-centred development. Mr. Speaker, in order to
ensure the delivery of the programmes and measures outlined, the Ministry
intends to promote very close collaboration within the work of the National
Commission of Self-help and the Community Development Fund and the
Community Development Division of the Ministry.

The process of community development is pivotal to the operation of the
Ministry. It is through this process that citizens and community representatives
interact with the Ministry to identify community needs and to access resources and services necessary for needs satisfaction and community improvement.

Mr. Speaker, under the changed administration, there is now a heightened focus on people-centred development, poverty alleviation, social justice and good governance. Operating in decentralized districts, the Community Development Officers will assist in mobilizing community action groups, village groups and the NGOs and CBOs network and assist them in defining the appropriate interventions to improve their standard of living. The existence of community groups is essential to achieving the interrelated goals of good governance and people’s participation.

10.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I looked at one particular section of the Ministry’s activities, and this is the Community Centre Construction Programme. The Community Centre Construction Programme could well be described as the main flagship of the Community Development Ministry.

Since 2007, the previous Government committed a tremendous amount of financial resources towards the construction of new community centres and the refurbishment of existing centres. I am certain that those of us who have been in this honourable House since 2007 will recall the previous Government’s grandiose plans to construct 100 community centres in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, as a former Community Development Officer myself, I must admit that I was convinced that the Government was finally getting to its senses and was committing resources that would impact positively on the social and cultural values of our country. My training and experience enabled me to accept and promote the community centre as the cog around which the village and community activities rotate. I see the community centre as the livewire for accommodating activities that lead to cohesive and vibrant communities.

I did not see the initiative as one that would have created a hotbed for secrecy, graft and corruption. I have discovered otherwise. It is now a financial nightmare. Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform this House of the amount of financial resources that have been committed to the accelerated community centre construction and refurbishment programme since 2007.

In those four years, they have spent a total of $248,675,000; and this is only the beginning of what I have to reveal on this community centre programme. They have gone further and utilized funding from the NSDP, which is separate from the funding obtained for community centres construction; and I have been
advised that the sum of $248,675,000 is not the entire sum that was utilized for the construction of community centres over the last four years.

I have been told that millions of dollars were allocated separately from 2007 to 2009 from the National Social Development Programme of the Ministry of Community Development. My Ministry is now trying to determine the exact figures that were utilized and expended via the NSDP. I was told that a rather secretive and hush hush arrangement existed, whereby the project unit, under the umbrella of the National Social Development Company Limited, accordingly effected the payments from the NSDP.

I was informed that the amount expended through the NSDP over the period of three years may be in the vicinity of $150 million, more or less. This amount will carry the total of $383 million expended to date, and what do taxpayers have to see for this enormous sum?

Mr. Speaker, it goes on a little further and it gets a little more interesting. The centres which are currently under construction are distributed as follows; and I give you according to the counties: County Caroni, eight; Mayaro, one; St. Andrew/St. David, six; St. George, 45; Victoria, 14; St. Patrick, nine; and this is the kind of imbalance we had with regard to the distribution of centres throughout the country. A total of 83 projects in Trinidad, Mr. Speaker.

Let us look at what the distribution reveals, Mr. Speaker. The county St. George alone got 45 community centres; a total of 54.2 per cent of the pie. The question may be asked by citizens of the rest of the country, what was their position? They were not part of this country? What happened to them?

Mr. Warner: What did Oropouche West get?

Hon. N. Baksh: I did not see Oropouche. Well, they have St. Patrick. Let us look at the rest of the distribution. Mr. Speaker, the industrial capital of Trinidad and Tobago, which is south and environs, only got 16.8 per cent of those centres allocated. Apart from the bold and blatant skewed distribution of community centres and projects by the former PNM Government, as a layperson who has been visiting completed and ongoing projects, I offered a rough average calculation of $6 million per centre, Mr. Speaker. That is from the figures we saw around.

With the sum already expended—that is almost $224 million—we should have had approximately 40 centres completed, if I use the average of $6 million per centre. We are nowhere near this figure, because I subscribe to the allegation that the Community Centre Construction Programme is riddled with corruption and irregular financial commitment. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, my technocrats have advised me that my Ministry would need some $588 million to complete the 83 centres now under construction. That is $588 million more. In the 2011 draft estimate, my Ministry has been allocated $60 million for the construction of community centres. Mr. Speaker, the 2010 allocation for the construction of community centres was $44 million, and those people in charge of the construction of community centres spent over $300 million without any approval; without any funding for the project.

Mr. Speaker, a typical case in point is the community centre in Caparo, where work commenced on the 24th of May, 2010. The 24th of May, the centre started in Caparo. Election day. We are now saddled with this unscrupulous conduct; a project that is estimated to cost $7.5 million. This is only the icing on the cake of the irregular and unscrupulous practices which were inherited from the former PNM Government.

Mr. Speaker, I now move on to what I will identify as the contagious virus called "variation" in the Community Centre Building Programme, as practised by the previous government.

Mr. Warner: Talk boy, talk.

Hon. N. Baksh: That is a real cancer, Mr. Speaker. Within the past three months, I have visited several of these community centre projects; some completed and some under construction. I have also commissioned two of the completed centres. I have had several meetings with the management of the Community Development Division; the Project Management Unit and the National Self-Help Commission; the organization which has been entrusted with the responsibility to oversee the construction of community centres and public facilities.

Out of these discussions and inspections, I have been able to make the following conclusions, Mr. Speaker. Every community centre project and public facility has been subjected to a series of variations; most of which could be questioned on the grounds that they are basic to any building project. Mr. Speaker, I will just read you some of those there from the documents I have been provided on the variations.

Let me just mention the Los Charros Community Centre, which is in deep south. I have asked for the variation, and they said that the cost of the entry culvert required to access site—listen to the kind of variation they had, and if you have a little idea about construction, you will realize that this should have been there from the very beginning in the original plan.

“Extra over-structural steel under-measured in contract.”
Meaning that whatever they decided what was required was not the correct amount, so that they had to go up; and that increase was $93,240.

“Negotiated stand-by reimbursement for period client halted works for redesign and relocation to be completed.”

So they had to stop the work while they changed the plans of the building, and that cost the taxpayers $100,000 while the contractor was just sitting and waiting for the design to be redone.

“Additional works required due to the relocation of the building site.”

Mr. Speaker, all these are madness here you know. If you have people who are at the Project Management Unit who are supposed to be skilled persons with regard to construction, and they go to a site and could not tell that the site they decided on for the community centre was not appropriate, after they start the construction work, then they have to shift elsewhere. I mean, you ask yourself what is happening there. Who decided these kinds of things?

You know, another recommendation there was the drainage necessary for the outfall due to the relocation of the building. So when you shift the building from one side to another, you had to do over all the drains which cost $178,000. I see another thing here, "Client’s request to independently house water storage and amenities."

Mr. Sharma: That is a water tank?

Hon. N. Baksh: I want to ask who is the client for this project, because I see this repeating in several of the variations there?

Mr. Sharma: How much that cost?

Hon. N. Baksh: This is $92,000.

Mr. Sharma: To relocate a water tank?

Hon. N. Baksh: Yes. To relocate and to decide on that.

Mr. Roberts: Do not make jokes man. It is getting late.

Hon. N. Baksh: Extra for electrical, under-measured in contract. So, even in the estimate for electrical work, they underestimated the thing, and that was $200,000.

“Increase in plumbing requirements due to relocation and change in design, $100,000.”

And that is only one community centre.
There is another one; a more popular one. This one is more interesting, Mr. Speaker. Waterloo Community Centre, variation; hear the thing:

“No allowance in original contract for AC support structure, $40,000. No allowance in original contract for internal staircase.”

Imagine, mad people you know. [Laughter]

“No allowance in original contract for internal staircase, $80,000 extra.”

And then they talk about client request, again, to modify the original design. Who were the clients, I do not know, because it repeats itself in every project.

Hear this one again, Mr. Speaker. You think it is jokey. Hear this one:

“No allowance in the original contract for external staircase.”

An internal staircase. I read about internal before; it is also the same building, external staircase. So you had no plan for any staircase at all. You would not know what is happening.

**Mr. Warner**: It is a gingerbread house?

**Hon. N. Baksh**: The internal staircase, $80,000; external staircase, $75,000.

“No allowance in the original contract for handrails, $58,000.”

**Mr. Sharma**: Is it made from gold?

**Hon. N. Baksh**: Again, in the next project:

“No allowance in the original contract for external staircase.”

So every one is repeating itself. It is a scam. It had to be.

Another item here:

“Client instruction for housing water storage pumping, $110,000; Footing against storage area for tanks, and so forth, $110,000; Cost of joinery for computer stations, $60,000.”

Those are only a few of the variations I am reading on those projects. Mr. Speaker, the list goes on and on, you know. I will give you the figures.

**Mr. Sharma**: What is the total variation?

**Hon. N. Baksh**: I am coming to that. The said variation, Mr. Speaker, has given rise to cost overruns, while in some instances, exceeding the estimated cost by 200 and 300 per cent.
Mr. Warner: Who was the Minister?

Hon. N. Baksh: Mr. Speaker, I want to place in the parliamentary record a few of the centres in which the variations have been widely practised: Palo Seco, Los Charros, the original estimate was $6.5 million; there was an additional cost of $984,000. Waterloo, $4.897 million original cost; gone up by $1.189 million. Gulf View, $6.785; a variation of $1.15 million. Bon Air West, $5.5 million original cost; an increase of $4.26 million; almost 100 per cent there. Roystonia, $5.652 original cost; a variation of almost $3 million; $2.98 million, and it is not open yet. The cost is still climbing there.

11.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, North Manzanilla, $3.8 million, the cost overrun was $862,000; Ortoire, original, $3.866 million, now increased by $747,000; Sisters Road, $3.1 million, cost overrun, $632,000; St. Augustine, $3.368 million, with a cost overrun of $402,000, and the list goes on. You have Samaroo Village, Upper Malabar, La Gloria—

[ Interruption ]

Mr. Roberts: Let me hear about Malabar.

Hon. N. Baksh: Malabar, original allocation, $5.36 million, a cost overrun so far of $185,000, and we "eh" finish there yet. We still have more.

La Gloria, $5 million, almost $2 million cost overrun; Duranta Gardens, Hindustan, Diego Martin Central—[ Interruption ]

Mr. Roberts: "Leh we hear Diego Martin Central."

Hon. N. Baksh: Mr. Speaker, $4.13 million, original cost, the cost overrun is $786,000, and these centres are not completed as yet, these are just the cost overruns up to today. [ Crosstalk ]

These 15 centres had been estimated to cost $75 million, we have a cost overrun of almost $18 million on these projects; $17.947 million, to be exact. That could have built three additional centres, if I use the exorbitant price of $6 million. [ Crosstalk ] This was the trend going on in these construction programmes.

Even the process we use to allocate these centres—in my day as a Community Development Officer, the process involved consultation with the communities, the village councils and the district officers. There was nothing like that in this process; those people were totally bypassed and ignored. The people at the project management unit were the ones who decided, with the political directorate, where these community centres were going to be built and at the cost. This is the trend we have been seeing of what is happening there.
Some of these centres are being built in areas where the village councils are not even functioning, so there is nobody to control it. The other thing is that when you involve people in the selection and construction of community centres, they feel a sense of belonging; that is theirs; they are proud of it; but when the project unit comes—I do not want to say as a thief in the night—without consultation and they start to build a community centre, nobody knows what is happening; they just drive pass everyday and see that something is going up. [Crosstalk] They are not part of it.

So there was no consultation whatever with the Community Development, the Director of Community Development or the respective communities, this led to them never feeling a sense of attachment to these community centres.

The thing continues a little more. The community centres construction programme was so vaille-que-vaille, that in a number of cases, the building designed was unsuitable for the site. Hear this one; this is an interesting one. They had some plans for certain community centres and when the contractors went to put down the building, they realized that the plan for the building was bigger than the site that they had to put the building on. That is the extent of craziness in this community centre construction programme. I could name some of those communities that I came up with. [Crosstalk]

The former PNM Government had in effect that every village should have a different design, which was never the subject of any consultation. It appears that this was wilfully done to engage in variations and corruption.

I know that in the past, many years ago, you had special designs that were applicable to the population of the communities, but when you go in these areas, every community had almost a different design. You could go to no two communities and find the same designed community centres.

I could name Gulf City, Waterloo Community Centre, Talparo, Preysal Community Centre and Las Lomas, where proper studies were not initiated about the site restrictions, therefore this cost a lot of variations.

Another critical irregularity which I have discovered in the Community Centre Construction Programme was that the head of the Project Unit which operated under the aegis of the National Commission for Self-Help, a special purpose committee, who was also a board member. So you have a project unit that should be under the umbrella of the Community Development Division and seeking the interest of the Community Development Division, being also on the board of the Special Purpose Company, which is a conflict of interest. In fact, I go a little further and say that was an incestuous relationship between those two organizations.
The People's Partnership Government is giving this honourable House the assurance that all these irregularities have ended, all these have gone; "it done, it stop". [Desk thumping] I have issued clear and concise instructions as follows:

- The designs of community centres must be reduced to a few and to suit the needs of particular communities.

Mr. Roberts: Talking about irregularities, we welcome back the Member for Diego Martin North/East. [Laughter]

Hon. N. Baksh: The instructions continue:

- Variations will no longer be the order of the day. In any event, no variation should be effective without prior consultation and approval.

- No community centre will be allocated to any community without the necessary checks and balances of the Community Development Division and consultation with the parliamentary representative.

Mr. Speaker, every community centre would be managed by a community centre management committee made up of representatives of the voluntary organizations of the community in which it is located. [Interruption]

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

We are encouraging volunteerism and civic mindedness in the appointment of these management committees.

- Community centre committees must undertake programmes and projects to raise revenue which will enable it to be self-sustaining in respect of management and upkeep.

- No individual or group should be debarred from use of the centres and its facilities.

- Every community centre that is formally opened, must be commissioned simultaneously.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with an allocation of $60 million, which represents a 30 per cent increase over the last PNM allocation in 2010, the People's Partnership cannot even liquidate the debts owing on community centres under construction. We are placed in the financial dilemma which I have to face squarely. The allocation and distribution of community centres will no longer be politically skewed. No county will ever get 54 per cent of the allocations. The People's Partnership Government will ensure equity and fairness; moreover there will be transparency in whatever we do.
I come to another interesting section in the Ministry of Community Development, one which has been hitting the airwaves for some time now, that is, the financial assistance for studies programme, the bursaries programme. The financial allocation for the bursaries programme for 2010 is $4 million. When I assumed duties following the May 24 general election, this amount was already exhausted. At that time as well, the former bursary committee had already approved a list of over 100 students for financial assistance for the bursary programme. The students concerned were already informed that the committee had approved their application for assistance and on that basis they in turn have informed their respective institutions that Government assistance was forthcoming, and this was only halfway through the process.

In order to avoid undue embarrassment and certain expulsion of the students concerned, I had to rake and scrape from the different heads and subheads under community development and muster a total in excess of $2 million, which I sought virement to save the studies programmes of our citizens, especially in foreign institutions. This is the kind of concern that the People's Partnership would have for the citizens of this country.

My hands were forced. I did not have any alternative; this meant that expenditure for the bursary programme for 2010 would be in excess of $6 million. I have sought to obtain accounts of the total expenditure of the bursary programme for the period 2002—2009. I have been told that financial records cannot be located for the period 2002—2007. That is the situation in the Ministry.

For six years accounts of expenditure for the bursary programme cannot be located. I have asked the authorities to continue to search. The Integrity Commission has written several letters to the Ministry of Community Development detailing information needed about the bursary programme, which different citizens sought throughout that agency. I have examined the response which the Ministry made to the Integrity Commission and I am appalled at the explanation offered. I could read some of the responses into the parliamentary record but I will prefer to give a synopsis of those reports.

In response to a question for the addresses and telephone contacts of beneficiaries of the bursary programme for six years, 2002—2007, the Ministry indicated that particular information was not captured in the database. So we just had the names of those who applied and no addresses for those persons.

I use the 2010 allocation as an average. I could calculate the total expenditure to date, as approximately $45 million spent on that programme. This means that for six years for which the data was not captured, more than $30 million would have been expended on bursary programme. We must note that the six-year
period was at the time when revenue from oil was very high and the figure may well be above what I quoted here.

In response to another question from the Integrity Commission, about the record of applications from those who were successful as well as those who were unsuccessful, the Ministry advised that those records could not be located. Let us juggle our minds to speculate on these responses. Is it that some of these names are ghosts or is it that moneys were siphoned and channelled elsewhere? Are those recipients citizens who now reside permanently in other countries and we will never benefit from this expertise? How is it possible for a Government agency with numerous checks and balances to allow so much of taxpayers’ money to be expended and vital records are not available?

As a public servant I am aware that as soon as a cheque is prepared for a voucher, all the certified documents are placed in a vault to be made available for audit purposes. To remove these documents and probably destroy would have had the sanctions of persons very high in the authoritative structure. I promise that from May 24 every aspect of the record of the bursary programme will be captured and stored securely. This programme will no longer be the secret domain of any public official. From now on, transparency in the true sense of the word will be the order of the day. [Desk thumping]

The guidelines for granting of financial assistance for studies are under active review and will be published on completion. There is going to be no secret about this.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Community Development organizes, promotes and administers a series of vocational skills training programmes. Some of these are as follows: the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme, acronym GAPP; Retirees Adolescent Partnership Programme, acronym RAPP; National Social Development Programme, NSDP—[Interruption] No, it is GAPP, RAPP and crap—Community Enhancement and Regeneration Programme, CERP and the Export Centres Programme. Within any one year, thousands of citizens, including youths and adults, participate and receive training from these programmes. I have been provided with statistics of every one of these programmes and the number of citizens who have benefitted from training as well as millions of dollars in stipends.

11.20 p.m.

I have been advised that the programmes are replete with, what may be termed as "course jumpers". Youths attend different classes not interested in the skill but regard the stipend as a monthly salary. In the end very little expertise is acquired or imparted.
[HON. N. BAKSH]

I have issued instructions that every single programme under the auspices of the Community Development from now on must be equipped with mechanisms that will enable tracer studies to be conducted. I have made it clear that tracer studies are vital to evaluate in the effectiveness of our social programmes. We must ensure that citizens of our country receive training which is relevant to their developmental trends.

Tracer studies which unearth information that programmes are not relevant will not continue year after year and facilitate wastage. For example, we have an agency under the portfolio of the Ministry of Community Development called Export Centre Company Limited which has been in operation for more than two decades. The original concept of this organization was to train locals to produce handicraft items and to facilitate the exportation of these said items.

After its existence for more than two decades, this organization has not exported a single handicraft item. I have been told on an annual basis that this company trains hundreds of citizens but not one citizen could produce a single item that can compete in the open market in this country and even compete with any foreign item coming into this country. I have also been told that this company has a permanent staff complement in excess of 40 and about the same number of part-timers. I am at the moment evaluating and reviewing the effectiveness of this company.

The National Commission for Self-help: I have made recommendations that the minor repair and reconstruction grant will be increased from $10,000 to $15,000 and this is for the poor citizens to benefit from this year. This is going to supplement the poverty alleviation programmes of this Government.

Under natural disasters or destruction by fire, I am going to recommend that this grant be increased from $10,000 to $25,000. I have seen where applications have been lying in that office; people applied since 2006, 2007, 2008 for assistance where their house has been burnt; roof has been blown off by a storm and so on, and no assistance was forthcoming. I have mandated the National Commission for Self-Help-Cuchawan had problems there too?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Hon. N. Baksh: Well I have mandated that the National Commission for Self-Help, that under these items here of emergency, that a cheque must be prepared within seven days of receipt of the application. [Desk thumping] I am learning from my colleagues here. We must deliver. People’s Partnership must deliver.

You know, when I gave that mandate there, let me tell you the outcome of that now. As a result of this mandate, the National Commission for Self-help will now
be distributing 80 purchase orders for building materials on Monday coming, September 20, 2010 at 1.30 p.m. at the Preysal Community Centre in Couva. This is as a result of the mandate I gave them, that those people who suffer these problems must be treated with immediately. Therefore on Monday we are distributing over 80 purchase orders for materials to repair houses. This action by the People's Partnership Government is the kind of support we will give to our people. This is only the beginning. A lot more is yet to come.

I am in the process also of having a brochure prepared in the Ministry which will be distributed to the Members of Parliament here, NGOs and CBOs and the faith-based organizations and the national community of the services available and ways of accessing these services. Application forms will also be made available on line where applicable so people would not have to come to the offices.

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. N. Baksh:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and thank you very much, colleagues. You know, we in this People's Partnership Government look after the interest of the citizens of this country, especially those who are less fortunate. We go further than that. I have under the Ministry of Community Development a swimming pool that was built in Cocoyea in the constituency of San Fernando East and you know the original cost of that swimming pool facility was estimated at $15 million. Do you know what the end cost of that was? The final cost of that project was $35 million. And I was informed that was built only for the residents of Cocoyea. I visited that facility and I gave a mandate to the people who are managing the centre, that that must be made available for every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. I have also put a note to the Cabinet of this country to hand over this facility to the rightful Ministry, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. [*Desk thumping*]

At this juncture I want to take this opportunity to commend and thank some of my colleagues for—you know, within the short space of time we have been in governance you could identify a lot of work being done throughout the length and breadth of this country. I want to thank the Minister of Works and Transport and his staff for their aggressive road paving projects in Naparima and throughout this country.

They have paved, within this three-month period, the Papourie Road, the GP Road and Iere Village. There was a bridge in Mussrap Trace for 14 years when
the river was realigned a bridge was never replaced there and within seven days on my request to the Minister of Works and Transport, I got a Bailey bridge—seven days. [Desk thumping] That is action. Within seven days a Bailey bridge was installed in that area, Mussrap Trace. People were cut off. All they had to cross was on a footpath across the river. I want to thank the hon. Minister and his staff for that kind of action. I know that we have had discussions where other roads are going to be paved, like the Cipero Road, Garth Road, Realize Road, Jaipaulsingh Road.

I have also had discussion with the Minister of Public Utilities where he had asked me to identify a number of areas that have problems with regard to getting a regular supply of water. There are areas where we get water once a week, sometimes once a fortnight. There are areas in the constituency of Naparima where we get a supply only once a month. So we have to solve these problems. There is also difficulty with regard to the demand for truck-borne supply. So I have had discussions with him. I have given him a list of those areas and indicated the kind of problems we experience and already we are seeing a difference in that. We are seeing areas that had these problems now getting a regular supply of water. So I want to thank the Minister of Public Utilities as well. I know that he is continuing to address the problems that we experience in Naparima with regard to water.

You know, for years we have been hearing that the mains from Navet to Malgretoute— you know, we have 50 per cent wastage along those mains. So that today we are seeing that this main is being replaced under this Minister of Public Utilities and it is due for completion by February next year. So this means that 50 per cent more water will be flowing in the taps in the southern districts of Trinidad. I want to thank him for that.

It is only three months. We have a number of other programmes. I have another list here that I want to remind ourselves of the number of things that the People's Partnership has promised us, but I know that other Members have been speaking about it and I would leave it here this evening in view of the time factor. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank you and the Members for providing me with this opportunity to contribute in this debate here this evening.

Thank you very much. [Desk thumping]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): [Desk thumping] Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thank you for permitting me to join in this debate and to thank the hon. Minister of Finance and his team for their hard work,
for their dedication in developing and presenting this fiscal package. In my respectful view it is an unparalleled package in our history in terms of what it purports to achieve at such a very critical juncture in our nation's history.

This budget represents commitment and fulfilment of the fundamental philosophy of our Government, your Government, the people's Government, and that is to serve the people, serve the people, serve the people. [Desk thumping] If I were to put the budget statement in the package into perspective, I am of the view that this 2011 budget will be recorded as a historic budget; I am of the view that the pages of the future will say it was the first People's Partnership budget; it was the first-time budget of a government led by a woman, and in many ways we will be remembered in this debate for circumstances of a historical nature that are frankly beyond our control and fall squarely at the feet of the last government. [Desk thumping]

History will be right when it says that this 2010/2011 fiscal package of the new People's Partnership Government is, indeed, a landmark one. History will record this package of our coalition-led Government as the first move by a government of Trinidad and Tobago to restore integrity, to restore humility, to restore service, to restore compassion and a human touch to the people of our land.

History will record this budget as a restoration of the true qualities of leadership by a government of the people, by the people and for the people, and would see it as a return to a path of productivity, prosperity and progress. History will say that this budget reflects a government and a leadership team which has the vision and conviction that a dream for the betterment of the people can be achieved, and history will record that our government, inspired through our policies, has the will power and the energy to get it done. This, as I say, is the people's government; this is your government.

In the words of Daniel Webster said so very long ago; words that we can repeat today as being very apt in the circumstances, and I quote:

“The people’s government, made for the people, made by the people, and answerable to the people.”

This is the people's government. This is where we see the difference between the PNM government and the present People's Partnership Government. Unlike the past administration, your Government took into consideration one vital element of leadership in the preparation of this fiscal package. We took into consideration the fact that in order to lead people we must first walk behind people. [Desk thumping] We must first find out where they are going; where they want to go before we can lead them. We took into consideration the fact that leadership should be borne out of the understanding of the needs of those who would be affected by it. That leadership is
understanding people and involving people. It takes good characteristics like integrity, dedication, purpose, selflessness, knowledge, skill, as well as determination not to accept failure. But we will not stop there. Leadership grows.

11.35 p.m.

Stephen Covey said, and I quote:

“Effective leadership is putting first things first. Effective management is discipline carrying it out.”

We have always said we put the people first. So, what the country requires at this time is not only leadership; but effective management as well. It is public knowledge that the former government was totally lacking in both leadership and management. They were hasty to point out growth in revenues and GDP, but we all know that this had nothing to do with their management capability; all it had to do was with the spike in prices in the energy sector.

So they would come to this Parliament and talk about prudent fiscal management, touting the high gas and oil prices, touting the revenue and the GDP increases and, at the end of the day, as the hon. Minister of Finance said, in spite of the billions, the ordinary man, woman and child in this country suffered.

They had thousands of pages of Vision 2020 documents, but they remained vision impaired. They were blinded by multimillion dollar drapes, $2 million flags and private jets and could not or, more appropriately, would not see the needs of the people.

Your People's Partnership Government stands for effective leadership and for effective management. That is why only after just about three months in office—Saturday will mark 120 days that we have been in office—your Government, for the first time in nearly a decade, has introduced a people's budget. It is this budget which reflects the change in leadership that our citizens voted overwhelmingly for in this historic May 24 general election.

The premise of my contribution is the very same one that has been for all of us here. It is in keeping with the theme of our budget: Facing the Issues: Turning the Economy Around. That is leadership and service to the people. It is relevant to our theme since the first responsibility of leadership is to define reality; in other words, you must face up to the issues and that is what he did.

As I sat here and listened to the Members of the Opposition, it became clearer to me, as it must have been to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to others listening in, that there is a clear ideological difference between the People's Partnership and
the Opposition People's National Movement (PNM). Where we seek to build a nation, they sought self-aggrandizement; where we seek constructive criticism, they sought political picong, as we saw from someone there earlier; where we seek development of our people, they sought development of a select group; while we seek consensus, they sought to impose their beliefs on others; where we seek to do, they sought to justify failure not to do. That is what they spend their time here doing and will continue to do throughout the course of this debate.

Initially, I was of the view that the hon. Member for San Fernando East was unique in this regard until it became clear to me that he had passed on all those failings to his new leader, the Leader of the Opposition.

Tonight I ask: Whom do they represent? One of the core ideological differences between the partnership and the People's National Movement is that we unreservedly represent all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Even whilst they were in government, they made it clear that they represented only the PNM. Today, as I speak in this Chamber, I can see clearly that even now in opposition they represent only the PNM; and a very dwindled sized PNM at that. It is clear to me that they are unable now as then to differentiate between narrow political interests and being a government.

Look at them now! Ask yourselves who the Members of the Opposition represent. When we, your Government, present ourselves to you and the citizens of this land, we wear the symbol. We wear the symbol of whom we represent. We are proud to wear the flag of Trinidad and Tobago. They continue to wear their party symbol around their necks, representing only the PNM; not an ounce of patriotism in any one of them, individually or collectively.

Many of you will recall several addresses I made to this House, including my inaugural address when we were sworn in, in which I called on Members of the Opposition to desist from wearing their party symbol of the Balisier tie in Parliament and at state functions since they are supposed to represent all the people. Now I see my words of advice may be getting through. I read in the paper that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is considering doing away with the tie. I am advised that when he did it, he was booed. I am so advised. Tell us if it is not true.

I go further: Dispensing with the Balisier tie, as commendable as it is, will not automatically qualify Members on the other side to represent all people. They must actively demonstrate that they have had a change of heart; not just a change of political fashion. They must leave their ivory towers and live among the people. They must understand their needs first-hand. If they had been doing that all along, I would not have been the one to let them know the obvious; that
wearing a party symbol while in Parliament and while at government functions was an act of extreme partisanship. It is discriminatory and unbecoming of a representative of the people. The People's Partnership will be more than willing to guide them in the ways of proper representation.

I come back. Whom do they represent? Whose views do they represent when they speak in this debate? When we sat on that side, we spoke for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago as we do now.

A former US politician, Anne Klein, had this advice, which I would like to repeat. She said:

“Do not talk to the people until you have listened to the people”.

So I would like them to tell us and the nation, whom they spoke with in deciding what they would speak about in this debate, whose views were they expressing? With which groups did they consult? Did they speak to the wider community to ascertain their concerns and queries? Did they speak to a chosen few close friends and family members?

As Prime Minister, I am proud to say that I consulted with a cross-section of the national community. I know the Minister of Finance has spoken to a variety of groups and individuals and their views have been incorporated and those views inform our budget presentation.

That is what consultation is; but the other side does not seem to understand the concept of consulting. Like the former Prime Minister, he believes consultation means telling people what to think. They do not believe it is about listening. The Leader of the Opposition believes that citizens in this country are "duncy" and that is why the PNM Members of Parliament can attack people's integrity in this House because they dared to attack the PNM. They hid under the cloak of parliamentary privilege to cast aspersions at the Attorney General without a shred of evidence.

He came talking about "is we time now"; always innuendos; always he comes with these in his contribution and then he says he wants to support and represent all of the people? That is the mindset of those who wish to represent and lead this country. The hon. Leader of the Opposition spent two and a half hours making mischief, trying to create fear in the minds of the population that GATE, CEPEP and UTT will be shut down; that this budget had hidden taxes; and he knows that not one iota is true.

His protégée, the Member for La Brea, yesterday claimed that members of environmental groups got their incomes from questionable means. What is he doing? He was casting aspersions on the integrity of all those; all wide and sundry without a shred of proof. You want proof, come to us.
The Minister of Finance told us you talked about some cheque paid to an advertising agency, casting aspersions on the names of persons. When the Minister of Finance presented his budget, he told us about the Clico matter. He said that this fiasco was a colossal, inexcusable, multi-billion dollar mistake. Fiascos have cost nations enormously and so on. This was caused by reckless corporate governance and the glaring failure of our financial regulatory institutions.

Lower down he said that this assumption was made without fully ascertaining the financial conditions of the troubled financial institutions. It was reckless assumption. Today, I want to find out if it was reckless or if it was deliberate.

I have in my mailbox, a cheque dated June 28, 2007 to pay $5 million to the People's National Movement from Colonial Life Insurance (Trinidad) Limited, signed at the back by Rose Janniere, Assistant Secretary. It is stamped for cash, with the PNM's stamp, Linus Rogers, Elections Officer.

When you bailed out yourself first, a Minister of Finance in this country, who has a duty and a responsibility under law as a representative of the people, did you know about this? Did you know about the $5 million paid to your party prior to the elections so that you came a year thereafter and you negotiated and bailed your money out and then entered an MOU to bail out this institution and then you come here with bleeding hearts, crocodile tears: Clico, poor Clico! Why do we not help them?

Reconsider when you sacked them. You gobbled up $5 million and you sank the country into a hole of $90 billion and more and counting. The one who was in charge, the Minister of Finance, bailed her money out first. Not only her own, but her mother's.

When an attempt was made to deal with this uncertainty, this is the largest hole that has impacted our economy and the rest of the region and you are coming to tell us: Poor people! What we did? Those persons would have gotten nothing; the liabilities outstrip the assets and what we did was to give them a lifeline and I am proud of the work of this party.

Tell me about this $5 million payable to the PNM. There is more. My Minister of Housing and the Environment will share some more with you about your Treasurer, Mr. Monteil, and the salaries he collected from these people to the tune of millions for consultancy services. I am advised—and tell me if I am wrong—he is collecting millions for consultancy services and he gets a severance. Have you heard a consultant get severance? Is this true? When was this sweetheart deal brokered? [Interruption] We have that too.
11.50 p.m.

CL Financial Limited US dollars salary, is US $500,000. Six multiplied by 5 is 30; over $3 million. That is CL Financial Limited’s bonus, TT $18,250; retirement proceeds, US $5,125,000 multiplied 6.3. That is for the year 2007. I got this in my mailbox too. I do not know if it is so. Stand up and tell me if it is a lie. This is what is there. Tell us if it is so. This is the PNM treasurer. This is Clico, the same people. Sum of $5 million into the coffers of the PNM and millions into the treasurer’s pockets. Is it true? Tell us if it is true.

Dr. Rowley: The scholarship in that.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: No, we would bring it in another one. We would deal with that, or you could tell us about it. In any case, that is the hallmark of consultation under the PNM. They would speak and they would ignore the comments from the people. When people dare to express a view different from their own, they insult those people, they berate them and abuse them.

Now they have started to attack the media again, because the media has been revealing their shortcomings. We must remember it was the media that "bus de mark" on the PNM’s Calder Hart. The immediate investigative report "bus de mark" on the Brian Lara Stadium and it was the media that let us in on the PNM’s Minister of Finance bail out and so many others, yet they think our citizens are stupid. They would stoop to the lies and the half-truths, casting aspersions far and wide against anyone who do not share their jaundiced views.

That is why, despite the smelter consultations, we still have them pursuing smelters. I was amazed, after the people voted against smelters they stood up in this budget debate after their overwhelming loss and come back with smelters. Remember what the lady said: "You have to listen to the people." You have to listen to them before you could talk for them. That is why the People’s Partnership won an overwhelming majority. We put people first and in the centre. That is why too, they refused to implement the vast majority of recommendations in the Food Consultation and all the other consultations. Consultation for them was sitting there, taking the documents back and doing nothing about it and when somebody says something different—I remember a PNM Minister because somebody—in the same anti-smelter movement—used obscene language and berated a citizen for going to a consultation down in Point Fortin, somewhere. It happened.

Whom do they represent? While they were in government, it was obvious that elected MPs were not the ones really running the government. Now that they are in Opposition, it appears that the backroom puppet masters—all they have done is change the figurehead, but they continue to run the show. That is why there was no consultation.
If I can spend a few moments, if you allow me, on some of the claims made by Members of the Opposition. The hon. Leader of the Opposition, even when his own party was in power, up to a few months ago, heaped criticism upon criticism upon this budget. Why? That is his right, as it is the right of any hon. Member here. I found it very hypocritical and sad, because in all my years of service in this Chamber, the budget response of the Leader of the Opposition was the poorest I have ever heard in this Parliament. It lacked veracity. In spite of its volume, it lacked content, it lacked vision and above all, it lacked corruption and these were the exact failures which characterized the former PNM administration which led them to lose the election.

It is hypocritical for the hon. Member to stand here and—in spite of all his long years in politics on both sides of the House—pretend that he was unaware the economy of this country was in difficulty. It is unpardonable, since he was a substantial part of the former regime which picked the pockets of the poor in this country to pay for what? There are multi-million dollar monuments of corruption such as the Scarborough Hospital, $7 million per bed. Then they say that is not how we should calculate it. How do we calculate? How else to calculate it, when you have a 100-bed hospital and you will spend $700 million, how else? Per bed; $7 million?

You talk about the Brian Lara Stadium. It cost $105,000 per seat, I am advised. Those happened under his watch. They sat there because the Opposition Leader was lost for words to describe the budget when he was asked one week ago, after it was delivered by the hon. Member for Tunapuna. His comment then, do you know what it was? He said: "Same old, same old", to describe this Government’s budget. It is said that imitation is the sincerest or highest form of flattery, but you cannot base political criticisms on copycat language because those were the exact words of the front page headline of my label for the PNM’s budget of a previous year, same old, same old, because every year oncology center, Scarborough Hospital, highway and Mamoral Dam. How many ECCE childhood centres? Same old, same old. This is the first budget of the People’s Partnership. The man could not even come up with words of his own; copycat language, same old, same old. If he could not find words to describe our budget, question comes back: Whose words is he mouthing?

I am not surprised, the Leader of the Opposition has in three months defined himself clearly by his words. I cannot say that he has done it by his action, because he is not about that action. It is easy to talk as he does. I need to ask the others on that side and the Leader of the Opposition: What are your policies? What is your party’s alternative to our people’s budget? Are you saying that you endorsed the budgets of the past eight years, because that is what your response led us to believe? If you are now admitting your greed with your past government’s policies, then why did you, for the
past three years, stand up, not only in budget debates of this House, in other debates when you spoke and you campaigned against your very own party? Answer us.

You are the one who said your government, under Mr. Manning, was corrupt, spendthrift and everything bad under the sun. Who consisted of that corrupt government to which you referred? The very colleagues sitting around him now were the persons in that government. They were bad then but now everything is "honky dory". Everything is okay. Everything is fine. The hon. Member maligned them, but now that he is leader, he can see no wrong in what they have done. You would recall this hon. Member was the one. He talked about him going to court marshal members of his own party. Do you remember? He says now is not the time to jump ship. Do you know what? "When de ship dock, court martial." What happened to that?

I remember in 2009, the now Leader of the Opposition chastised his colleague, the MP for Diego Martin North-East. Why did he chastise him? He chastised the hon. Member for defending Calder Hart. All kinds of words were used there: he was a yes man and who was a schoolboy. What has happened with that now? They are all friends and all honky dory on the Bench. Suddenly, when he gets the post, all the transgressions of his colleagues are forgotten. There is a famous comment with the PNM. It is said that the PNM really does take care of its own. Here is it, this person, this hon. Member, the same people he chastised for supporting corruption and mismanagement, that he himself pointed out, are the same people he wants to lead this nation as he sits with them. We say to him through you, Sir, PNM under Rowley now stands for "Please No More".

The merchant of mischief; his personal ambitions are more important than the greater good of the cause and the people that he is supposed to serve. If you do not believe me, ask Members of the previous administration; the very same administration that the belonged to; some of them who sit with him today. Ask them.

I want to remind you that you are no longer in Government. Wake up and smell the coffee. People rejected the PNM, so stop defending the indefensible with denial. The PNM left a hole in this country. That is unforgivable and no amount of denial and PR will change that. You are no longer in government. You must go further and understand that you are leaders, because you have been elected to represent people and to understand that leadership is not so much about technique and methods; whilst those are important. It is also about opening the heart. Leadership is about inspiration about oneself and others. Great leadership is about human experiences, not about process. They are about human experiences. Leadership is not a programme, it is rather a human activity that comes from the heart and considers the hearts of others. It is an attitude and not a routine. That is what the People’s Partnership leadership team on this Bench is about. That is why we listened to the people and that is why we put the people in front and we lead from behind.
For all those who spoke of all the good the former government did, all I say to them is that we are facing the issues of economic reality in this budget. The time has come for you to face the reality. The people voted against your lack of vision; the unbridled and unfettered corruption which you allow to thrive, which suck the lifeblood of this nation. They voted against that. It is time to reflect on why you were kicked out. This country and its citizens would only take you seriously when you repent and apologize to the citizens for nearly destroying this land of ours. As you engage in your reflection, I want to remind you of the words of the American poet, Ann Bradstreet, when she said:

“Authority without wisdom is like a heavy axe without an edge, fitter to bruise than to polish.”

You have made suggestions, some of you, and recommendations about how we should run this country. If they are sincere, as they want us to think, then they really believe that we should implement their suggestions. I want to ask them this: Why did you not implement those recommendations and suggestions you are coming to give us here? Why did you not do it four months ago when you were in government? If they were such great plans, programmes and policies that you want to put forward, why did you not do it? Why should we take them seriously now, when they did not do it, but they want to ask us to do it. They had the opportunity and the chance. That is why the hypocrisy in their contributions becomes clearly manifested.

Let me use this opportunity to clear up yet another misconception. The hon. Members on the opposite side have great difficulty in understanding and accepting the fact this is a government of the people. That is why they keep referring to COP and UNC when they refer to this Government; UNC-led Government. This is also why they have difficulty in understanding that this budget is not a COP budget. It is not a UNC budget. It is not an NJAC budget. It is not an MSJ budget. It is not a TOP budget. It is a budget of the people of Trinidad and Tobago; all the people. It is a manifestation of the participatory approach to budgeting.

You may recall in 2005, there was the third meeting of the Committee on Human Development and Civil Society in Ethiopia and the concept of participatory approach to national budgeting was developed and it was recognized then that:

“Full participation by all citizens in socio-economic and political policy making and in institutions and mechanisms that link human and financial resources and government is considered key to building and sustaining democracies, reducing conflict and achieving human development and social
equity. People’s participation in policy making, leads to greater accountability, openness and transparency and builds up social reciprocities characterized by equity, inter-group tolerance, as well as inclusive and responsible and active citizenry, all hallmarks of good governance.”

That is what this budget was about. The whole process of preparing for this budget was informed by participation in the policy making of the document.

12.05 a.m.

So when we stand here today, in this juncture of our nation's history, we have to ask: Who is responsible for the state we are in now? Who is responsible?

Mr. Warner: PNM!

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: During the election campaign, the People's Partnership started a dialogue with citizens of Trinidad and Tobago as to the state we expected the Treasury would be in. We did not need a prophetess to tell us that things would have been bad. After all, the PNM was in Government, it could not be good. One only has to look at the history of this country and the facts will reveal a hallmark of previous PNM governments as being corruption, squandermania and economic mismanagement of the country's resources. Those are the hallmarks.

You would recall me coming to this House and telling the PNM Minister of Finance and the government as a whole to slow down, review some of the mega structure madness, save for hard times and to take the necessary steps to diversify the economy, but they did not listen. They refused to listen. Every time the PNM was in control of the country's coffers, the financial resources that have been built up by sound economic fiscal measures and management would be fritted away, and this started way back when in this latest cycle.

In April 2008, the Governor of the Central Bank finally began to reflect what we and so many international financial institutions, local economists and business agents were saying. Governor Williams cautioned then that there was urgent need to reduce public expenditure. He noted that he was referring to both the spending directly by the central government, as well as expenditure by quasi-government institutions.

The IMF also issued similar warnings. Wherein their directors have expressed great concerns that the increase in public spending, the widening of the non-energy fiscal deficit—in the context of our economy operating in a near full capacity—could exacerbate inflationary pressures and jeopardize fiscal sustainability. Who was responsible for that? Do you know what was the then government response to the IMF and the Governor of the Central Bank?
The Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East, the then Minister of Works and Transport—and, of course, he is the PNM resident; know it all—announced that the Government disagreed with the Governor of the Central Bank and they were going to proceed full steam ahead with their projects.

On April 22, 2010, the PNM Minister of Finance said that it was the people’s spending which had created high inflation, not the government’s public expenditure. This was in the face of the IMF and your own Governor of the Central Bank telling you that it was your public spending that was putting on the inflationary pressures.

The Member for San Fernando East, in typical blazer style—that same style is now being imitated by the new leader, the Leader of the Opposition—claimed that warnings to slow down the then government was a ploy to prevent the country from achieving developed country status by the year 2020. It was a ploy by whom? Is it by the Governor of the Central Bank who said it or by the IMF who said it? It was a ploy by them to slow down getting developed country status?

In fact, he said instead of slowing down, the Government was accelerating the rate of the country’s development, but we say, thank you Lord that May 24, 2010 intervened so that we could put a stop to this madness that was going on. [Desk thumping] While all of this was going on, the honourable Leader of the Opposition was still a proud Member of the PNM government. There was not a peep from him; not a word out from him when all this was going on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, by September when this financial global crisis began to impact on our domestic economy, the Government was urged to be conservative in its budget and, of course, it was not. In fact, the PNM know it was all back stated. Do you know what he said again? He said that the Government could pay off the country’s debts tomorrow. It is that thinking that has us in the problems we are in today. Instead of taking sound advice, what did they do? They went in the opposite direction—spending, spending and spending. What happened when the money ran out? They borrowed and borrowed; and spent and spent. Who did this? They did it, the Members of the PNM.

Even with higher and expected revenues, the PNM government continued to borrow and borrow, committing this country and our children to increased debt repayments with little social improvements, as the Minister of Finance said—little to show for it. Crime is at an all time high; infrastructure everywhere is in chaos. The Member for Diego Martin North/East, the then Minister of Works and Transport—

Hon. Members: Minister of nothing!
Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:—then stood in this Parliament and told us that everything we were saying—what was his favourite word? Arrant nonsense! Dotish! Foolish! Every such word, and yet we were going into that hole that they were creating in this economy.

So, in six years, the highest revenues in this country's history, despite repaying over $25.5 billion in debt, the incessant borrowing meant that the public sector debt continued to rise by 40 per cent. Today, the public sector debt is about $50 billion more than the annual budget of this country. Who did that?

Hon. Members: Them!

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: The PNM government. That is where they have brought us. What did they spend all this money on?

Mr. Warner: Tall buildings!

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Was it on schools?

Hon. Members: No!

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Was it on hospitals?

Hon. Members: No!

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Was it on highways?

Hon. Members: No.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Was it on laptops for the children?

Hon. Members: No.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: The Government was spending on the Hyatt; multi-million dollar contracts with companies owned by friends of the PNM leader. Who did this? Not the people; it was done by the PNM.

During this period, what happened to this country? We saw a fall in the business confidence index; a reduction in the ease of doing business and a general fall in rank in Trinidad and Tobago on virtually every international index that was used to measure human development. We fell, and yet they were boasting that they would continue to spend.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as the economic climate worsened under that government, crime and social ills skyrocketed. Yet, they have the gall to come to this Parliament and claim what—do you know what they said? They said that their government left the country with a strong foundation. Is that the strong foundation? This is the same
person who came here and said by his calculations that the debt to GDP ratio was about 1 per cent. Mr. Speaker, whom do they think they are fooling? And they want to run this country! Face the issues; face the reality; stop the games; stop the deceit and stop misleading the people. So they told us that they left the country with a strong and stable economy which was already growing as a result of the excellent management of the PNM. You know "Trinis" have an expression they say: That and a green donkey you would never see.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me remind you of some of what they left. They left a huge number of government buildings constructed without the benefit of proper management and quality control checks, which now require millions to repair before they can be inhabitable. They left several contracts signed on the cusp of election which were of questionable benefit to the nation; they left the highest public sector debt in the history of this country; they left a billion-dollar crisis called CL; they left the country in which inadequate infrastructural maintenance was done so that flooding was the norm; and they left the severely short-staffed police service.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they were not recruiting any officers. Crime is going up every day, but they were spending billions of dollars down in Tarouba and these mega projects like NAPA, the church in Guanapo and all these things, but they could not recruit police officers. What did they do when the crime continued to go up? They turned around and blamed the officers. They blamed the ones who were there working so hard. They left a severely short-staffed police service without a commissioner, because they subverted the parliamentary process and the law. When the Parliament voted in one direction, they found a way—when the nomination came to the Parliament, they found a way. The same Member for Diego Martin North/East came here talking from the left of his mouth and subverted the local man who was chosen by their process, so that they could put their person to act.

They left the Brian Lara Stadium; the Scarborough Hospital; and a host of buildings in Port of Spain that were rushed, but remained unoccupied due to the high cost of finishing these projects. [Interruption] They left a series of contracts signed condemning future generations and to find millions more to complete these projects—the smelter, the rapid rail. The Minister of Finance told us that $577 million was for the designs.

I am going to tell you about the OPVs on another day; the $1.3 billion they sank into OPVs that still cannot be delivered up to this today. We will talk more about that on another day—the wastage of money that could have been put in schools, hospitals, roads, community centres, laptops and to give the police the
equipment and the human resources in the fight against crime. On top of that, we have a massive $7 billion debt to contractors who had accepted the government's commitment, and went ahead and undertook the works. They left a $7 billion debt to contractors. So, how can we trust what they are saying? [Desk thumping]

They hired contractors and signed contracts with them and, in many cases, vetted and certified payments, but they simply refused to pay for four years. I have met these contracts and Members of our team have met these contractors. Several small contractors have indicated that they were forced to close down their businesses because they could not afford to pay staff.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Thank you very much, hon. Members. How can we trust them? We met with these contractors. They had to lay off staff and so on, and this had a multiplied effect on sub-contractors, many of whom had smaller business. Hundreds of jobs were lost. So I think it is shameless for them to claim that the action of the People's Partnership Government may cost this country employment, when under their leadership, the country lost so many jobs, because of their failure to honour their commitments. That is the difference.

Listen to what the contractors said. When we met them, it was reported in the Newsday dated August 28, 2010. The President of the Association, Mikey Joseph, described the meeting as an unprecedented one as they never had the opportunity to sit with Ministers and a Prime Minister to talk about their issues. He said:

I feel very pleased this meeting took place even if there wasn’t action. We cannot say they never listened. We were given a chance to speak freely and frankly. They listened and they promised to address our issues.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have been addressing these issues, and that is a far contrast with what had been happening with the PNM.

Another story in the Newsday dated November 17, 2009, the caption says it all: "Contractors are afraid to speak out." They were afraid! We met them head on; we heard their issues and we would address their concerns. We will do that. They were afraid to even speak out. That was the nature of the political machine that was the PNM.
[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

In the time that I have left, I want to repeat what I think is a very innovative budget in many ways. It sets the tone for diversification and it changes social policies. Our commitment to education and health is reflected in the fact that the biggest slices of the budget’s pie went to these sectors. Why? As the hon. Minister of Finance said, we have focused on the seven pillars of human development in the country.

For the past eight years, we have seen budgets from the former regime that had nothing for women and children. All they did was to demonstrate that the former Manning regime was content with its last place ranking internationally, in terms of development of women and children. Now, we have revolutionized this in one budget in this country. We will treat with these two important elements of our policies. We will be moving to ensure gender across the board.

Their version, if you recall, was to draft a gender policy. They drafted a gender policy and it was knocking about for quite a while. One day the budget debate was coming out, and we filed a question about the gender policy, lo and behold, a Minister was out on the road the next day saying: We are bringing the gender policy. That was years ago. So they had this draft gender policy and then they scrapped it. And they sat there and fully endorsed the denial of that gender policy and, therefore, the place of our women. Mr. Speaker, I am saying that we will reverse that, and we are very proud that we will partner with the women in this country equally as we partner with the men. [Desk thumping]

12.20 a.m.

Our milk programme reflects our recognition with the plight of the poor. We had made that promise and we have kept that promise to single mothers who cannot afford to feed their children. Our laptops for all SEA students, through our commitment to ensuring that our education system is the first reflection of the great line in our National Anthem, "Here every creed and every race find an equal place". No longer will our children feel the pain of inequality in schools; no longer will our children lag behind as the world embraces technological change; no longer will poor children run the risk of feeling they are lesser, but there is something more fundamental in this issue.

I just want to remind you, Sir—you were in the Parliament in another place; the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker were around at that time—when we came here and we promised that we would give a place to every single child who wrote the Common Entrance Examination. So said, so done and we delivered. But do you know the arguments were the same? These are the same arguments they are
using about giving the laptops to the children. They are the same. Shamefully by logical reasoning you will see you are saying that the Government is giving laptops to first form children.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education has a laptop for you because he thinks you are a "duncy" first former. Therefore, reason and do it. Look at the premises, what is the conclusion? Therefore all first formers are "duncy". All first formers are "duncy". You want logic? Go out there and apologize to the children. [Desk thumping] Apologize and withdraw that statement. We have some of the brightest children in the world. When we still had the A level examination under our watch, our children scored at the top of the world in the A level exams. We have the brightest children in the world. We have children with challenges and we will help them. They will all rise. We do not have "duncy" children here. They may have challenges, but there are no "duncy" children.

So I am saying for those laptops it was the same approach when we were giving that place. The Member for Diego Martin North/East said that we were building schools for "douens" and parrots. You all remember? They did not want the children down in the East, down in your constituency. They did not want those children. The few of them who got a place had to travel to Port of Spain to get a place in a secondary school, and they blamed the children and said: They are too "duncy", why are you putting them in secondary schools?

Mr. Imbert: Open the school.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: The answer is not that. The answer is you did not provide sufficient school places, so you blamed the children and said that they were "duncy". In every other developed nation, every child was passing out and going through in a secondary school. But no, our children were "douens" and parrots and we are building schools—and now, we are giving first formers laptops. What happened to them, they are "duncy". It is the same, same attitude. It is an elitist attitude that only you must have and the others must not have.

How many of you are condemning this laptop venture? How many of you have children at home with a laptop? How many of you? [Desk thumping] So what is good for the goose is good for the gander, and the poor children, the disadvantaged and the vulnerable, we will give computers to every single one of them. [Desk thumping] And then the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West tells us, give them to the teachers. One long treaty to justify why we must give it to the teachers. Well, you know, Ma'am, we are giving them to the teachers as well. All the teachers are getting. We have gone further than just
giving to the teachers. We are giving to the children as well. Nothing will stop us. We made that pledge; we will keep that pledge. There are challenges in the delivery dates, but we will keep that pledge and the children will get their laptops. [Desk thumping] So I am saying there is something far more fundamental in our policies for women and children, which ties into our policy for crime reduction and our commitment to changing the crime reality of this country.

Mr. Speaker this war's first voice is the lament of the cries of mothers, wives, sisters and grandmothers who lost their sons and daughters, and then they have to fight to ensure that the children not only survive these wars, but are rescued from a life of crime.

It has been said that a nation is not defeated until the souls of its women are on the ground, and therefore, the war's first voice, then, is the pain of loss, of disappearances, murders, executions, families split apart, all borne by the women of the land, first. So that is why I want to spend a few moments in addition to state some of our policies, on programmes in the fight against crime in addition to those already enunciated by my colleagues in this debate and will be done later on in the debate.

Tied to the laptops, we know we are in the Internet age. We recognize that economic prosperity without personal safety is pointless. Because you know what, you cannot enjoy being rich, you cannot enjoy being prosperous if you are dead. You have to be alive first. Life and limb must be protected.

So the fight against crime will receive much of our attention as we intensify our efforts to deal with the tsunami of criminal activity in this country. We cannot win this battle alone. We cannot win this battle without assistance from the public, from good right-thinking citizens of this land. I do believe the public is willing to help, but they have little or no confidence in the existing programmes and policies with the result that the society has disengaged from the government’s fight against crime. We intend to change that. We intend to facilitate and encourage society's involvement and support. Without it I am saying, respectfully, the fight against crime cannot be successful enough.

It is clear now that there must be a dramatic change in our techniques and methodology as the criminals are one step ahead of the game. To this end, I have mandated the Minister of National Security to liaise with the new leadership of the police to develop programmes and strategies geared towards utilizing the Internet in the fight against crime. As our society becomes more computer literate, more people spend their time on social Internet sites. We will therefore take advantage of this opportunity to involve a substantial part of our society in the fight against crime by the introduction of a number of new web initiatives.
This concept has been highly effective in the fight against crime in other nations, and it is our intention to bring relevant information about criminals and their nefarious activities directly to you, wherever you are, in the online world. A police presence will therefore be created on MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, MSN, Twitter and iTunes. Wanted criminals, missing persons, and sketches by police artists and so on transmitted through these media. We will also establish an email alert service, syndicated newsfeeds, and a series of podcasts and widgets to make it easier for the public who are Internet literate, to help us track down wanted fugitives, missing children and adults and to provide vital street information and intelligence from those right good-thinking citizens who wanted help. Virtual billboards with mugshots of wanted fugitives can be made available on these sites. An email alert service shall deliver latest information regarding criminal activity and high profile investigations right to your Inbox.

A virtual command centre shall be established as part of our national security intelligence operations. This centre shall be responsible for disseminating and receiving information, and managing the Internet interface with the general public. Any and all information received will be treated in the strictest confidence. The selection of personnel for the command centre will be subjected to the most rigorous selection criteria including polygraph testing. It will be a criminal offence to misuse or share any information received otherwise than in the fight against crime in collaboration with other law enforcement agencies. And citizens who wish to share information can do so anonymously, by way of illustration, video camera footage of certain crimes that occurred right here in Trinidad. And they have already been posted on YouTube. Citizens have been doing that for themselves.

The video footage posted has proven invaluable to the police in the arrest and prosecution of a number of criminals. Our security agencies are in possession of CCTV footage of actual crimes. In many cases, the culprits are still at large. Why is such video footage not shared with the entire population via YouTube as I said BlackBerry and the other media online?

Mr. Speaker, in my respectful view, we are under attack by criminals and we must launch a counter-attack united as one nation. We shall therefore bring the fight against crime into your laptops, into your cell phones, into your desktops, your iPods, your iphone and BlackBerrys, so you will have the fugitives at your fingertips.

Technology: The cell phone as well. These techniques are same old, same old, in one sense; they are not new; we are not reinventing the wheel. They are already being used elsewhere in the developed world.
Cell phone: Technology is rapidly changing the way we live and interact. Next to the computer, the simple cell phone, the most important communicative device. It has long transcended the simple function of receiving and making calls, as many of us know. With multimedia option capabilities and Internet access, it is fast becoming a four inch—you cannot call it a laptop now. It is a "handtop". Four inches in your hand. The recent BlackBerry craze with the free BlackBerry Messenger (BBM) option, multimedia capability means that you can send pictures and video footage to multiple contacts instantaneously.

As you would recall, Mr. Speaker, it was only recently that the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management began using text messages to alert citizens to imminent national disasters. So desperate citizens who are aware of or are victims of crime, they have already started to use this, that when something happens they send it out to their list of contacts. So it has become a norm for a victim to text all their contacts on their cell phones and details or a description, for example, of a stolen vehicle. So as it happens, you send it out to everyone, "hi, people will see that vehicle." If we can spread this wide using the technology, not just the people on my phone alone, but as a nationwide alert, we can help in the fight against crime. You can provide descriptions of vehicles, the criminals’ vehicle, physical description of the criminal themselves.

This simple measure has been of assistance in the fight against crime elsewhere and here. So we intend to alert all citizens via text messaging of serious crimes in real time, so that they can assist the police by keeping a lookout. If such details are provided via text messaging in real time to citizens, then it is my respectful view the population will be alert and vigilant and on the lookout for the suspects and their vehicles. It is our hope that right-thinking citizens will embrace this opportunity and become involved in the fight against crime.

CCTV Cameras: As you have seen anti-crime activity has received the largest slice of the People's Partnership budget. [Desk thumping] The moneys we have saved by the termination of some of the mega projects will be diverted into the fight against crime. In keeping with the use of technology in the fight against crime, we will have an ongoing programme for the installation of high quality CCTV cameras in crime hotspots, and so, we will have them under 24-hour surveillance. Those are some technology measures. Others have already been announced by the hon. Minister of National Security. So I want to turn to something that has been on the minds of many in the fight against crime, and it is the Special Anti-crime Unit (SAUTT).

We have read and heard much about this and many have expressed concerns and want to know the direction in which we will want to go with SAUTT. SAUTT
had great intentions and projections, but has fallen very short on delivery. This unit has been functioning without proper legislative support and accountability. Policies are decided upon by the Government and then implemented by the Law Enforcement Department. So if poor policies, ineffective operations of plans and targets are enforced unto that unit, productivity and success of course will then be very low. This is what happened to SAUTT. For several years it has failed to make a dent on crime and a cost of over $350 million per year, including nearly $100 million for 55 retired foreign officers to remain assigned. When we were bringing a police commissioner because of parliamentary process, your process, their process, they were complaining about the salary—$100 million for 55 retired foreign officers.

Mr. Speaker, this Government can see that there is some value in SAUTT, but it needs to be totally restructured. It is a powerful tool that could be used to reduce crime, but has failed to deliver based on improper utilization of its resources. So we proposed, after consultation, this is our proposal which we will hold consultations with the stakeholders on these proposals. There will be a restructured unit and we will downsize it to focus on two core functions—right now it is all over the place—including tapping my cell phone, I understand, and yours. And so, the unit will be restructured. It will be downsized to focus on two core functions.

(i)  The central point for criminal intelligence; and

(ii) As a national security training academy.

The Central Intelligence Unit: This year the intelligence gathering will focus on two specific aspects:

(i) Acquiring intelligence in regard to counter terrorism and other major criminal activities that affect the security of our nation;

(ii) Intelligence to combat criminal activities that affect the daily lives of the law-abiding citizens in our country.

SAUTT will focus on the latter, that is, criminal activity in daily lives, with the several present Intelligence Units forwarding relevant information to this unit for it to be turned into intelligence, upon which the necessary and appropriate operational plans can be implemented.

It is our respectful view that this will ensure the prevention of such crimes taking place, or act as a catalyst towards the apprehension of the felons and ensuring proper evidence is gathered to achieve conviction.
12.35 a.m.

The intelligence departments, Mr. Speaker, require an immediate overhaul as the present system through SAUTT and other intelligence organizations have failed to deliver the critical information required to combat crime. I am advised that there are several intelligence agencies in this one small, twin island Republic which keep their information secret and they do not work with you as they should so you have a duplication and a hiding at the same time. We propose, and as I say after consultations we will take final decisions, that SAUTT will become the central point to have all intelligence accumulated, upon which the appropriate operational plan will be implemented.

We were using our departments for the wrong reason, Mr. Speaker, such as sending them out to investigate the nationality of an 81-year-old man named Percy Villafana. That is what we were using our resources for, because he refused to allow the then Prime Minister to go onto his property during an election campaign. Other uses of these departments for political mileage rather than the reduction of crime, Mr. Speaker, will cease immediately. We will not use those units for those agendas. [Desk thumping] These departments, through the use of personnel and equipment, will be used in a manner upon which positive results will follow.

The underworld and criminal elements seem to be impenetrable based on poor government policies and intelligence. This statement could be verified when a previous Prime Minister said there is a difference between having information but not being able to charge a convict because of lack of information. This is because of poor intelligence gathering. The former Prime Minister said that. And so, if—the previous head of the National Security Council, the former Prime Minister, he admitted that he knows who the criminal elements are, the major ones—he told us here he knew a major terrorist, he called him Mr. Big, but for five years this individual cannot be found or touched—it means that the previous government failed in intelligence. [Desk thumping] So that is one aspect of a core function that we say that SAUTT can fill.

The second is with training—National Security Protective Services Training Academy. We propose, after discussions and consultations, to transform SAUTT to ensure that the training facilities will not only focus on military operation and training but instead the priority will be to have its assets utilized to ensure that each and every law enforcement officer will be trained in each and every aspect that their duty requires. A proper training environment is needed to ensure that our personnel in the services achieve the required basic standard of competency.

At present, each arm of the protective services improvises in its training. It is also, Mr. Speaker, my respectful view that it is unacceptable to use an operational
environment as a training ground. The present training environment for law enforcement officers is totally unacceptable hence the reason for law enforcement officers at times falling short in the performance of their duties as they do not have the training that their environment required.

The National Security Training Academy in SAUTT will ensure that all aspects of training required for the service, police and other arms of law enforcement will be provided so that they can be truly called Trinidad and Tobago’s finest forces, Mr. Speaker. This will be similar to a university in size and concept, as is the case with similar academies in North America, and will have intakes from the following—the regiment, the coast guard, the police service, the prison service and the fire service, and, indeed, from the private security firms which we propose to incorporate to assist in the fight against crime.

Mr. Speaker, the following are just a few of the wings that will now be provided in this academy at SAUTT which will show that our law enforcement agencies have been totally short-changed in the last decade due to prehistoric training facilities. Indoor and outdoor shooting ranges for all the protective services. It is unacceptable that the policemen, firemen, sailors, prison officers and soldiers are currently issued with firearms but there is no proper shooting range for them during recruitment training. How can that be, Mr. Speaker? And we send them out there each day and night to put their lives on the line. Mr. Speaker, we propose that there will be an immediate, mandatory requirement that each law enforcement officer, inclusive of precepted private officers, will be mandated to use this range annually for evaluation in their use of the firearm, inclusive of safety use and accuracy, Mr. Speaker.

Psychological evaluation: this will also be conducted annually to ensure that each officer who carries a firearm is of sound mind so to do. Polygraph testing. This will be part of the recruiting process conducted at SAUTT. Regular testing will also become part of the process to ensure that criminal elements are weeded out from our law enforcement agencies. Mr. Speaker, we have a plan. This is the proposal and we will work on it.

Immediately, Mr. Speaker, as we downsize the SAUTT, we will give those police officers the option to be reintegrated into the Police Service, and, when we do that, immediately the numbers of our police officers will increase in the fight against crime. [Desk thumping] The non-police part of the operational command, soldiers, because there are also military persons there, will be subjected to further training and will have the option to become absorbed into the police service or to be reintegrated back into the Defence force. In that way their specialized training and experience will be put to effective use.
Mr. Speaker, these are some of the proposals, as I say, to assist us in the fight against crime. There is just one other issue as I close, and it is this. The hon. Leader of the Opposition and others on the Opposition Bench attempted to mislead the public with respect to the property tax and the lands and buildings taxes. I say again, like my colleague from D’Abadie/O’Meara, read my lips. There are no new taxes in this budget, [Desk thumping] absolutely none, no taxes.

We will go back to the lands and buildings taxes, as the hon. Minister of Finance said. We will go back to the rates, the old rates, and we will go back at the old valuations. Not a single person, not—so, for the avoidance of doubt, not a single person will be paying more lands and buildings taxes than that which they paid in the year 2009.

With respect to 2010, the hon. Leader of the Opposition again, when we said we were granting a tax amnesty, again attempted to make mischief and mislead and said, well, "No tax amnesty because you did not change and that is why you could not do it." We could have changed that law any time in the last three months. We could have done that and kept it, Mr. Speaker. But you know what again, why I say they do not listen to the people is that the people said no property tax [Desk thumping] and yet the hon. Member for Diego Martin West came back to the Parliament talking about some kind of property tax.

So where is the change? Where is the change? There has only been a change, Mr. Speaker, in the seating. The leadership of the PNM remains the same. [Desk thumping] It remains the same, Mr. Speaker, with the same policies, the same projects, the same attitude and the same mindset.

Today as I close, I want to quote from Cicero, that great philosopher, Mr. Speaker. I know you are very familiar with his writing. He said, salus populi suprema est lex—the welfare of the people is the ultimate law. The welfare of the people is the ultimate law. [Desk thumping] It is to demonstrate the commitment of your Government, Mr. Speaker, a government which I am very proud to be a part of and to lead, that we will continue to put the people first and we will walk behind them.

I say thank you to all citizens who weathered the storm with our partnership in the past eight dark years our country was going through. Thank you all for your strength, for your hope, for your courage to fight and stand up with us against all the discriminatory policies of the former regime. We say thank you for putting your faith, confidence and vote in us to lead our beautiful country back to a path of equality, prosperity, fairness and progress.

To you citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, you have inspired us in this partnership to see that the only way to govern people is by serving them and for that I say thanks to
the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] Let me assure all citizens that our Government will continue to ensure that we account to you and do your business with the highest regard for consultation, transparency and accountability.

To all the bodies, the groups, the institutions and interests that met with our Government, met with the Minister of Finance, met with many of us in the budget consultations, to all those who helped to prepare the budget documents, to all the public servants and all the Ministries who assisted in putting these documents together, we say thank you all. We have listened to you and we have made your voice a part of our policies. In the Partnership we look forward to your continued cooperation and inspiration in carrying out the business of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

To those on the other side, I say thank you also for your contributions. I urge all of you to ensure that your role is to contribute to the country’s positive development and you cannot, with any rational thinking, vote against the people’s budget and so we wait to see your vote on this budget. And so, to my colleagues here, my parliamentary colleagues, my Cabinet colleagues, all who helped to make this budget, put it together to make it a success, I say thank you for your ongoing support and unwavering contribution to the service of this country as Ministers, as MPs and public servants.

You know, there is a saying, Mr. Speaker, that a general is just as good or just, or just as bad as the troops under the command that make her and that no general can fight her battles alone. Rather, she must depend upon her lieutenants and her success depends on her ability to select the right persons for the right job. I say to my troops, all of you, thank you for making me and our Government a great one. [Desk thumping] My modus operandi has always been to never tell people how to do things but rather to tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity.

Thank you all my colleagues for always proving that you are capable, you are competent, you are model Ministers and MPs who embody our party’s credo of serving me, serving the people, serving the people. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping]

Dr. Amery Browne (Diego Martin Central): [Desk thumping] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this budget debate. The night is well spent, Mr. Speaker.

I would begin by extending my sincere congratulations to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition who did an excellent job in his first budget response here in the lower House. [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, he was comprehensive, he was measured, he was balanced, he was incisive and he initiated what has been a very vigorous debate on the 2011 fiscal measures. [Desk thumping] We are proud of our Leader of the Opposition.
Mr. Speaker, there have been many contributions thus far and I want to maybe depart a little from convention and also congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance, the Member for Tunapuna, on the presentation of his first Budget Speech of the new Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, very few members of the national community would ever know the pressures and challenges of preparing a national budget, and, on behalf of myself and the constituents I represent, I salute his efforts in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, a number of Members have already noted that it would have been ideal if this budget was anchored in a vision for development or a medium to long-term developmental plan for Trinidad and Tobago but that this would have been impossible because those on the other side lack both a vision for development of this country and a developmental plan. [Desk thumping]

Madam Prime Minister, you in your contribution tonight gave us a very clear admission that you and your Government possess neither a vision nor a plan for this beloved country. [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, I am not even sure that the Hon. Prime Minister understood a lot of what she was saying or reading tonight, and, as an example, I would ask her, what is a widget? Through you, Mr. Speaker, what is a widget? [Crosstalk] Mr. Speaker, no clue of what was being read but creating an impression of being modern and cutting edge and—[ Interruption] oh, not a midget, a widget. [ Interruption]

12.50 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, a number of Members have already noted that the budget statement was very long on rhetoric and desire for improvement, but at the same time, it was quite short on how such improvements would be achieved for the people of our country. [Desk thumping] When confronted with this reality, the Minister of Finance promised the country that the details would have been provided during the contributions of Members with respect to their various portfolios; and so, the population and the Members of this House waited with bated breath for these various areas to be fleshed out during the debate.

Unfortunately, what we got was a lot more of the same, literally. Speaker, after speaker, after speaker on the Government side succumbed to the temptation to spend much of their time focused on the same old foreign-used talking points from the election campaign. [Desk thumping] An absence or avoidance of putting any real flesh on what was served up by the Member for Tunapuna.

I think there were some exceptions, to be fair. Maybe the Member for St. Augustine; maybe my good friend from Mayaro and one or two others. But in general, we had a very familiar, passionate political arm-wrestling match about which
party was better than which, and which was worse, and so forth; not really recognizing, especially on the Government side, that the voters had already decided just a few months ago—[Interuption] Seriously, they placed their trust in you, Members of this Government, to find meaningful solutions to the nation’s challenges, beside the old song that Manning must go. That decision has already been made.

Mr. Speaker, and you listened to them even tonight at this hour; for example, the Member for Oropouche. You listened to them and it is clear that very few of them have recognized how solemn their task ahead of them is. And we see the early signs of arrogance, of chest beating, of shoving numbers in the face of the Opposition. All signs that should worry not just the citizens of this country, but also the Members of the Government themselves. Some of them would have seen it all before and should be very concerned about the conduct of their colleagues, even within this House, Mr. Speaker.

I do not want to focus too much attention on the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, but, certainly, he has been recognized by many as becoming the flag bearer of this uncouth arrogance, disrespect and viciousness for other Members within the Chamber. [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, worse yet for the Members of the Congress of the People, who would have been following the progress of this Government and monitoring the progress of some of their own membership.

Mr. Speaker, the Members opposite have been entrusted with sectors and portfolios via election and appointment; and your success and the nation’s success will not be measured by how hard you can lash the PNM in any debate. It will not be measured by how much you can take credit for existing programmes, or how snarling or vicious you can be when you rise to your feet.

Your success as a Government, Mr. Speaker, through you, and our success as a nation, over the next five years or however long it might be, will be measured—[Interuption] It could be shorter, it could be longer; not by how hard you can lash the PNM or what talking points you repeat from the campaign, but it will be measured by what meaningful improvement you can bring to your sectors, our people, and our country, Mr. Speaker. That is where the focus really should be. But we hear Ministers still saying things like, "Is we time now," and "Trinidad and Tobago has too much democracy". Ministers of Government giving utterances—

Mr. Roberts: Who said that.

Dr. A. Browne: You know exactly who said that. Giving utterances like this, and the population must be concerned. Mr. Speaker, some Members even criticized the hon. Member for Diego Martin West when he said that those who have broken the
law under any Government must be charged and pursued. I do not know who could have any difficulty with a position like that.

What is clear is that in the absence of any charges being laid against a single person, after four months of passionate and dedicated scrutiny by the hon. Attorney General, it is very clear that this Government desires to get as much traction from possible innuendo and suspicion in the absence of charges being laid. And a lot of the contributions were pointed in that particular direction, and maybe that is understandable.

Mr. Speaker, some seemed to forget that there is also a serious challenge to the hon. Prime Minister and Attorney General; and that is to ensure that while you correctly look back at past actions and officials, you also, at the same time, take care to carefully scrutinize and monitor those who are around you today, and those who sit next to you today. That is also part of your duty as a Government. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, we have had many changes of Government in the last three decades in our beautiful country, and one of the recurrent pitfalls seems to be that the incoming Government seems often to be lulled into a false sense of security by the parliamentary majority, and by what they view as past errors of commission and omission; and they are seduced by a false sense of security and fail to monitor the growing impact that perceptions of corruption can have on their own Government’s effectiveness. They become lulled into a false sense of security.

Mr. Speaker, under this dangerous illusion, all that is needed for one’s current time of office is sufficient public relations and loud mouths to keep pointing at the other side. One leading NGO in this country has suggested that because of this phenomenon, every government in our nation’s future must overcompensate on the issue of public integrity. Every government in our nation’s future must overcompensate on the issue of public integrity; and I want to ask the hon. Prime Minister if she feels that her Government is overcompensating on the issue of public integrity. Mr. Speaker, a worrisome silence from the other side.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: What? You asked me a question?

Dr. A. Browne: I am sorry, Madam Prime Minister. I was indicating that a leading NGO in this country—[Interruption] Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, please be silent and offer the same respect the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre requested. You are no longer on a talk show. This is the lower House of Parliament, and while there may be crosstalk, you do not try to drown out a Member who is on his feet. Mr. Speaker, I request your permission to continue.

Mr. Speaker: Yes.
Dr. A. Browne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A leading NGO suggested that because of the phenomenon that we just examined, every government in the nation’s future must overcompensate on the issue of public integrity. And the Prime Minister seems distracted, so I will proceed.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, I remember the passionate words of the hon. Prime Minister on this very issue, when she promised on CNC3 to, in her words, do very differently to every Government in the past by ensuring that anyone accused of corruption is removed from the scene of the alleged crime, so that, as she put it, evidence cannot be tampered with. On national television, to do different to every Government in the past by ensuring that anyone accused of corruption is removed from the scene of the alleged crime so that, as she put it, evidence cannot be tampered with.

I have a question this morning, Mr. Speaker. How can you stand by those words today when you put the then Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Public Utilities as Minister and returned Mr. Ganga Singh to the scene of WASA immediately after the general election—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: On a point of order, Sir, the Standing Order which deals with imputing improper motives. [Interruption] No, no, no. You cannot do that. You cannot impute improper motives against a Member of this House or the other House. Accused of a crime?

Dr. A. Browne: I am not alleging anything, Mr. Speaker. I am asking a question of the hon. Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker: No, I think the point is—and you would know and I would know—that a Minister from either House, if you are going to query or raise issues that can query his conduct or his behaviour—

Dr. A. Browne: That is not what I am doing.

Mr. Speaker: No, well you are heading there, so I just caution you. [Desk thumping]

Dr. A. Browne: Thank you for your guidance, Mr. Speaker. And in case the Prime Minister may have distracted herself, the words on CNC3, Mr. Speaker—because these are important words, and you cannot lead a country and then hide from what you have been saying.
Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: No, no, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. A. Browne: These are important words, and she accused the Leader of the Opposition of all sorts of things here this evening, very boldly. On CNC3, she would do differently to every Government in the past by ensuring that anyone accused of corruption is removed from the scene of the alleged crime.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Who is accused?

Dr. A. Browne: She did not say charges, you know. The scene of the alleged crime so that, as she put it, evidence cannot be tampered with. At that point, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister would agree that she was referring to matters that were not under any criminal charges, but there were allegations. [Interruption] Allegations. And the question is, how can one stand by such words when the actions that I mentioned have been taken since the general election? It is a very simple question, and from the squealing on the other side, you might realize that the truth can hurt. Mr. Speaker, you hear them. You hear the pain on the other side. It has begun.

Mr. Speaker, if you fail to see any incongruity in this matter, it does not bode well. Because you cannot judge a five-year term in four months, but you can look at the early signs and you can look at the incongruity between what is said and what is being done, even within four months. And you hear the sad defence, Mr. Speaker.

The Member for Tunapuna has been listening closely to all of this and also observing his colleagues as they have gone along, and there are many members of his own party who are outraged by this new politics, which is really the old politics dressed up in new skin; and that is what we are seeing on the other side in the form of this Government. Just a facade. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, it cannot be good enough to brush aside issues of Desalcott; to brush aside the issue of sending Steve and Ish to Uncle Sam; to brush aside issues involving the cries of the Soca Warriors; to brush aside today’s cronyism in hiring practices; and I saw some questions in the media with regard to the hiring of a former mayor and questions about that. You do not see that as cronyism.

Mr. Speaker, the invitation to the hon. Prime Minister is not to be seduced by her majority in this lower House; to stop squandering the confidence of the people who voted for her on the 24th of May. It is not good enough, Mr. Speaker, to say that Manning did bad, or Manning did worse. That is not good enough anymore. It is not good enough to claim that Manning did worse.

People all over this country are saying to the UNC dominated coalition, it is time to stop the campaigning and time to start running this country. [Desk thumping] People
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[DR. BROWNE]

are telling them it is time, high time, at 1.00 a.m., to stop the campaigning and start running Trinidad and Tobago. The hon. Prime Minister shared with us a lot of wisdom tonight; a lot of wisdom.

1.05 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, one area of wisdom she shared with us was her thoughts on effective leadership. I recall her words that effective leadership was putting first things first. The question at this juncture, based on those words, is: If effective leadership is putting first things first, how can you justify India Day, 2010 and a 10-day jamboree to the US, when state boards were not appointed, when there was a budget to assist the Minister of Finance in preparing, when there was a vision for Government to prepare, when there was the Prime Minister's residence to refurbish and prep for her eminent arrival and when there was a pension issue to sort out, when they still have not figured out what is their real story on that?

If they represent all the people as they claim, why did they leave all the people to go to an ethnic celebration in New York, USA, at the taxpayers' expense? To use her words: An act of extreme partisanship. That is exactly what it was. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. A. Browne: I crave your protection, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Finance also has some concerns to respond to. How could the hon. Minister of Finance, after campaigning heavily against deficit financing, in good conscience bring to our citizens the largest fiscal deficit in the history of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago? How can you square those two things, after campaigning heavily against deficit financing?

Many citizens are also very worried that he has pegged our gas and oil prices way, way too optimistically and that the actual deficit is going to be much bigger. Only time will tell in that regard.

Many citizens in the south-west peninsula are also worried that while talking about creating downstream industries in the energy sector, they have simultaneously snatched away these citizens' best prospect for employment at the development of their communities, without giving them any alternative whatsoever. That was one of the gaps in the budget. You had many persons poised, and you took away this major project that bore some promise with regard to employment and development of their community, but they failed to replace it with anything within the budget. [Laughter] [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order!
Dr. A. Browne: Mr. Speaker, I fear the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara is incapable of order.

The senior citizens and retired persons and other taxpayers who put their lifesavings into Clico, are worried that what the Minister has called his final solution to their woes is in reality the sum of all their fears; it is the sum of all fears. They are saying that he has left them at the mercy of other financial institutions such as banks and insurance companies that would seek to profit from their current situation after this budget and, thus, they could be further disadvantaged as we move forward. They are saying that this budget has expunged the interest that they were literally living on and that their funds, as well as credit union investments, pension funds and the savings of tens of thousands of citizens will shrink by as much as 60 per cent when stretched out on the torturous 20-year rack that the Minister has devised.

I received a letter from a constituent dated September 15, 2010. This was not a letter that I solicited in any way. It reads:

“I am approaching you in connection with the Government's plans regarding Clico's short-term depositors as outlined in the 2011 national budget. I am a 62-year-old retiree living in a ground floor apartment.”

She goes on to describe her medical conditions, osteoarthritis, et cetera.

“I am not in receipt of a pension from any of my former places of employment, therefore, after purchasing the apartment, I invested the remainder of my money from the sale of my former home in two Clico annuities. The monthly interest I receive is literally all I have to live on in addition to my NIS retirement benefits. Osteoarthritis is just one of the many health problems I have, all of which require doctor’s visits, diagnostic procedures and other forms of therapy from time to time.” [Interruption] Mr. Speaker, please, I really have to ask for your protection.

Mr. Speaker: You have my full protection.

Dr. A. Browne: I am quoting the constituent:

“I was therefore quite alarmed to read of the present Government's intention to make an initial payment of $75,000 to short-term depositors like myself, over the next four years, then amortize the balance owed over a 20-year period at zero per cent interest. I would have to wait 24—yes 24 years, to collect my funds at zero rate of interest. They should kill me quickly rather than slowly, as it would be more humane so to do.”
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  
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[DR. BROWNE]

I would pass it on to the Member for Oropouche West, the new Mickela, afterwards. [Crosstalk]

The letter continues:

“The budget also states that a government IOU will be structured so that it could be traded in the secondary market for immediate liquidity, however, information I have just received from a financial institution indicates that this discounted trading arrangement will result in significant loss of income.”

A 62-year-old retiree.

She went on to write:

“The decisions outlined above will definitely not enable me to live for very long. It is a virtual death sentence.”

I want to ask Madam Prime Minister: Are you proud of this situation? Could you possibly be proud of this particular situation?

I have two additional questions that citizens have been soliciting of the hon. Minister of Finance. First of all, when he was Governor of the Central Bank, did he ever respond to then Attorney General, Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj SC’s, concerns about the lack of regulation at Clico? It is a simple question and he may respond in his winding up.

Question No. 2 to the hon. Minister of Finance: Did he think of consulting—[Crosstalk] Mr. Speaker, I am asking for protection from the Member for Diego Martin North/East. [Laughter] Did the hon. Minister think of consulting with a cross section of Clico depositors and getting their feedback on what he has called the final solution and maybe have them consider a range of options before bringing the final solution? I thought one of the things that would distinguish this Government was the issue of consultation. We had the Prime Minister very excited about the word "consultation" tonight, but why not consult with the depositors who stand to lose the most, before imposing such a final solution? Those are questions this Government must answer. [Desk thumping]

The comments on the budget are not all negative. Clearly the Minister of Finance and his technical team tried to complete their work in a very short space of time. Clearly he has attempted to give partial relief to the HCU shareholders and clearly he has seen merit substantive programmes of the past administration and there is some real effort at continuity within this budget. That must be recognized and commended by Parliament.

The Minister may know the wisdom of continuing those programmes, but some of his ministers seemed confused enough to still pretend that these are new
programmes, after changing the names of the programmes, after taking a few photos or after having breakfast with the media.

The Minister of Finance has also given the nation a few first glimpses of policy direction from this UNC dominated coalition and hopefully it will be a case of more to come. So it is not just a case of condemning or opposing for opposing sake. The Opposition has an important role in our system of democracy. Even though one Minister has complained that we have too much democracy in Trinidad and Tobago, it is this same democracy that has resulted in the fact that we are all here in this Chamber today to speak on behalf of the citizens.

When I walk through the University of Woodford Square, or check in with the guys at Harding place or when I chat with people in Petit Valley, they had some concerns before the budget and a number of these concerns have still not been addressed, after many, many hours of debate.

Why has this Government now allocated over $100 million in this budget to purchase properties in New York? Who do those properties belong to? Why has the Ministry of Public Administration been allocated an additional $670 million for renting buildings in this fiscal year? This is a recurrent cost that is predicted to increase. Is this sustainable expenditure? [Crosstalk] Who will be the landlords that would benefit? Perhaps the Government would tell us.

Mr. Roberts: Rahael!

Dr. A. Browne: Members opposite had certain complaints about the identities of certain landlords, so maybe as part of their change they would consider publishing a list every quarter of new landlords to the State, including details. You could give that list to the Press Secretary, Mr. Nicholas. You promised change to the country. I am just giving a suggestion as to one of them. [Crosstalk]

Young Miss Panday seems very excited in the back.

Hon. Member: Get your facts correct!

Dr. A. Browne: Mr. Speaker, another question that has been concerning citizens before and is still now, is how long would the Government retain what they are holding out as the whole values of lands and buildings taxes. The hon. Prime Minister made heavy weather tonight saying, "We are going back to the old valuation", but the unanswered question is for how long would those old valuations hold. [Crosstalk] For five years? [Crosstalk] Should we record in the Hansard that the old value will be retained for five years? [Crosstalk] It is a simple question.
Mr. Speaker, you realize the regard for the role of the Opposition by this new Government. I will proceed.

The Minister of Finance spent some time during the budget presentation indicating that he would rebuild confidence in the economy, when some have indicated that he was actually one of the architects of the loss of confidence in the first place, misquoting statistics on the economy to make a resilient economy look bad to the citizens in this country and to those who might be outside.

The Members for Caroni East and Nariva gave us excellent reasons why the Government of Trinidad and Tobago encountered difficulties with the local construction industry. I certainly recall the example of a multipurpose centre in Diego Martin, which was being constructed under the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, and recognized the project being held hostage by local contractors and a situation where the costs were being escalated, and the community which was scheduled to benefit was being held to ransom.

1.20 a.m.

So on the one hand you had the Ministry that was trying to resist the escalating cost, the contractor who is deciding to discontinue work and members of the community who were saying, "We just want the project delivered." And we have seen that time and time again. That is a small-scale example and there have been many larger examples of that difficulty that the Government has been wrestling.

I know the Member for Caroni East also spent some time on the Summits and saying they were a waste of taxpayers' money. I am not going into the details at this point but I would like to ask.

Mr. Peters: "Go in nuh; we want yuh tuh go."

Dr. A. Browne: Hold on; hold on. Do not be too in a hurry. I want to ask the Member for Caroni East, he said it was a waste of taxpayers' money, can he say that he or his companies did not benefit from the taxpayers' dollars associated with this Summit? Silence, Mr. Speaker. [Crosstalk]

Ms. Hospedales: That was Chaguanas East.

Dr. A. Browne: Chaguanas East. Thank you for the correction. Let me repeat then. I want to ask the Member for Chaguanas East whether or not he or any company associated with him was a beneficiary during the Summit of taxpayers' dollars associated with those events. Silence.

I also listened very closely today to the Member for St. Joseph.
Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I would like to refer Members to Standing Order 40. I would like at least that we recognize when others are speaking we pay particular attention. Could you continue? [Desk thumping]

Dr. A. Browne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also listened very closely today to the hon. Member for St. Joseph, the Minister of Justice, and many persons were expecting him in his first contribution to clarify or withdraw or apologize for telling the population that he advocated public hangings in Woodford Square at 6.00 a.m. That type of talk would not have been acceptable from even the uninformed, maybe, Members, but from a newly elected Minister of Justice, we would have expected something a lot better and he failed to even address that matter. There was an opportunity to do so in this debate.

The hon. Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development gave a very nice and, I would have to say very informed summary of key developments in labour history and the background of development of this country, but his heart must have been very heavy as I am sure he was aware that many of his former labour colleagues were protesting outside this very Red House during the day today. I did see his comrade, Cabrera, and others outside and they were not very happy with the Government, even as the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development was speaking. [Desk thumping]

The Member for Caroni Central—I think I have the constituency correct—put on his game face today and tried to pretend that he is up to speed with the social sector at this point when, in fact, it is clear that he has yet to come to grips with any aspect of the social sector or any aspect of his Ministry. He gave us a few quotations today; a few less than last time and did a slightly better job of pronouncing the words therein. So I compliment him on that.

He proceeded to spend 10 minutes directly contradicting everything contained within the Social Sector Investment Programme which, ironically, he himself has signed off on so that it could come before this honourable House, and also denigrating the hard work of the staff of the various divisions of the Ministry that he now governs.

Everything he said about these programmes tonight was either outdated information or flat out wrong and the targeted conditional cash transfer programme is a classic example of that. That programme and the rigorous efforts that were made to review and regularize it are contained right here in the verySSIP that he brought to this House. So it is amazing that he would then come and denigrate the efforts of those very same staff members who he expects to work for him.
I wonder if the Minister has even read the SSIP, because the contribution today was not informed by the existing programmes or the past programmes of the Ministry. I really do not think that he did. If he did read it he would not have demonstrated such an ignorance of the Ministry's breadth, scope and strength even at this time.

A lot of time was also spent trying to convince us that a Ministry of the People has actually been established in Trinidad and Tobago, when every single citizen is fully aware that no Ministry of the People has been established in this country at this time. Such a ministry does not exist. There is no magic in it. He gave us a bit of a lecture on him being caring, personally, about needy citizens and it is interesting that there are indications that he sends all complaints over to our dear colleague in Lopinot/Bon Air West to be attended to. I know we have a witness on that particular issue.

The hon. Member mentioned collaboration with non-governmental organizations but failed to acknowledge the many NGOs that we have contracted through robust annual subventions to assist the Ministry and its staff, in doing what? Servicing the people of Trinidad and Tobago—173 NGOs; over 80 of them funded and monitored by the Ministry of Social Development.

He failed to mention the Poverty Reduction Programme that we successfully took over from the European Union's control and have steered that in the right direction. He also failed to mention the Regional Social and Human Development Councils that have been established right across Trinidad and Tobago in urban as well as in rural areas and he is still denigrating the work of the staff of the Ministry.

He failed to mention the telecentres for computer and Internet access and training for vulnerable persons in various parts of the country, again in both urban and rural centres. The reason for that, it does not fit into the logic construct of Members opposite because they want to paint a certain picture of the PNM administration. That is the picture they want to paint.

He failed to give any details on the excellent work taking place in disability affairs, with the training of personal assistants for disabled persons; very visionary work, and there is an opportunity for these new Members to build on the excellent work that was done before. So it is in the SSIP, but a very different and stark picture was painted here when the Member stood, instead of representing the work of those that now fall under his purview, and all the workshops; the increases in all the grants within just the last term of administration. Virtually all of those grants since 2007, including the Disability Affairs Grant—and I can tell
you with certainty that many differently-abled citizens were listening very closely, first of all, to the Member for Tunapuna and then to the Member for Caroni Central to hear if they would get any suggestion that the Disability Affairs Grant will be improved, because they are seeing the seniors going up and up, and they are wondering what is happening with them. We did increase it under our term. The mantle is passed on, but they got no word of comfort from the Government in this budget debate.

Another programme that we heard no mention of is the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. That would be very familiar to the hon. Prime Minister. She was one of the champions of this cause in years past. Now they are in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, what has happened in the last term? And the Member for Arouca/Maloney knows it very well. The board was established; the secretariat was recruited—

**Mr. Roberts:** Arouca/Maloney know something?

**Dr. A. Browne:** She knows a lot more than you, my friend. The board was appointed; staff were recruited; applications were received; processed; cheques were being disbursed to persons who were injured via criminal means. What has happened now? This Government has been in power for a full quarter; just about four months. The unit has been dormant for the last four months. There is the non-appointment of a board; non-appointment of a chairman and all of that work has now fallen into abeyance. This is something those opposite were claiming they were very passionate about, and that is why we heard nothing from the Member for Caroni Central on that issue. So they were talking about what was in the budget; there is a lot that is nowhere in the budget at all.

He also mentioned, in passing, the decentralization of social services. But, of course, he did not have the facts right and did not mention or acknowledge that this is a process that he already met, fully designed, planned and being implemented with recruitment of staff, procurement of offices and design of work programmes. I do not know what more to say about the Member for Caroni Central in this regard.

The Minister has, after four months, only triggered mass confusion among staff and clients on the issue of this Ministry of the People, because many of the wrong requests continue to come to staff members on a plethora of issues. It appears that the main issue with regard to the Social Sector Investment Programme was to get the staff to remove the words, "Ministry of Social Development" and put in the words throughout the document, "Ministry of the People and Social Development" even when describing events, programmes and
activities that took place before May 24. That is the nature of involvement with the Social Sector Investment Plan and what has been done before in this country, and I am very, very, very disappointed.

**Miss Hospedales:** Very dishonest.

**Dr. A. Browne:** Well, I would not use the word, dishonest, because that would be infringing the Standing Order.

**Mr. Peters:** That would be very dishonest of you.

**Dr. A. Browne:** Yes. I became even more concerned when the Member for Tabaquite became—

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

*Motion made,* That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes *[Miss M. McDonald]*

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. Speaker, I thank you and thank Members of the House for the extension. As I was saying, the concern became even greater when the Member for Tabaquite, I believe in an inadvertent slip, confessed in this debate that he was interviewing clients on behalf of the targeted conditional cash transfer programme. So that while theSSIP outlines categorically the steps that were taken to negate political influence in this poverty-reduction initiative, the opposite is clearly happening where you have Members of Parliament interviewing staff on behalf of the—he boasted that it was 80 clients he had interviewed on behalf of the TCCTP programme. *[Interruption]*

Well, he needed to phrase it a lot more clearly than that.

The Member for Caroni Central also spoke about staff morale and I would not go too deeply into this issue because there are other things to be said later on, but there are indications—there was one event where—it was mentioned by the Member for Couva South a little while ago, when staff were making excuses at an NGO called Hernandez Place from 9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. on behalf of the absence of the hon. Minister. He was in Powder Magazine, Cocorite at a political event taking credit for work being done by the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what is at Hernandez Place? It is elderly senior citizens who were formerly on the streets, socially displaced; taken up by a caring government; care, board and meals paid for by the Government and the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. They were waiting for hours from 9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. The staff were there making excuses on behalf of the Minister. He was at a
political event taking credit for other work and that must affect staff morale. So I am not too sure about the concern about staff morale.

1.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, there have been many articles and letters about the habit of taking photographs for media use with recipients of grants and vulnerable families, having them ending up on the front page of newspapers to receive a small grant of $400 or $500 while having to display themselves alongside a minister of government just for the sake—[Interruption] That is not an ad you know; that is worse; that is exploiting people's vulnerable situations for political gain and that is not something that should be encouraged at all.

That brings me to the issue of flood relief; something that the Government is very proud of. When you ask about what they have done in the first four months, they always talk about their flood relief efforts.

On Friday, May 28, the Newsday carried an article reflecting the hon. Prime Minister's indication that she had kept her promise by leading a three-hour rescue mission to several flooded communities and relocating a number of families.

On Wednesday, September 08—and this is the initial headline—"Kamla leads flood relief action"—lovely pictures of her holding a child and demonstrating care and concern for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago—C news brought an updated story on these same families.

The hon. Prime Minister, along with the Member for St. Augustine, had promised families Boodram and Rampersad relocation homes. After living in the homes at Oropune Gardens, they received letters from the HDC on September 06, 2010 ordering them to clear their belongings by the very next day. This is the report that was carried.

They were promised a house in Tunapuna; they were in Oropune for two months and then the house that they were occupying was confiscated. The Rampersads have a 12-year-old son, who is suffering with cancer. Can you imagine the impact? [Interruption] Mr. Speaker, we need to invest in a muzzle. [Interruption] You need a muzzle. They have a 12-year-old son who suffers from cancer and they are indicating that the money they could have spent on rent is now being used for cancer treatment. I am sure that the Prime Minister will have an update on this story or, based on this, she might trigger some further relief to those individuals.

Mr. Speaker, there was another issue with respect to a visit to Surprise Grounds in northern Diego Martin where staff were waiting quite a long time. The
hon. Prime Minister arrived by helicopter, purportedly to give relief to flood victims and a motorcade was organized, complete with a music vehicle in front playing music. This is the report I have received.

The motorcade proceeded to Richplain in the constituency of Diego Martin West, where a few hampers were given out, with no screening, no triage, no determination of need and that was the end. It was an excellent photo opportunity.

This brings me to the issue which the Minister of the People and Social Development, the Prime Minister herself and all of them wish would go away, but which would continue to haunt them because of their early actions in office. It is another issue about which they continue to demonstrate immense arrogance and a total lack of remorse.

On this issue, the flimsy and transparent excuses of the other side are leaving a deep scar on the minds of every citizen, especially those who trusted the UNC to do better than they did in the past. Anytime you hold them to their word on the issue of trust in public office, the only response now, after the election, is that, as far as they are concerned, the PNM should not talk about trust.

That is an arrogant response. It is a response that disrespects the role of the Opposition under the Westminster system; a response that avoids dealing with the substantive issue; one that citizens will not tolerate from a government that promised change.

You cannot avoid answering to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. You cannot avoid the scrutiny of the Houses of Parliament. When you do good, you can claim praise; but when you do not and, worse yet, when you act dishonestly, you cannot simply blame the other side.

Mr. Speaker, it is about trust and this Government has violated the trust of about 160,000 seniors over the age of 60 in both Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, they kept this issue alive themselves with a litany of creative stories, contradictions, cover-ups, passing of the buck, denials and a complete disregard for the truth of what actually happened in this issue.

One Minister in this debate loudly shouted that there was only one advertisement that lied. Imagine that! A Minister of Government boasting that his party only had one advertisement that lied and if there was more than one, he would apologize. That is what I heard him say. [Interruption] We will pull the Hansard. This is pure arrogance and a "don't-care" attitude that has never been seen before in this country. It does not do well for the future. It describes you, hon. Member.
The first thing they tried to do was to deny they had ever indicated anything about 60 to the population. The Prime Minister herself made that statement. The quote is in the Hansard. They were then confronted with a full colour advertisement with both the UNC and COP logos, run in the Express and the Guardian on May 19 and 20, five and four days after the general election. They had no response that day in Parliament. A few days later, they said it was a misprint. Minister Roberts and the press secretary were saying that.

The press secretary was reckless to do so on the media and even on the PNM's Facebook page. He then came back a few days later and removed his own comments from the Facebook page, but he was not able to remove them from the media record, much to his disappointment.

They then tried to sell this to the senior citizens at public fora, in a few meetings, including meetings at St. Joseph and Diego Martin. They were met by angry seniors who rejected these explanations. Notably, the Minister did not go himself, but he sent the Minister of State, Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West to the one in St. Joseph.

A 60-year-old who would have done the math would realize that he would get $180,000 between the ages of 60 and 65 if he voted for the UNC. If he and his wife were age 60, they would get $360,000 by voting that way, before they would get a single cent on reaching age 65 under the PNM.

It was clear that the issue was not responding to first line PR. When it was clear that the seniors were not accepting their foolish excuses; when it was clear that the people were expecting them to come clean, after three months, the Prime Minister got an epiphany. It was Ernie Ross' fault; not the Prime Minister's fault; not the UNC's fault; not the COP's fault; not the campaign manager's fault; not Minister Ramadharsingh's fault; it was Ernie Ross's fault. Do you know what the last straw was? Ernie Ross is saying it is not his fault; it is the fault of his creative director.

How can 160,000 seniors accept this? We have gotten calls from the people who work in the advertising industry. What they are saying is that it is impossible; it could not have happened the way they claim it happened.

Both the age 60 years and the issue of making it automatic, removing criteria, could not have been a misprint. Over 100,000 seniors have been disenfranchised by this Government and they are saying it was only based on one ad. If the issue of 60 years was a misprint, what is the excuse of making the pension automatic, which was in the same advertisements? Madam Prime Minister, you said the promise was never made and you have been proven wrong.
What is the name of the creative director at Ross Advertising? Mr. Speaker, let the record show that the Prime Minister shook her head casually and said she had no idea. How could she not know this and they are happy with this response?

The Prime Minister, on her learning of this issue, did not even care enough to find out who was responsible for this debacle of disenfranchising 160,000 of our citizens. Someone in an advertising agency found a creative way to deceive so many of our citizens and the Prime Minister—the ad had her logo and the COP’s logo on it and they did not even care enough to find out who it was. That is complete disrespect for the citizens of this country.

This cannot be acceptable to any right-thinking citizen of this country. The two logos were on this advertisement. The ad did not make a mistake and say 60, 80 or 90 years; very conveniently, by an act of God; it said a lower age so that more persons would have been deceived. We cannot accept that.

Who can these people turn to for honesty on this particular matter? The Member for Caroni Central gave an example of an apology when something went wrong on the issue of senior citizens. The hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of the People and Social Development should apologize to the senior citizens over the age of 60. They ran the most seductive political advertisement in the history of Trinidad politics; five days before the election; then four days and then, guess what?

Five days before the election; four days before the election—Mr. Speaker, he said he would apologize if there was another one. Two days before the election another ad was run in the Newsday. The title, Prosperity for all: Manifesto 2010. In this ad, the same issue is repeated: Pensionable age 60 years. This cannot be a misprint; this cannot be an error; you cannot blame Ernie Ross; you cannot blame his creative director; you must apologize to the senior citizens. There is no other recourse in this.

This is a government that cannot be trusted and it is arrogant in that regard. The promises of this Government cannot be trusted. The Prime Minister has danced and ducked on this issue and has avoided her responsibility. She said that the promise was never made to these citizens.

In conclusion, their trade union colleagues know it; the senior citizens know it; the URP and CEPEP workers know it; the OIT and reforestation workers know it; the people of La Brea know it; the contract staff of these ministries know it; applicants to the Criminal Compensation Board know it; the flood victims know it; the COP rank and file know it; every human being in the advertising industry knows it; the fishermen know it; the public servants know it; the families of the 150 persons who were murdered since the election know it; the people of the disabled community know it.
This Government cannot be trusted; they feel they are still in opposition. They feel they can spend the next five years pointing at and blaming the PNM and survive in government that way. But the mask has already slipped and the citizens are ploughing through the PR. They are seeing this Government for what it really is—arrogant and untrue to the citizen. While they are talking about restoring public trust and restoring service to citizens, all we see is public relations and the intention to fool the people, fool the people, fool the people.

I thank you.

1.50 a.m.

Mr. Colm Imbert (Diego Martin North/East): Mr. Speaker, I cannot say that it gives me pleasure to join this debate at 1.50 a.m., but I believe that it is my responsibility to bring to the attention of the national community. Whether the Members on that side care to listen or not, is irrelevant. That is all right. We are live on television.

I have in my possession, following the point just made by the Member for Diego Martin Central, the 2007 manifesto of the Congress of the People. The photograph on the cover is hon. Winston Dookeran, now the Member for Tunapuna. On page 4 of that 2007 manifesto are the following words; it was part of a general rubric of promises, where the Member for Tunapuna, then an aspiring politician said:

“As Prime Minister of a COP Government, my most urgent mission would be to bring prompt relief to the vulnerable in our society...”

He made a number of promises. Promise No.4:

“We will establish a universal pension plan under which every citizen will be entitled to a minimum pension on reaching the age of sixty.”

That is a campaign promise of the Congress of the People in 2007.

I also have in my possession the manifesto of the UNC of 2007. We see before us a Government comprised of the UNC and the COP. At the launch of the manifesto, where the then political leader of the UNC, Mr. Panday and the Chairman of the UNC-A, Mr. Jack Warner, presented their 2007 manifesto. In that manifesto the Member for Siparia was—[Interruption]

Mr. Roberts: Point of order, 43(1). "Take out yuh book an read!"

Mr. Speaker: No. I do not think he has gone there as yet.
Mr. C. Imbert: They are suffering from newness. In this manifesto—why are you afraid?—at bullet point number 8, there is a pledge of Mr. Austin Jack Warner, then Chairman of the UNC-A and Mr. Basdeo Panday, Political Leader of the UNC. The Member for Siparia was the Deputy Political Leader of the UNC-A at the time.

“A UNC government will adjust the pensionable age from 65 to 60 and increase pensions to $3,000 per month.”

In 2007, the COP promised to reduce the pensionable age to 60 and to provide a pension of $3,000 and the UNC promised to reduce the pensionable age to 60 and provide a pension of $3,000. The Members opposite could pretend that this is not so. They could carry on. They could rant and rave and misbehave, as is the habit of the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara; a very uncouth man.

The fact of the matter is that the UNC/COP coalition or whatever it is, went to the population in 2010 and followed through on its manifesto promises of 2007 and you convinced the population that you intended to reduce the pensionable age to 60 and give everyone a pension of $3,000, irrespective of their income and other qualifications. You could scream all you want. The population has already judged you on this. The fact of the matter is you promised this and you have broken your promise. You could jump high, you could jump low, it makes no difference. These are the facts. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker, there is an irritating noise behind me; a very irritating noise.

Mr. Peters: That is your echo.

Mr. C. Imbert: Before I go on—

Mrs. Mc Intosh: "Give him ah chance to talk nah."

Mr. C. Imbert: "Doh worry with him. He cyah help it." Yesterday we were treated to a presentation in this Parliament by the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara. The Member spoke about when he was not a Member of this House. He spoke about a time back in 2002 and 2003. [Interruption]

Mr. Roberts: "Ah thought yuh was not watching?"

Mr. C. Imbert: I was not here. He spoke about a time when he was an employee of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and he was not a Member of this House. He claimed that in the 2002/2003 period, he was the advisor to the then Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. He alleged that when he performed this function of advisor to the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, when he was not a Member of this House, he was privy to a number of decisions, with respect to sport that he did not agree with. He
alleged that the then Minister of Sport, sometime in 2002/2003, showed him the plans of the Brian Lara Stadium at a cost of $850 million, which he could not support. He said that for these and other reasons, he left the Ministry and he left the PNM.

The fact of the matter is, in 2002 and 2003, when the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara was not a Member of this House, he was also not the advisor to the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. That is and was a figment of his imagination.

Mr. Speaker, the post held by the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, when he was not a Member of this House, was the Sports Programme Coordinator in the Ministry. I have in my possession the letter of acceptance from the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara when he was not a Member of this House, where he assumed his duties as Sports Programme Coordinator in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. I better refer to him as Mr. Anil Roberts, because he was not a Member of this House then.

In 2002, Mr. Anil Roberts assumed duties as Sports Programme Coordinator in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. We heard a lot of talk from the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara. We heard him talk about how he could not countenance what was going on inside there, he could not take it; all these decisions reversing policy and all sorts of things and as a patriot he had to leave that Ministry. Let me read into the record, this is about someone at a time when he was not a Member of this Parliament.

“A January 08, 2003”

A letter written by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs to Mr. Anil Roberts, who at that time was not a Member of this House.

“Dear Mr. Roberts

Performance of duties as Sports Programme Coordinator

I have noted since my resumption of duty as Permanent Secretary, that I have never seen you in office. I am advised however that your office is located in Head Office at 86 Duke Street, Port of Spain.

As a consequence, I feel constrained to request you Mr. Roberts, that you advise me of your whereabouts on a daily basis and account for your long absences from duty without delay.”

That was written to Mr. Anil Roberts in January 2003.

I have a letter written to Mr. Anil Roberts in February 2003; to Mr. Anil Roberts who was not, never was, the advisor to the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs.
February 03, 2003.

Reference: Performance of Duties as Sports Programme Coordinator

I refer to previous correspondence on the subject at caption and our meeting in the presence of Mr. Wade Alleyne, Acting Senior Human Resource Officer on January 13, 2003.”

Which, as I have said, was a time when Mr. Roberts was not a Member of this House.

“You will recall that in the course of our meeting, we discussed the following issues: accommodation, cellphone, team work, reporting line.”

If I can just elaborate on the paragraph with reporting line.

“Your employment is with the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and you do not form part of the Minister’s team which is comprised of his personal advisor, not you, his personal secretary, his personal assistant and his driver. Your work therefore, should be submitted to the Permanent Secretary or to a member of staff so designated.

You will further recall Mr. Roberts that great emphasis was placed on my concerns about the frequency with which you are quoted in the print media and about your utterances in the audio visual arena. I pointed out to you had no authority to speak on behalf of the Ministry, nor to represent the Ministry in any way, unless so authorized by the Permanent Secretary.

I was concerned that quite often the reports were erroneous, could not be substantiated by hard evidence, so the Ministry was caused much embarrassment, particularly since your employment with us tends to convey the impression that you are articulating the views of the Ministry.

In light of our cordial discussion and you expressed understanding of my position, I expect that this last matter would not be a subject for further concern.

It was with dismay, therefore, that I saw the headline of the Newsday of January 23, 2003, which read: ‘Al Qaeda booms million dollar sports plan.’ The article which followed quoted you extensively of the subject of the negative impact of reports of terrorist, on the Ministry’s plan.

Although you were reported to be expressing the concerns of the Ministry, the Ministry has no knowledge of these matters and you have no documented evidence of your statements.
As a consequence, I spoke to you on Friday, January 24, 2003, reminding you of our previous discussion. This is about Mr. Anil Roberts who was not a Member of this Parliament at that time, and cautioning you about the seriousness and possible negative repercussions of the newspaper report.

One week later, on Thursday, January 20, 2003, the *Guardian* described you inaccurately as advisor to the Minister or Sport and Youth Affairs, Roger Boynes, has reported in an article entitled: Suspended players to Form Association.”

—which, by the way, was when he took a good serious lag and attacked the reputation of the person, who is now the Member for Chaguanas West. I would read that into the record as well. It is an article entitled:

“Suspended players to form association

You have described the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation as abusive employers and quoted your advice to certain players. I am now constrained”

“What happen? Yuh could give but yuh cyah take?”

“—to caution you in writing Mr. Roberts about your continued inflammatory public utterances, the embarrassment caused to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs.

Should you continue in this vein, I would be left with no choice but to dissociate publicly your views from those of the Ministry.

Permanent Secretary

Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs”

**Dr. Moonilal**: Point of order. Please sit down and shut up. All right, sit down alone. [*Interruption and crosstalk*] No, sit down alone, do not shut up. I withdraw. Standing Order 36(1).

**Mr. Speaker**: Hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, I myself am getting a little difficulty in connecting. If you could link your contribution to the budget or in reference to what was said, please.

2.05 a.m.

**Mr. C. Imbert**: You see, yesterday, the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara came into this House and gave us a pious and sanctimonious account of his tenure in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. He went on to say that in his capacity as advisor to the Minister, he was privy to all decisions with which he could not agree on, and he had to leave the Ministry and the PNM. The fact is, the record shows that the contract of Mr. Roberts was not renewed because of high absenteeism,
chronic non-performance and wild and unauthorized utterances in the media and moonlighting working on a radio talk show—

Mr. Roberts: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. You are imputing improper motives. Excuse me! Mr. Speaker, 36(5). I was never on radio in 2003, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I know the temperatures are rising and I am asking you that whenever you are making your contribution, try to link it to either what was said by another Member or to the fiscal measures.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, the point I am making is that he was fired for absenteeism.

Mr. Roberts: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, 36(5). I was never fired. He is quoting from a document that was never seen. I was advising the Minister and if he brings something from Minister Roger Boynes, I could understand that. I was not on radio in Trinidad and Tobago or on any talk show until March, 2005. Thank you. [Desk thumping]

Dr. Moonilal: He said that you are lying again.

Mr. C. Imbert: Now, the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara is responding, I have to correct the record. I have in my hand a contract prepared by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs between Earl Nesbitt, Acting Permanent Secretary and Anil Roberts for the position of Sport Programme Coordinator. He was never the advisor to the Minister. It was a hallucination on his part. With respect to talk show, now he has given me an opportunity to talk about that. [Interruption] In January 2003—I am responding to what he said. There was a meeting held at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs between the Permanent Secretary and Mr. Anil Roberts and I quote:

Mr. Roberts was advised that his contract states that persons employed on contract were exclusively employed with the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, and he needed to be careful with his employment relationship with the media, for example, his employment with a talk show.

That was in January, 2003; official records of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs.

Mr. Roberts: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, please.

Mr. C. Imbert: What is the point of order?

Mr. Roberts: On a point of order, please. Clearly, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. C. Imbert: What is the point of order?

Mr. Roberts: On a point of order, 36(5). Mr. Speaker—
Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, if you are making statements on the conduct of a Member—

Mr. C. Imbert: He was not a Member of the Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: No, he is a Member of the Parliament here now. If you are imputing— [Interuption]

Hon. Members: Arrogant! [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: I know that the temperatures are rising.

Mr. C. Imbert: I know you have experienced this before.

Mr. Speaker: I want us to calm down. I am simply saying that you should desist from imputing improper motives to the Member of Parliament for D'Abadie/O'Meara. That is all I am asking you to do.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Who could trust these people when they are such strangers to the truth? [Desk thumping] Who could trust them? The Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara makes up an imaginary scenario, and he has lived this imaginary lie for 10 years, convincing everybody on that side; a figment of his imagination.

Mr. Speaker: Let us move on; let us move on to another point, please.

Mr. C. Imbert: The Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara is now the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, and he has some very strong views on sport. He had always had strong views on sport. I would like to read into the record a view. I am not going to impute any improper motive. I am simply reading an article into the record—a view expressed by the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara in 2002.

The headline is: Roberts hits Jack for football statement—don't blame Government.

A lack of accountability by the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation led to the withdrawal of government support for the staging of the 2005 World Under-17 Championships. This was stated yesterday…”

You see, you live a life of fantasy:

“by Anil Roberts Sports coordinator in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs.”

So the Newsday lie too! Everybody is lying on you! The Permanent Secretary lied on you; the newspapers lied on you.

Mr. Roberts: Mr. Speaker, 36(5).

Mr. Speaker: You are going back on a point that I made reference to a short while ago. Let us not go there.
Mr. C. Imbert: I understand. So, the current Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, who was then the sports coordinator, expressed his very strong view about football—football is going to be funded in this budget—that $49 billion budget with its $8 billion deficit. One has to look very closely at the operations of the various organizations within football, because this Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs will now have to interface with the same Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation that he accused of all sorts of things in 2002.

Let me just read into the record, the views of the current Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs:

“The swim coach was responding to statements made on Sunday by FIFA Vice-President Jack Warner who said that a letter of commitment withheld by government led to the awarding of the prestigious tournament to the Netherlands. But Roberts contended yesterday that the football federation...”

You see how politics makes strange bedfellows.

“failed to provide detailed financial accounts of the last World Championships staged in Trinidad and Tobago.”

He said:

“the absence of a report on the tendering procedures..”

Listen to this!

“...Roberts, sports coordinator in the ministry said the absence of a report on the tendering procedures for the last World Under-17 Championships and a proper analysis on the post mortem of the competition showing the benefits to host, government had no choice but to withhold their support.

Warner also said a new stadium at Point Fortin would have been built for the 2005 championships and he was still awaiting a lease on a parcel of land in Santa Flora even after FIFA had already allocated $400,000 for this project.”

Hon. Member: What this has to do with the budget?

Mr. C. Imbert: Hear Mr. Roberts, who is now the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs:

“We totally rejected the idea of bidding for a new stadium in Point Fortin. We could not justify this expenditure when four new stadiums were already built. An angry Roberts said yesterday.”
So, in 2002, Anil Roberts was happy to terrorize the current Member for Chaguanas West and accused him of not accounting for expenditure for the World Under-17 Championships.

“He said the football federation estimated they spent $30 million on last year's tournament and anticipated an increase for the 2005 World Championships.”

In the end:

This is Mr. Anil Roberts.

“It is a good thing that the Netherlands got the tournament for they deserve it.”

He said the quality or development of the game in Trinidad and Tobago had deteriorated under the stewardship of the Member for Chaguanas West since last year’s Under-17 tournament and national teams have failed to fulfil their promises.

Mr. Speaker, for this letter; for this article; for this wild public utterance where he attacked the Member for Chaguanas West, Mr. Roberts was written to by the Permanent Secretary. That is the letter I just read out. So, I think it is necessary that everybody in this Parliament become aware of exactly who they are dealing with.

Hon Member: That is your point.

Mr. C. Imbert: Now, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin Central made the point that this Clico bailout plan is going to cause severe hardship to the people of this country. I cannot understand, when you look at the profile of the persons who have deposits in Clico; when you look at the profile of the 25,000 persons who are going to be affected by that policy decision of this UNC/COP Government; when you look at who we are talking about, we are talking about trade unions, like the trade union that the Member Pointe-a-Pierre had the honour to lead for many years; the Oilfield Workers’ Trade Union, that has millions of dollars invested in Clico. We are talking about credit unions. [Interruption] I am advised that is contained within the—

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I do not know what their problem is. Contained in the $12 billion in EFPA's at Clico is $1.2 billion in credit union funds. [Interruption] I hope you all understand—Mr. Speaker, please.

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order!

Dr. Rowley: This is the Parliament! [Interruption]

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, contained within the $12 billion in deposits at Clico is in excess of $1 billion in credit union funds. I am told that the Tecu Credit Union—I am
sure the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre is familiar with that credit union—T.E.C.U, because its headquarters is somewhere in the Pointe-a-Pierre area. Is that not so Member for Pointe-a-Pierre? Tecu Credit Union headquarters is somewhere around there?

Mr. Mc Leod: I would hardly help you with anything. [Laughter]

Mr. C. Imbert: I do not want you to help me. I am trying to help you. I am told that the Tecu Credit Union has $100 million invested in Clico. That is one credit union alone; $100 million. That $100 million is the savings of oil workers; persons that the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre would have represented for many years—people who worked in the energy sector; That $100 million is now about to go up in smoke because of this so-called Clico bailout.

What the Minister of Finance has said is no matter what size of deposit you have, you are going to get $75,000 and the balance in 20 annual installments over a 20-year period at zero interest. I know some of you have money in there. You cannot fool me. I know you and your family and your friends have money in there. "Allyuh cannot fool me!"

2.20 a.m.

But the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, when you take a whole bunch of credit union members, some will have $50,000, $100,000, $200,000, $25,000 and they pool their money and the credit union invests that lump sum in Clico at $100 million and the Minister of Finance, representing the People's Partnership Government, UNC-led coalition, comes in this Parliament and says: "You see that $100 million, you will get $75,000 and the other $99,925,000, you will get that over 20 years at zero interest."

Now those of you on that side—because there are one or two persons on that side who will have some kind of education or so, I am told, will understand the concept of the time value of money, and you will know how to calculate the present value of an annuity. Simple basic accounting principles, and you will know that if you are getting an annuity at a zero interest rate over a 20-year period and you want to bring that to a present value, you will have to apply a suitable discount rate.

Now the discount rate that you will apply will be a notional deposit interest rate that you assume over the 20-year period. Now, if we go back 20 years in history and we look at the average interest rate in this country, we will see that 20 years ago interest rates were somewhere of the order of 9 per cent. They rose as high as 10 per cent, 11 per cent, 12 per cent. As recently as six months ago, the Home Mortgage Bank was offering 6 per cent to individuals on deposits. I am told that the Home Mortgage Bank is currently offering 4 per cent. But the point is that if you look at deposit interest rates over the last—Mr. Speaker, I know you want to hear because you are close to the trade union
movement and you know that trade union deposits are jumping up inside of Clico. You very well know that, and you know the hardship that will happen to ordinary workers if the Government continues with this plan. So if you take an average deposit interest rate over the last 20 years of say 7 per cent—because that is what it is—and you use that as a discount rate, the present value of the deposits at Clico is 50 per cent of the face value.

So that $100 million that the Tecu Credit Union has in Clico, has been reduced in one fell swoop to $50 million. Every deposit of every credit union member that is contained within that lump sum, is now cut in half. That is the effect of what you have done. And what the Minister has done as well, the Minister sent an instruction to Clico on September 08, 2010, the same day that the budget was read, to cease all payment of interest on Clico deposits forthwith—September 08, 2010.

So who did not get in the first week in September, because the way these things went, the interest payments were made on the anniversary date on which the policy or the deposit instrument was taken out. So some people got paid in the first week, some people got paid in the second week, some in the third week and some in the fourth week. So those who were lucky to get paid, let us say, on September 05, 2010 or September 06, 2010, they got away. They got their interest payments for this month, but they will not get next month if the Government continues with this ill-advised policy. But anybody who is going to be paid after September 08, 2010, well, "crapaud smoke dey pipe", since the reading of this budget.

So what has happened now, all of these people who have deposits in Clico, as of September 08, 2010, they are no longer getting interest payments and they are now going to be given these zero-rated bonds which can only be cashed once per year for the next 20 years. So when you look at the typical profile of these 25,000 people, the typical profile is not any filthy rich person, and there are people in here who are filthy rich. The typical profile is not a filthy rich person. It is a retiree who is over 60 years old, who has put all their life savings into Clico and is using that money to live, to pay for medical expenses, to pay for loans, to support extended families, to pay for mortgages, to support their grandchildren.

I heard the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre tell us the names of all his grandchildren. Obviously, he has a very close-knit family. I admire him for that. Obviously he is very close to his extended family. But those Clico deposits were paying to support extended families, to support children, to support people who are disabled, unable to work, unable to earn an income. For some people, as the Member for Caroni Central has pointed out, it was their only income outside of the NIS pension.
So what is going to happen now? From September 09, 2010, interest done. So somebody, a retired permanent secretary, a retired public servant, whoever, who would have gotten a gratuity, put all their savings there, maybe put $500,000 into the Colonial Life Plan—$575,000 to make the maths easy. So they get $75,000 back, and there is $500,000 left. That $500,000 would have been earning 9 per cent—those are the kinds of interest rates that were being given—9 per cent, 10 per cent, depending on the amount of money you have—was earning $45,000 a year, approximately $3,800 a month and that is what those people were living on. What your Government has done, you have stopped that $4,000 a month as of September 08, 2010, and you are telling the people now that you are going to give them bonds at zero per cent interest over 20 years. Do you know what is going to happen?

When you go to any commercial bank, the first thing that the commercial bank will do is to discount the bond and bring it from an annuity down now to a present value. So that brings it down to 50 cents on the dollar. Which commercial bank is going to cash in a bond without making a profit? Who is going to do that? Banks are not non-profit organizations and, therefore, they have to further discount the bond. The present value brings it from $500,000 down to $250,000 and then the banker will have to assume a risk other than the 20 years and you have to make a profit and you will have to report to shareholders so that cuts it down to 40 cents. In fact, I am told that many people have gone to banks and have been told categorically that the most they could get is 42 cents on the dollar. So the retiree who put the $500,000 into Clico is now going to be receiving $200,000. They just lost $300,000 and when you go now, what are you going to do with this $200,000, because all you are getting is 2 per cent and 3 per cent interest rate in the other financial—2 per cent, 2.5 per cent. That is the kind of thing you are getting.

So you have gone now from earning $4,000 a month which is what you are living on and your family is living on and what your dependents are living on, $4,000 a month, you gone down to $400 a month. That is the effect of this Clico bailout plan.

But let us look at the effect on the economy Mr. Speaker, because people use these deposits in Clico as collateral. They use them as collateral to secure mortgages, to take out loans, to make investments and when the value of the collateral has now been cut by 60 per cent, because that $500,000 would have been used as security for a loan or something to help one of the children, to buy a house or whatever it is, and the collateral was to the full $500,000; now the net value of that deposit is $200,000. What will happen? The banks will call in the loans; they will foreclose. You all have no idea of the hardship you are causing retirees. Minister of Finance, I am telling you something. Do a profile on that 25,000 people and you will discover and I know the
Prime Minister is aware of this, because I have in my possession a letter written to her by somebody who is in possession of the information on the profile of the typical depositors in Clico and the majority of these depositors are over 60, they are retirees; as I said, they are not filthy rich and they are using this money to live.

So quite apart from causing distress to over 200,000 people directly and 450,000 and 500,000 people indirectly, because each one of these people may be a spouse and you gone up to 400,000 people immediately and then you have the extended families. You are talking about half the population, so what your Government has done has just caused distress to half the population of Trinidad and Tobago and what beats me is that at least half these people are the supporters of the People’s Partnership UNC Government. [Crosstalk] At least half because what happens, the leadership of Colonial Life, as we all know, was dominated by UNC supporters for many, many, many years. That is public knowledge.

Mr. Lawrence Duprey publicly professed his support for the UNC. You had directors on Clico who are UNC councillors. I mean, it is no secret. So what Clico did because of its connection to the UNC, through its agents, through its managers, through its directors, through its shareholders, they targeted a number of people in the 2008 and 2009 period. So half of that 500,000 people I am talking about are people who just voted the People’s Partnership Government into office. [Interruption] I mean, you all could not be serious.

Hon. Member: Five hundred thousand.

Mr. C. Imbert: Boy, you be quiet. You all could not be serious. I mean, I am speaking to the Members over here and I know that they know exactly what is going on. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker, I am advised that this plan is going to seriously undermine the integrity of the Unit Trust because the Unit Trust has billions of dollars inside there and what the Minister of Finance has just done is cut the value of those Unit Trust deposits by 50 per cent but the Unit Trust is exactly what the word says, it is a trust where people put money into that institution and the Unit Trust invests in securities and equities to get a return so that the value of the units is supposed to grow over time. But now the People’s Partnership Government has taken a decision which is going to destroy the value of the assets of the Unit Trust and will create difficulties for thousands—

Hon. Member: You will go and run Unit Trust. That is a dangerous thing—

Mr. C. Imbert: I am speaking the truth. You cannot handle the truth, that is your problem.
Hon. Member: You handle it.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. C. Imbert:—the problem with the Member for Caroni East is that he cannot handle the truth. The Unit Trust has substantial sums of money invested in Clico and if we go ahead with this plan—because I am hoping that good sense will prevail, you know. I am hoping that good sense will prevail. If we go ahead with this plan, we are going to damage the Unit Trust; we are going to damage the trade unions; we are going to damage the credit unions; we are going to damage the savings of this country; we are going to damage the lives of 500,000 people, Mr. Speaker. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. C. Imbert: Now, I have heard a lot of "ol' talk" both inside and outside of this House about the people who invested in Clico took a risk and it was a Ponzi scheme. [Interruption] But the Minister of Finance invested in Clico in 2006. So the Minister of Finance, the current Minister of Finance took out an investment in Clico to the tune of $500,000 on October 05, 2006, so the Minister of Finance invested in a Ponzi scheme.

Hon. Member: Karen Tesheira too.

Mr. C. Imbert: Fine, but the point I am trying to make is that this thing transcends political parties. It transcends political parties because the current Member for Tunapuna was sufficiently confident—Sure.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Miss M. Mc Donald]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I thank hon. Members opposite for their kindness in extending my time. No, I am serious and the reason why I am certain you extended my time is because you want to hear what I have to say.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. C. Imbert: Because all of you are affected by this. Put all joke aside. All of you are affected by this.
So, as I said, I have heard some academics say that the deposits were a Ponzi scheme and I have made the point the Minister of Finance himself invested in Clico. But I want to read into the record too, what are the facts and I have in my possession a letter dated March 23, 1990 and who was in power in 1990, not the PNM. This is a letter from the Supervisor of Insurance. It is written to one Mr. R. A. Rammarine, Manager, Actuarial Life Services, Colonial Life Insurance Company, March 23, 1990.

2.35 a.m.

We have heard "a lot of ol' talk" about people took a risk and this thing was not approved. I want to correct the record. In 1990 under the NAR government the Supervisor of Insurance wrote Colonial Life as follows:

I am directed to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 13th March, 1990 to the Supervisor of Insurance and to advise that the Executive Flexible Premium Annuity policy is approved for market 1990.

Let us fast-forward now to the time when the Member for Tunapuna was the Governor of the Central Bank, 20th of April, 1999 at which time the hon. Winston Dookeran was the Governor of the Central Bank. His signature was on our money. There was a thing with central bankers, as soon as they make them Governor "they does put" their signature on their money, but no big thing. The point is, he was the Governor of the Central Bank and he signed our money.

Letter written to Marcia Tam Marks, Manager Corporate and Financial Actuarial Services by the Supervisor of Insurance then under the Minister of Finance then under the government of the UNC when the current Member for Tunapuna was the Governor of the Central Bank. Headed, "Approval for Foreign Currency Policies Lifetime Advantage, Flexible Premium Annuity, Executive Flexible Premium Annuity":

Reference is made to all correspondence on the captioned subject ending with your letter dated 31st March, 1999.

I want to repeat, this is when the Member for Tunapuna was the Governor of the Central Bank.

I am pleased to advise that permission is granted to market in a foreign currency the Lifetime Advantage, the Flexible Premium Annuity and the Executive Flexible Premium Annuity products.

[Interruption] Foreign currency. So in 1990 under the NAR, the Executive Flexible Premium Annuity was first approved and in 1999 under the UNC it was approved for marketing in foreign policy. So I put that into the record to put paid to this nonsense that is in the public domain that this was a Ponzi scheme and people took a risk. Nonsense! It
was approved by the Ministry of Finance under the NAR and by the Ministry of Finance under the UNC and the Governor of the Central Bank—and this is what makes this all so dangerous. When, under the PNM administration, Clico got into trouble and the then PNM government decided to step in and to secure the deposits of depositors—

Mr. Roberts: Did you know the Minister of Finance was a shareholder?

Mr. C. Imbert: No. The Governor of the—youse how we could talk when we are talking—[Interruption] when we are talking—[Interruption] you see, when we are talking serious matters we could talk seriously? So that, I have in my possession a message from the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, public advertisement:

“As regulator of the financial sector, we wish to assure the public that the rights and interests of Clico third-party policyholders preserved through the Government’s commitment…”

This is the Governor of the Central Bank speaking with the authority of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago:

“…are preserved through the Government’s commitment of funds to meet Clico’s liabilities consistent with the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and Clico.

2. Having assumed control of Clico under section 44D of the Central Bank Act, we are providing support to restore stability, sound and profitable management of Clico.

In summary we are committed to a new and vibrant Clico in which existing and future policyholder funds are safe.”

So we have a situation when the NAR government approved the EFPA type of deposit. You have a further situation where the UNC government approved the marketing of that type of policy, which is a type of fixed deposit in effect, in foreign currency, and then you have a situation where, under the PNM government, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago gave an assurance that they would preserve policyholder funds.

This is where we find ourselves today and there is enough in here for aggrieved depositors to file a class action lawsuit against the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance for breach of contract. There is enough inside of there and I do not think this is where we want to go because the people who will be filing this lawsuit will transcend political parties. It will be a coalition of PNM, UNC, COP, PNM—"wha’ is it"—MSJ, "is everybody, toute baghai, trade union, credit union, man in the street." So I call on the Government to rethink this ill-advised policy if it is—sure.
Mr. Dookeran: Thank you. I was wondering if the hon. Member for Diego Martin North East, assuming without admitting that what he has said suggests a solution—did he submit this to his government 18 months ago when this matter was, in fact, first pronounced, and did they do anything about it?

Mr. C. Imbert: When, as I told the hon. Member—and I do not think I am telling tales out of school at this point in time. As I told the hon. Member for Tunapuna off camera that when this problem occurred, when the crisis at Clico occurred and the Governor of the Central Bank moved in and the Government decided to back up policyholders’ funds, and, in fact, you could even have accusations of discrimination because the person—I am just coming off the point but I will come back to your question—persons at Clico Investment Bank got full satisfaction of their deposits. All the third-party deposits in Clico Investment Bank were transferred to First Citizens Bank backed by a government guarantee.

So the person who had put their money into Clico Investment Bank, which is part of the CL Financial Group, got 100 per cent and they were given a certificate which they then took—people went down by the Oval, I am sure you all know this—you have a question? [Crosstalk] Yes, people went—I think the transaction took place somewhere by the Oval. You would take your fixed deposit certificate from Clico Investment Bank, you carried it and they give you one and exchange it for a First Citizens Bank deposit and those people got 100 per cent of their deposits preserved. Of course the interest went from 8 per cent down to 2 per cent. You wanted to ask a question? Sure.

Mr. Roberts: Thank you, Member for Diego Martin North East, because this is a serious—now we are getting somewhere where it is a serious discussion. Seeing that I hear where you are going and class action lawsuit and knowing that you just completed your masters in law and so on, but—no, seriously, do you believe, though, that the non-disclosure of the main proponent of the negotiation on behalf of the very citizens in that initial meeting to sign the MOU, which then led the Central Bank Governor to give the blanket approvals, weakens the case or at least shows some sort of culpability or serious nature on the former Minister of Finance and maybe the Cabinet even though they were not advised?

Mr. C. Imbert: I do not think so, no, but, I mean, that is a matter for another discussion. We have already debated that at length. The Member for Siparia in another incarnation brought a Motion of No Confidence, I believe it was, I cannot recall the form of the Motion but the Member for Siparia brought a Motion against the former Minister of Finance and we debated this matter at length. I do not think so. I do not think any issue—and that matter was fully ventilated and answered and I, in fact, stated in this House that I saw no conflict of interest with respect to that matter. The fact is, I
do not think that issue would weaken any lawsuit against the Central Bank and against the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. I do not think so.

The point I am making is that it has gone way beyond that, because, by the time the public advertisements and so on were being made, that issue, that allegation that you are referring to was already in the public domain and the Central Bank continued with its public expression of commitment to the policyholders. [Mr. Roberts rose] I will ask for injury time, you know.

Mr. Roberts: No, "dey is ah good discussion". I like this.

Mr. C. Imbert: But I will need injury time, you know?

Mr. Roberts: No problem. [Crosstalk] "All right, nah, is joke ah making. Yuh wasting time." Yes but the other point, being a shareholder, the former Minister of Finance would have been privy to the last accounts of December 31st, 2007. By not disclosing her shareholder status she did not provide the Central Bank Governor with those accounts and therefore he did not have the information that we now have that the assets were encumbered.

Mr. C. Imbert: Now, Mr. Speaker, I will ask for injury time, eh, because you are asking me now to go into the theoretical construct of a class action lawsuit. The fact of the matter is that the insurance legislation at that time was not sufficiently tight to allow the Central Bank to intervene. In the case of a bank—and, I mean, I will excuse you because obviously you do not know. In the case of a bank, banks have to report to the Central Bank on a regular basis, a monthly basis, and the Central Bank had the power at that time to intervene with respect to a bank. If they see that there is an issue with the assets and the liabilities, the Central Bank had—the Regulator had the authority under the law to intervene. It was not so with insurance companies.

Insurance companies were required to report, but, under the law, under section 44D of the Act, the Regulator did not have the power to intervene and do anything except on an annual basis. So even though the Regulator could see that "things not looking too nice", until the law was changed, the Regulator could not intervene. That is why we came to this Parliament in 2009 and we changed the law. So we put—[Interruption]—we changed the law and we put insurance companies under the same framework as banks.

So now, if the Regulator can see that an insurance company is in trouble, hypothetically, let us say there is a problem with Guardian Life—I am not saying there is—the Regulator can now intervene, suspend operations, take over the insurance company and deal with it in the same way that he can with a bank. That was not so in 2008 and 2009. We had to come to this Parliament and change the law to give the Regulator at the Central Bank that authority to intervene.
However, let us not continue with these legal arguments. The point is, there are 500,000 people who are going to be affected by this decision. I am urging the Government to rethink, urging you. Twenty years is too long. As I said, I was talking to the Minister of Finance off camera and at the time—and I will answer his question now—when the Governor of the Central Bank intervened I asked him myself, "Why are you doing this? Because it is a risk. You are talking about exposure, at the time there were estimates—5 billion, 10 billion, 15 billion. You are talking about that level of exposure. Why are you doing this?" The Governor told me if he did not intervene it could threaten the entire financial system in this country because—[Interruption]—that is what he said. [Interruption] "Dah is all right." Whether he is right or wrong that does not matter. That is why he did it. The Governor at the time was of the view that there were systemic risks to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago because Clico and its subsidiaries represented 10 per cent of the GDP of Trinidad and Tobago. That was the view, okay?

So that, the view was also that Clico had about $100 billion in assets, whether they are encumbered or not, $100 billion in assets, and that over a long period, over a 10-year period, you could generate—because some of the assets, their value was depressed, Methanol Holdings at the time, commodity prices were low and therefore the value of the Methanol Holdings was low, so the view was that, as the world economy rebounded—because the world would not be in recession forever—so as the—and it is now. The world economy is rebounding now—that there would be demand for petrochemicals, demand for commodities and therefore methanol prices would rise and therefore the value of the shareholding in the methanol companies would increase and therefore you might be able to realize enough of a return on the investment over a 10-year period to cover the investment by the State. That was the thinking at the time.

2.50 a.m.

You have to remember, Clico also owns 53 per cent of Republic Bank, even though the assets may be encumbered. So you have 53 per cent of the largest local bank; you have this huge methanol company; and then you have Home Construction, which has vast acreages of land throughout Trinidad and Tobago which can be monetized, if they are managed. So the view was, this company had assets; real assets; and over a 10-year period, you would be able, if you manage these assets properly, to get a return and recover the investment. That was the view. [Interruption]

Yes, I know that, but the fact of the matter is that based on an assessment of the situation, the Central Bank moved in and gave a guarantee to the depositors. So there
are two problems here. One is, the depositors were given a public guarantee; and two—
forget the guarantee now. That is a legal argument. You know, as you say, you have
been positing some theoretical constructs about liability and culpability. Forget that.
The fact of the matter is, let us deal with hardship.

I would hate to be part of a Parliament—forget which party I belong to. I would
hate to be part of a Parliament that takes a decision as oppressive as this. As I said,
trade unions will be affected; credit unions will be affected; 200,000 families, or
200,000 people will be affected; 25,000 elderly people will be affected. Their income is
going to be destroyed and there will be a domino effect on the economy, and I am
asking the Government to rethink. Twenty years is too long. Make it five years; make it
10 years. Rethink. Zero interest is just not on. Put some interest on the deposits.

If you want to stretch it, because my understanding is that the problem was
that these deposits are maturing within the next two or three years, so you will get
a large hit—$7 billion to $8 billion within the next two to three years and the
economy cannot cope. This is what I am told. The financial system cannot
accommodate a hit like that. Of course, you could borrow the money, but there is
a view that that might send our debt service ratio too high.

So stretch it out. It does not have to be two years. It could be four or five
years, seven years; whatever. And put some interest on the money, so that the
discount rate, the net effect of the actions will not reduce it to 42 cents on the
dollar, because that is what is happening now. The effect of all of this is going to
reduce those deposits to 40 per cent of their true value. I am appealing to the
Government. This is going to affect not just PNM people.

Mr. Roberts: You should not have wasted your first half hour.

Mr. C. Imbert: All right; all right.

Mr. Roberts: Now you are making sense.

Mr. C. Imbert: I am appealing to the Government to rethink this thing. And you
see this thing about stopping interest from next month? People will die, you know. I am
telling you there are people in hospital depending on this money. There are people
depending on this interest to pay their medical bills, and if they do not get something
next month—I mean, you do not have to give them 8 per cent. You could cut it to 4 per
cent; but give them something. Do you know how many people—[ Interruption]

Give them something. You know how many people are in a state of extreme
trauma at this point in time? That they were surviving on that money for the last
couple years? They were planning ahead, because two years from now, when the
deposits mature, they know they cannot get 8 or 9 per cent, so they are planning ahead, seeing how best they can maximize their income; but you have cut it from eight to zero. So my boy who was getting $4,000 a month—[Interruption] Pardon?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: They will get the $75,000.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, but that is their capital. You are going to destroy their capital. Let me explain. The person had their capital which was used as collateral to secure investments and mortgages. You are now telling them, rather than earning a return on their capital, which is what people are using to live, "Eat your capital." And they cannot. Because the capital is tied. It is heavily leveraged.

The trade unions are in this problem. The credit unions are in this problem. They used the value of the assets in Clico as collateral to make investments in housing projects and all sorts of things. Now you are telling them, no more income on your investment and your capital is now cut in half. So this is a very serious matter, and I am warning the Minister of Finance, you have some technicians around you; armchair theoreticians; university people. They do not live in the real world. You want to know what is going on? Go in Republic Bank; go to Royal; go to First Citizen’s Bank; go to Scotia Bank; and ask them what are they going to give for these deposits. You will find out it is 40 cents on the dollar.

So, Mr. Speaker, to me, this is one of the most crucial aspects of the budget that has to be dealt with. It is easy to say that, you know, as has been said in the speech, the PNM Government is responsible for this. I cannot accept that. The PNM Government agreed, as the Governor of the Central Bank publicized, to make good the deposits. The PNM Government agreed to do that. So that when the Clico crash came, there was a panic all over Trinidad and Tobago. People crying; they do not know what to do; their money gone up in smoke; and the Government and Central Bank came in and people breathed a sigh of relief, because they said, "All right, my money is safe."

And the hard part of all of this is that people’s deposits have matured over the last two years, and they were encouraged to roll them over at a lower interest rate and leave the money there. Because there were about 30,000 people in the first instance. About 5,000 people have got their money back. That is a little known fact as well. You all need to understand these things.

At least 5,000 people, their deposits matured and they were fully repaid by Clico. They had to wait; they got it in drips and drabs. If you had $500,000, they might give you $200,000 now; and then tell you come back six months later for another $200,000; and then come back another three months later and get the final
$100,000, but they got it. Five thousand people have had their deposits repaid by Clico, based on assurances given by the Government and the Governor of the Central Bank. Others, because they felt a sense of security; because they felt that whether the Government changed or not, a new incoming Government will not renege on these commitments made. They rolled over the deposits.

Mr. Dookeran: Where were the funds?

Mr. C. Imbert: Pardon? I told you, either borrowings.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Borrow?

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes. There is no other way to do it, because the long-term plan is to monetize the assets of Clico. It could take 10 years; it could take 15 years. In the interim, you have to borrow the money. It is as simple as that. And what I am telling you to do is to stretch it out over a five to 10-year period. Because you asked where the money is coming from, but what kind of country do you want to run? You want to run a country where people are outside there rioting on the road; where the value of homes is destroyed; where real estate goes up in smoke; where people lose their livelihood? That is the kind of country you want to run? Credit unions gone through? Unit Trust gone through? All your PSIP and your fancy "ol’ talk" in this budget will come to nought because you will have no country to manage in terms of managing the development of this country. The country will go through.

Mr. Roberts: You are actually making some sense.

Mr. C. Imbert: I am dead serious, and I am cautioning you. I mean, I could say nothing. I could have come here tonight and said nothing. And then the bacchanal would have started next week when the credit unions realize what is going on. And then what would happen? Chaos would erupt in this country. But there are too many people affected by this. So, I think I have said enough on this point. I think—[Interruption]

Mr. Peters: You only let the stupidness come to the surface. You have good things inside of you.

Mr. C. Imbert: I think you all understand the point. Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have left?

Mr. Speaker: Five minutes.

Mr. C. Imbert: Five minutes? Well, I dealt with you. In that little five minutes then, Mr. Speaker, I will not bother with the Member for Chaguanas West, because you know they say imitation is the most sincere form of flattery, so the Member for
Chaguanas West is implementing all of my projects. I cannot criticize somebody who goes into a Ministry and just implements everything that his predecessor did. That is all right. I will not waste my five minutes on the Member for Chaguanas West.

But, Mr. Speaker, I need to talk to the Member for St. Joseph, because I have heard the Prime Minister condemn the Member for Diego Martin West—the political leader of the People’s National Movement—for using parliamentary privilege. Now, the Member for St. Joseph insinuated that the former Attorney General, under the PNM, had made special arrangements for the present Chief Justice. He did it in a clever way. He referred to the Chief Justice as the "exalted one", but everybody knew. You do not have to be a rocket scientist. We know who you are talking about.

The Member for St. Joseph insinuated that the former Attorney General, Mr. John Jeremie, had done a favour for the sitting priest—Chief Justice, Honourable Ivor Archie.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Priest?

Mr. C. Imbert: Chief Justice, sorry. I am getting tongue-tied. And he insinuated that because of this favour, which was a luxurious house somewhere in Goodwood Park, that the present Chief Justice is or was beholden to the former Attorney General; was his puppet, more or less. Now, the fact of the matter is, it was not John Jeremie who was the Attorney General when the Honourable Ivor Archie was appointed Chief Justice of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. It was Mrs. Brigette Annisette-George.

Furthermore, the Salaries Review Commission has suggested, and this Parliament has approved, that all sitting Chief Justices are entitled either to a housing allowance or to supergrade quarters. Previous Chief Justices—the one immediately before Mr. Archie, and the one before—that is Mr. Sharma; and the one before, Mr. de la Bastide, they opted to occupy their personal private residence and received the housing allowance.

Mr. Roberts: How much was that allowance?

Mr. C. Imbert: It was $10,000 or $14,000. Something like that. They opted. It was a choice. You could request supergrade quarters or you could opt to receive the housing allowance. So if an incoming Chief Justice decides that he wishes to exercise the option of supergrade quarters, then it should not—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I know that you said that the hon. Member for St. Joseph insinuated. You have now gone beyond insinuation and you have called the name of the Chief Justice. I want to caution you that under Standing Order 36(10), let us not go there. If you want to insinuate, but you already brought the Chief Justice’s name into the picture. I ask you to go on to another point now.
Mr. C. Imbert: No problem. The point I am making, Mr. Speaker, is that I know that the Member for St. Joseph and the person that he referred to as the "exalted one" did not get along. I know their relationship was not good. I know he is new to this Parliament, but there is a rule that you have just referred to, Mr. Speaker, that the conduct of a judge should not be questioned, except on a substantive motion.

So I am just asking the Member for St. Joseph, I know you had your problems, but do not use this Parliament and do not abuse parliamentary privilege to settle some old score from your previous employment. I am just appealing to you. You can do better than that. Do not use this Parliament to settle some grudge that you may have had in your previous employment. And that is why, you know, I used the utterances of the Prime Minister as my point of departure.

Mr. Speaker: Member, I am giving you one more minute as injury time. Please complete.

Mr. Peters: But your injury is bad? [Laughter]

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, regrettably, with the current arrangements, one is allowed 75 minutes to speak in here. I am happy, even though 50 minutes or 45 minutes of my contribution were taken up with this Clico matter. I am happy that I had the opportunity to explain how dangerous this decision is, and how much damage it will do to ordinary people in this country. And I urge the Government, rethink this position. If you do not revisit this position, you are going to destroy the lives of more than half the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3.05 a.m.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Jack Warner): Mr. Speaker, at 3.05 a.m. this must be a record by any standard. For the past three days I have been here taking part in this debate and during that time I heard the good, the bad and the ugly.

I heard the good when I listened to my colleagues on this side and those at Nos. 41, 42, 43. [Laughter] I heard the good when I listened to the Member for Oropouche West, Miss Stacy Roopnarine. I realized that she was the youngest Member in the Parliament and I compared her to the Member for Arouca/Maloney, and I said, "Chalk and cheese". I said that the future of the People's Partnership is in good hands. [Desk thumping]
When I heard other Members, even the Minister for Sport and Youth Affairs, the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara—when I heard the Member for St. Joseph, despite what the last speaker said, and the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, when I heard the Prime Minister tonight—I do not know where our Prime Minister gets her energy from, because I left her in St. Augustine at the university at a matriculation ceremony and here she is back down again in the Parliament up to this time—as a matter of fact, when I heard all the speakers on this side, I felt good. I felt that our Prime Minister had made a judicious judgment in her selection of candidates and speakers. I commend her very highly. When I heard the Member for Tobago West, the Minister of Tobago Development, and the Member for Tobago East, who are now within the pale of this Government, I said even the future of Tobago is in good hands. [Desk thumping]

In fact, I want to thank the Minister for Tobago Development for enlightening me on certain aspects of Tobago politics of which I was unaware. I was unaware that Tobago had a black Calder Hart. I was unaware that in Tobago there were advisors who received $66,000 per month. I was unaware that in Tobago the last audit was done in 2003. I was unaware that in Tobago the Members of the THA and those who are on committees, do not have to face the Integrity Commission. Mr. Speaker, if anything has emerged from this debate in these past few days is that we have to take a second look at how politics is conducted in Tobago. I thank the Member for Tobago West for that. For me, that was the good.

The bad, and there were several, I will not go into all. I listened for 45 minutes to the Member for Point of Spain North/St. Ann's West making one point: Laptop, laptop, laptop. I listened to the Member for La Brea, full of sound and fury, but saying nothing. I listened to the Member for Arouca/Maloney and I got the usual comic relief. When I realized that the Member had been with us for the past three years and the Member for Oropouche West has been with us for the past three months, I said, "Heaven help us."

I listened to the Member for Point Fortin. I listened to her reading a speech given to her by the Member for San Fernando East. [Desk thumping] The Member for Point Fortin did not have a clue about energy and energy affairs; some of the terms she could not even pronounce properly. I listened to her going up the road and I said, "Yes, we have reached." In fact, for a few minutes she even attacked our Prime Minister for the fact that she spoke about an ATM machine and that we were not an ATM machine. We are not an ATM machine; that is what we are not, and if anybody wants to be the godfather of the Caribbean, she does not want to be the godmother. [Laughter] She attacked the fact that the Prime Minister sang Bob Marley songs. So she does not have personal taste and choice? I love Celine Dion and every chance I get I sing Celine Dion. So what?
Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Move on!

Hon. J. Warner: Move on?

Dr. Moonilal: "Doh talk rubbish!" [Crosstalk]

Hon. J. Warner: She also spoke about the fact that our Prime Minister danced and how she was dancing. [Crosstalk] I cannot accept that we would allow this to pass without my making a comment about it; it is wrong. [ Interruption ] What control? It is because of control that you are there and she is here. [Crosstalk] That was the bad.

The bad for me was further aggravated—and the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara spoke about it—when the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Diego Martin West, an aspirant for the office of Prime Minister, leaves this Parliament and goes to the public gallery and sat while the Member for Chaguanaus East was making his contribution.

Dr. Rowley: That was not true, jack!

Hon. J. Warner: The point was made here and it was not defended.

Dr. Rowley: It is not true. What you are saying is not true.

Hon. J. Warner: Okay, it is not true.

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order! Order! Members!

Hon. J. Warner: The Member for Diego Martin West attacked the budget presentation by the Minister of Finance, the Member for Tunapuna. He said it had no plan, "is dis, is dat". He said that, "We, from a PNM perspective, must acknowledge that we did wonderfully well in keeping Trinidad and Tobago whole." "...we did wonderfully well in keeping Trinidad and Tobago whole." [Crosstalk] He went further:

“The budget as presented, with two significant exceptions, is a ringing endorsement of virtually all the policies as crafted and executed by the PNM, save a little tinker here and a little tickle there.”

The Member has a short memory. He has forgotten what he said exactly a year ago in this very same Chamber. I want to remind him in some ways of some of the things he said last year, before I come to the Member for Diego Martin Central and, of course, the last speaker.

On Monday, September 14, 2009, in this very Chamber at 2.30 p.m., the Member for Diego Martin West was in the back row raving and ranting. He said and I quote:

“I do not think we should be fooling ourselves. We are not alone on this planet. These are difficult times and it does not matter who is in office, these will be difficult times.”
What makes it so different now? These are difficult times. While I will deal with the Member for Diego Martin North/East in the next few minutes, the fact is that these are difficult times and if there were difficult times last year when you were speaking, they are more difficult now, because you left it so. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, everything I say here was what the Member for Diego Martin West said a year ago. He was talking about Petrotrin and the programmes. He said:

“Most of those programmes are not anywhere near completion. When we took a decision to go down that road, and it may very well be necessary because we have to go into the correct markets and have better products, we took a decision at a cost, at the time, of $3.3 billion. Today, we are looking at a cost of $9.3 billion. We have to digest that in the context now of, 'De money done.' We are now talking about raising revenue by taxation, 'chirrup' 'chirrup', household by household, lands and buildings taxes, cigarette and rum taxes, as revenue raising measures. Do not be fooled by that.”

As if that was not enough, he said:

“Mr. Speaker, I can tell you without fear of contradiction that every statement about these projects being within budget and within time, every one is a wrong statement. So now we have come to the point where we have to try to find the money to stand in the same place, we are not going forward you know, but to stay in the same place, we are looking to find money.”

That was last year, September 14 to be exact:

“…we are not going forward you know, but to stay in the same place, we are looking to find money.”—“We eh find it yet.”

He continues:

“But the people in Trinidad and Tobago wherever they are located, whoever they are, are now called upon to pay from our pockets for the fun and games that were had by others.”

We did not have fun and games. The fun and games were had by you guys, all of you.

And many of you sat down quiet while the Member for San Fernando East ravaged the Treasury and they did so at will.
3.20 a.m.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and the Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to later today, September 17, 2010 at 1.30 p.m. when we will continue the debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2010.

Mr. Speaker: Before putting the question, allow me to extend, on behalf of all hon. Members, our collective joy and happiness on the swift return of the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries to her duty. [Desk thumping] I want to give hon. Members the undertaking that I have been advised that the Parliament will take swift action to address that challenge that seems to be cropping up on many occasions in this Parliament. So I want to just give hon. Members the assurance that we will take measures to address that particular problem.

In addition, I would like, on your behalf to again offer sincerest congratulations to the following Members on their maiden contribution: the hon. Minister of Justice; [Desk thumping] the hon. Minister of Education; [Desk thumping] the hon. Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprises on his maiden contribution here. [Desk thumping] [Interruption] Yes, in this Parliament, the 10th Parliament.

Dr. Rowley: So how come I did not get that? [Laughter]

Mr. Speaker: No, you spoke earlier.

Dr. Rowley: But then I did not get that.

Mr. Speaker: Sorry, I will mention you. We are talking about maiden contributions: the hon. Member for Laventille West; [Desk thumping] the hon. Minister of the Arts and Multiculturalism; [Desk thumping] the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Legal Affairs and Member for La Horquetta/Talparo; [Desk thumping] and the hon. Minister of Community Development and Member of Parliament for Naparima; [Desk thumping] Dr. Keith Rowley, Leader of the Opposition. [Desk thumping]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 3.23 a.m.