

Leave of Absence

Friday, May 22, 1992

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, May 22, 1992

The House met at 1.35 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have granted leave of absence from today's sitting to the Member for St. Joseph, Mr. Augustus Ramrekersingh.

PETITION

St. Joseph's Convent Past Pupils' Association

Mr. Desmond Allum (*Port of Spain North*): Madam Speaker, I beg to present a petition on behalf of the St. Joseph's Convent Past Pupils' Association who are desirous of constituting the Association into a corporate body by private bill. I now request that the Clerk be allowed to read the petition.

Petition read.

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

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of Reinsurance Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the year ended December 31, 1991. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Wendell Mottley)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of Forres Park Limited (Involuntary Liquidation) for the period 1st March, 1986 to 31st May, 1987 and for the years ended May 31, 1988, May 31, 1989, May 31, 1990 and May 31, 1991. (*Hon. W. Mottley*)

(To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

ECHO and Food Stamps Programme

33. Mr. Krish Jurai (*Nariva*) asked the Minister of Consumer Affairs and Social Services:

Would the Minister state:

- (a) The number of persons responsible for the ECHO and Food Stamps Programme by constituency and what is the criteria used for selecting these persons?

- (b) The criteria used for selecting persons for the said benefits?
- (c) Number of households receiving benefits by constituency?
- (d) Nature and quantity of food hamper per household?
- (e) Frequency of distribution of food hampers?
- (f) What are the controls for the efficient distribution of food hampers and what steps are taken to ensure that food hampers reach the needy people?

The Minister of Consumer Affairs and Social Services (Dr. The Hon. Linda Baboolal): Madam Speaker, the Member for Nariva is advised that the Food Stamp Programme has, since 1982, been replaced by a food subsidy which now stands at \$61.00 per month and which is given to all recipients of public assistance and old age pension and has no connection whatsoever with the ECHO Programme.

The ECHO Programme was implemented in December, 1990 in the context of an environment of economic stringency and sought to utilize the resources of the state, non-governmental organizations and the business sector in an effort to bring relief to the disadvantaged. However, during its tenure a number of reports were made which suggested that the food was not reaching the target population for which it was intended, since no specific criteria were laid down by Government for the selection of persons for benefits and since the intention at the onset was to allow feeding organizations a free hand in making that determination. In addition, not enough was being done with respect to the developmental component of the programme. In particular, the following problems surfaced:

- (1) A variety of complaints from the public concerning the authenticity of some of the voluntary organizations which were responsible for distributing food;
- (2) Serious concerns about accountability;
- (3) The view that the programme was highly politicized;
- (4) The infrequency of meetings of the National Management Committee, poor attendance of its members and the resulting marginalised role of the National Management Committee in the programme;
- (5) A lack of communication between the Secretariat's Directorate and the National Management Committee.

In the light of these problems, and the fact that \$10.4 million was expended on the programme, this Government has decided to review the entire system of management of the programme, including its staffing. To facilitate this, all feeding has been temporarily suspended from April, 1992. No actual feeding is therefore now taking place. However, an interim feeding programme using well-established and trusted organizations feeding a limited number of the needy will commence from June, 1992 pending the outcome of the proposed review. This interim feeding effort will target the needy population and an appropriate system of accountability will be put in place to ensure reliability. It is expected that the proposed review of the ECHO Programme will be completed by July of this year. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Voting Machines

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Krish Jurai (Nariva):

34. Would the Minister of Finance state:

- (a) When were the voting machines purchased and what was the total cost of same?
- (b) How many voting machines were purchased?
- (c) What is the total cost of these machines to date?
- (d) Are these voting machines still being maintained?
- (e) What does the Government intend to do with these voting machines?
- (f) Whether the PNM Government has any plans for the re-introduction of voting machines in the electoral system?

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Wendell Mottley): Madam Speaker, I would request the hon. Member to give me one week's deferral, again, on this matter. By way of explanation, much of the records pertaining to the item in question were destroyed by fire and the Ministry is, therefore, having to reconstruct some of it.

Question, by leave, deferred.

1.45 p.m.

Pierre/Tahadille Road Project

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Miss Hulsie Bhaggan (Chaguanas):

38. Would the Minister state:

- (a) The details of all costs incurred to date in the construction of the Pierre/Tahadille Road project?
- (b) The amount of funds still required for the completion of this project?
- (c) Whether Government intends to complete this project?
- (d) If in the affirmative, would the Minister indicate when steps will be taken to complete the project?

The Minister of Local Government (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Madam Speaker, I want to inform the House that the Pierre/Tahadille Road project falls under the portfolio of the Minister of Local Government. I have spoken with the hon. Member and I have requested an extension of one week.

Question, by leave, deferred.

**Charlieville ASJA Primary School
(Relocation of)**

39. Miss Hulsie Bhaggan asked the Minister of Education:

Would the Minister state:

- (a) Whether lands have been acquired for the relocation of the Charlieville ASJA Primary School?
- (b) If in the affirmative, would the Minister state when steps will be taken to construct a new building for relocation of the school?

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Dr. The Hon. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, Government has agreed in principle that a parcel of land situated approximately half mile south of the existing Charlieville ASJA Primary School, be acquired by private treaty from Caroni (1975) Limited, for the purpose of relocating the Charlieville ASJA Primary School. Acquisition proceedings are in train and the land will be leased to the Anjuman Sunaat Al-Jamaat Association of Trinidad and Tobago, ASJA, upon completion.

The initiatives that have been taken so far by the Ministry of Education for the construction of the new building include:

1. Provision of an architect's brief to the ASJA board for the construction of a 720-place school;
2. Discussions with the ASJA board with respect to the preparation of design and working drawings for the new school.

Government's contribution, that is 75 per cent of the total cost of construction towards the rebuilding of the school, will be included in the proposed 1993 development programme of the Ministry of Education.

**Priority Bus Route
(Shopping Plazas)**

40. Mr. Krish Jurai (*Nariva*) asked the Minister of Works and Transport:

Would the Minister state:

- (a) How many shopping plazas were built along the Priority Bus Route?
- (b) What is the cost per unit of building same?
- (c) How many of the said buildings or sections remain untenanted to date?
- (d) If any of the said buildings or portion of same are unoccupied how soon can we expect tenancy?
- (e) What is the present rental income per month from these investments?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, up to December, 1991, four terminal malls had been built along the Priority Bus Route. These are located at San Juan, Curepe, Tunapuna and Arima.

The cost of these terminal malls are as follows:

San Juan	\$2.3 million
Curepe	\$1.4 million
Tunapuna	\$1 million
Arima	\$0.9 million

The situation with respect to the vacant tenancy of the buildings is as follows:

San Juan	15 booths unoccupied
Curepe	19 booths unoccupied

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Tunapuna	Top floor unoccupied
Arima	Entire building unoccupied

Due to unsuitable construction detailing, renovation work is required to the buildings before additional tenants can be admitted.

The situation with respect to rental income of the buildings at present is as follows:

<i>Malls</i>	<i>Monthly rental</i>
San Juan	\$7,000
Curepe	\$4,950

No rental income is earned from the Tunapuna and Arima malls at present.

Mr. Jurai: Madam Speaker, the Minister said that these buildings were not properly designed. Was the Ministry not consulted in the construction of these buildings? Was there not proper design and construction?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, as I stated, the construction detailing was unsuitable. These buildings were constructed towards the end of last year. The Ministry is now in the process of finalizing the detailing required to make the building suitable for tenancy.

**ADJOURNMENT MOTION
(LEAVE)**

Mr. Ramesh Maharaj (*Couva South*): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 12 (1) and (2), I gave notice that I wish to ask this House for leave to raise a definite matter of urgent public importance, to wit, the closure of and conditions existing at the Carapichaima Roman Catholic School.

It is urgent public business because it affects the constitutional rights of parents and children. This school which has about 900-plus students, has been closed since Monday, because the parents and teachers decided that the health facilities which exist at this school were a threat to the health and safety of the children. Particularly, there is one and a half toilets to service 900-plus students and 32 teachers. There are two water taps to service this staff and there is no privacy for the teachers and students when they go to the toilets.

The conditions are very bad. As a matter of fact, both the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Couva North and myself, went yesterday. The matter

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affects children generally and the right of parents to the education of their children. Section 4(f) of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago guarantees to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, by the state, the right of the parent or guardian to provide a school of his own choice for the education of his child or ward. That education cannot be provided if the facilities are dangerous to the health of children. It is the obligation of the state to provide that education and the facilities for proper education. Not only the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago is involved, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights request state parties to ensure that children are protected in all measures in which the state is responsible.

If I may, with your leave, read from Fact Sheet, number 10 of the Rights of the Child—Human Rights, by the United Nations. Under Article 3, it says:

1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
2. States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.
3. States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.

So I think there can be no more urgent matter, no more grave a matter of public concern, than the rights and the education of children. If these children go back to the school, the health of these children will be affected.

1.55 p.m.

Madam Speaker: I think the closure of public schools has to be of concern to the nation and I am satisfied that this is a matter of public importance. Therefore, hon. Members, leave of this House is now being sought to raise this as a matter of urgent public importance. The matter will stand over until 6.00 p.m.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

The Minister of Local Government and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Madam Speaker, may I ask that this item be deferred to a later stage of the proceedings?

Leave granted.

CUSTOMS (AMDT.) BILL

Senate Amendment

The Minister of Local Government and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Madam Speaker, I beg to move,

That the Senate amendments to the Customs (Amdt.) Bill 1992 listed in the Appendix be now considered.

Madam Speaker, as you know today is Private Members' Day. This is a small item. Sometime ago we debated in the House, the Customs (Amdt.) Bill 1992 in the other place, and certain minor amendments were made. We merely seek leave to consider these amendments before we proceed to Private Members' Business.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 2.

Senate amendments read as follows:

- A. Renumber subsections (5) to (7) inclusive as subsections (6) to (8) respectively.
- B. Insert immediately after subsection (4), the following:
 - (5) An Order made under subsection (4) shall be laid in Parliament within thirty days and shall be subject to a negative resolution of Parliament.
- C. In subsection (8) as renumbered, substitute for the reference to subsection (6), a reference to subsection (7).

Hon. K. Valley: Madam Speaker, I beg to move that the House doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. K. Valley: Madam Speaker, there are two private bills on the Order Paper, one is extremely important to your colleague. I seek the leave of the House to take these two matters before we proceed with the Private Members' Business.

**RAMESH LAWRENCE MAHARAJ
FOUNDATION (INC'N) BILL**

Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj Foundation (Inc'n) Bill

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Question put and agreed to, That a bill to provide for the incorporation of the Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj Foundation and for matters incidental thereto, be now read a second time.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill referred to a special select committee of the House appointed by the Speaker as follows: Mr. Desmond Allum (Chairman), Mr. Hedwige Bereaux, Mr. Jarette Narine, Mr. Sahid Hosein.

**POLO GROUND HINDU ORGANIZATION
PREYSAL (INC'N) BILL**

Question put and agreed to, That a bill to provide for the incorporation of the Polo Ground Hindu Organization, Preysal, and matters incidental thereto, be now read a second time.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill referred to a special select committee of the House appointed by the Speaker as follows: Dr. Rupert Griffith (Chairman), Mr. Andrew Casimire, Mr. Cyril Rajaram, Mr. Krish P. Jurai.

**SPECIAL JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE
(1992 BUDGET)**

[SECOND DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [April 24, 1992]:

Be it resolved that this honourable House appoint a Special Joint Select Committee to monitor and report to the House on the performance of the Government in relation to the implementation of the budget proposals for 1992. [Mr. B. Panday]

Question again proposed.

Mr. Trevor Sudama (*Oropouche*): Madam Speaker, when this debate was adjourned on the last occasion, I was on the question of making referral to a conversation I had with the former Prime Minister, Mr. George Chambers, on the role and participation of Members of this House in the process of budget formulation which has implications for the monitoring of the budget when it was eventually being passed in this House.

I make the point that it was important for us to make some reference to the way in which the budget is completed, decided upon and presented to this House

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before we can talk about how the provisions of the budget are being monitored. I made the suggestion to the then Prime Minister of the ruling PNM, that prior to a budget being discussed and presented to this House, Members of the Opposition should have a part to play in making an input into the contents of that budget, particularly as they relate to the capital development aspect of the budget, as they relate to the consistencies which they represent. Otherwise, one asks, what is the role of Members of Parliament in this House if when the critical mechanisms for the allocation of resources come up he does not have a role to play. What really is his role in the Parliament?

After the first issue was raised—it dealt with a Government of national unity and the second one, the alternative was to invite the Opposition in to participate, to give its views in the preparatory process of budget formulation—I wrote a letter to the then Prime Minister, Mr. Chambers, and after due consideration by his party he responded after three weeks to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition and copied to me, that to entertain my proposals would mean that the Government has abdicated its right to rule. You understand the mentality we are dealing with. To entertain my proposals would mean the abdication of the right of the Government to rule. The emphasis being on rule. You understand how the Westminster system puts us in a straitjacket with respect to budget formulation and assessment of the budget?

2.05 p.m.

Then in the subsequent period, I became a member of the ruling party which was in power from 1986 onwards. To emphasize that the problem is a systematic one, I want to read into the records a letter which I wrote on August 25, 1987 to the then Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and the Economy, and mind you I was a member of the ruling party in those days:

"Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

I have been reading reports in the press that the estimates for the 1988 fiscal year are being prepared i.e. estimates of recurrent and capital expenditure and that instructions have been issued to Ministers as to procedure and deadline date. The capital expenditure budget would, of course, comprise the proposed expenditure on development projects to be initiated or continued in fiscal year 1988.

I would have thought that in the course of this exercise, as well as in the drawing up of longer term sectoral plans, the representatives of the various

constituencies would have been consulted and asked to suggest the priorities which, when added to the proposals of the respective Ministries, would have provided the pool from which a final list of priority projects to be included in the budget would have been determined, taking into account demands throughout the country in the light of financial and other constraints being faced.

As far as I am aware, only the Ministry of Works, Settlements and Infrastructure requested representatives to submit a list of priority projects to be considered for possible inclusion in the 1988 Budget. It is not clear how the other Ministries went about this exercise and what priority guidelines were observed. It is obvious that for these other Ministries, the priorities of the respective representatives would not have been known and taken into account.

The Manifesto of the NAR for the General Elections of 1986 did hold out the promise of some equitable distribution of facilities and services throughout the country."

One of the planks with which we went to the country in 1986.

Part 6 specifically states *inter alia*:

"Under an NAR Government, the State will spare no effort to fulfil its obligations to our citizens in all areas of the social system. No state can provide an equal share of goods and services to all individuals but it should strive to provide an equitable share...the state must take the measures necessary to ensure a proper and adequate distribution of amenities so that the social and cultural goods of the society are equitably distributed and shared."

The major mechanism for doing so is the budget presentation in any given year. I continued:

"The population in all constituencies have entertained certain expectations and while it is fully recognized that all these expectations cannot be satisfied, a perception that all areas are given some measure of attention would serve to neutralize an increasing feeling of frustration, disenchantment and alienation and serve to promote a sense of sharing. This would provide a basis for hope and patience.

When I examine the comprehensive list of priority development projects to be undertaken in the short term I see that the constituency of Oropouche is

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completely excluded from considerations. In addition, I may mention that I have been making representations on behalf of the constituency of Oropouche over the years for a number of projects to be undertaken but without avail. Many of the projects which I had proposed would serve to upgrade the infrastructure for boosting production and productivity in the agricultural sector.

I could not expect that all my proposals would be accepted or acted upon, but if one or two projects could have been undertaken every year, the constituency would not be so deprived and wanting in economic and social infrastructure as it is today. I may add that we have done our fair share of self-help and propose to do more, but there are limits to this method, given the size of expenditure involved, the low income levels of the majority of constituents and the technical complexity of projects."

I raise the problem because today, in 1992, we are still with this problem—the non-participation of representatives of the people—

Mr. Manning: How can you write the Prime Minister a letter like that?

Dr. Rowley: It is no wonder he fired you.

Mr. Sudama: I do not want to get distracted again. I do not want to get into a row as in Rowley.

If I may spend two minutes just trying to illuminate the thinking of my friend from Diego Martin West, because he keeps referring to this problem of my involvement in the budget operations under the NAR Government. I just want to tell him, and let this matter rest once and for all, what role I had to play. I merely wish to quote from the budget team which was set up at the end of 1987 to prepare the 1988 Budget.

There was a co-ordinating team, but if I may mention the members of this team who were critically involved in this exercise, you would see my role. I hope Members of this House would not raise this issue again in this honourable Chamber.

Revenue Team

Co-ordinator

Mr. A. Harewood

Sub-Teams

Revenue Estimates	Mr. A. Harewood Mr. J. Andrews
Fiscal Reform	Mr. S. Ferguson Mr. P. Ganteaume Mr. J. Andrews
Oil Taxation	Dr. Trevor Farrell Mr. John Andrews
Debt Borrowing	Mrs. Pat Robinson Mr. C. P. De Souza

Expenditure Team

Co-ordinator	Hon. S. Wilson
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Sub-Teams

Capital Expenditure including Manifesto Provisions	Hon. W. Dookeran Mr. N. Raphael Mr. V. Hart Mr. G. Pemberton,
Welfare and Social Policy	Mr. R. Henry
Recurrent Expenditure	Mr. K. Henry Mr. C. Greaves
State Enterprises	Mr. F. Rampersad (National Planning Commission)
Organization and Administrative Reform	Mr. E. Moore
Macro/International Perspective Team	Mr. E. St. Cyr Mr. R. Ramsaran Dr. Terrence Farrell
Political Consultation	Mr. T. Sudama Dr. B. Tewarie

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Now, this is where I come in, a Minister in the Ministry of Finance and this is my role, together with Dr. B. Tewarie who was not even a Minister at that point in time.

Budget Drafting

Dr. J. O'Neil Lewis
Hon. S. Wilson
Mrs. Pat Robinson
Dr. Trevor Farrell.

I have put this on the record so we could let this matter rest once and for all as to my involvement in the preparation of the 1988 Budget. I hope that matter is closed.

Mr. Valley: What about 1987?

Mr. Sudama: Do you want to make an intervention in this budget debate?

I promised the Chief Whip on our side that I would be brief in my presentation, so I do not want undue distractions from the other side.

Mr. Valley: You cannot be brief.

Mr. Sudama: I think that Pascall said that he did not have the time to be brief.

Today, we are seeking, through this motion, to set up a committee of this House to review the provisions of the budget in terms of their implementation. The argument has been raised that machinery already exists through various budgets. I am arguing that this existing machinery is either non-existent or non-functional and, therefore, there is need for something additional to see that what we put in the budget proposals, which is the key document that any government presents to the House, that the provisions of that document are in fact implemented as they are included in the document and any variation of those provisions ought to have the prior sanction of this House.

2.15 p.m.

This is our position. The reason is that we want to have a mechanism in place which does not facilitate the manipulation of the public finances of Trinidad and Tobago. The Attorney General mentioned that we have existing machinery and that machinery was contained in sections 112, 113, and 115 *et cetera* of the

Constitution, which relates to the payment of all moneys, except as otherwise provided by law, being paid into the Consolidated Fund and any expenditure from that Fund being authorized by an Act of Parliament.

I had cause to raise in this House the expenditure related to the community upgrade programme of the last Government. I asked the question specifically, whether expenditure on that programme was included in the 1991 Budget. I was given an answer. I cannot recall the details, but I was told that it was not so included, and that there was a system whereby Treasury deposits could have been used to finance governmental expenditure, which could not and was not accounted for in the budget. This was the response I got in relation to that question. Here you have a specific instance where the need for such a committee arises, where a government may be inclined to use whatever loopholes there are in the system in order to circumvent the role, the authority and the responsibility of this Parliament. This is why this motion is so important in what it seeks to establish.

We have also been told that there is a Public Accounts Committee and provision has been made for that in the Constitution of this country. I want to ask the Members on the other side, when was the last time this Public Accounts Committee met? When last was a report of the Public Accounts Committee presented to this House? You say there are monitoring mechanisms, but these mechanisms, I am arguing here, are totally non-functional.

The Public Accounts Committee is supposed to have at its disposal the Auditor General's reports. In some cases, and with respect to some departments, that Auditor General's report is five years or more late, which has very little relevance to the issue of investigation at any current time. We will come later on to talk about state enterprises.

My argument is that the Public Accounts Committee, because of the way it is structured, because of its power and its authority, if it is to be effective, these have to be widened. Section 119(4) of the Constitution states:

"The Public Accounts Committee shall consider and report to the House of Representatives on—

- (a) appropriation accounts of moneys expended out of sums granted by Parliament to meet the public expenditure of Trinidad and Tobago;

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- (b) such other accounts as may be referred to the Committee by the House of Representatives or as are authorised or required to be considered by the committee under any other enactment; and
- (c) the report of the Auditor General on any such accounts."

Our argument is that the Public Accounts Committee or the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee cannot second-best the work of the Auditor General. We do not have that facility because we who comprise that committee are all Members of Parliament. We need a separate support organization for investigative work which must therefore support the work and the function of the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee. We need accounting analysts; we need economic analysts; we need experts in management services, to ascertain whether we are getting value for the moneys being expended, rather than whether moneys are being expended in accordance with a regulation. All the regulations can be satisfied and there could still be corruption, wastage and mismanagement, with respect to public funds. Therefore, it needs a specialized committee with specialized expertise supporting it in order to do this work properly.

I recall, I was a member of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee, and when that committee met, we were presented with reports of various state enterprises which went back sometimes eight or nine years—historical documents. First of all, how can you analyze a historical document? I myself am not a historian by trade. Secondly, there is a provision in section 119(8) of the Constitution which says that:

"The Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee shall consider and report to the House of Representatives on—

- (a) the audited accounts, balance sheets and other financial statements of all enterprises that are owned or controlled by or on behalf of the State; and
- (b) the Auditor General's report on any such accounts, balance sheets and other financial statements."

The view was expressed in that Committee that you could not touch anything except the audited accounts of the state enterprises. That is all the information that you had to go by and, therefore, if you asked for other documents to be produced to this committee, then constitutionally and legally, they were not obliged to produce them. Here we were sitting as a Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee really doing nothing except extremely superficial investigation and

analysis. One wonders what was the role of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee. I had in those days raised the question of giving this Committee more teeth by having the Constitution amended—and proposals were put forward to that effect—to expand the authority and function of the Committee and to give it independent staff so that it could really carry out a watchdog and monitoring function on behalf of this Parliament. Neither the previous regime nor the PNM regime was really interested in a more critical investigation of the goings-on in these state enterprises because that was one of the avenues by which enormous corruption took place in this society. We have to go back to the days of the O'Hallorans and Prevatts under the PNM regime to understand the extent of corruption because there was no monitoring, no watchdog function being performed over the expenditure, on these state enterprises.

2.25 p.m.

You had the grossest form of financial manipulation being carried out from year to year, from the 1970s going into the 1980s, the expenditure of billions of dollars of taxpayers' money and yet there was no mechanism within the system to investigate and to take corrective action. You had a Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee which met and looked at accounts which were dated in the first place, and that committee had little authority and no support.

Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the House that I consider this motion very appropriate, timely and important if we are going to improve the parliamentary democracy that we so conveniently boast about. The Prime Minister went to North America, boasting about Trinidad and Tobago's parliamentary democracy and yet you have a situation where this democracy and the mechanism under which it operates allowed people to steal millions and millions of dollars under their regime. They are boasting to the outside world about this effective parliamentary democracy that we have in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the Auditor General's report which is supposed to report on the public finances of Trinidad and Tobago to this House. The Auditor General, may I inform the other side, is an officer of this Parliament and when his report is presented to this Parliament to you, Madam Speaker, that report ought to be debated in this House. You want to have monitoring of the provisions of the budget, let us start, first of all, with debating the Auditor General's report in this House. When was the last time an Auditor General's report was debated in this House?

Dr. Rowley: I would like to ask a question. For my own edification, Madam Speaker, could the Member tell this honourable House what impediment currently stands in the way of the debating of a report of Auditor General and if there is no impediment, has he ever tried to debate such a motion in his time as a Parliamentarian?

Mr. Sudama: Would the Member consult with his Leader of Government Business? It is when your Leader of Government Business puts the Auditor General's report down here for debate then it comes up for debate, Madam Speaker. Does he want the Opposition to do the work of the Government? That is the work of the Government, to present Auditor General's reports in this House for debate.

Mr. Valley: Madam Speaker, let me really inform the Members opposite, if at any time they require a debate on the Auditor General's report, all they have to do is ask their Chief Whip who will consult with me and we would find the time to do so.

Mr. Sudama: I am so assured, I am deeply moved by that assurance and I do not cry all that easily, Madam Speaker. I am moved by that assurance that they will find the time to debate something like the Auditor General's report. For 30 years, 32 years going now, they have not had the time to debate it, now they said they will provide the time to debate.

Madam Speaker: The past is gone, maybe beyond recovery. Maybe he is assuring you of the future.

Mr. Sudama: Not only the past is beyond recovery. When I look at the Member for San Fernando East, I see the present is also beyond recovery.

Madam Speaker: Then hon. Member is assuring you now.

Dr. Rowley: Hon. Member, please.

Mr. Sudama: My time is limited and with these disruptions, he is looking for a row.

Dr. Rowley: It is only a question.

Mr. Sudama: Now, is it going to be an intelligent question?

Dr. Rowley: I guarantee that it will be. Madam Speaker, the Member seeks to give the impression that it is the Opposition that wants to debate the report. Could the Member say what impediment was placed in his way when he was a Member of Government?

Mr. B. Panday: He was not there long enough.

Mr. Sudama: Not only that, I just tried to outline the role I had in that previous Government. He does not seem to understand.

Dr. Rowley: You appeared as a Minister then, refund the money.

Mr. Sudama: If he is paid on performance he should get no salary at all.

Dr. Rowley: That is your point of view.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Will the Member continue, please.

Mr. Sudama: Madam Speaker, the point I was making is that these mechanisms that we have at the moment are totally inadequate to deal with a proper probing into the implementation of budget measures: whether it is the Public Accounts Committee; whether it is the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee; whether it is the role of the Auditor General, whether, in fact, Madam Speaker, it is the reports of the Ombudsman.

Now, the Ombudsman also has a role to play, where departments of government have erred with respect to expenditure or any other decision which they have made. From time to time, reports of the Ombudsman come before this House, who is also an officer of the Parliament, of this legislature. Therefore, this legislature ought to take heed of the reports of its officers. But, you see, under the present Westminster system, it is as if these people are paid employees of the state. It is as if the Auditor General and the Ombudsman have to account to Ministers, because they are paid the least regard. Departments of Government and Ministers pay scant regard to the Auditor General of this country and to the Ombudsman. That is a fact of life, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Valley: Madam Speaker, I wonder whether the hon. Member would inform the House, given all that is happening, existing committees, how would the appointment of a new committee help the situation?

Mr. Sudama: Madam Speaker, the new committee we are proposing will be vested with much greater powers than the existing committees and the officers who are in place.

Secondly, we are asking that this committee we are proposing to set up, be given independent staff; that is, staff which would be responsible to the committee itself and will have certain critical expertise in the area of forensic investigation, financial analysis, the authority to call witnesses and to question

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witnesses and to ask for documents and so on. That is not available under the present system.

Question proposed, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Sudama: Madam Speaker, I believe that the Government is aware of the problem. They understand the problem, because when the Member for Diego Martin Central sat as the Chairman of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee in the last session he himself emphasized the problem. Today, he is a member of the Government; today, he has some say in determining whether we can improve that system of investigation of public expenditure or not, and today you see what happened; he takes the opposite position, that everything is in order, there is no need for any additional committee or for any improvement of the mechanism.

Mr. Valley: Madam Speaker, I have not even taken part in this debate as yet, but I will just inform the Member that I argued then to strengthen the committee rather than to appoint a new committee.

Mr. Sudama: What has he done in his stint now as a Minister to strengthen that particular committee of which he was formerly a chairman, what has he done? Here we have this glib assurance of strengthening and improving and so on. But we understand, Madam Speaker. They make promises during an election period and before, which, when they get in the Government turn out to be false promises, according to the Member for Diego Martin East. If you know what I mean, you say things at election time, but of course when you get into Government—you know what I mean—you really do not mean that. That is the philosophy of my good friend from Diego Martin East. Of course, having taken him down to a tour of Oropouche I know what he means and he means nothing.

Mr. Manning: Come on; uncharitable.

Mr. Sudama: I will not refer to charity, because if the Member for San Fernando East is talking about charity I will ask him how charitable has he been to the former Member for Laventille. But I do not want to raise these questions in the House, the whole question of charity.

Mr. Manning: What have I done to the former Member for Laventille?

Mr. Sudama: Do you not know?

Mr. Manning: What have I done? Tell me.

Madam Speaker: I think you are bordering on irrelevancy.

Mr. Sudama: Madam Speaker, I was merely responding to what the Member for San Fernando East said.

Let me give you an example of what happens, Madam Speaker, in the absence of a proper system of monitoring of Government finances and budget proposals and so on: Friday, April 17, 1992, headline in the Express, "Himself to himself—Trintoc, Government in shares deal." Now, I am certain that this financial manipulation recorded here was never part of any budget provision. In fact, it was outside of a budget provision that this manipulation took place. Let me read to you, Madam Speaker, to show you the necessity for having such a monitoring committee:

"A High Court judge was told yesterday that Trinidad and Tobago Oil Company (Trintoc) increased its share capital to \$1 billion last year and the then Government of Trinidad and Tobago bought the shares in order for the state-owned company to pay back to the Government a debt of \$800 million."

Have you ever heard about accounting like that, Madam Speaker? We increase the share capital. From what source did the Government get equity to increase the share capital; could you tell us, Member for La Brea?

Mr. Bereaux: When I am ready to make my contribution, I will tell you.

Mr. Sudama: Which will be never, probably.

Where did this Government get this money to increase its share capital and then give the money to a state-owned company, Trintoc, to pay back the Government which they were owing? Creative accounting, Madam Speaker.

Now, this was revealed in San Fernando High Court when the matter of Trintoc and the Companies Ordinance came up for hearing before Mr. Justice Bissoondath Ramlogan. The case involves the alleged failure of Trintoc to legally register the allotment of \$155,730,400 ordinary shares as required by the Companies Ordinance before releasing them to the Corporation Sole. Breaking the law, circumventing the law in a financial matter and nobody is to monitor this. Attorney for JC Sellier and Company who was representing the company, apparently, submitted:

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"Trintoc's outstanding tax liability to Government amounted to \$778,662,000. The company was unable to pay because it was running at a loss."

Apparently, it is not only Caroni (1975) Limited that is running at a loss. Were Caroni (1975) Limited to have gotten into such a deal, you can imagine the uproar. In fact, they would not have okayed it in the first instance because that is Caroni (1975) Limited. Caroni (1975) Limited cannot increase its share capital in order to make more money available to the company, either to pay sugar workers' backpay or to pay anything else, because that is Caroni (1975) Limited. But here is Trintoc being given that facility to increase its share capital from where? From what source? To do what? To be forgiven its debt.

What we are looking at here is the principle of this whole thing. Here you have a tax liability amounting to \$778,662,000 and through financial manipulation involving the Government, Corporation Sole on the one hand and the state enterprise on the other, not subject to any review or investigation of any independent public authority in this country. Because, you see, they can do what they like because they are the Government; they have a mandate to rule.

Mr. Valley: Madam Speaker, I do not know, perhaps unintentionally the Member is misleading the House. In fact, this Parliament or the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee can review that. That is subject to review by the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

Mr. Sudama: He does not understand. Madam Speaker, if this is not recorded as such in the documented, audited accounts and balance sheet, we have no role as a Public Accounts Committee in reviewing this. What I am arguing for is the setting up of a special committee with vastly increased powers to review all items with respect to budget proposals and their implementation which involves expenditure.

Mr. Valley: Why did you not win the election?

Mr. Sudama: You understand the attitude, Madam Speaker. "Why did you not win the elections?" So if you did not win the election, you have absolutely no role to play and you have no authority in this place. They have a mandate to rule and they will rule as they see fit. That is the mentality which has destroyed the country, which has destroyed any attempt at national unity. It is this PNM's mentality, "I have a mandate to rule; why did you not win the election?"

Mr. Manning: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Oropouche for giving way. I just wanted to draw to his attention, whether he realized it or not, that what he is asking for is a mechanism to review a budget before the budget is actually advanced to Parliament.

In short, Madam Speaker, what the Member is saying is that he wishes to have a say and be part and parcel of the Government's policy in budget formation. If that is the case, we can discuss that.

Mr. Sudama: Madam Speaker, I raise that *inter alia*; that is, that budget formulation has implications for budget review and monitoring. The substance of this motion has to do with budget review and monitoring. Even if you reject the proposal for Members of this House to have an input in budget formulation, the mechanisms for budget review as currently exist are weak, inadequate, non-existent and, in fact, non-functional. I want him to dispute that. Twenty years as a Minister of Government, I would like to find out whether he wants to dispute that.

Madam Speaker: I think what the hon. Minister is submitting is a committee to monitor and report to the House on the performance—that is, after the budget has been presented; that is what we are dealing with here today. You are sort of putting forward arguments to support this.

Mr. Sudama: What I am saying is you do not do it in a vacuum. A budget is a result of a process. The budget formulation process, which goes into the preparation and delivery of a budget to this House is also relevant to the matter of how you are going to review the provisions of that budget once it is passed by this House. That is the point I was making at the beginning of my contribution.

Now, I am saying, Madam Speaker, regardless of the fact that Members of the Opposition—in fact, many Members of this House, even when they are on the Government side, have no input in budget formulation. A budget is presented to this House and it is passed and I am saying that the existing machinery for the review of the implementation of those budget proposals are totally inadequate and I have said, in some cases non-existent and non-functional. Therefore, I was referring to the Public Accounts Committee, the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee, the role of Auditor General, the role of the Ombudsman and so on.

The argument, Madam Speaker, is beyond dispute, that one of the problems with the Westminster system, one of the reasons that we cannot have independent and searching review of governmental expenditure through the budget is because

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the Executive dominates the legislature. Therefore, the legislature, in our Westminster system, does not appear to have any independent existence, initiative or whatever. Unlike, for example, the American system. In the American system the President, as the executive authority, cannot sit in the legislature, his ministers do not sit in the legislature. He presents budget proposals to the legislature. Those budget proposals are argued and adjusted and dealt with in the legislature where party lines are not really adhered to, or if they are adhered to, they are not strictly adhered to. Therefore, the legislature can amend, reject or reform those budget proposals and send them back to the President for review.

Mr. Manning: I thank the Member for giving way again, Madam Speaker, if, in the system to which reference has just been made by the hon. Member, party lines are not strictly adhered to, as he has said, and I think he is correct, would the Member be prepared to tell this honourable House on what basis are the decisions therefore taken and what are the implications for the use of such a basis in a country like Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. Sudama: Well, Madam Speaker, he will have to tell me now Trinidad and Tobago is so vastly different. The question he is posing is that you must have an authority—and it goes back to this thinking: the mandate to rule—there which exercises control over the legislature and the legislature does not have an independent mind.

Now, if in this legislature, party lines were not drawn as they are drawn now, where once the Government puts forward something you have a question of the ayes have it and the ayes will always have it, Madam Speaker—

Mr. Maharaj: Except with specified majority.

Mr. Sudama: —what is the role then of Members of this House in having an input into this budget? This is the question I am really trying to address. In the House of Representatives and in the Senate in the United States, they do have a critical input in the final form in which those budget proposals come out. Because if they do not agree with the President, then it goes back to the executive authority. The executive authority cannot dominate the legislature in the United States' system; that is the critical distinction. Therefore, it has to bargain and negotiate with the legislature and its members to see that an acceptable document is produced which will be presented.

Mr. Manning: Madam Speaker, I really do apologize for interrupting the hon. Member as often as I am, but I think he has now come to the crux of the

matter that he is raising, and I gather from what the hon. Member is saying that he is really questioning the Westminster system by which this country is governed. If that is so, may I suggest to the hon. Member, Madam Speaker, that he may wish to bring a motion to the House to debate the wisdom or otherwise of the system of government rather than the mechanism that he is now seeking to use. On the question of constitutional reform, may I suggest, Madam Speaker, that we deal with the substantive issue. Let us debate it.

Madam Speaker: I can assure the Prime Minister that this is indeed a topic down for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Seminar in this session and I think the hon. Member would do well to come and make a contribution.

Mr. Sudama: It is just that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Seminar has no authority here in this House or any influence over the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So I may avail myself of that opportunity.

Mr. Humphrey: Would you give way to a question? Madam Speaker, I want to ask the hon. Member whether this Parliament, in fact, under our Constitution, has the power to establish such a committee?

Mr. Sudama: Madam Speaker, I would think so. Not being a lawyer myself, but I would think that this Parliament has the power to establish the committee which is the subject of this motion. But even if the question of the relevance of the Parliament, of the Westminster system is subject to review or needs to be reviewed, I want to ask the Member for San Fernando East whether he is satisfied with the operation of the present system in all its respects. Is he so satisfied?

Mr. Manning: Let me answer him forthwith: The answer is no. I am not satisfied with the operation of the present system in all its respects, but permit me to say that with all its faults, Madam Speaker, it still represents the best system available to us at this time.

Mr. B. Panday: That is called a cliché.

Mr. Manning: The Government is committed, Madam Speaker, in dealing with matters as fundamental as the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago and matters as fundamental as the system by which we will be governed, to move in an incremental way. In fact, the experiences between 1986 and 1991 should tell my colleague from Oropouche that to move otherwise is to tread very dangerously indeed and that the last stage could quite easily be worse than the

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first. We take very careful note of the defects in the system and in due course the Government will make appropriate proposals to this honourable House.

Mr. Sudama: Madam Speaker, he agrees the system needs to change, but he is going to move incrementally to change it. For the past 30 years they have been moving incrementally and I do not know what “incrementally” means.

Dr. Rowley: That is a cliché.

Mr. Sudama: They had a report of a constitution commission in 1974. The then PNM Government, did they move “incrementally” to deal with the system? So long as the system satisfied their ego to control and manipulate power, it is only that system that they are interested in. The Westminster system is now under question and investigation in the mother of parliaments, the United Kingdom. But here we have the Member for San Fernando East standing up proudly in one of the ex-colonies to state that there is very little wrong with it, but it is going to change incrementally. I wait with bated breath for these incremental changes to be expressed and implemented by the hon. Member for San Fernando East.

It is not a question of reform. If the system is not working, could you look at it in an objective way and see how best we could reform it in the interests of everybody? The emphasis has to be exclusion from participation of Members of this House and exclusion from participation in the processes that you are making by the wider community of Trinidad and Tobago. A small clique comes to power in the system in which we operate now and they then lay down the law. That is the problem we face—a mandate to rule and they will rule as they see fit.

2.55 p.m.

Mr. B. Panday: They hand over to the parasitic oligarchy.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Mr. Sudama: We are making a modest suggestion: let us establish a committee of this House with sufficient power, authority and expertise at its disposal in order to monitor the proposals of the budget in any given year. Whether, in fact, the Government come to this House and say they are going to spend \$7 billion and end up spending only \$5 billion, they exclude areas of expenditure at their own discretion. Where they want to spend money they will spend; where they do not want to spend money they will not spend, and this Parliament will only know after the fact, not before the fact.

We are saying that if there is a system where whatever they do can be reviewed on a timely basis, whatever adjustments they make to the expenditure pattern proposed in the budget speech is reviewed on a timely basis, they will be more wary of using their unfettered discretion to manipulate expenditure of public funds in Trinidad and Tobago. That is what we are saying very clearly in this debate.

Madam Speaker, in the Canadian jurisdiction they have established what is called a "Committee of Undertakings". That is a committee of the House and the job of that committee is to monitor every undertaking given by a Minister in Parliament. So that when a Minister gets up in the House and says that he will do X or Y, that committee has the function to see whether, in fact, X or Y is being done. What we are doing here today is merely proposing a partial Committee of Undertakings, not to review the undertakings of all Ministers, but merely to review the undertaking of the Minister of Finance in the presentation of his budget proposals. The Canadian jurisdiction adheres to the Westminster type system. They have not found it repugnant to the system to set up a Committee of Undertakings of the House, so that Ministers' pronouncements and undertakings will be monitored on a timely basis. That is the Westminster system. Perhaps, the Member for San Fernando East has not heard of it. He may wish to make a trip to Canada to look at the parliamentary system as it is functioning, and to see that there is a Committee of Undertakings there and the role and function of that committee.

All we are merely asking for in this resolution is to set up a committee of this House which will probe into the implementation of the budget proposals in any given year. It is a simple request. One wonders why they are afraid of such a simple request. Why? Is it because they do not want themselves to be subjected to investigation? Is that the reason? They have been so accustomed to unfettered power all these years of PNM rule that they do not want, in 1992, to be subject to any kind of restriction with respect to the exercise of that power. I believe that is the reasoning.

The other reasoning, Madam Speaker, as I said, is that having been given a mandate to rule, as they say—you go to the polls, you are given a mandate to rule, the impression being given is that you are given a mandate to do anything, without reference to the rules, procedures and conventions of this House, this legislature. This is why this legislature is treated so shabbily by Members of the Executive. They do not come here and explain what they do; they come here and

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merely announce decisions. There is a situation existing, for example, in one health institution in this country and, so far, we have had only the most superficial explanation of what was going on simply because, I believe, there is little regard or respect on the part of the Executive, that administration, for this House, this legislature.

Miss Nicholson: For lives!

Mr. Sudama: And for lives. I take the prompting of my colleague, the Member for Tobago West.

Dr. Rowley: Mind you get fired again!

Mr. Sudama: They have no respect either for this House or for people's lives. Fourteen people died in a public institution in this country and the Government stays mum and does not want any investigation into this matter. It was a case of himself investigating himself. If you really want an investigation into the operation of the St. Ann's Mental Hospital, you should get some outside people to do it; do not do it in-house because you will never get the truth. That is their whole attitude.

Hon. Member: The Minister should resign.

Mr. Sudama: Madam Speaker, this touches upon the very issue that we have been debating here for the last couple of days: That they do not want to subject themselves to investigation. They do not want to do it. Whether it is with respect to budgets, whether it is with respect to what is happening at the St. Ann's Mental Hospital, whether it is with respect to the police service, they do not want to subject their administration to any form of independent, objective investigation.

All that this motion seeks to do, in the area of finance, in the area of budget proposals, is to have a review committee established to monitor the implementation. I wish to give my full support to this proposal which, perhaps, even in a very small incremental way, will enhance the parliamentary democracy that we so glibly boast about all over the world.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Miss Hulsie Bhaggan (Chaguanas): Madam Speaker, I rise to support the motion of the Member for Couva South. The Motion before the House is:

Be it resolved that this honourable House appoint a Special Joint Select Committee to monitor and report to the House on the performance of the Government in relation to implementation of the budget proposals for 1992.

My colleague, the Member for Oropouche, has pointed out several of the technical arguments to support such a motion. In my presentation, I want to focus squarely on the issue of management, and secondly, on the question of democracy. I believe this particular motion, and this particular committee, in fact, fall within both the ambit of management, the science of management, and the whole question of real democracy in this country.

Madam Speaker, in the first place, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago actually manages a very big business. The business of this Government is the biggest in this whole country and perhaps in many parts of the Caribbean. We are talking about an annual budget in excess of \$6 billion. We are talking about managing resources that probably are worth trillions of dollars in assets. At the same time, we are talking about human resources which relate to thousands of workers; so obviously it is the biggest business in this country. If small, medium and large businesses could put into place a management system to take care of their affairs, why cannot we, in this House, also adopt a management approach in the affairs of this country?

3.05 p.m.

I know, for instance, that Members on the other side will argue that there are the mechanisms in place with respect to managing public finances and so on. But when we look at the history of the financial management of this country, it is very clear that we have incidents and a history of wastage, corruption, mismanagement and various forms of inefficiency in the system. So it is very important, therefore, that we have some kind of independent mechanism where, in this House, we will be able to monitor things also, especially as they have to do with the annual budget.

Madam Speaker, it is like a large company. The people of Trinidad and Tobago are the shareholders. You might say that the Members of Parliament in this House, whether on that side or on this side, are the board of directors. We were elected by the shareholders.

Mr. B. Panday: Like a committee of the board.

Miss Bhaggan: I am drawing an analogy here.

Mr. Manning: I am glad that the hon. Member has given way. When more experienced Members of Parliament, such as the Member for Oropouche, make the kind of comments that they make, it is easy to mislead those who may not be as experienced as the originator of such statements.

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In the Westminster system of democracy you have a clear distinction as between the legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. So that the board of directors of which you speak is not the Parliament in the sense in which you say, it is the Cabinet. Therefore, I wish you would be guided accordingly.

Miss Bhaggan: Madam Speaker, I am not getting into technical arguments here. There will be all kinds of arguments why this particular motion should not be passed in this House. I am talking about the spirit of looking at the budget, because when you look at the past, even if you had the separation of powers that we speak about, that did not work. In reality what we found was billions of dollars in this country having been wasted for 35 years and the evidence is there to prove that.

In the absence of a mechanism in this House, it therefore means that the system that we have in place now simply is not working. I understand what you are saying. I may not have been in this House many years, but the principle of it is that taxpayers' money is being wasted every year. The principle of it is that every year you find the budget allocations to the various ministries are being shifted about and so you do not have the various development works being carried out.

A very clear example is last year. Last year under the LID Programme, \$170 million was spent on LIDP. Moneys were taken out from the various ministries and placed into LIDP and today we have a crisis in the health ministry. We have a crisis in St. Ann's where 13 people have died. The point I am making, therefore, is that moneys must be expended—

Miss Nicholson: Madam Speaker, I would like the Member for Chaguanas to give me some clarity on that, please. Is she saying that the 13 people who were killed was because of the shifting of the funds? Here is where we tie down ourselves. Madam Speaker, could she answer that for me?

Miss Bhaggan: The answer to that, Madam Speaker, is that with respect to the St. Ann's Mental Hospital, it has been more than 10 to 15 years that situation has existed, both under the PNM and NAR administrations and neither one undertook the kind of measures necessary to ensure that the mental institution was upgraded to acceptable standards.

Miss Nicholson: Madam Speaker, on a matter of clarification. The area of food is what impacts upon the people, what goes into their stomachs is the food that was bought. Is she telling me that it is not food, but facilities that caused

that? I would like some clarity, because I think that is why we are not placing the people under a commission of enquiry.

Miss Bhaggan: Madam Speaker, I am sure the Minister of Health will respond to that question. But the point is—

Mr. Palackdharrysingh: But the Minister of Health agrees with you.

Miss Bhaggan: If there were proper refrigeration facilities, if you had adequate staffing—when I said facilities I did not only mean physical facilities, I meant the human resources—so obviously both administrations have got to share the responsibility of what happened in St. Ann's. I want to make that categorically clear on this side.

Madam Speaker, as I said before, the question of the management of this budget, at least in terms of its monitoring is very important, because it is a part of the management process. For instance, the budget formulation is part of what is called the planning process, if you look at the systems approach. The implementation has to do with whatever is passed in this House, various ministries will use those fundings and so implement its programme.

There is also an element on controlling which has to do with the standards, qualities, costing and so on. So while you may not have a budget being implemented with a hundred per cent accuracy, you may find five to ten per cent variation. But if we monitor that in this House we will avoid or preempt a situation where large sums of moneys will be shifted from one ministry to the other, and so whatever we plan, or whatever was actually presented before this House, will be carried out according to plan.

The fourth element with respect to the systems approach has to do with follow-up. If for instance the matter came before this House, where we saw a particular aspect of the budget is not being implemented the way it should, then we would be able to alert the House and the mechanisms would be put in place in the various ministries to ensure that this does not happen again. For instance, we have found that in almost every public project in this country, there are cost overruns. So for instance if a project has actually been presented to this House in the budget and we are saying, for instance, we are going to spend \$20 million on a racing complex, say in Caroni for instance, we will not allow it to escalate to \$240 million. Before it reaches to that point, we would have been alerted to the fact that something is wrong with this project. It could have been in terms of the

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actual formulation of the project; it could have been the corruption that is later associated with it; it could have been anything.

The point is, we cannot close the stable after the horse has run out; and most of the committees we have established in this House have all to do with what happened after the fact. It is like going to the police station and telling the policeman, “well my neighbour is harassing me, I need to do something about that”. The policeman says “well, I cannot interfere with your neighbour until something has happened” and when the neighbour kills me then the policeman comes to find out what the situation is. We cannot afford that kind of situation in this country.

Mr. Palackdharrysingh: That is the Westminster system.

Miss Bhaggan: For the past 35 years it has been happening and so that system today is irrelevant. Regardless of what changes we ought to put—and I believe the Members in this House are committed to ensuring that the finances of this Government and of the public are managed properly—this motion before the House will have its support.

Madam Speaker, the other point I want to make is that the establishment of a special select committee can really be the first mile towards the launching of new initiatives for democracy and development. The challenge this motion presents to this House is whether we are willing to move from formal democracy to real democracy. Every five years the population of Trinidad and Tobago is told “well, it is time for you to vote”; so usually the Government in power announces elections on the last day before the six weeks; everybody is guessing when the elections will be held—

Mr. S. Panday: Like the local government elections.

Miss Bhaggan: Like the local government elections I have been told. Election comes up every five years, but what happens after that. We all go and vote and then after that the population waits for another five years. So all we have really is formal democracy; we do not have real meaningful participation by the people of this country; and if you have parliamentary representatives in this House, who represent all the constituencies, this is a first step towards real democracy. So my suggestion, therefore, is that this select committee really is in keeping with the whole principle of moving from formal democracy to real democracy.

Mr. B. Panday: Incrementally.

Miss Bhaggan: Yes, incrementally, as I am told. Madam Speaker, I do recall an incident when I was a student in high school not so long ago. I remember coming into the public gallery and sitting looking on at the Members of Parliament and there was the late Dr. Eric Williams sitting in the Prime Minister's chair; it was the first time I came here and that impression stayed with me. The impression I had of the Prime Minister was with his back turned to the speaker on this side, whoever was speaking at that time, his hearing aid was off, and he was reading the *Trinidad Guardian* and he could not be bothered with what was being said on this side. Sometimes I wonder whether Members on the other side are still possessed with the spirit and the ghost of the late Dr. Eric Williams. I believe the time has come, Madam Speaker, when the other side has to listen to this side, especially as they can have empathy with this side, because they were here for the last five years and they considered themselves the government in exile.

Hon. Member: They learnt nothing.

3.15 p.m.

So we are suggesting to this House that we are now in an era where we have got to create a rupture with the past. They have got to respond to this side so as to be able to put in place the mechanisms to create new frontiers to effect a transition from formal democracy to real democracy.

We, on this side, were elected, just like those on the other side, so we have a right also, to have a say as to how public funds are spent in this country; we have a right also to ensure that there is public accountability; we have a right also to ensure that we avoid a system of corruption, waste and mismanagement, especially at this time when this country is in deep financial crisis. Perhaps this is why the Prime Minister, in speaking to the media, mentioned that when he went, he understood the problems of this country—at least words to that effect—so he is going to introduce a structural adjustment loan programme, I believe. But he is saying he wants to do it in his time and in his own way. Whether it is done in his own way or not, the point is, he is going to introduce such a programme and that programme is going to have a negative impact on the people of this country and moneys are going to become scarce. Because when I look at the debt situation and the debt problem and the fact that domestic borrowing is going to take place, it is very clear that financial resources of this country have got to be managed

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properly. This select committee will help the Government to be able to do that more effectively.

When this Government came into office, there was a lot of talk about consultation and consultative democracy. I do not know how many people remember, but as a student who studied Caribbean and Latin American politics, I remember that in, I think it was 1965, the person who coined that phrase, "consultative democracy", was a dictator in the Caribbean, the late Forbes Lindon Burnham. This gentleman used to make his decisions and then tell the Leader of the Opposition about them, and he called that, "consultative democracy." In fact, his consultation went so far that one day the President of the Trade Union Congress—the public service union were on strike and the late Forbes Burnham wanted to encourage this trade union leader to call off the strike, and the way he did this was simply by getting his army to take this particular trade union leader in a helicopter, dangle him over the South American forest and ask him: "Are you going to call the strike off now, or do I drop you into the South American forest?" When the helicopter came down, the strike was off.

The point I am making is that his idea of democracy later led to a system which became a dictatorship in the English-speaking Caribbean. In that country, since 1968—and I do not want to get into troubled waters with you with respect to the internal affairs of another country and so on—this particular country has not had free and fair elections. In fact, I was hoping that the Prime Minister would have made some mention of that when he spoke about some new arrangement he is looking into for the three Caricom countries.

Mr. Manning: Madam Speaker, I cannot afford a statement of that nature to pass. Those are statements that are picked up by the media and reported internationally. This country is noted for free and fair elections. I want to place that on the record.

Miss Bhaggan: I am very happy that the Prime Minister has made that comment, because I am sure when the elections are due that we are going to have a joint parliamentary team from this Parliament going to monitor the election in Guyana. In fact, I do remember in my capacity as the general co-ordinator of International Solidarity for Democracy in Guyana, a letter was directed to him and the Foreign Minister and I am sure he is probably giving some consideration to the fact that we ought to also be part of the monitoring team in Guyana for the elections. But that is just an aside.

As I was saying, the question of consultative democracy can be very dangerous, because what it does, really, it becomes, in effect, a rubber stamp rather than real consultation. This is why, again, I am stressing the need to move from formal democracy to real democracy.

I also want to ask the Prime Minister, through you—we talk about democracy and consultation and talking to us on this side and so on—why is it, prior to his visit to Washington, he did not see it fit to call the Opposition Leader and have a meeting with him, or even after he returned, to have a meeting with him, so that he could probably discuss what is happening in Washington; or for what purpose he was going, and seek the support of the Opposition Leader or get his views? That is what democracy is about. They are saying that they are going to consult the Opposition Leader, yet he went off and committed this country to all kinds of programmes and big announcements are being made to the media. But, as far as I am aware, there has been no formal meeting between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition with respect to the recent trip to Washington.

But the dear Prime Minister has another challenge. I believe in July he is going to chair the Caricom conference in Trinidad and Tobago. I want to issue a challenge to him today, that in conducting that function, he invites the Leader of the Opposition, the labour leaders and the private sector—

Mr. Manning: To carry baggage?

Miss Bhaggan: Madam Speaker, I will leave the Member for Couva North to respond to the Prime Minister with respect to that particular comment.

The point I am making here is, it is time for us to really get consensus in the Caribbean. With respect to this whole question of consensus and democracy and this select committee, it may look a bit far-fetched, but it all has to do with that whole principle, as I said before. So I am saying that the time has come when we have to promote and advance the discussions that we have had at the Caribbean Economic Conference. There was much talk about the social partners and the social partners relate to the private sector, to the labour sector and in my case, I am advancing also, the Opposition Leader and the Opposition parties, because they are all part of the system of democracy in the Caribbean in keeping with our own context.

I also want to make the point that we can only advance democracy if this nation is united. So, for instance, we cannot have this country being divided along

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any lines, whether it is people telling a group of people that there are jobs available in Caroni, for instance.

3.25 p.m.

In my opinion, I viewed that statement as very dangerous with respect to national unity. I felt almost as if this hon. Member was creating a smokescreen, was creating the stage so that when people are retrenched in the public utilities—

Mr. Bereaux: Madam Speaker, On a point of order. What is the relevance of this statement to this particular debate?

Miss Bhaggan: Madam Speaker, as I said before, it has to do with the question of national unity and democracy in this country. I am saying that perhaps we ought not to set up smokescreens, that is irresponsible, because what we are doing is dividing this nation. For instance, if you are going to make decisions publicly and take actions that may be contrary to some promises you have made, than you have got to face those consequences fully and squarely. I do not think any Member from the other side ought to place those responsibilities on this side.

Mr. Bereaux: Madam Speaker, this is a debate dealing with a motion which calls for the monitoring of the budget. I cannot see how comments, which are being made with respect to people going to look for jobs elsewhere, have anything to do with this motion. *[Interruption]* I am not speaking to you, you can crank some other time. I cannot see how that has any relevance.

Madam Speaker: It is not time to debate the Caroni issue. Could you please stick to the point in question?

Miss Bhaggan: The point is democracy in a very wide term and based from the responses I am getting from the other side it is very clear that we have got to debate exactly what is democracy in this country. Democracy relates to many things and as I said before, one is the question of national unity. When I spoke I made that comment, if I may just mention it, which had to do with the spirit of national unity and I hope the Member for La Brea will take the point I am making.

I returned recently from Venezuela, one of the larger democracies in Latin America which recently had an attempted coup. I went there to study what gave rise to this situation because Venezuela has many similarities as us, in terms of their politics, in terms of the kind of problems they have had in managing their

economy and also because they are an oil economy and it is important for us to study Venezuela. Within recent times we have had a Customs Bill being brought in this House where are are to do substantial trade with Venezuela. I also think Venezuela has an interest in coming into Caricom.

Madam Speaker, I went there to see the reason such an attempted coup had taken place and there are five points and they all relate to the question of democracy and give credence to the establishment of this committee I am speaking about. The five points simply are:

1. There was a lack of accountability.
2. Like here in the past, there was unbridled corruption.
3. There was the inability of the congress to influence decision-making because the powers of the President far exceeded those of the congress.
4. There was a lack of credibility in the politicians because they made promises they could not keep. And finally, something that I was speaking about.
5. They have been implementing what is called the neo-liberal model of capitalism in Venezuela.

And so we had a situation arising in Venezuela where there was an attempted coup.

The reason why I introduce that point, Madam Speaker, is to demonstrate to this House what the Venezuelan government has done to be able to deal with that situation.

Unfortunately, only when there was this crisis in Venezuela, the Government chose to start to dialogue with the Opposition and that dialogue has led to a situation where right now in Venezuela, two Members of the Opposition party, the Party of the Christian Democrats are now ministers in the ruling Government. I am not making a case for us to become Ministers on that side. I am just giving you an example as to when a crisis situation arises it is then that the Government will tend to seek the assistance of this side. We are talking about pre-empting such a crisis. In Venezuela they have also set up what is called a multi-party, multi-interest National Advisory Commission. In fact, that commission is actually advising the President and the Government as to what steps it ought to take to preserve democracy in Venezuela. I should also mention that discussions are still going on with the Opposition party and the intention is not to rule together; the

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intention is to work together to be able to save that democracy because Venezuela has been for a long time an example of democracy in Latin America.

Madam Speaker, I want to make it clear we cannot allow ourselves to just come to this House and make lovely speeches. It does not make sense criticizing the budget and all the bills. We may as well say the ayes have it and go with it. Why are we sitting here and wasting time? We may as well go home and service our constituents or do something else. Why debate and propose a motion, and propose recommendations and alternatives and then the other side just stands up and says well, the Constitution does not permit it because there is what is called the separation of powers. I think it defeats the whole purpose. Somehow there is a contradiction in this system where you can say, or whatever you say, on that side, you can go ahead and say it but we are not going to take what you are saying because the system does not permit it. Yet, we allow a debate every Friday evening to take place. It does not make sense.

The time has come, Madam Speaker, as I have said before and many times in this House, when we have to look at the whole new system in terms of looking after the affairs of this country. The time has come when there has to be consensus. We are not saying, and as I said before we are not suggesting here that all of us should join in a big tea party and form the government and live happily every after. We are saying that we have to agree on fundamental issues that are taking place in this country. We have to agree as to where this country ought to go as a nation. Whichever Government rules is fine, but we have to agree on that because if we do not do that, every time a new government gets in, in fact, when we get in, in 1996, you will find that we will have to start all over again. That should not happen. We should have a chance now.

Mr. Casimire: Would you kindly tell this House if the problem of unemployment is fundamental to this country and if so, why did the UNC not find it necessary to be at the National Symposium?

Miss Bhaggan: It is fundamental, but this Government was elected on a promise made to the population that they can solve the unemployment problem and we gave them a chance to do just that.

Madam Speaker, perhaps now is the time for us to develop consensus in a real way. The time has come not just to go and meet people in different areas and talk shop and give big PR about how nice you are, and how you are a great government and you are caring. The time has come for meaningful dialogue on debate. The time has come for round-table discussions because I am very worried

seeing the pronouncement of the Government having returned from Washington. I am very worried that some policies are going to be put in place which are going to have a serious impact on this country. The time has come for us now to set up the mechanisms and the instruments which will ensure that this population is not put at risk.

This whole select committee has to do, as I said before, with transforming formal democracy to real democracy. It is to give the Members in this House a meaningful role to play because everyone here was elected. Whether in Government or Opposition. We are accountable to our constituents as they are accountable to their constituents. But in the final analysis, all 36 Members of this House are finally accountable to the nation of Trinidad and Tobago. Without reservations I want to say that I fully support the motion before this House, as proposed by the Member for Couva North. Thank you.

3.35 p.m.

Mr. Andrew Casimire (*Toco/Manzanilla*): Madam Speaker, I rise to reject outright the motion before us and in doing so, I want to make reference to the system of government under which we operate. We operate under the Westminster type model government and contrary to what my friends opposite are saying, the very system is responsible for their being in Parliament today. We must understand that we must play by the rules, not when it suits us, but at all times. We must understand that the separation of powers which is the principle under which our Parliament operates, caters for—

Mr. Humphrey: Could you give way to a question? Would the hon. Member indicate where in the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, there is separation of powers?

Mr. B. Panday: You do not have to answer it.

Mr. Casimire: No, I will answer it. The separation of powers is a fundamental principle of the system under which we operate. The question as to whether this honourable House should appoint a special joint select committee to monitor and report on the activities of the Government is absurd. I say so because the hon. Member for Oropouche dropped something and ran. I was hoping that he would have sat there to see the folly of the statements he was making, because he sat as a Minister of Finance, be it that he was behind closed doors and no work was given to him, he was still the Minister of Finance. He must know that right next door to him there was the Budget Division which is responsible for

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monitoring the performance of the Government's budget both in terms of performance and expenditure.

I wonder if the committee, as proposed by the Member for Oropouche, would come from out of space, be an alien or public servants? I gather that as far as we are concerned, the public service is supposed to be people who are neutral, and we respect that. We must not come into the House and make people believe that public servants are this type of animal, that the Members opposite charged them to be, but we have faith in them.

I myself have been a public servant for 28 years and I understand the system and know how hard we work to get things going, but we must understand that the Public Accounts Committee, about which so much has been said, is a committee appointed by this House. It is responsible for doing investigative work and reviewing the expenditure. If you look at the structure of the Committee, you will see it contains Members from both Houses. That is democracy and not only that, the Chairman of the Committee is a Member from the opposite side. I have seen the Committee at work.

If perhaps, over the last few years, no reports have been laid in this Parliament from the Public Accounts Committee, do not blame it on us, but we are replete—Hansard will bear witness to us—with reports of the Public Accounts Committee heretofore, and very serious reports at that. Madam Speaker, Permanent Secretaries and other accounting officers have been summoned before the committee to answer questions and give explanations. That is why I think the committee was proposed in the first instance. To sit here and say that the mechanisms for the operations were non-functional, has nothing to do with the committee itself. It has to do with the operations of the people who are on those committees.

This committee has been in nearly all of the Commonwealth states, even in the Great House of Commons in England, these committees have been responsible for bringing things to the attention of the public, making known—

Mr. Maharaj: Since he is speaking about England, would the hon. Member tell this House whether he is aware that in 1979, in England, under the Westminster system, the committee system was overhauled?

Mr. Casimire: Whatever England has done we are still under the Westminster system and I would not be lured into that line of thinking that the Member is advocating. I go ahead.

We understand from the arguments advanced by Members opposite that the committee in question was supposed to do investigative work, to come and look over the shoulders of the people's Government and try to tell them what has to be done; how it is to be done. My friend from Couva South has not indicated how the Select Committee will operate. The system under which we operate requires that the party forming the government be responsible, and accountable and to be charged with running the affairs of Government.

I want to let Members opposite know that no investigative committee or otherwise can be responsible for looking at the performance of the government. The performance of the government is not judged by select committees. It is judged by the electorate out there. When we go out there with a manifesto for an election, the people out there will determine, not a few persons on a select committee. The rank and file will indicate to us whether we have been doing well or not as in indeed they have done to the last government. We must understand that.

Miss Nicholson: They are crying now.

Mr. Casimire: The tears which they are crying is an overflow of the last five years. I would let my friend from Tobago West know that it is a dramatic overflow of the last five years. We must understand that sometimes the shedding of tears is not indicative of the true feelings of the shedder of the tears. Some people may shed tears of joy, while others would shed tears of sorrow.

As we were saying, Madam Speaker, assuming, but not granting that this honourable House agrees to form a committee as the one proposed by the Members opposite, what then? Whither goeth thou? Would not the same committee be required to report to us and allow us to debate on the findings of that committee, where the government itself will have an opportunity to forestall the operations of the Committee and render it ineffectual? So, we are going in circles.

What they are trying to do is to share power without political authority and responsibility. That is the problem. You see, I hear all kinds of things. Listen to what the Member for Oropouche spoke about—they believe in so much “jumbie”—“forensic investigation”, “undertaker”. The Member for Chaguanas mentioned “spirit”. So that a motion like this was doomed to death and destruction long before it was laid on the Table of this House. I want to let Members opposite know, that the Auditor General is an officer of this Parliament.

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Over the years the Auditor General has been made to audit all the accounts of Government and state-owned companies, and the reports of those audits are placed before us. I do not know if the Members opposite were thinking of another Government side by side with the people's Government.

3.45 p.m.

Mr. B. Panday: That is what frightens you?

Mr. Casimire: It does not frighten me, it sounds foolish.

When the Auditor General, an officer for whom I have the greatest respect, submits a report, that report is impartial and it is here at all times for the scrutiny of Members on both sides. It is a fact that sometimes the reports are late but, as a general rule, the reports on the Government accounts are always on time, and we want to let the Auditor General know that we are happy about his performance over the years.

Some people seem to think that the separation of powers must be equally balanced, but there can be no balance in the separation of powers. Each arm will have its own arrangements and we have to understand that. According to the system we operate, no government can allow an ex-parte government or what they may call, a ghost government, operating side by side with it. The Government of the day must be accountable to the country, and that is what I hope will happen in the next few years.

I just wanted to find out the structure of this Committee that the Members opposite are proposing. Who constitute the House? We are the people in the House who must determine how to structure this. What will happen? Who is to form this committee? Where will the members be drawn from? The Opposition? Who will we ask to appoint these members? That is a problem. So, your motion is not only without basis, it is incomplete and a formula for confusion. We know that confusion is what they are prepared to make, but we do not want to join in that.

One point that I wish to touch on, which the Member for Chaguanas spoke about, and that is consultation. We want to let them know that to consult does not mean to accept the advice given during consultation. You may consult me, you may advise me, but I do not have to accept your advice. If your advice is not accepted, you ought not to get vex and say you were not consulted. Government

must reserve the right—and I hope that you will understand that—to make the final decision in any matter touching the lives of the people of this country.

In spite of all the noises and the points made by my friend from Oropouche, I always sit here and watch him try to create confusion. He is very skilled and adept at creating confusion because he knew that the proposal did not have a chance of being accepted by this House. Let us not be emotional, but pragmatic. We must be managers and must manage the affairs of this country with prudence and with sensitivity. We are not here as a Government to score points, but to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago—at least that is why I am here, whatever might be said.

Reference was made to my erstwhile leader, the late Dr. The Rt. Hon. Eric Williams and I want this House to know that I am very happy today to be a member of the PNM, the party which Dr. Eric Williams founded. I do not want to cast any aspersions, but my friend from Caroni East used to sit and sing at the same convention table in the People's National Movement, alongside myself.

3.55 p.m.

Mr. Shamshuddin Mohammed: I am here now, do not trouble me.

Madam Speaker: I believe the hon. Member is beginning to border on the realm of irrelevance. Will you confine yourself to the motion at hand, please.

Mr. Casimire: I bow to your ruling, Madam Speaker. As I said before, the Member had been a member of the People's National Movement. He had endless opportunities—more opportunities than I have today—to speak on the formation of these committees. But now all kinds of aspersions and all kinds of things are being said and they want to create all kinds of little things to attach to this House.

You see, Madam Speaker, we are going to reject this motion outright, without fear or favour. We look forward to any further elucidation that they might be able to give on this ghost committee.

The Minister of Local Government and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Madam Speaker, I stayed this long to participate in this debate in the hope that somebody on the other side would tell me the purpose behind this motion. The motion, may I remind Members, asks:

"Be it resolved that this House appoint a Special Joint Select Committee ..."

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I think an amendment was moved to delete "Joint",

"... to monitor and report to the House on the performance of the Government in relation to implementation of the budget proposals for 1992".

Madam Speaker, the first question of necessity one must ask is, why are the existing arrangements deemed unsatisfactory? Because, as you corrected the Member for Oropouche, we have to be talking about after the fact, we cannot be talking about getting involved before the expenditure. Given that the budget has passed, one expects that the committee would, of necessity, have to operate after an expenditure has taken place. One cannot assume that the intent of the motion is that the committee would get involved beforehand because, as the hon. Prime Minister stated, if that is the case, obviously, one is talking about getting involved in decision-making, the function of which rests with the Executive. Therein lies the concept of separation of power, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Humphrey: Will you give way to a question? Does the national budget have to be passed by this Parliament to enable the Government to expend funds?

Hon. K. Valley: The answer to that question is obviously yes. Madam Speaker, if that is the case, why do we not, I am asking—

Mr. Humphrey: It is the Parliament that has the power.

Hon. K. Valley: Madam Speaker, I do not want to charge the Opposition with dereliction of duty, because it seems to me that it is the Opposition's responsibility to monitor the performance of the Government. That is the primary function of the Opposition, and the national budget is perhaps one of the main policy documents of the Government. So that the Opposition's job is to do that. The whole *raison d'être* of their existence is to monitor that performance. So they cannot come to the House and ask us to do that.

I am saying that there are certain initiatives that the Opposition can take, but I will deal with that. I was making the point, Madam Speaker, that the decision-making with respect to governing resides with the Executive. That is stated quite clearly in the separation of power concept; the separation of functions: The Executive has certain functions primarily to govern; the legislative has certain functions, to make laws. In fact, in today's world there is a contention that Parliament is, in fact, a debating chamber; we would want to look at that. But the legislature is supposed to be that law-making body. Then there is the Judiciary, another arm of the state, and therein lies the concept of the separation.

Now, as a fact, Madam Speaker, as the Member for St. Augustine mentioned, there is a fusion, as Bagshot would say, "a buckle that fastens, a screw that tightens, a hyphen that joins the executive to the legislative, the Cabinet." There is that fusion, because the Cabinet must come from the Parliament and that is a fact. In spite of that, there is still that separation of functions. We must understand that.

Mr. Humphrey: Would you give way to a question? Madam Speaker, will the hon. Member please explain section 75(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago which reads as follows:

"There shall be a Cabinet for Trinidad and Tobago which shall have the general direction and control of the government of Trinidad and Tobago and shall be collectively responsible therefor to Parliament."

Can he show where the separation is indicated in that section? I have many other sections that I am going to question him on.

Hon. K. Valley: Madam Speaker, the Member is merely making the point. What the section says is that the Cabinet is responsible: Collectively responsible. One of the pillars of our system is the concept of collective responsibility.

Mr. Humphrey: But to Parliament.

Hon. K. Valley: To Parliament.

Mr. Humphrey: Exactly.

Hon. K. Valley: But it says quite clearly, there shall be a Cabinet for Trinidad and Tobago. The function of that Cabinet is the control of government.

Mr. Humphrey: Correct.

Hon. K. Valley: The executive function resides with that of Cabinet. If he were to look at—

Mr. Humphrey: Responsible to Parliament.

Hon. K. Valley: Obviously, because the whole system is built on that.

Mr. Humphrey: That is the principle.

Hon. K. Valley: Madam Speaker, if the Member would look at section 53, he would see clearly in that section, that Parliament is to make laws. So the making of laws is with the Parliament; the running of the country, the is

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Government, with the Executive; the implementation of those laws with the Judiciary. That is the separation of functions that we talk about.

There are a number of pillars. That is a pillar on which our system is based. Our system is also based on the concept of collective responsibility of the Cabinet to the Parliament from which it is drawn. It is based on the concept of ministerial responsibility; it is based on the concept of representational government; it is based on all of these things.

I was at the point where I was asking the question, why is it we are not simply talking about strengthening existing institutions? We have them. The Member mentioned a while ago, the Appropriation Bill must be debated in this House. There are questions, Madam Speaker, that the Opposition can ask. There are motions, a number of them; we are debating one of them today. There are motions on the adjournment. There are the motions with respect to definite matters of public importance. There is a Private Members' Day. If you look at the Order Paper, Madam Speaker, you will see that the Opposition monopolizes that and that ought to be so. We have no problems with that. So that one day in every month, in other words, 25 per cent of the time we spend in Parliament is now allocated to the Opposition so that they can bring up matters that they consider to be important. The fourth Friday in every month, 25 per cent of the time, they have it.

Most importantly, Madam Speaker, there is the Public Accounts Committee. That is the most important committee. I just want to quote from a writer, Garvin Drewry, and I want to thank the Chief Whip for loaning me his book. I simply want to talk about this Public Accounts Committee. You will remember that the Member interjected a while ago and mentioned the fact that in 1979, there was a change in the UK with respect to committees where they brought in 14 Departmental Committees in 1979. I will want to speak of that in a while. But listen to what this writer is saying with respect to the Public Accounts Committee, Madam Speaker. He says:

"In directing our attention at the committee's concern with aspects of policy and administration ..."

He is now speaking about those 14 Departmental Committees:

"we must not forget the continuing importance of what is generally acknowledged to be the most formidable of the Commons Select Committees: The Public Accounts Committee."

So that the first point he is making is that even though we have now brought in all of these select committees, 14 of them, where they thought that they would change the world, the writer is saying that the most important committee is still that Public Accounts Committee. We have it here, Madam Speaker.

"The PAC was set up by Gladstone in 1861, as part of a continuing process of reform of the antiquated machinery for regulating public expenditure, initially with the technical function of seeing that departments were spending the money voted to them by Parliament strictly as Parliament had intended.

Gladstone's Exchequer and Audit Departments Act of 1866..."

Mr. B. Panday: 1866? No wonder.

Hon. K. Valley: "...later amended, then completed the last portion of the cycle of financial control by establishing the office of the Comptroller of Auditor General to verify the regularity of departmental expenditure by a process of audit, the logical extension of this role being that he should report his findings to the House of Commons via the PAC."

The point I am making, Madam Speaker, here you have the PAC, then the Auditor General and then the logical extension, as I said quite clearly—let me just make this point—remember I said very early, "as later amended". I hope they bear that in mind. The point is that exactly what happened in the UK was mirrored in Trinidad. There is the Auditor General's Department, there is the Public Accounts Committee, the Auditor General's work is reported to Parliament, the PAC looks at that and submits a report to the Parliament.

Mr. Maharaj: Is the Minister aware that one of the reforms of that Auditor General's Department in England was that it became an office of the Parliament itself and it has a national audit office, totally independent of the Government? Are you aware of that?

Hon. K. Valley: Madam Speaker, *ipso facto*.

Mr. Mohammed: What is that?

Hon. K. Valley: That is exactly the situation here. Of course he is. But he is more than that. The Auditor General is appointed by the President.

Mr. Maharaj: Madam Speaker, who appoints the President? In whom is the executive authority of this country vested? The Executive. Who is the Executive?

Mr. Manning: The President is elected by the Electoral College.

Mr. Humphrey: Where is the separation?

Mr. Manning: The records will show that the Opposition could have made an independent nomination and did not do it.

Mr. Mohammed: *Ipsa facto*, go ahead.

Hon. K. Valley: Madam Speaker, they continued here in making the point that the Public Accounts Committee is always chaired by a prominent Member of the Opposition, normally an ex-Minister of Finance or what have you. The point is that this Public Accounts Committee, even today, is still considered the most important committee with respect to accountability for public funds in the UK and in most parliamentary democracies.

What is the situation with respect to these various select committees or departmental committees which came into being in 1979? Madam Speaker, I think it is important that we understand the differences, not because the UK found it necessary to appoint 14 departmental select committees that we must follow that system here. We have to remember, Madam Speaker, that whereas our Parliament, the House of Representatives in Trinidad, consists of merely 36 Members, in the UK it is around 650 Members. Roughly about 100 of them will participate in the government at different levels: Cabinet ministers, ministers, under-secretaries and so on. There are roughly 550 of them for which something has got to be found, lest they get themselves into mischief.

We see a number of things: We see that these select committees are really concerned with back-bench power, as it were, to ensure that back-benchers' function is not only to sit, it is to use their talent while they are in training, as it were. These committees each have about 11 members. So when you consider 14 of them, you can see right away we are talking about over 100 Members.

Now, we have sufficient problems with our PAC and PA(E)C where we sit here and cannot get a quorum. I was the Chairman of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee and it was with great difficulty that I was able to do a report.

Mr. Mohammed: What year?

Hon. K. Valley: Covering the year July 1987 to August 1989. Notice that the first time we sat was in July of 1987. Madam Speaker, one of the points we made in this report was the fact that the committee had, to some extent, been affected by the waiting period necessary to obtain a quorum to hold meetings, resulting in

late starts with a failure to have a quorum on some occasions resulting in meetings being aborted or not called.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I will now interrupt this debate to take a statement from the Minister of Health.

**ST. ANN'S HOSPITAL
(DEATHS)**

The Minister of Health (Hon. John Eckstein): Madam Speaker, I wish to address this House on the incident at the St. Ann's Hospital that has resulted in the deaths of patients institutionalized there.

I wish at the outset to state that the Government, and I as Minister of Health, are grieved by the tragic episode. I take this opportunity to express my personal sympathy and that of my Government to the relatives and friends of those patients who have died.

I assure this honourable House and the citizens of this country that both the Government and the Ministry of Health are very concerned and we are taking a most serious view of this unfortunate incident.

In a statement made in this House on Monday, May 4, the acting Minister of Health announced that a full-scale comprehensive report from top officers of the Ministry had been commissioned. The report of that committee, as promised, was made public. It was made available to all media on Tuesday, May 12, and has received widespread publicity. The entire report was carried in the print media.

Given the very serious nature of the incident and its tragic consequences, the report has been referred to the Public Service Commission for such action as it considers appropriate. The report has also been referred to the Solicitor General, and I quote the last paragraph of the Ministry's memorandum:

"I shall be grateful if you will advise whether the report provides any basis on which disciplinary action may be initiated against any individual or individuals of this Ministry."

This advice, when received, will be forwarded to the Public Service Commission for members must be aware that according to the Public Service Commission Regulations, it is that body which is given the authority in law to prefer disciplinary charges against public servants.

Chapter VIII, Regulation 88(1) reads as follows:

"When the Commission becomes aware of any act of indiscipline or misconduct and the Commission is of the opinion that the public interest or the repute of the public service requires it, the Commission may direct the officer in writing to cease to report for duty until further notice from the Commission, and an officer so directed shall cease to perform the functions of his office forthwith."

Madam Speaker, the focal point in this whole incident at St. Ann's Hospital is clearly the system of food management within the hospital. This involves storage, preparation and distribution of food. The kitchen, which includes the central wash-up area is an integral part of the system. Therefore, let me place in some historical perspective, governmental action as it relates to this kitchen area.

In 1991, the kitchen at St. Ann's was perceived by the Ministry of Health as an area requiring priority attention. Consultants were engaged to prepare architectural and other drawings. For this exercise, they were paid \$43,071. I have here a letter dated March 26, 1991, from the consultants Watkins, Phillips, Bynoe and Partners inviting four contracting firms to tender for the construction of a central wash-up facility at St. Ann's Hospital in accordance with the enclosed drawings, specifications and scope of works. Bids were received from the contractors and evaluated, but no contract was awarded because Government did not make funds available for the execution of this very important project.

I also mention, in passing, and only because Members are already aware of it, having been mentioned in a recent debate in this House, that approximately \$45 million of the 1991 allocation of the Ministry of Health was transferred via PTSC and the Port Authority to the 1991 LID Programme.

In 1992, the Ministry of Health, recognizing the need for urgent improvement work to the said kitchen area, sought and obtained the approval of Cabinet on February 20, 1992 to utilize the sum of \$800,000 from the 1992 development programme provisions of the Ministry to undertake the refurbishing of the kitchen, including reconstruction of part of the suspended floor slab.

On May 4, 1992, \$2,000,000 was disbursed to the National Insurance Property Development Company to commence this project. In fact, work on this area is expected to begin next week.

Madam Speaker, we deeply regret that sufficient time was not available to address this area, but all indications are that we are moving with despatch to carry out priority works that have been identified since 1990.

Madam Speaker, Cabinet also granted approval in March, 1992 for the implementation of urgent upgrade works at hospitals and health centres throughout the country and authorized the Minister of Finance to negotiate and finalize the terms and conditions for funding in the sum of \$69 million, the estimated cost of the works identified. These projects expected to commence in the fourth quarter of 1992, will be undertaken as a joint initiative between NIPDEC and the Ministry of Health. Of the \$69 million, \$19.2 million, almost one-third, is earmarked for the development of the St. Ann's Hospital.

In addition, some other minor works were undertaken aimed at providing a safer environment for the preparation and service of food at the St. Ann's Hospital. The above actions, Madam Speaker, predate the incident at St. Ann's. Since the outbreak, the following actions, among others, have been taken:

- Nursing: The Chief Nursing Officer has met with nursing supervisor of the hospital to review the nursing administration and service activities of the hospital, including the nursing pool.

The staff development unit of the hospital has been directed to develop programmes aimed at further improving the ability of all nursing personnel to detect and respond to patients at risk in circumstances as experienced with the outbreak of diarrhoeal illness.

- Infection control: All infection control procedures and practices are being reviewed and manuals are to be updated and additional training provided for all staff.
- Wards: The National Maintenance Security and Company Limited recently contracted to supply plumbing services at the hospital has been requested to assess all toilet facilities. Ongoing assessment and repair of the pantries undertaken by hospital staff are to be intensified.
- Disaster epidemic preparedness: The disaster preparedness programme of the hospital is being reviewed and drills will be continued.

4.25 p.m.

Madam Speaker, I have just listed those areas in which action has actually been taken or initiated. Other areas are also being addressed, but on account of

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the very nature of the activity, immediate action is not possible. I can assure you that there will be no letting up. This is a very traumatic period, not only for the St. Ann's Hospital but also for the Ministry of Health and the people of this country, as a whole.

One major factor that has stood out in this whole situation is that the system of administration management is totally irrelevant and ineffective, even archaic. If the health services are ever going to work in this country, we need to make dramatic and far-reaching changes in the system by which the health sector is managed.

Several countries in Europe, Africa, the Americas, the Far East have recognized the impotence of the old centralized system and are discarding it for a decentralized form of management spearheaded by administrative health boards with direct responsibility for, and authority to manage the institutions they head.

Madam Speaker, the fundamental problem in the administration of our health services is that it is a system that separates responsibility from authority and makes efficient management all but impossible. This Government is resolutely committed to the radical transformation of the present system. You will recall that I made a statement in this Parliament to the effect that it is Government's policy to introduce boards for the management of all health institutions. My Ministry is now preparing the basic document which will form the basis for this decentralization. But until we change the system, we have to work within its constraints, and we are doing all that we can to avoid situations like what happened at the St. Ann's Hospital.

In every situation, Madam Speaker, there are those who respond with great feeling and concern for their fellowmen, regardless of their condition. The present situation is no exception. The Government, on behalf of all the people, expresses its sincere thanks to those members of staff of the St. Ann's Hospital and other health personnel without whose dedication the situation could have been worse.

In closing, Madam Speaker, once again, I extend condolences to the families of the deceased patients.

I thank you.

Mr. B. Panday: Show your sincerity by tendering your resignation.

Mr. Maharaj: Madam Speaker, would the hon. Minister clarify whether, apart from taking disciplinary action, having regard to the fact that there were 13

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deaths and having regard to what has been disclosed, he would consider sending the papers to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for him to institute criminal prosecutions, if necessary?

Secondly, when he says the system, who is the system; what is the system; and who is responsible for the system?

Thirdly, would he agree for the statement that he has made to be debated at some time in this House?

Hon. Member: Do not get up, resign!

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of this House is now suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.10 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

**SPECIAL JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE
(1992 BUDGET)**

Hon. Kenneth Valley: Madam Speaker, I was making the point that although there are now 14 departmental committees in the UK, it is the opinion of those who ought to know that the Public Accounts Committee is still, by far, the most important. I made the point that, in fact, the departmental committees was a way to give power to back-benchers. Permit me, Madam Speaker, to quote a bit from a book on *Parliament—Functions, Practice and Procedures* by J.A.G. Griffith and Michael Ryle.

On page 415, Madam Speaker, dealing with Select Committees, the point is made that—"Select committees consist primarily of back-benchers." Government as well as Opposition. There is a feeling, Madam Speaker, that these committees are just investigatory committees, that really there is no bite. In spite of that, however, it is said that there is a high level of demand for places on these committees especially the more important ones—

Mr. Mohammed: We cannot get a quorum.

Mr. Valley: I will tell you why that is so. They say:

"Competition for membership of the more prestigious committees is keen and overall there are many more volunteers than vacancies."

And if one wants to know why, Madam Speaker, one simply has to go to page 421 of this book, where they talk about travel. It says, Madam Speaker, that—

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"Frequently committees seek information away from Westminster. Committees which have power 'to adjourn from place to place' can go anywhere in the United Kingdom at their own discretion, their expenses being carried on the House of Commons (Administration) Vote. On average, each committee spends about £3,000 each year on United Kingdom visits. Overseas travel is more tightly controlled. The House of Commons Commission has delegated power to the Liaison Committee to authorize expenditure up to a ceiling for all committees, each of which has to make its case to the Liaison Committee."

In spite of the strict control, Madam Speaker, it might be interesting to note that in the normal length session of 1985—86, 14 committees spent some £220,000 on overseas visits, Foreign Affairs Committee, among others. So that the select committees as a fact in the UK have not proven to be of much significance.

With respect to reports, for example, again on page 423 it is reported that over the period 1979—1983 those departmental committees made 193 reports, of which six were debated. In other words, the rest were of little consequence. Six of those 193 reports were debated. In terms of the impact of these departmental committees they say—

"Select committees have not made a general impact on Government policy nor can it be said that departments today are making policy decisions in a distinctly different way from that of 10 years ago because of the existence of the departmentally related committees or because of any increased pressure from other select committees."

So that they are of little impact, Madam Speaker; they spend a lot of money; they travel hither, thither and yon, quite unlike the Public Accounts Committee. As I said before, it was found to be still a very important committee.

And it says, going back to Drewry—

"The PAC's role has steadily developed far beyond the narrowly technical concern with legality and regularity, as the Auditor General himself has delved ever more deeply into issues of administrative efficiency and effectiveness and value for money..."

And that is where some of the concerns of the Opposition seem to be valid, Madam Speaker. There seems to be a need for strengthening the Public Accounts Committee.

Madam Speaker, as Chairman of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee, some years ago we made that point about the Committee. As a matter of fact, we went even further. We looked at the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee in 1988 and directed the Clerk of the Committee at that time to write the Clerk of the House of Representatives; and Madam Speaker, I would just want to put this short note into the records. It states:

"Proposed Legislative Amendment—Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee".

It is addressed to the Clerk of the House of Representatives and it is from the Clerk of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

"I am directed to advise that the following proposals were considered and approved by the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee at its meeting held on Thursday March 10, 1988—

- (1) that draft amendment to Sections 71, 72 and 79, as outlined in Appendix 'A' be forwarded to the Speaker for consideration by the Standing Orders Committee..."

Madam Speaker, would you believe that up to now the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee is not deemed to be a Sessional Select Committee and that was the purpose of that first amendment, to have the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee so named because certain powers flow from that? The Standing Orders just do not consider the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee. That is the purpose of that amendment.

- "(2) That the Parliamentary Counsel be approached to draft an appropriate amendment to give the Auditor General, with respect to the audit of state companies, the duties and powers as outlined in Section 9(2) and Section 10(1) of the Exchequer and Audit Act as suitably modified and further, to give the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee the power to direct the Auditor General to carry out examinations into the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of such State enterprises where necessary or specific areas of such enterprises from time to time..."

The purpose of that amendment, Madam Speaker, was to avoid in the future a situation like the Plipdeco situation that Members opposite spoke about. In other words, recognizing that Parliament is the supreme body, we thought that it should have the powers necessary to do its work.

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Thirdly, Madam Speaker, we recommended—

"That the Parliament be approached to forward the following proposed amendments for the consideration of the Constitution Review Commission:

(and those were two recommendations having to do with the Constitution)— that the following should be added to section 119 subsection (5)—

"and which shall be appointed no later than the third sitting of Parliament. The Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee may meet whether Parliament is in session, in recess or is prorogued..."

simply giving power to the Committee and one expects that the same would follow for the PAC whether or not Parliament is meeting, Madam Speaker.

5.20 p.m.

The point is that we recognize the importance of accountability. But unlike those on the other side, where there seems to be a quest to look for new committees when those which are now existing seem unable to operate in an efficient manner, we believe that we ought to strengthen our existing institutions, especially in an environment where those who ought to know, have found that those institutions can, in fact, work efficiently.

Madam Speaker, as I said a while ago, one cannot help but wonder whether the motion, in a sense, does not suggest a dereliction of duty, or of obligation, by the Opposition, that in fact, given the existing institutions, the Public Accounts Committee, the fact that they can ask questions, the fact that they have 25 per cent of parliamentary time in the Lower House; a minimum of 25 per cent—one Friday in every four, minimum, to debate whatever matter they want. You have the motions on the adjournment. Again, as I said, this Government, as you saw earlier, takes the point about accountability very seriously, as you saw a while ago, the Minister coming to Parliament to account. Because we believe in that.

Mr. Humphrey: I just want to ask the hon. Minister if the functions of the Public Accounts Committee include monitoring the performance of the budget. Because the Public Accounts Committee is prescribed by the Constitution and it deals strictly with accounts, and accounts occur after the fact. But budget allocations are enabled by appropriation bills passed by this Parliament, and projects, especially in development programmes, are identified to be executed. Does the Public Accounts Committee, under the Constitution, as presently formed, have the power or the authority, or even the interest, in monitoring the

performance of the Government in delivering to the country the promises made in the budget speech of the Finance Minister?

Mr. Valley: Madam Speaker, I made the point that we believe that those committees ought to be strengthened. If the hon. Member understood Item 2 in our recommendations which were made in 1988, it says:

"The Parliamentary Counsel be approached to draft an appropriate amendment to give the Auditor General, with respect to the audit of State companies, the duties and powers as outlined in sections 9(2) and 10(1) of the Exchequer and Audit Act, as suitably modified....and to carry out examinations into the economy with efficiency and effectiveness.

Widening the scope. I am saying it would apply to the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr. Humphrey: They only deal with accounts.

Mr. Valley: Yes, but you are looking at the value for money concept. As a matter of fact, I believe that the Public Accounts Committee—and I did that when I was a Member of the PA(E)C. We asked questions. I never thought that we were limited to simply looking at accounts of 1983. When a company came before the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee, we tried to get a view concerning the current operations of the company; what they were doing. One would think that is what any committee would attempt to do.

So that simply to go through some of the comments made by previous speakers, the first one I picked up here is the Member for Chaguanas: "Opposition has a right to public accountability." I would be the first to agree. Not only the Opposition, but the country. We simply believe in that. We believe in the concept of accountability of the executive to the legislative, to the people, because we know that in the final analysis, sovereignty is the sovereignty of the people. While we admit that, in fact, in today's world it is the Government who is the initiator of legislation, that, in fact, if the Government wants a bill to pass it would pass; if the Government decides a bill ought not to pass, it would not pass. That is the system under which we operate, that, in fact, more and more, Parliament is becoming a debating chamber. But that is a very important role, because the purpose of the Opposition, as I understand it, is to get its message across.

I would not want to comment on the Caroni situation, Madam Speaker. Let me just say that I was at that session at which the Member for Laventille West

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spoke and I understood quite clearly, the Minister to be making a point with respect to equity as it pertained to LIDP, having nothing whatsoever to do with race. That is all I would say on that. I understood the Minister quite clearly that evening. So I was horrified when I saw in the ensuing week, that those who have skills, attempted with some success to turn it in a certain direction. I say time and time again, that our country of 1.2 million people can ill-afford the luxury of that type of discussion.

So that in rejecting this motion we, on this side, say quite simply, that institutions exist already and what is needed, if anything at all, is simply a strengthening of some of those institutions to allow them to perform a bit more efficiently. We have on the table, recommendations with respect to certain changes with respect to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee. I know my colleague who was the Chairman of the PAC, submitted similar recommendations to the Speaker on this matter. We are saying when that is done, our Public Accounts Committee can very well operate as efficiently as it is operating in the United Kingdom. Madam Speaker, I thank you.

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Raymond Palackdharrysingh(Caroni Central): Madam Speaker, the motion before us reads:

"Be it resolved that this Honourable House appoint a Special Joint Select Committee to monitor and report to the House on the performance of the Government in relation to implementation of the Budget proposals for 1992."

It is important to note the operational words "to monitor and report to the House on the performance of the Government in relation to implementation of the Budget proposals for 1992". That would suggest that while moneys are being expended there must be some check and balance operating simultaneously so as to bring some measure of account before the Parliament and the people, before it is too late.

When I listened to some of the arguments from the other side, I cannot believe that in a day and time like this, they are going to justify a system that has been relegated to the dustbin of history and try to keep it here, and I ask, why? It is clear that those who have "cocoa in the sun always looking for rain." To talk about no quorum on such an important committee, is not that in itself an admission of failure of the system in which we operate? If people are properly motivated as to the usefulness of such a committee then, I am afraid with about

10 members on a committee you would more than get four which is the normal quorum.

Madam Speaker, for most of the day it would appear that accounting to this House has been the focus of using the parliamentary Public Accounts Committee and trying to justify that committee as a cure-all for all the inefficiencies in the system. One must really listen carefully to hear what is coming from the other side and as we shall see later what is the investigative role of the committee. I am afraid it is a dog that barks after the thief has run away, and the sad thing about that is the dog has no teeth at all. You must understand this—because to talk about recommendations the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central, I have never seen him limping so lamely along trying to justify the unjustifiable, and talks about the draft amendment.

Madam Speaker, there have been recommendations to the PNM Government prior to 1986 concerning some of the weaknesses of the system and although they were in power, they did not have the political will to implement anything at all and that has been their problem. I do not know if this evolutionary process is so slow that it defies human reason and rationale for doing what is correct. If they are all creatures of evolution, what slow development they all have. I cannot understand that in the context. If the Government debated the important roles of the committees why then at this point in time the committees have not had the desired effect? We have gone through an exercise for most of the sittings of this Parliament this year that indicated to us that there was something so fundamentally wrong that it led us to question seriously the operations of the Parliament and, at the same time, to even question whether or not this august Chamber has become merely a talk shop.

If I want accountability can I get it here or do I go to the trenches and to the courts? That is the question one has to ask, and that is the situation because talk as you will, write them in profusion and nothing ever sticks in their minds; their brains and their hearts are also hard.

Madam Speaker, what a pathetic state of affairs that we face in this country. As we look at the Public Accounts Committee—and briefly, you set up the Public Accounts Committee and Members of this House are named to sit on that committee and are joined by our colleagues from the other place in equal numbers. We come here and we have with us staff from the Auditor General's Department, we have the Comptroller of Accounts represented and then we sit and have to be advised by those who have the technical knowledge as to the type

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of questioning to elicit certain responses and information from the committee. You would begin to realize so very often that if you have to go through this exercise all the time—there are a number of short-comings with the Public Accounts Committee, and I am confining my remarks to the Public Accounts Committee because I was a Member of the Public Accounts Committee and in the last year I was also the Chairman. I cannot say very much about the PA(E)C except that one previous Member of the House fasted for 40 days at least to bring attention to some of the deficiencies of that PA(E)C. You will get to realize that though the Public Accounts Committee is a committee of this House, whenever its findings and recommendations are submitted, they seem to be of no avail. I recall somewhere in 1988 when the hon. Member for Laventille West—at that time it was not Laventille West, I cannot remember the exact designation—I remember I served with him on that committee and so very often we seemed to have been of one mind when certain things came up. Then, for the last year, because of the changes in the Parliament, I was asked to serve as the Chairman of the committee. Of course, while the Member for Laventille West was there, a report was submitted and debated. Before the session closed in 1991 we tried to get another one in before the Parliament for debate but it had become almost an exercise in futility because it depends upon the prevailing attitude of the Government of the day to respond to the recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee.

It is said—and this is the Public Accounts Committee document which I find very useful, prepared by C.S. Gopaulsingh, Assistant Secretary who was the clerk to the Public Accounts Committee, was passed to the Public Accounts Committee on which he delivered an address on July 6, 1962. He made some very important suggestions in this paper and he said when he looked at the control which the committee effects he found that:

“...there were several areas in which control could have been made: Expert control, financial control, judicial control, non-party control, control which is deterrent and a control through operating expert, post-facto is not a mere post mortem”.

Madam Speaker, in terms of expert control he was of the view that the Public Accounts Committee, would have had the help of the Audit Department to help it with its work. I am afraid, that while he suggested this, the kind of expert control that was needed did not find its realization neither from the Auditor General's Department, nor the Comptroller of Accounts, because these committees having

been set up so long, no real adjustments for provisions have been made for them, since perhaps 1962 and in spite of the growing number of state and statutory bodies, their staff has been almost at the same level.

5.40 p.m.

The Auditor General has on more than one occasion indicated one way or another to this Parliament, that the staffing it has is inadequate. How can the Public Accounts Committee depend—and probably if we go to share our own experience in the working situation, those comments have been made over and over again to us. Then we have financial control and as the gentleman wrote, it is as the name implies, an accounts committee, directing its attention to strict appropriation, accuracy, authority and responsibility. It looks into cases of waste and extravagance and also the award of contracts.

I am afraid that in terms of waste, no country in the world seems to parallel us. In terms of extravagance, again, we have a record that is difficult to beat; and in terms of the awarding of contracts, there are so many mechanisms that are employed that there is no one single procedure in which principles are established for the awarding of contracts. Therefore, neither this House nor the people of this country will know the truth about some of them.

Time and again, even the procedures laid down by the Central Tenders Board have been abrogated and its provisions have been amended from time to time. Of course, when you come to look at the PNM and their record with respect to government-to-government contracts, I am afraid that not even another 30 years in office will absolve them from the type of mismanagement and extravagance that they have impacted upon this country with respect to corruption.

Again, I am reading about a new procedure for awarding contracts in this country, that is design/finance/construct (dfc). I am wondering if we have to wait another three, four or five years for reports to come in to find out what is happening and what has taken place. We have to be concerned. I was told that the police headquarters which was recently constructed, the original cost has far been exceeded. I want to know if they would answer and tell the nation what is happening. At the same time, a \$200 million contract is being awarded to build a maximum security prison at Golden Grove. I am wondering what form of bidding or what was the system used for the award of this contract.

There are many practices which are carried out that do not fall under the purview of this Parliament at all. All that we have to do is to accept it. Do you

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know that many of these state enterprises and statutory boards are supposed to submit their financial reports to the Auditor General by the time of July in the ensuing year? That has not taken place in very many instances, from six months it goes to six years, maybe 10 years at times and nothing has happened. Is there any method by which to compel these statutory boards and other similar bodies to keep in line? The Public Accounts Committee cannot do that because they cannot deliberate until an account is submitted in this Parliament and then refer to it. Do you see how ineffective, useless and obsolete the present system is? It really does us no good and this is why the motion moved by the hon. Member for Couva North is so appropriate. It might be a bit untimely, because it should have happened about 10 years ago, but it is still appropriate. If we do not have such a mechanism, I am afraid that this country will never begin to practise the morality of accounting to the people.

We all know the experts know how to find the loopholes and to evade. The other thing is that on many occasions, the Public Accounts Committee has found itself trying to find accounting officers who might have migrated and in many instances some of them have gone to the great beyond. The Public Accounts Committee is so limited, that to even suggest the power of resurrection for it is a far-fetched idea.

When we look to judicial control, this is said to have emanated from Treasury minutes which are finally presented by the Treasury with recommendations in the field which are supposed to be given some measure of implementation. However, I am sure that you will agree that some of these matters will not see the light of day, because some of the ministries and statutory bodies themselves, in terms of management, are ill-equipped to deal with these matters. When you come to this House, the Government seems to be so preoccupied with the business of the day, that they do not really pay you any mind.

On the question of the committee being non-partisan, true, that might be so, but one of the constraints which we have is that when we have people in politics, the adversarial type politics as we have in this House now, we will sit on a committee and might be of the same mind on certain issues, but if the Leader of the House and possibly the Whip says to you this is our position, all the work goes down the drain.

5.50 p.m.

Will it be possible, Madam Speaker, for you to indicate to Members of this House that when they are here they shall not be subjected to control of party,

because if it is a committee of the House, they must be free to speak their minds, irrespective of the party to which they belong. *[Interruption]* You will well appreciate that my leader has never said that he is going to tie any camels on this side. We are all free to graze in plenitude.

Madam Speaker, I want you to understand how very limited the Public Accounts Committee is in the present situation. I want you to understand that no amount of dressing up of that committee will help because the rationale for its existence is not really monitoring, it is to try to look at what has happened when so many things have gone wrong, and so many things cannot be recalled. I am sure that if we could have recalled many people from foreign countries, we would have done that; if we could have recalled them from their graves, we would have done that, but it is not possible. So, the time is now. It must be an existential situation in which there is a functional committee to meet the challenges of the day and to help form its direction; help implement it in the way and manner it was supposed to be. We must understand that very well because if we do not I am afraid we would have lost the boat, in this generation, to do something with some respect and dignity for posterity to look at and say, those were men and women of political will. I am well aware of current theological thinking where they are coming with a mother's prayer also. I want to concede that and give it to them. I want to bring to your attention that no matter what the Treasury does, in terms of Treasury minutes, I feel that they have been far from effective.

The Public Accounts Committee, as we well know, is given its life by the Constitution and there are some concerns about how it functions. There has been a debate on the matter as to whether or not the deliberations of this committee should be held *in camera* as our sittings are, or be open to the public. If this committee is so important to the life and work of this House, then I believe that other citizens must at least be given the opportunity to have their interests satisfied even in observing what is taking place. I do not know how long we can continue to hide away from public's view, some of the most important deliberations of this Parliament and this committee.

It is a shame that in a democracy like this what happens in this House has been so distorted by the media, and what happens on the Public Accounts Committee is never at all heard by the citizens of this country. That has to be a concern because what transpires in this House and what is reported of what is transpiring, is abominable, because it is so inadequate and so biased.

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I have the good fortune to put my hands on a Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on a Comprehensive Audit on the Internal Audit Function in Government Ministries/Departments and Statutory Boards, of April 1987. *[Interruption]* You read that. Which manifesto are you talking about? You read this? You understood what you read? If you did, I am sure that the kind of apology and resistance all those speakers have made on the other side today, would not have been made.

I just want to quote from page 20 which says:

"6.7 Discussions with the Comptroller of Accounts revealed that he was not clear about his role in the establishment and management of internal audit sections. He was of the opinion that it was the role of both the accounting officers and his department to establish the internal audit sections and monitor the operations. He admitted that guidelines were not issued by his division on the establishment of internal audit sections, but stated that accounting officers were well aware that the services of his division were available when needed.

6.8 The Comptroller of Accounts stated that his division's involvement so far was limited to organising training sessions and conducting conferences for internal auditors over the years. He stressed that the prime responsibility lay with accounting officers with back-up support from his division.

6.9 The Comptroller of Accounts appears to be a passive rather than an active participant."

6.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker, what could a Public Accounts Committee do? A Public Accounts Committee will not have time, will not have resources, will not have anything whatsoever to get down to where the expenditures are made to really verify what is happening. In that case, Madam Speaker, this system of nominal accounting, where books are balanced, does not tell you about performances or value for money. That is why you have so much corruption. It is time that there be some effective mechanism whereby, simultaneously, money are expended from this House; there must be some measure of monetary control and supervision. Is that what the Government is afraid of, Madam speaker?

Madam Speaker: I will interrupt this debate, hon. Members, so that the Member for Couva South can deal with the matter which was raised. It is now 6.00 p.m. I have granted the Member for Couva South permission to raise the matter to move the adjournment of the House on a matter of public importance.

**CARAPICHAIMA RC SCHOOL
(TOILET FACILITIES)**

Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj (*Couva South*): Madam Speaker, I am very sad that it has become necessary to raise a matter like this in this House, as I thought that the experiences of St. Ann's Hospital would have forced the Government to ensure that public institutions, hospitals and schools to which they have an obligation to properly maintain and to ensure that the health and safety of persons who go to that institution are protected.

It seems, however, Madam Speaker, that regardless of what happens, for some unfortunate reason, this Government does not care. I am talking about a school and the school is Carapichaima RC School. I am talking about over 900 innocent children who, since Monday, are being denied the opportunity of education because of the fault of some official. This school, which was built 75 years ago, was build initially to accommodate 250 students. The school has 32 teachers: 24 female teachers, 8 male teachers. During the last few weeks, the situation in the school has gotten worse and worse. It has culminated in the fact that the toilet facilities are almost non-existent.

Madam Speaker, in that school, with that number of students and with the number of teachers there are one an a half toilets. When I say one and a half toilets, I mean that there is one toilet and there is actually half of a toilet in that it is almost non-functional. What happens is that the other toilets are non-functioning and have not been repaired despite requests to the Ministry to have them repaired. There is a parent/teachers' association and the matter is so grave, Madam Speaker, that the parents and the teachers, some of them, have decided to come to Parliament today.

You have a situation where 900 students at intermission time, rush to go into one and a half toilets and the teachers have to use the same toilets that the students use. Male or female, same toilets. Madam Speaker, the sad thing about it is that it is a co-educational school. When the teachers go into the toilets, the students have to block the door so that other children or teachers may not see them. There is a door which is non-functional and the door has to be put there and they have to hold it. The toilet is near to the Southern Main Road, so that the teachers and the students have to be very careful that their privacy is not invaded.

Madam Speaker, the problem could be simply solved, at least with respect to the toilets. It is shocking that such a situation has been able to get so bad that children are forced to stay home.

Mr. B. Panday: That is the mandate to rule.

Mr. Maharaj: There are no urinals in the school. In other words, Madam Speaker, as one would know it, there is a urinal system. The boys can use the urinals, but there are no urinals. What happens is that the urine flows from the toilets into a drain near to the classes and the stench—and apart from that, the risks involved for the children in being infected. Teachers and children are forced to go into a nearby cemetery to respond to the call of nature.

Mr. B. Panday: That is the great caring Government we have. That is a scary Government, not a caring Government.

Mr. Maharaj: The septic tank is at the back of the toilet, which is near to the road. The septic tank is partially exposed so the children could be infected from the septic tank.

Madam Speaker, that is not the end of the matter. Coupled with those facts, in the infant department there is a drain which runs through the vice-principal's office and some part of the primary department. This drain is covered with a few concrete slabs. When rain falls, the drain overflows and there can be no school and the vice-principal has to come out. When it rains, also, teachers and children, while in the school, have to use umbrellas. That is the kind of situation which exists at that school.

Madam Speaker, do you know that there are only two water taps which are working in that school and at intermission time, 900 children have to rush to two taps and the teachers have to use the same taps? Madam Speaker, this is not only a matter with respect to amenities at the school. This is a serious situation. From those facts, it is even clear to a layman, if one goes there, that there is a serious risk of cholera by the use of these facilities by the children.

Do we want 13 people to die? We have heard today from the Minister of Health some similar circumstances, at the health facilities. Do we want that to happen before steps and measures are taken to ensure that these facilities are such that they will be safe for these children? I would like, Madam Speaker, to appeal to the Government that they would tell these parents, tell the public something today that that will reinforce in their minds—if they think that the people believe, but for the people to be sure—that this Government seriously cares about the rights of children; this Government cares.

Madam Speaker, I do not want to use law in this matter because one can have anything guaranteed in a Constitution; one can have anything guaranteed in the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But it would work if the men and institutions which are supposed to administer them are committed to social justice and committed to moral and spiritual values. It would work. But I ask, Madam Speaker, that those on the other side would remember—

Mr. B. Panday: Other side of heaven, of course.

Mr. Maharaj:—that they took the confidence of the people, and despite the fact that they are only a Government of a 6,000-vote majority, and despite the fact that we on this side of the House and when I say "we", I mean both the National Alliance for Reconstruction and the UNC—have more votes than they, they went to the population and said at page 32 of this manifesto:

"The party is committed to improving administrative machinery to effect better management of all schools."

Madam Speaker, I am told that at this school land was even given by a villager for a new school to be built. I am told that the Government promised the construction of the new school. But what I am here to do this afternoon, Madam Speaker, is not to ask specifically for the Government to take steps now to build a new school, for them to build it tomorrow. I am not asking for that. What I am asking, Madam Speaker, is that the Ministry of Education, the Government, within 48 hours—because what is there, a caring Government and a committed Government can solve those problems in 48 hours, so that those children can go to school Monday morning and a signal can be sent to the country that the rights of children are protected, or that this Government cared about the rights of children.

Madam Speaker, this is a public school, and under the Education Act, parents are compelled to send children to school. This Government, by its action or inaction, in effect, has prevented the parents from fulfilling their statutory duty.

Madam Speaker, in England recently, a Minister who was supposed to perform his statutory duty—in this country, from what the Attorney General said it might take 10 years—but the Minister was compelled by mandamus to perform his statutory duty with respect to education. Will children have to resort to litigation in order to compel the Government to do its duty?

Under the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, we hear much about the Westminster system. But under the constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, if a Minister cannot ensure that children are properly educated and housed, they are

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supposed to resign. The Government is supposed to resign. If the Government, under the Westminster system, does not do its duty and cannot perform its functions, conventions demand that the Government resign.

Mr. Manning: Is that written in the British Constitution?

Mr. Maharaj: It is a convention. Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for San Fernando East does not appreciate that in England there is no written Constitution so that would not be written into the Constitution.

Madam Speaker, in England they operate by convention. We tried to transplant some of the Westminster conventions into the Constitution. What has happened is that the transplanting of part of the Westminster system has proved to be sometimes a detriment in that in the Caribbean, we do not hear about Ministers resigning at all; public officials do not resign.

Madam Speaker, I am indebted to you and this House for giving me the opportunity, for giving the children of this nation the opportunity of raising such an important matter, a matter which affects their lives.

Mr. Valley: You already did it because you are testing our patience.

Mr. Maharaj: Madam Speaker, you notice the arrogance on that side: Testing their patience. The arrogance that the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central went to this country and said he cares, he loves, and we are testing their patience when we talk about the suffering of children. I hope, Madam Speaker, that the people from Carapichaima who voted PNM would realize what has happened.

Madam Speaker, incidents like these demonstrate whether people are committed by word or by action.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Dr. The Hon. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, I think I should start, in responding to my colleague from Couva South, by apologizing to all those unfortunate parents who have been sitting in the Parliament all afternoon waiting to hear about this unfortunate outcome.

Madam Speaker, the fact that a school has had to be closed and children are denied the opportunity to go to school is a matter of great concern both to me and my Government and to all of us in this House. I have absolutely no problem with any Member of Parliament seeking to raise the matter in a manner which is geared towards getting attention and also raising it commensurate with the facts.

Madam Speaker, what I find extremely abhorrent and a sleight of the hand of the Member of Couva South is the intellectual dishonesty that underpins his argument. He raised his voice to the highest decibels when he spoke about the name of this school, but he dropped his voice when he mentioned "RC School".

Mr. B. Panday: He did?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: You did not hear that? He is so close to you, you did not hear it was an "RC School"?

Mr. B. Panday: It was the public address system.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: It was the public address system which caused him to call the school a "public school", seeking to give the impression that it is a Government school for which the Government has full responsibility and that the Government has fallen down on its responsibility. Madam Speaker, what is the fact? The matter, as eloquently described by the dishonest Member for Couva South—

Mr. Maharaj: Madam Speaker—

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I take that back, I apologize.

Mr. Maharaj: I take strong offence to that, because I can tell you about dishonesty.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I take that back. Madam Speaker, I raise the question.

Mr. B. Panday: National Quarries.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Which side are you, Couva North or South?

Mr. B. Panday: Both.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Intellectual dishonesty, Madam Speaker, I can deal with the Lone Ranger, I cannot deal with Tonto at the same time. I will take them one at a time.

Madam Speaker: Order please!

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: The problem as outlined by the Member for Couva South is, in fact, a serious problem. The problem relates to the Carapichaima RC School and, therefore, in the context of the way the argument was presented, that is what I have a problem with, because I interpret the Member's approach to be less than forthright with the House, the public and the parents. Let me

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demonstrate to you, Madam Speaker, why I said that and why I apologized to those who were kept in the House all afternoon in that piece of shenanigan.

Madam Speaker, I started my education at a primary school in Tobago, Mason Hall Government School. It was the first primary school built by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and recently it celebrated 50 years of existence in that village. I raise this in the context, Madam Speaker, only insofar as to ask the Member for Couva South to seek to go to the records of that particular school and engage himself in understanding what went on when the Government decided to build a Government school in Tobago. The denominations objected most strenuously because, Madam Speaker, in this country, the denominational schools are very closely tied into religious freedoms and persuasions. There are approximately 500 primary schools in this country; 400 of those schools are run by the denominations; the RC being one of those. There are approximately 100 public schools for which the Government has 100 per cent responsibility.

Mr. B. Panday: Would the hon. Minister state categorically that the Government has no responsibility for the Carapichaima—and I am saying "RC" loud now—RC School?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I am talking to you and I am talking to the unfortunate parents who were brought here this afternoon to see the performance of sleight of hand. Because, this House knows of the nature of the arrangement for the sharing of authority and responsibility with respect to the primary schools in this country. The Government has some responsibility and the church has some responsibility.

In the case of the Carapichaima RC School, apparently, like many other primary schools—and I mentioned to you there are approximately 400 schools which are the responsibility mainly of the denominations. The arrangement is that the Government provides a certain measure of support and the Church body provides the other support.

With respect to maintenance and, in particular, maintenance of sanitary facilities, Madam Speaker, which is the facility at the schoolhouse which has become more degraded, over the years, the church bodies have had great difficulty in providing their input. There is an arrangement where the Boards would provide the money to maintain the schools and then they can recover some of it from the Government. What has been happening in the economic situation and the rising costs of maintenance, Madam Speaker, is that many of these

organizations have not been able to come up with the funds for maintenance and, therefore, the system would break down there. The Government has intervened.

In the light of recognition of the fact of the serious situation as has been described by the Member for Couva South with respect to the Carapichaima RC School, which I said applies to the many of the other schools, there has been a system of either completely rebuilding some of those primary schools, doing major renovations to some of those schools or in the case of some schools with a peculiar problem, as described by him, the Government has offered to come in and assist in all respects, except that the church schools would provide the materials. Even with that, Madam Speaker, there is difficulty with the arrangement. Some of the denominations have been having difficulty in coming up with even that. In some cases, some denominations have a large number of schools under their portfolio.

Mr. Maharaj: Madam Speaker, could the Minister say quite simply whether the Roman Catholic Board is responsible for the state of affairs or whether the Ministry of Education is responsible for the state of affairs and whatever the situation, does the Ministry intend to do anything about it?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, the Members for Couva South and North like to speak for me. I have my privilege, with your permission, to speak, Madam Speaker. If the Member would listen and wait I will tell him that at my time. When he had his time he took it to mislead the people. He used his time to mislead the public.

Madam Speaker, the point I am making is that there is a protocol arrangement for the management of these schools, and the sharing of resources and responsibilities. The extent that there is a breakdown in that arrangement, largely due to the inability of the denominational boards to provide their aspects, the Government has been forthcoming in offering additional assistance outside the protocol.

It is unfortunate in this case that the school had to be closed. Much of what the Member has described in this House in his grand performance really, Madam Speaker, belongs somewhere else. Somewhere else where the responsibility lies, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Maharaj: On a point of order. Is the hon. Member saying that the description of the inhumane conditions which children and parents have to face belongs somewhere else than in this Parliament?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I can speak for myself. I do not need the Member for Couva south to speak for me. I am talking about responsibility.

Mr. B. Panday: That is what we are asking, whose responsibility is it?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, the responsibility for the Carapichaima RC School is the responsibility of the Roman Catholic Board. To the extent that a problem arose and the Government has some measure of responsibility under the protocol, the Government has intervened in that, Madam Speaker and as a result of the Member for Couva South's grandstanding here this afternoon—

Mr. B. Panday: Will the Member give way?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: My patience has grown so thin here this afternoon. He is making a joke of it. Are you serious or making a joke?

Mr. B. Panday: I am serious.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Get up, then.

Mr. B. Panday: Is the Member saying that we should have taken our complaint to the Archbishop? I am deadly serious.

Mr. Mohammed: You looked for that, boy.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, the extent to which the Government has a responsibility, the Government is discharging its responsibility.

The urgency of the situation is such that the Ministry of Education, through the Catholic Education Board and management, has instituted action for the refurbishment of the sanitary installation at the Carapichaima RC School. This has resulted in the mobilization of the church board's contractor, Mr. Edward Caesar and Sons.

The scope of works to be carried out in the context of the immediate problem, Madam Speaker, is as follows:

- 1) Repair, replacement of all damaged toilet sets, bowls, tanks and seats;
- 2) Repair, replacement of face basins and water troughs;
- 3) Repair of the boys' urinal and the attendant plumbing works;
- 4) De-sludge all clogged sewer lines and general repairs to the toilet block.

Madam Speaker, the contractor has been urged to engage his work-force with the primary intention of satisfying a Tuesday, May 26, deadline for the re-opening of the school. These actions, in the discharge of responsibility, are being carried out under the aegis of the Catholic Board.

I think, Madam Speaker, that should make it abundantly clear as to whose responsibility it is and who is engaged in doing it with the assistance and involvement of the Government. It is not necessary when an unfortunate situation develops for Members of this House to seek to behave in such a way as to give the wrong impression; knowing full well what the real story is, and if he was so caring, he would have told the parents exactly what the situation was and would have saved them having to sit in Parliament to watch him “gallery” all afternoon.

6.30 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Local Government and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Madam Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourned to Friday, May 29, 1992 at 1,30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: I have granted permission to the hon. Member for Caroni East to raise a matter under Standing Order No. 12, and the hon. Member may now make his contribution.

Mr. Shamshuddin Mohammed (Caroni East): Madam Speaker, I stand here a bit scared, in the context that the response to the matter which I have to raise has to come from the Member for Diego Martin West.

Mr. Valley: Madam Speaker, on a point of order. We are unaware that there is a motion on the adjournment.

Madam Speaker: It is unfortunate, but this was granted about two weeks ago.

Mr. Valley: A motion on the adjournment for today, for which leave was given two weeks ago?

Madam Speaker: Yes, under Standing Order No. 11.

Mr. Mohammed: I must point out, for the benefit of the Leader of the House, that this is a matter which requires a departmental response. I envisage that the procedure will be that when the motion is filed, it is communicated directly to the Ministry concerned, and I am quite certain that my friend, the

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Member for Diego Martin West, will be quite prepared to respond, having regard to the urgency.

Mr. Valley: Madam Speaker, there seems to be some error. We are uninformed and we do not even know which Minister the motion falls under. No one here is prepared to respond to any motion on the adjournment. In those circumstances, I ask that this matter be deferred.

Mr. Mohammed: Madam Speaker, I am aware that the Members on that side are receiving education in government and collective responsibility is important. If the Leader of Government Business does not know that, I am very surprised. He is implying, therefore, that the Minister in the Cabinet, who is responsible for this matter, did not communicate it. In essence, according to our Standing Orders, it is the head of the particular department who is responsible for this particular motion.

Mr. Valley: Madam Speaker, quite simply, the Leader of Government Business is normally informed a day or two before, so that we can arrange our business. We are extremely surprised to hear about a motion on the adjournment at this time.

Madam Speaker: May I inform the hon. Member that there is a possibility that the Clerk of the House who looked after this matter—unfortunately, he is at a conference at the moment. I am not too sure what happened but I know that approval was granted by the Speaker. I thought this was brought to the attention of the Leader of Government Business. However, if this is the position of the Leader of Government Business, we would defer it and have the matter raised at the next sitting of the House.

Mr. Mohammed: Madam Speaker, this particular provision in the Standing Orders is separated from "Definite Matter of Urgent Public Importance" by a very thin thread—there is an element of urgency in it.

Madam Speaker: I know.

Mr. Mohammed: I thought perhaps the Government would have, if they are unable to respond allow me to present the case of the particular matter and they will respond if they wish. The fact of the matter is, it requires a simple response from the Minister who is in charge.

Madam Speaker: What I am saying is that the Chair is aware of it, I granted leave to the hon. Member to raise it and it is raised under Standing Order No. 11.

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Unfortunately, however, it has not been brought to the Leader of Government Business, but since I have already granted leave, I do not think that one week's delay will really cause us too much problem in the poultry situation. The Member can raise it, definitely, on the next occasion.

Mr. Mohammed: Madam Speaker, I must make this comment, however. It would seem to me that something is wrong somewhere. I do not know whether it is the number of trips that are being taken abroad or whether there are some other factors involved, but we are getting requests, repeatedly, in this House to defer answering questions; now we are deferring motions, and this is a very simple matter.

Mr. Valley: Madam Speaker, I object to that. We are just uninformed. We cannot participate in a debate for which we have no knowledge. We will not do the Opposition that.

Madam Speaker: I do not think that is really a fair statement. This comes to the Speaker's office, and it is the Clerk's responsibility to really bring it to the attention of the Leader of Government Business so if it has not been done, it is really not your fault, it is not my fault.

Mr. Mohammed: We do not know if the Minister has received the communication and not communicated with his Leader. This needs a departmental response.

Madam Speaker: Under our system, the Leader of Government Business has to be informed.

Mr. Mohammed: They are not communicating, I do not know.

Madam Speaker: In the circumstances, I will be granting permission to raise this matter at the next sitting of the House.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.35 p.m.