

Leave of Absence

Friday, February 5, 1993

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, February 05, 1993

The House met at 1.40 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 Caroni East, Mr. Shamshuddin Mohammed.

PAPERS LAID

1. Caribbean Industrial Research Institute (CARIRI)—Annual Report 1991. [*The Minister in the Ministry of Planning and Development and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. C. Robinson-Regis)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of National Flour Mills Limited for the year ended December 31, 1989. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. W. Mottley)*]
3. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of National Flour Mills Limited for the year ended December 31, 1990. [*Hon. W. Mottley*]
Papers 2 and 3 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.
4. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of the Government Employees' Provident Fund for the year ended December 31, 1989. [*Hon. W. Mottley*]
5. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of the Government Employees' Provident Fund for the year ended December 31, 1990. [*Hon. W. Mottley*]
6. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of the Government Employees' Provident Fund for the year ended December 31, 1991. [*Hon. W. Mottley*]
7. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of the Management Development Centre for the year ended December 31, 1990. [*Hon. W. Mottley*]

Papers 4—7 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**Labour Intensive Development Programmes
(Nariva)**

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

Would the Minister state how many Labour Intensive Development Programmes are earmarked for the area of Nariva during the 1993 fiscal year?

(Recruitment)

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

Would the Minister state:

- (a) Who determines where these projects would be located?
- (b) What are the criteria used for selecting labour for these projects?
- (c) What method would be used for recruiting labour for these projects?
- (d) What period will each recruit be employed on the said projects?
- (e) How does a person know his name is on the Register for employment and when will he be selected for employment?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): The Minister of Works and Transport wishes to advise that the Labour Intensive Development Programme was terminated on December 31, 1992 and has been replaced by the Unemployment Relief Programme. As stated previously on several occasions in this honourable House, the Ministry's Unemployment Relief Programmes are administered on a regional basis and not on a specific area basis. Resources are allocated to the various regions within the programme on the basis of a number of factors—geographical, demographic, population density, levels of development and so on.

Mr. Sudama: Is there a region called Nariva?

Mr. Jurai: Madam Speaker, this is a specific question that asked about the constituency of Nariva and that is why I am asking. Could you so relate?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, as I have stated in this House on several occasions, projects are not allocated on the basis of constituencies. [*Interruption*]

**School Cleaners
(Recruitment)**

103. Mr. Krish Jurai asked the Minister of Works and Transport:

Would the Minister state:

- (a) How many persons were employed as cleaners in schools as at December 31, 1992?
- (b) How many men were employed?
- (c) How many women were employed?
- (d) What are the criteria used for the selection of persons for the 1993 programme?
- (e) What method would be used for recruiting labour for these projects?
- (f) What period will each recruit be employed on the said project?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, answer to part (a): 18,353; (b), 191; (c), 18,162; (d), experience, qualifications and economic need; (e) the criteria described in (d) are applied to the master registration list of unemployed persons to select labour; (f) the primary objective of Unemployment Relief Programmes is to ensure the widest possible distribution of employment opportunities. As a result the period of employment for persons in such programmes will be limited. The target periods of employment for various categories of workers are now under review.

**Scavenging Cost
(Regional Corporations)**

104. Mr. Sahid Hosein (Siparia) asked the Minister of Local Government:

Will the Minister indicate to this House what was the cost of scavenging for 1992 in each of the Regional Corporations?

The Minister of Local Government and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Madam Speaker, the total cost of scavenging in 1992 in the nine regional corporations was \$42,673,396.00 detailed as follows:

Diego Martin	—	\$ 5,967,636
San Juan/Laventille	—	12,355,673
Tunapuna/Piarco	—	10,158,931

Oral Answers To Questions
[HON. K. VALLEY]

Friday, February 5, 1993

Sangre Grande	—	2,209,612
Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo	—	3,231,791
Rio Claro/Mayaro	—	1,787,420
Siparia	—	1,615,482
Penal/Debe	—	1,780,719
Princes Town	—	3,566,132

**Water Wells
(Siparia)**

105. Mr. Sahid Hosein (*Siparia*) asked the Minister of Public Utilities:

Will the Minister indicate to this House:

- (a) When will the following water wells in the Siparia Constituency be brought back on stream:-
 - (i) Clarke Road #5
 - (ii) Clarke Road #6; and
 - (iii) Barrackpore #13?
- (b) When will the new well at Morne Diablo be equipped and brought into service?
- (c) What steps are being taken to bring the inoperative wells that service the Penal Water Works back into service?
- (d) What measures are being taken to bring relief to residents affected by the non-functioning of the wells as stated in (a) and (c)?
- (e) What steps are being taken by WASA to ensure that the following areas are in receipt of an adequate water supply:-
 - (1) Upper Lachoos Road;
 - (2) Dabiedial Road;
 - (3) Katwaroo Trace;
 - (4) Dignity Village;
 - (5) Transfer Village; and
 - (6) Sunress Road?

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Morris Marshall): The Minister wishes to advise this Honourable House as follows:

(a) (i) Clarke Road, Well #5

The motor that services this well is defective and thus rendered the well inoperative. Funds are expected to be available by March 15, 1993 to have the well operative once more.

(ii) Clarke Road, Well #6

This well is, in fact, #4 and was erroneously described as #6. This well has been out of order for the past 6 years. Major electrical works are necessary to bring this well into operation. This well has to be completely rehabilitated. The cost of rehabilitation to this well is to be determined.

(iii) Barrackpore, Well #13

This well was restored to operation on December 10, 1992.

(b) Morne Diablo

This well requires an estimated \$100,000 to be fully restored to operation. Due to constraints in funding, a projected date for restoration has been fixed at June, 1993.

(c) Penal Waterworks

There are two wells, Nos. 7 and 11, which are inoperative at present. Well No. 11 is being repaired and should be restored into operation in early February, 1993.

(d) There are two major projects which are being implemented by the Water and Sewerage Authority at the present time that will have a positive impact on the water supply to this region. These are the St. Patrick and the Point Fortin Water Supply Projects. The Water and Sewerage Authority has indicated that to date it has completed works to improve the amount of water supplied to the area by rehabilitating and equipping well sources at Clarke Road and Barrackpore and, in addition, two wells have been drilled in Morne Diablo and Penal, of which the one at Morne Diablo has been completed and the other at Penal is being equipped and will be in operation within the next few months. The Water and Sewerage Authority has also embarked upon additional works under Phase 1 of the Point Fortin Water Supply Project (pipe laying) and on completion this would have the effect of conveying water from Caroni-Arena into the system and thus would

Oral Answers To Questions
[HON. M. MARSHALL]

Friday, February 5, 1993

allow water generated from the Penal and Siparia Waterworks to be used for augmenting the supply into Siparia.

1.50 p.m.

The construction of a new treatment plant at Penal to treat an estimated 9,000 cubic meters of water daily, is included in the Authority's long-term projects under its development programme for 1993. In the interim, extensive water trucking is being carried out from the facilities at the Penal Waterworks to supplement the existing service.

As aforementioned, in the short term extensive water trucking is being carried out from the facilities at the Penal Waterworks to supplement the existing supply of water to the Siparia region which includes the following areas:

Upper La Choos Road

Katwaroo Trace

Digity Village

Transfer Village

Gunness Road

In this regard, three trucks have been assigned to cover these areas with approximately two hundred and seventy trips per month. In the long term, it is projected that the construction of a new treatment plant at Penal, which is included in the Authority's Development Programme for 1993, will ensure that an adequate supply of water is provided for residents of this region.

Mr. Sudama: May I ask a supplementary question, Madam Speaker? Could the Minister indicate to this House whether the Ministry of Finance has given any assurance that he is going to get the money to establish the upgrading of the Penal Waterworks?

Hon. M. Marshall: Madam Speaker, as Minister, I am going to do all that I can to ensure that what I spelt out here is, in fact, addressed.

Mr. Sudama: Another supplementary question, Madam Speaker. When the Minister says he will do all that he can, can he elaborate on that? Can he inform this House what that incorporates?

Hon. M. Marshall: Madam Speaker, just to establish that I mean what I say, we understand the financial constraints; there are budgetary problems, we know this, but there are certain commitments here in terms of rehabilitating certain

wells, putting certain things in place, the continuation of the projects at Point Fortin. We are, in fact, going to do our best to ensure that those things are done and to address them in the way that I described a while ago. That is the point that I am making.

**Agricultural Access Roads
(Chaguanas)**

106. Miss Hulsie Bhaggan (*Chaguanas*) asked the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources:

Would the Minister indicate which agricultural access roads in the Chaguanas constituency his ministry intends to upgrade/construct in 1993 from funds to be received under the IADB loan as stated in the 1993 Budget?

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Dr. The Hon. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, funds from the IADB programme as a loan for agricultural access road development will be utilized in two phases. In Phase 1, to be undertaken in 1993, a number of access roads in counties, St. George, St. David, St. Andrew, Nariva, St. Patrick, Victoria and Tobago are earmarked for upgrading/construction. In county Caroni, La Republica Road is earmarked. In Phase 2 of the programme, the following agricultural access roads in county Caroni have been identified for upgrading in the programme:

Joyce Trace Extension

Pantin Acevero Road

La Gloria Estate Road

Kangaroo Road.

The ministry does not conduct its business on a constituency basis. The ministry operates by regions and counties, which are non-political considerations.

**Bejucal Road—Chaguanas
(Development Work)**

107. Miss Hulsie Bhaggan asked the Minister of Local Government:

- (a) Would the Minister indicate whether Bejucal Road in the Chaguanas constituency is included for development works in 1993?
- (b) If the answer is in the affirmative, would the Minister give details of the proposed development works?

The Minister of Local Government and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Madam Speaker, Bejucal Road is the responsibility of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation. The Corporation is cognizant of the urgent nature of the reinstatement works to be undertaken and is also aware that the Advisory Working Committee of the Tunapuna Regional Corporation included expenditure in the sum of \$75,000.00 for resurfacing of this road as Phase 1 of a comprehensive reinstatement programme in the 1993 Development Programme of the Corporation.

The total project is estimated to cost \$425,000.00 to be executed in two subsequent phases at estimated costs of \$200,000.00 and \$150,000.00 respectively.

The Finance, Planning and Allocations Committee of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation at a meeting on December 15, 1992, however, indicated its intention to review the 1993 Development Programme as proposed by the Advisory Working Committee. A decision on the matter is expected to be taken shortly.

**Warren Road Residents
(Hardship)**

108. Miss Hulsie Bhaggan asked the Minister of Works and Transport:

- (a) Would the Minister indicate whether he is aware that residents and farmers of Warren Road in the Chaguanas constituency suffer undue hardship as a result of the non-completion of the link road east of the Uriah Butler Highway?
- (b) If the answer is in the affirmative, would the Minister indicate whether he has plans to build this link road to provide much needed relief to residents and farmers?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, the Minister of Works and Transport is aware that some inconvenience is experienced by these residents.

The non-completion of the link road east of the Uriah Butler Highway between Bejucal Road and Warren Road refers to Frontage Road, No. 41. The estimated cost of construction of Frontage Road, No. 41, is \$1.5 million.

The completion of this road was originally programmed to be undertaken over the period 1992 to 1993. Available funding in 1992, however, did not allow for the project to be undertaken.

It does not appear that this work could be undertaken in 1993 based on the funds available. As soon as adequate funds are available, this project will be completed.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Subhas Panday (Naparima):

WRITTEN ANSWER TO QUESTION

**Agricultural Tribunal
(Allowances)**

109. Could the Minister state:

- (a) The number of matters which have been pending at the Agricultural Tribunal of Trinidad and Tobago (North) for each of the following years:-
 - (i) 1990
 - (ii) 1991; and
 - (iii) 1992?
- (b) How much allowance is provided to each member of the said Tribunal per sitting?
- (c) How many sittings of the said Tribunal have been held for the year 1992?
- (d) How many sittings of the said Tribunal have been aborted for the year 1992?
- (e) What are the average lengths of adjournment of matters of the said Tribunal?
- (f) What is the date of filing of the oldest matter now engaging the attention of the said Tribunal?
- (g) How many matters have been heard and determined by the said Tribunal for the year 1992?
- (h) Have members of the said Tribunal been awarded their allowances for their attendances of sittings of the said Tribunal which were either not held or aborted during 1992?
- (i) If the answer to (h) is in the affirmative, could the Minister indicate how many members were given their allowances and how much did each member receive?

- (j) What steps, if any, are being taken to rectify this situation?

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**Impounded Motor Vehicles
(Number of)**

110. Could the Minister state:

- (a) The number of privately owned motor vehicles which were confiscated and impounded by the police as a result of the events of July 27, 1990?
- (b) How many of the said motor vehicles are still in custody of the police?
- (c) What steps, if any, are being taken for the return and/or compensation to the owners of these said motor vehicles?

**St. Croix Road
(Repairs to)**

- 111.** (a) Is the Minister aware that the condition of the St. Croix Road between the 2 1/2 m.m. and the 5 m.m. marks has deteriorated so badly that the said road has now become almost impassable?
- (b) What immediate steps are being taken to repair and/or resurface the said road?

Questions Nos. 109, 110 and 111, by leave, deferred.

**Justice Crane's Matter
(Expenses Incurred)**

113. *The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj (Couva South)*

Would the Attorney General state to the honourable House:

- (a) The total fees and expenses incurred to date by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in respect of the High Court matter brought by Justice Richard Crane giving all material particulars of the fees and expenses?
- (b) The amount of moneys the Government estimates it would spend in respect of the legal fees and related expenses in its appeal in the matter against the decision of the Court of Appeal to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council?

The Minister in the Ministry of Planning and Development (Sen. The Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, I have spoken with the Member for Couva South and I am requesting a deferral for one week.

Question, by leave, deferred.

**Surrendered Insurance Policies
(Taxes on)**

114. Mr. Trevor Sudama (*Oropouche*) asked the Minister of Finance (Hon. Wendell Mottley):

Could the Minister state:

- (a) Why the cash proceeds of insurance policies which have been surrendered continue to be taxed when insurance premiums paid are no longer an allowance expense for tax purposes?
- (b) Whether the Government intends to remove the 15% tax payable on interest on savings deposits in commercial banks and other financial institutions as a stimulus to savings?
- (c) Whether the Government will make auto diesel fuel available to registered farmers in the country at a price below 96.48 TT cents per litre (VAT inclusive) as is the case with fishermen?

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Wendell Mottley): Madam Speaker, tax is not payable on the cash proceeds of all insurance policies. Deduction of tax from the cash proceeds of insurance policies at a rate of five per cent is made only in respect of policies which were contracted prior to 1988. This means that only taxpayers who enjoyed tax relief would be required to pay tax. Indeed, this relief was as high as 28 per cent in some cases. Policies contracted after 1988 were not tax shielded, so there is no justification in deducting tax from cash proceeds of such policies. It is therefore equitable that in the circumstances a tax on the cash surrender value should be paid in respect of those policies, which were contracted before 1988 and not after. Because of the tight fiscal situation, Government is not at this stage proposing the elimination of this tax.

The Government is well aware of the importance of ensuring the nutritional welfare of the population by facilitating increased agricultural production. The payments of subsidies to agricultural producers is one such facilitatory mechanism. However, the use of subsidies within recent years has been somewhat constrained by the dwindling pool of financial resources available to Government,

and greater emphasis is being placed on other support mechanisms such as import duty concessions on inputs and machinery for agriculture.

2.00 p.m.

It should be noted that fishermen purchase auto diesel fuel at the prevailing rate of 96 cents per litre. However, they are entitled to a rebate of five cents per litre in respect of auto diesel fuel used on providing satisfactory evidence of their purchases to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. This system, Madam Speaker, is proving difficult to administer and is open to misuse. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is of the view that administration of a similar system applied to farmers would pose even more administrative difficulties, may be subject to abuse and would be expensive relative to potential benefits afforded.

Mr. B. Panday: Madam Speaker, I wonder if the hon. Minister would permit this question. It arises because, recently, I have been informed by the fishermen that they are not receiving their fuel supplies from NP. I know I should file this as a supplementary question, but I just thought I would take this opportunity to ask, if he is aware of that, and why that is happening.

Dr. Rowley: Madam Speaker, if I understand the situation to which the Member is referring, fishermen normally receive their subsidized fuel from National Fisheries. There is a situation existing now, where legal action has been taken against National Fisheries by the fishermen, and that has caused a review of the situation which is causing the disruption in the supply. Fishermen are still free to obtain their supplies from NP as far as I know, but with respect to National Fisheries where they normally get their supplies, there is that problem of a suit.

Fuel is available at NP, but the subsidized fuel is administered by National Fisheries. There is this legal problem at the moment, as I said, and that is being addressed.

Mr. Sudama: Madam Speaker, I have two supplementary questions. Firstly, with respect to the Government's response that it cannot remove the 15 per cent tax payable on interest on savings/deposits in commercial banks and other financial institutions because of the tight fiscal situation which is faced, and because it needs all revenue it can possibly put its hands on for the purposes of administering government's affairs, I merely wish to ask if all this revenue it has to put its hands on includes expenditure for the purchase of ALGICO building to the tune of \$8 million.

Hon. W. Mottley: Madam Speaker, the answer is that the moneys that we collect through this system are in excess of \$50 million—that is on interest. The purchase price of the ALGICO building is \$6 million and that is being financed over a 10-year period.

Mr. Sudama: Madam Speaker, there were two supplementary questions to the Minister of Finance. Since he has refused to provide any relief with respect to the cost of diesel fuel to farmers, could he indicate to this House, in view of the difficulties being faced by farmers in this country in meeting their costs, whether he intends to look into the question of any other form of fiscal relief for the farmers of Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. W. Mottley: Madam Speaker, the Member did not hear what I said—we are moving away from systems of direct subsidies and attempting to provide other fiscal incentives to farmers.

**Natural Watercourses
(Drainage)**

115. Mr. Trevor Sudama (*Oropouche*) asked the Minister of Works and Transport:

Could the Minister state whether his ministry has an action plan for 1993 for drainage of the natural watercourses in the Oropouche constituency and, if so, could he provide details?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Works and Transport has a programme of works for improving the drainage of the natural watercourses in the Oropouche constituency. Details of the plan with regard to the watercourses and the scope of works to be undertaken in 1993 are as follows:

Location of Watercourse	Project/Scope of Works	Schedule
Coora River and Blackwater Channel, Oropouche Lagoon	Construction of culvert and two sluice gates	1st and 2nd quarter, 1993
Oropouche River, Barrackpore	Backfilling 1993	2nd quarter
Mitchell Drain	Widening and	2nd quarter

Oral Answers To Questions
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, February 5, 1993

Outfall Channel, Barrackpore	deepening	1993
Gucharan River and Tributaries, Debe Village	Widening, clearing, realignment of watercourse	2nd quarter 1993
New Cut Channel, Pluck Road	Rebuilding embankment 1993	2nd quarter
Raju Trace River Diversion, Raju Trace North, Penal	Backfilling	2nd quarter, 1993

Mr. Sudama: I am happy that the Minister—at least this Minister—operates on a constituency basis, unlike the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. Is the Minister aware that half of the natural courses listed, do not fall in the constituency of Oropouche?

A second supplementary question, Madam Speaker. Since we have been given this plan of action, could the Minister indicate what assurance he has that this plan will be adequately financed this year?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Speaker, these are the programmed works for the area in 1993.

Nursing Aides (Recruits)

116. Mr. Trevor Sudama (*Oropouche*) asked the Minister of Health:

Could the Minister provide:

- (a) The names of the persons recruited as Nursing Aides at the Port of Spain General Hospital, the St. Ann's Hospital and the San Fernando General Hospital in 1992?
- (b) The criteria adopted in the selection process?

Mr. Sudama: With respect to question No. 116, I have been informed that the nomenclature of these nursing persons has been changed from "Nursing Aides" to "Nursing Assistants". Therefore, I would pose question No, 116 to the Minister of Health in that light.

The Minister of Health (Hon. John Eckstein): Madam Speaker, no person was recruited as Nursing Aide for the Port of Spain General Hospital, the St. Ann's Hospital or San Fernando General Hospital in 1992. Part (b) of the question therefore does not apply.

BREACH OF PRIVILEGE

Madam Speaker: There is a matter which has been drawn to my attention, and which under the Standing Orders should come just after "Oral Answers to Questions". I now call upon the Member for Tobago East.

Mr. A. N. R. Robinson (Tobago East): Madam Speaker, I rise to seek leave to move a motion touching the privileges of this honourable House and its Members. The motion I seek to move is under Standing Order 27 which reads as follows:

- "(1) A motion directly concerning the privileges of the House shall take precedence of all other public business.
- (2) Any member desiring to raise a matter under this Standing Order shall first obtain leave of the Speaker who shall determine whether the Member is entitled to raise the matter as a question of privileges."

2.10 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Before we move to subsection (3), I think we ought to get rid of subsection (2). The hon. Member has written a letter to me and, in the circumstances, leave is granted to the Member to raise the matter.

Mr. A.N.R. Robinson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. By letter of February 1, 1993, I stated the essential facts on the basis of which I intended to move this motion. I refer to the letter and quote certain sections of it. The matter relates to threats by the Prime Minister and Member for San Fernando East and/or his attempted intimidation of a Member of this honourable House namely myself, the Member for Tobago East.

Examples of the threat and/or attempted intimidation complained of, appear on page 1 of the *Sunday Guardian* of January 24, 1993 and published in the electronic media of even date. However, the Member for San Fernando East has on several other occasions issued the same or similar threats. I refer to the newspaper of the *Sunday Guardian* of January 24, 1993. As I indicated, it contains an example of those threats.

Madam Speaker: For my own records, could the hon. Member repeat that date please?

Mr. A.N.R. Robinson. Sunday, January 24, 1993.

Madam Speaker: At one?

Mr. A.N.R. Robinson: Page one, Madam Speaker. An article headed:

"Manning to ANR: 'It's war'

No longer treating him as 'elder statesman'"

written by David Cuffy.

I quote:

"PRIME MINISTER Patrick Manning, in a fighting mood, yesterday said he would no longer be treating former Prime Minister ANR Robinson as an 'elder statesman.'

'From today, the kid gloves are off,' he loudly declared to shouting and cheering People's National Movement (PNM) party members and supporters at a meeting at the Diego Martin Junior Secondary School."

Further on in the article it states:

"Manning said since assuming office he had publicly offered to treat Robinson as an elder statesman in recognition of his service as Prime Minister to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, on the condition that he would conduct himself in a distinguished manner and try to avoid the 'cut and thrust' of the weekly debates in Parliament."

"However,' he said, 'the goodly gentleman believes it is not proper to take advice from me, and has decided to jump into the thing.

'Well, from today the gloves are off and the Member for Tobago East, therefore, will no longer be immune from what transpires in Parliament."

Madam Speaker, my comment is that this is clearly an attempt to influence my conduct in Parliament by the threat of or injury—see how they laugh, all together—or adverse action to me and as a consequence to my constituents and the people of Tobago whom I represent. Madam Speaker, see the contempt that they display when a motion of privilege is being moved?

As you are all aware, all Members on admission to this honourable House are bound by their oath of allegiance under the Constitution to perform their duties without fear, favour, affection or ill-will. It is in accordance with this oath of allegiance that I have been endeavouring to perform my duties in this honourable

Breach of Privilege

Friday, February 5, 1993

House, only to find that I have been subjected to public castigation by the Member for San Fernando East and more specifically to the threat and or spectre of punishment.

The hon. Prime Minister and Member for San Fernando East is in breach of the privilege of this honourable House by publicly impugning my conduct in Parliament and seeking to impose upon me under threat of punishment, his own subjective restrictions in addition to those imposed by the Standing Orders and the custom and the practice of this honourable House presided over by your honourable self.

It is of the essence of democracy and parliamentary government that there should be freedom of speech and that Members should not be under threat or should not be induced or bribed to change their conduct or so to conduct themselves in such a way as to please others. It is the clear rule that they must act in accordance with their oath of allegiance and in accordance with what they consider right and just. I quote from May's *Parliamentary Practice* as to what constitutes privilege on page 70.

My edition is the 20th Edition, I am reading from the paragraph under the rubric, "**Ancillary nature of Privileges—A necessary means to fulfilment of functions**".

"The distinctive mark of a privilege is its ancillary character. The privileges of Parliament are rights which are 'absolutely necessary for the due execution of its powers'. They are enjoyed by individual Members, because the House cannot perform its functions without unimpeded use of the services of its Members; and by each House for the protection of its Members and the vindication of its own authority and dignity.

Further on it goes on to say:

"Breach of privilege and 'contempt'.

"When any of these rights and immunities, both of the Members, individually and of the assembly in its collective capacity, which are known by the general name of privileges, are disregarded or attacked by any individual or authority, the offence is called a breach of privilege, and is punishable under the law of Parliament."

Freedom of speech is of particular importance as I said, and I quote from page 77, of the same volume.

Breach of Privilege
[MR. ROBINSON]

Friday, February 5, 1993

"Necessity of the freedom of speech"

"Freedom of speech is a privilege essential to every free council or legislature. Its principle was well stated by the Commons, at a conference on 11, December 1667, the conference which resulted in the reversal of the conviction in 1629 of Sir John Eliot and others..."

It states:

" 'No man can doubt', they said, 'but whatever is once enacted is lawful, but nothing can come into an Act of Parliament, but it must first be affirmed or propounded by somebody: so that if the Act can wrong nobody, no more can the first propounding. The members must be as free as the houses; an Act of Parliament cannot disturb the state; therefore the debate that tends to it cannot; for it must be propounded and debated before it can be enacted'."

Further on in another quotation, it states:

"According to Elsynge, the 'Commons did oftentimes, under Edward III, discuss and debate amongst themselves many things concerning the king's prerogative, and agreed upon..."

and this is the king's prerogative—

"...'petitions for laws to be made directly against his prerogative, as may appear by divers of the said petitions; yet they were never interrupted in their consultations, nor received check for the same, as may appear also by the answers to the said petitions.'"

I quote this particularly and emphasize:

"There could be no assured government by the people, or any part of the people, unless their representatives had..."

Madam Speaker, may I ask that I be not interrupted by the Leader of the House?

Madam Speaker: The Leader of the House, please take note that the Member is having difficulty presenting his motion.

Mr. Valley: My sincere apologies to the hon. Member.

Mr. A.N.R. Robinson: I repeat:

"There could be no assured government by the people, or any part of the people, unless their representatives had unquestioned possession of this privilege'."

That is, the privilege of freedom of speech. I now refer to improper influence:

Madam Speaker: May I remind the hon. Member that the time allowed under this motion is 15 minutes. Having regard to the nature of the presentation you have five more minutes, so you can begin to wind up.

Mr. A.N.R. Robinson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

"What is particularly obnoxious is either attempts of bribery and or intimidation or anything favouring of bribery or intimidation. "

I quote from page 156 of May's *Parliamentary Practice* under the rubric **"Attempts by improper means to influence Members in their parliamentary conduct."**

"On 2nd May 1695, the Commons resolved, 'That the offer of money, or other advantage, to any Member of Parliament for the promoting of any matter whatsoever, depending or to be transacted in Parliament is a high crime and misdemeanour and tends to the subversion of the English constitution'.

In the spirit of this resolution, the offering to a Member of either House of a bribe to influence him in his conduct as a Member, or of any fee or reward in connection with the promotion of, or opposition to any bill, resolution, matter or thing submitted or intended to be submitted to the House or any committee thereof, has been treated as a breach of privilege."

2.20 p.m.

Any attempt to influence the conduct of a Member of Parliament by offering an inducement such as to treat him in a special, particular way or to punish him, if he does not behave in a particular way, is a crime according to the law of Parliament. It is seeking to improperly influence the conduct of the Member. I read under the examples of misconduct as stated in the volume.

Finally, page 157 states:

"Attempted intimidation of Members. To attempt to influence Members in their conduct by threats is also a breach of privilege.

Examples of this kind of misconduct are:

Publishing statements, impugning the conduct of Members and threatening them with further exposure if they took part in the debates of the House..."

Breach of Privilege
[MR. ROBINSON]

Friday, February 5, 1993

The attempt to hold out an inducement is a breach of privilege; for any Member to influence his conduct or to threaten him, if he did not behave in a particular way is also a breach of privilege. Clearly, that is what has happened.

I regret to have had to raise this matter, but from the Prime Minister of the country one expects a certain example for the rest of the country. When he makes these statements to his followers, in that kind of mood and spirit, a message is sent right through the administration of the Government, and it also influences the behaviour of his party followers. Recently, we have seen what can happen. In accessing the precincts of this House, we see what can happen if followers are influenced by any sort of improper statements, or if they are incited to behaviour which is hostile to the Members of this House.

Madam Speaker, on all these grounds, I ask leave to move this motion, and that the matter be referred to the Committee of Privileges.

Madam Speaker: I have noted very carefully what the hon. Member has said. My decision on this matter will be given at the next sitting of this House, on Friday, February 12, 1993.

Mr. Humphrey: Madam Speaker, I rise to second the motion and merely to remark that with age comes experience.

Madam Speaker: I am wondering if the Member can show me under Standing Order 27—seeing we are creatures of the Standing Orders in this House, if there is need for a seconder of this motion. It is a special type of privilege granted to Members.

ADJOURNMENT (LEAVE REQUEST)

State of the Nation

Mr. Basdeo Panday (*Couva North*): Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order No. 12, prior to the sitting of this House, I sent a notice to you which reads:

Dear Madam Speaker,

Take notice that at today's sitting of the House, I shall seek your leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order 12 for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent, public importance, to wit, the dangerous level of discontent in the society, resulting from the Government's mishandling of the situation at WASA, Port Authority, Public Service Transport Corporation, Police Service, TTUTA and the Public Service, and the

Breach of Privilege

Friday, February 5, 1993

urgent need for the Prime Minister to use the powers of his office to remedy the present situation.

I submit that this matter is definite for the reason that there was reported in the newspapers recently an announcement by the Government to retrench workers at WASA, Port Authority and PTSC before the Carnival, but there was no mention of them being sent home with their terminal benefits; that it was done without discussion with the union, and that this will affect, directly and indirectly, about 50,000 persons.

The matter is definite because the mishandling of the problems in the Police Service has caused, for the first time, in the history of this country, as I recall, members of the Police Service to march around the Red House. Failure of this Government to deal honestly and fairly with the teachers and the public servants in relation to all their grievances is definite matter.

If there were any need to prove to you that this matter is urgent, you only had to open the window a little earlier on and you would have seen thousands of reasons standing outside there. They were marching around the Red House. Surely, the presence of people marching around the Red House cannot be ignored by this House. That is the evidence that it is urgent.

No responsible Parliament will wait until the society explodes. My information is that the affected workers are contemplating returning to Parliament next Friday, and they are likely to be joined by other aggrieved workers, the unemployed, businessmen whose businesses are being closed down because of an increase in both water and electricity rates; the fishermen who, as we have just heard today, are being denied the sale of fuel and their vehicles are outside in the Gulf. Are we to wait to see when it is urgent, or are we to deal with the matter now?

I submit that it is urgent. If the Prime Minister and his Government do not deal with this matter urgently, we all know what is likely to happen. It is a similar situation that led to the "explosion" if I may use that term, in 1970, where the callous indifference of a government to the cries of people who were suffering resulted in tremendous trauma, to this nation.

The matter is of public importance because if this matter is allowed to escalate, the integrity and security of the state, I submit, would be threatened. Public safety and public welfare would be endangered and that must be a matter of public importance.

Adjournment (Leave Request)
[MR. B. PANDAY]

Friday, February 5, 1993

When your police service is so discontented that it must resort to marching in uniform around your Parliament, you have reached the lowest ebb that a government can reach. That situation is explosive. It is urgent. We cannot wait. The Government has a duty to air this matter to have it discussed. Parliament has a duty to deal with the state of affairs as it is and not to allow it to continue. The Government has been talking about the effect that such things are likely to have on the economy. Therefore, it is urgent.

I recall a sitting of Parliament last Friday which started at 1.40 p.m. and went on to Saturday morning. At 2.00 a.m. I recall telling the Prime Minister that all I can do in this House is my duty. I cannot do the duty of other people. Indeed, no one can do another's duty. All I can do is mine. I can do no more, and surely, I ought not to do less. I think I have a duty when I see the nation about to explode to bring it to this House as a matter of definite, urgent, public importance, and to get a commitment from the Government, immediately, that it will do its duty and what is necessary in order to improve the country and bring it to a state of safety.

Madam Speaker, I crave your leave on the adjournment to have this matter debated.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Valley: Madam Speaker, before you rule, I just want to inform you that we on this side are willing to entertain the motion.

Mr. B. Panday: Why are you saying that?

Mr. Valley: If it does not qualify under Standing Order 12, we are willing to entertain it under Standing Order 26.

Mr. Panday: What has happened here in this House has caused this House to be accused of bias. When they do not want something, it does not happen here, but when they want it, it will happen. You are totally out of order to stand up and say that you are *[Interruption]* You have no right to influence the ruling of the Speaker.

Mr. Valley: I thought we were trying to help the Member. All we are saying is that we are willing to entertain the motion; that we want to debate it as long as Madam Speaker is prepared to grant leave. I do not understand what the problem is.

Madam Speaker: I do not understand what the hullabaloo is about. I think that the matter is urgent enough to receive the attention of this House. I therefore

Breach of Privilege

Friday, February 5, 1993

grant leave to the hon. Member for the debate. *[Interruption]* Order! Order! I would prefer Members not presume what the Chair is going to do. At this point, the debate will be adjourned to 6.00 p.m. today.

**RENT RESTRICTION ACT
(RE-ENACTMENT AND VALIDATION)**

The Minister of Housing and Resettlement (Dr. The Hon. Vincent Lasse):
Madam Speaker, I beg to move,

Whereas the Rent Restriction (Re-enactment and Validation) Act, 1991 (No. 36 of 1991) re-enacted the provisions of the Rent Restriction Act, Chap. 59:50 save and except subsection (2) of section 1 which was repealed and replaced therein:

And Whereas it is provided by the said subsection (2) of section 1 as replaced, that the said Act shall continue in force until February 23, 1993 and may be continued in force for further periods of three years by resolution of Parliament;

And Whereas the provisions of the Rent Restriction Act, will expire on February 23, 1993 and it is expedient that they be continued in force for a further period of three years commencing on February 24, 1993:

Be it Resolved that the Rent Restriction Act, Chap. 59:50, shall continue in force for a period of three years commencing February 24, 1993.

In moving the motion that the Rent Restriction Act, Chap. 59:50, shall continue in force for a period of three years, commencing on February 24, 1993, I wish to state that this Act was passed by Parliament to restrict the rents of certain premises and the right to recover possession of such premises.

The Act, among other things, deals with the Rent Assessment Boards, standard rent, pending determination by the boards, applications to the boards to determine rents, determination of standard rent by the board, maximum rent permitted, and permitted increase in rents.

The Rent Assessment Boards which presently can determine applications for rent reviews by both landlords and tenants under the provisions of the Land Tenants (Security of Tenure) Rent Review Regulations and Order, 1992 are created under the Rent Restriction Act. The life of this Act must be extended in order that Rent Assessment Boards may legally continue in operation. Further, the Rent Restriction Act, while recognizing the rights of landlords of premises which fall under its provisions, also protects tenants from arbitrary removal by landlords.

Rent Restriction Act
[HON. V. LASSE]

Friday, February 5, 1993

Given the still considerably unsatisfied demand for shelter in Trinidad and Tobago, including shelter under rental arrangements, this Government is of the view that the Rent Restriction Act should continue in force for a further period of three years commencing on February 24, 1993.

Question proposed.

Mr. John Humphrey (*St. Augustine*): Madam Speaker, if there is any matter that can be brought before this Parliament that confirms the total failure of the management of national resources to provide for the needs of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, it is this measure.

What is the genesis of the Rent Restriction Act, Chap. 59:50? This was Act No. 13 of 1941. It has been amended over the years, and I think in order to understand its genesis, one needs to know a little of the conditions that existed in this country in 1941.

In 1941, the world was at war. What was described as the Second World War commenced in 1939 and by 1941, in Europe, the war was blazing. Trinidad and Tobago was a colony of Great Britain at that time. We were a part of a Commonwealth of nations headed by Great Britain. All of the members of the Commonwealth, as many other members of the human species, recognized the dangers of the war to humanity and to the principles on which civilized society is based. Trinidad and Tobago did its part. Apart from sending many of our brave young men to join with the allies in putting the axis powers in their place, we did our part in making sacrifices at home.

2.40 p.m.

Madam speaker, what we did then was to seek to support the war effort of Great Britain. Our resources, meagre as they were, we being a small poor society contribute to the effort to win that war for the sake of humanity.

The Rent Restriction Act was part of that. It is quite clear that at that time we could not mobilize resources required to satisfy the need for shelter of our people, both for homes and other types of shelter—commercial et cetera—because we were contributing to the war effort. Even though the provision of shelter is a very basic requirement of our species—food, clothing and shelter, without these three basics, we cannot survive as a species. So even though it was recognized that it was important to provide adequate shelter, at that time, 1941, we realized that we could not provide adequate shelter. Therefore, restrictions had to be imposed on the shelter that existed.

You see, in the system of capitalism, the market place determines the value, and you do not have to legislate to determine the value of things like rent if the system is working properly. The system of the market place is premised on supply and demand. If you mobilize resources to supply in satisfaction of the needs of the people and, therefore, you meet their demand, then you do not have distortions.

If there is a shortage of shelter and there is a great need for shelter, then it stands to reason that that shelter that is provided is going to be valuable and will command a high financial return. A shortage of shelter existed then, though not as critically as it is now. It was found expedient to impose a restriction on the rent of premises because of that shortage and not to bring too much pressure on the citizens of the country. That is why the legislation was enacted. There is no other reason. That was over a half century ago. We are now in 1993. The British Empire is no longer in existence. We were a colony then, but we are independent now. We have been independent for over 30 years.

Madam Speaker, here we are, every three years, extending the life of this legislation. What I want to suggest to this House is that by doing that, we are admitting the failure of the management of our own resources; that we cannot provide adequate shelter for our people.

We are not providing adequate food for our people. There are hungry people in this country today, and people who are inadequately sheltered, yet we are a very wealthy society. In fact, by admitting that we cannot do it by extending the life of this legislation for a further three years—when that three years has expired, we will meet and, as a routine, extend it for another three years, because we are not coming to grips with the proper management of the resources of this society in providing for the basic needs of our people. That is the reason.

The electorate has no alternative but to go to the elections and vote for people to send to the Parliament as their representatives with the hope that when we assemble here, we would use our better judgment in the interests of those who send us to find solutions to the problems faced. That is the purpose of our being here.

We have a Constitution and on the basis of that Constitution, what we do is seek to manage the resources of this country in the best interests of people. Is that what we are doing? If not, we are failing miserably. We are not able to so manage the resources of this country and after more than 50 years we have not been able to do it.

Madam Speaker, if there were adequate shelter, we would not need to restrict rent or restrict anything, really. If there were adequate shelter and everybody was

Rent Restriction Act
[MR. HUMPHREY]

Friday, February 5, 1993

adequately sheltered and there was a dynamic in their provision of continuing shelter for those who need it—because the school leavers become mature, they become adults, they form new family units and the population expands, so, obviously, we have to continuously provide shelter for our people.

Unfortunately, we have to recognize that there is inadequate shelter and that is why we have to come here as a ritual. I have done it many times, because I have been in this Parliament since 1977; not as long as the elder statesman, the Member for Tobago East. I would like to mention in the context of recognizing the Member for Tobago East, that he has been honoured and recognized for his chivalry and his commitment to humanity. He has been recently conferred a knighthood and I think that we have got to recognize that.

In that context, we have crossed swords—though I have no gym to get strong and healthy, like our Prime Minister these days, and I dare say that that is why he is feeling fighting fit. We have crossed swords, but that does not mean that I do not recognize the ability of the Member for Tobago East. I stood up to second the motion. Madam Speaker, you said it was not necessary, but I think it really is. If it is not necessary, it really is superfluous, then it really does not matter. I did that because I, too, am learning that with age comes experience. Some of us learn the hard way.

Getting back to this motion, I think what we should do, given the opportunity, is not merely to ritualize this, but to recognize that we have a responsibility to so manage and direct the national resources—and in this forum, the responsibility weighs heaviest because the people have put us here with the expecting that we would put our collective intelligence together and use the opportunity of parliamentary debates to find solutions to their problems.

What I should like to do on this occasion is to try to steer this debate in the direction of seeking to find a solution to the shortage of shelter. I believe that is relevant because rent restriction is based on shortage and we can avoid having to restrict rent. If, as the government appears to be, it is committed to the free enterprise market economy that the new ideological wave in the world seems to be recommending for all of humanity, it is going to accept the forces of the market, that is, if you mobilize resources to satisfy demand, we can keep a balance on things and we do not get severe distortions.

If that is the system that the Government is, in fact, going to seek to implement, it is extremely important that we understand the system and it is important that we manage resources so that that system really works. This is

contrary to the principles of the market economy. The market economy requires free enterprise and the economic forces at work should not be hindered if you are going to have the market determine things like priorities and allocation of resources.

I believe what we should do is examine what we have been doing in the recent past, what is being done now and what is being planned for the immediate future in the area of providing shelter for our people to see whether, in fact, the strategies are working.

Where I should like to start is with the PNM manifesto and I want to advise the hon. Prime Minister that very soon my artist's pen—if I could get the attention of the Member for San Fernando East—is going to be modifying the picture on the manifesto. Madam Speaker, that is not a threat, because he might come out better looking.

Mr. Manning: Madam speaker, I take it that you would take note of the threat that has just been made to the Member for San Fernando East by my good friend the Member for St. Augustine.

Mr. J. Humphrey: Madam Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister is anticipating, because I do not know if it can be improved, quite frankly, but possibly it might.

Under the section "Housing", in the PNM manifesto we see:

"Under the PNM, the nation's housing needs were well looked after to the extent that by the end of 1986, over 50,000 public housing units had been provided by the State throughout the country.

By contrast, the present Government..."

and that was referring to the NAR Government—

"has demonstrated total disregard for the housing needs of the population. This has aggravated the shortage of housing units particularly for those in lower and middle income groups. The NAR Government has the unenviable record of not having built a single house during its term of office.

Unless immediate steps are taken to deal with the shortage, a potentially explosive housing crisis will ensue.

To correct this misguided approach, the PNM's policy will be:

- Reactivation of a comprehensive approach to housing, recognising that land development on its own does not address the needs of most citizens

Rent Restriction Act
[MR. HUMPHREY]

Friday, February 5, 1993

- Implementation of a broad range of policy instruments, such as:
 - provision of fully serviced lots
 - construction of apartments
 - construction of starter houses and fully furnished units
 - provision of adequate community facilities in public housing development
 - provision of low-interest housing mortgage loans
 - ensuring the availability of funding for private home construction and ownership
 - tax incentives for home maintenance
 - aided self-help housing programmes.

Squatter and squatter regularization...”

And it promises certain things.

I do not think anybody could fault the objectives as stated in the PNM manifesto. But what we have to ask is how many of the things promised by the PNM are, in fact, being delivered to the people. The PNM was very critical of the NAR, because the NAR did not, in fact, set out to build and complete houses from the resources of the state.

The NAR felt that the crisis was so massive that it was necessary to go a step at a time and solve firstly the land problem, provide land and infrastructural services and then seek to encourage the citizens to take up the opportunity, having acquired the land, to get a house going. Those things were being put in place.

Now, when the PNM boasted that by 1986, the state had provided 50,000 housing units, I do not think anybody could say that was not true. It is true. But the state had also exhausted all of the national savings in the provision of those 50,000 housing units.

You notice, today, that every time Members of this House get up seeking service for their constituents, they get a reply from that side that there is a shortage of finance: “There is no money”. That is what the government keeps saying.

If there is no money, then quite obviously the state is bankrupt. I think what government should do is declare bankruptcy and surrender the power that it has to

enable the citizens to give a new mandate, either to them or to some other group, because a state cannot be without money. It is a physical impossibility for a state to be without money.

Identifying priorities is one aspect of it, but, you see, the provision of something like housing, like the provision of food, requires the mobilizing of certain resources. If we settle down to properly mobilizing the resources of this country, we could satisfy both the food and shelter needs of the society.

The problem is that we are not identifying the resources that are indigenous and so managing them in every respect, including the respect of educating our people, that the needs are fashioned along the availability of indigenous resources instead of continuing to rely on the resources of other societies. I am talking about the basics of food and shelter.

I give you an example, Madam Speaker. As an architect, I use talent and skill to deliver to my clients buildings, whether it be their house, a commercial building or what have you. If I have a client who insists that we maximize local input and minimize imports, I could sit down and identify the locally sourced resources and try to design the building to achieve that.

I can assure you, Madam Speaker, that in Trinidad and Tobago today we have resources that have come out of development, investment and industrialization that can be used for satisfying the shelter needs. I can assure you also that the vast majority of the input in the provision of basic housing for the people of this country can be locally sourced.

In fact, if you really sought to provide adequate shelter by mobilizing indigenous resources, and we identify those things that we cannot provide from our own industrial base and have to, therefore, import, we could set about to put industries in place to further minimize imports in that housing sector. This is where we should be putting our ability.

As Minister for just under one year, I was seeking to do exactly that. I think that I was well on the way to achieving it. When it came to dealing with the multilateral lending agencies, I was able to introduce an idea to the representatives of the IADB, for example, that we plan a programme of providing shelter and identify the import content that was required to sustain that programme, both to supply the industrial activities and to ensure that we were properly equipped. Then we could see what import content was needed and have the multilateral agency, instead of lending blanket sums of money that were merely used for further imports, identify sources of imports required to keep our

Rent Restriction Act
[MR. HUMPHREY]

Friday, February 5, 1993

factories going at 24-hour shifts. We could put spare parts in the storerooms of those who had heavy equipment and that sort of thing. We could seek to purchase in bulk, at tremendous savings, those things that we identified and we should rally and get everything that was already in place working right up to maximum efficiency. I called the architects and the engineers together, and they all agreed that if we pooled our resources and united the human potential of this society, we could, in fact, get on top of this problem.

Madam Speaker, the programme was continuing, but unfortunately, politics crept in and it came to an abrupt end. But the principle is a valid one. The government says it has no money and yet, out there, the physical resources required for the provision of shelter, especially low cost housing, exists in abundance. There is no shortage of resources.

If you visit some of the yards of the contractors of Earthworks, for example, you will see a tremendous surplus of heavy equipment, even though we have exported a major part of that; it was already here, we had paid for it with our scarce foreign exchange and you had Trinidadian workers who could operate and maintain that equipment. Those resources belong to us. We paid for them and they were available to be utilized productively. Even today, if you go out there, you are going to find a tremendous quantum of unused resources of this nature. The quarries that were built at tremendous expense—

Mr. Manning: I thank the hon. Member for giving way. Is he suggesting that the government should just commandeer the resources of private individuals without any compensation?

Mr. J. Humphrey: No such thing. Madam Speaker, I am calling on the government to identify the resources and to plan a programme that will achieve full mobilization of those resources.

You see, private enterprise is not in a position to do it. In fact, nobody would invest money in a programme of low-cost housing, because there are no profits to be derived from providing that. In fact, there is no such thing as a low cost house in terms of producing it, but there is such a thing as the need for cheap accommodation, because so many of our citizens are not earning adequate income to support the kind of price being charged.

What I am suggesting is to identify the resources. For example, a very cheap resource is concrete. It can be fashioned in many ways. But to provide concrete, you need cement, which we have. We are producing first class cement in this country at Trinidad Cement Limited. You also need aggregate and we have

quarries, some owned by the state, some owned by private enterprise. They are already in place. They are very expensive installations, not only expensive in terms of equipment itself, but expensive also to put it to work. Because you had to provide road access, water and electricity. You had to train the people to operate these things. Madam Speaker, they are closed down; they are not operating.

We have a steel mill, producing high quality, high tensile steel for reinforcing purposes. You have downstreamers already in place producing a wide range of components for construction. Those downstreamers are prepared to produce other things that we might find we need. You have people who have block factories both for concrete and clay blocks. We have an abundance of clay. We are producing floor and roof finishes. We have a natural pitch and a petroleum pitch, perfect materials for waterproofing. And these things we have in abundance.

We have factories already in place to produce a wide range of the import requirements, for example, for the plumbing and electrical requirements of a house. We have factories in place with steel form work to produce all kinds of construction components, from piles to wide beams for bridge construction which are not being utilized.

Now, from my simple way of thinking, all of that is money; that is capital. All of the skills developed by our people, that is investment; that is capital. Here we are saying we cannot mobilize it, we have no money, we have got to wait until some foreigner comes in and says, "Listen, I have some project to invest in." But that is investment that we acquired and we had to pay for it. Every piece of equipment that we imported into this country, part of the petroleum income of this country has gone to pay for it and it is there.

It is ridiculous to say there is no money and, therefore, you cannot put it to work. The need of the population is there for adequate shelter and we have the resources. We can, in fact, by mobilizing the resources, provide to satisfy the need. That is what we have, that is a given.

3.10 p.m.

Now, if Members on that side say we do not have those things, that those resources do not exist, that we do not have the capability to mobilize the things that are in place to solve the problems, then they should go out and say to the electorate, "We cannot do it".

I should like to say, Madam Speaker, that we can do it. We do have the ideas; we do have the ability to mobilize the resources of this country; and it requires a

Rent Restriction Act
[MR. HUMPHREY]

Friday, February 5, 1993

change in attitude. But we have changed our attitudes—my colleagues and I—and we can do it.

In terms of the problems: the Government employed a group of very capable citizens and gave them a mandate to look at the problems of the shortage of shelter, of housing, particularly. They were established as a task force on housing and settlements. A report was submitted in August, 1992 and recommendations have been made. It would be useful for us to re-read these from the Summary of the recommendations, Madam Speaker, at page 9 of the report, *Policy on Housing and Settlements*. This is the Summary. Let us look at what the task force had to say. They recommended:

"(1) Introduction of a programme of continuous research supported by regularly conducted market surveys to provide up-to-date structured data for policy formulation and implementation."

In other words, you need to assess the needs, plan and then go to the next stage of mobilizing resources and satisfying the needs.

"(2) The creation and equipping of a system of viable settlements as the basis for public sector investment intended to support housing development."

That was the policy of the NAR Government and that programme had started. This is an independent group of experts put together by the PNM regime that has recognized the validity of that approach.

"(3) The streamlining and improvement of the institutional functions for land identification, land assembly, release, vesting, registration and development approval."

I remember being in this House when a former PNM Attorney General promised that reforms were being implemented that would have enabled the Government to facilitate the transfer of land from one citizen to another, as easily as the transfer of a motor car from one citizen to another. Admittedly, there are some problems in the transfer of motor cars. The Prime Minister wants to know who it was. It was Mr. Selwyn Richardson, who was then Attorney General under the PNM and, of course, you had the Law Commission that was working, looking at the laws and seeking to reform them.

I believe that an exercise was started in the Diego Martin area to simplify the whole process of land identification and land transfer. No progress has been made in that exercise. But this group of experts is saying that you need it.

"Housing markets—Recognize the differentiations in the housing market and devise appropriate policies to meet the needs and capabilities of each segment."

"Specifically for low income households:

(a) maintain, strengthen and extend the sites and services programmes."

"Sites and services", in fact, was the emphasis given by the NAR Government when I was Minister; and I dare say it was continued by the Member for Tobago West when she was Minister.

"(b) develop appropriate means of facilitating households who are not capable of meeting the economic cost of developed lots."

So the task force has recognized that many of our citizens are not in a position to meet even the basic cost of providing basic, inexpensive services.

"(c) provide funds for construction financing for use by qualified beneficiaries;"

I do not see how the Government can provide funds when it says that no funds are available. But there is a way it can be done—

"(d) re-introduce aided self-help and assisted housing programmes."

In the past, when the former PNM was seeking to resolve the problem of shelter, a programme was introduced in the Morvant area of aided self-help and it is a good example of what can be done when the Government applies some resources and then mobilizes citizens to provide other resources to get the job done. Excellent shelter was provided for poor people through that programme, and this task force recognized that and has proposed its re-introduction.

"(e) adopt the principle of cross-subsidization as a feasible means of including lower priced units within projects; and

(f) introduce incentives to support and encourage conversion of existing housing to higher density units, and for construction of urban apartments for rental or ownership."

Madam Speaker, the Government did adopt that in this year's budget.

"For lower and middle income households—

(a) increase the supply of housing by the private sector;

(b) reduce the cost of delivery of housing;

Rent Restriction Act
[MR. HUMPHREY]

Friday, February 5, 1993

- (c) assist households to access housing in the market; and
- (d) provide incentives for both supply and demand of housing by adjusting taxation and financial factors."

The task force, at page 34 of the report gave further specific recommendations dealing with the poor and it is interesting to see what they said—

"Broadly speaking, policies will be required, on the one hand, for households who cannot enter into any kind of conventional purchase transaction and, on the other, for those who can participate in the housing market. In the first group are the low-income households who earn less than \$1,500 per month and whose affordable limit is \$60,000, a price at which, within existing parameters, the market cannot deliver an acceptable housing product. Appropriate support would have to be provided to this group, but they would also have to invest 'sweat equity' in building their own homes."

Madam Speaker, that is the reality.

What the NAR, in its heyday, was seeking to do, was to provide the land base with the basic services and I had advocated—but it was not accepted by the powers that be at the time—that a mortgage arrangement be created that would enable little people—because we do not need to represent in this Parliament those who can represent themselves. I do not see my role as a politician to come here and speak on behalf of those who do not need me to speak for them. They are powerful and rich, they do not need us. They can do it on their own. So we are here to represent those who cannot do that for themselves.

I had advocated that a system of mortgage finance be extended to the poor, whereby the first increment of \$10,000 would be interest free; the second increment would be at two per cent interest rate; and each subsequent \$10,000 would attract two per cent with a ceiling of 10 per cent; and that that be extended to all comers—the poor and the rich alike. I did that with the knowledge that \$10,000, in the hands of a poor person who has a piece of land, is sufficient to get the process of a starter house going.

Madam Speaker, historically it has been found that the poor honour their financial obligations far more reliably than the rich. In fact, it is the exception when the poor do not, at least, try to honour their obligations. The rich try to do exactly the opposite. They try to get out of obligations.

3.20 p.m.

It would have acquired, therefore, a rotating fund, without a tremendous amount of seed capital. What the poor family would have done with \$10,000—and we were trying to give certain assistance, like designing houses that could be built incrementally and offering a range of designs as a free service from the Government to the poor—was rally relatives and friends and, by and large, "sweat investment", "sweat equity". That is what they would have invested. With the little help that we could have given them—and it was very valuable help, because the architects were committed to a programme of housing the poor, and were giving their ability, training and skill to that. Therefore, we were getting excellent designs as starter units that could grow into acceptable middle-class accommodation.

With that sort of commitment from our people, we felt that we could get on top of this problem—\$10,000 free of interest will provide a \$50,000 unit in value, because of the kinds of inputs that you will get. They will find a way to get free aggregate, for example. You will have a friend who has a truck to deliver sand that you do not pay for, and that sort of thing. Much of it was obtained on the side of the road where it was delivered to government projects and not utilized. But we should be happy to know that our poor are utilizing it productively.

Madam Speaker: The speaking time of the Member has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. J. Humphrey: Madam Speaker, if you examine the approach to satisfying needs for low-cost housing of poor people, you would find that once the land was acquired—the hardest step to make was, in fact, to get the security of the land; but once that step had been made, a temporary shelter is normally built with a view, eventually, to building a more permanent house and demolishing the temporary shelter. We recognized that that was a waste of resources, and instead of building a temporary shelter to be demolished, if we could have assisted them to build a component of the permanent house, those resources would have been better utilized. That is what we were trying to do.

Let me tell you how it is done. When poor people start to build a permanent shelter, they put up columns and beams and a concrete slab and they live under that; then they put up bricks and they live within the shelter provided. They do not

Rent Restriction Act
[MR. HUMPHREY]

Friday, February 5, 1993

put in doors and windows at this stage. It is gradually that they are able to provide an acceptable middle-class standard house.

There is nothing novel or unique about this approach, because, historically, this is the approach that was used. The big landowners of this society, in order to make the land viable and bring a profitable return, recognized that they had to provide the basic needs of the labour component. Most of them took part of their very large estates and allocated that land for the workers to build houses. It cost them nothing because they gave the land that was least productive, in the main. In fact, they did not even employ surveyors and engineers. The people themselves pulled the chains and marked it out, and they planted Rahyo as the boundary marks. So it really did not cost that much to provide that land. And gradually, over the years, with the involvement of the utilities, of local government, of central Government, we have seen an upgrading of those communities that started in very, very humble circumstances, and today are very modern middle-class villages, all over the country. It was done gradually. In fact, the beneficiaries of those homes hardly felt an economic burden in that process.

If we recognize that that is a legitimate approach incrementally, the Sou Sou idea, put a little bit at a time, and it becomes effective when the little bits accumulate to an effective amount; it is a very valid idea. It is an incremental approach, even with the meagre financial resources that the Government cries about. You do not need a lot of seed capital to establish a rotating fund to enable little people to start their houses.

I recommend it to the Prime Minister. I also want to suggest to him that you do not need a mortgage finance company. You can have a window of your Central Bank, because you have the security of the land. As long as the people have the land and they are secured with it, the bank can buy it—a simple signature on a piece of paper; hold that as security. You could advance the funds required because you could create those funds. As long as you have the resources that those funds will mobilize, you are not going to get inflation. And we do have those resources in abundance.

I do not expect this Minister of Finance to even take me seriously, because he is going to go to these fellows and ask them. "Is that viable"? I want to advise the Minister of Finance, not to go to the World Bank to ask questions, go outside right now and interface directly with the people of this country and ask them the questions.

The Government cannot tell the people of this country today that it does not have financial resources to apply to resolving the problems. It cannot! Because

the Government has admitted that it has the financial resources to service the international debt in full. If I owe money to two persons and I service the debt of one, totally, and I deny servicing the debt to the other, I have one enemy. One friend; one enemy! If, on the other hand, I go to them and say, "Listen, this is the reality, I cannot, in fact, service the debt of both of you because circumstances do not permit it, and I need to service both," I am sure they will understand.

I want to recommend to the Prime Minister that he go to the directors of the World Bank and tell them that if he should continue to manage the resources of this country to satisfying their demands—as he is doing—he is going to be facing the most serious consequences at home, where the money would be of no use to them or to us. He has got to tell them, "Look, we ask you, please, to understand the situation." The pressure is just beginning and it is going to mount and mount. We tasted a little of it in 1970 and in 1990. It is going to happen again. He must tell them that he has got to release some of the resources under his charge to the people of this country to satisfy their needs.

Pressures are mounting. The middle-class in this society is gradually disappearing because of the pressures imposed on them. To achieve middle-class status, it is done on credit, on borrowing, and you have got to, as a family, service the commitment of your loan for your house, car, appliances, whatever you have acquired to give you that middle-class standard of living. And with increasing rates and taxes imposed on these citizens—their incomes are not increasing—what you are, in fact, doing is whittling away what they have. That is what you are doing. You must find a strategy to support them, not to whittle away what they have. If the middle-class disappears in this society, that would be the end of us. It is going to take us 500 years to put it back together.

3.30 p.m.

The Government has to tell the World Bank, the IADB, the Paris Club "We cannot afford to meet the commitment, because there are demands being made by the people of this country, and if we do not fulfil those demands, we are going to be in trouble." Madam Speaker, they would understand that, because in this recommendation of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, recognition was given to that. They recognize that the dangers of the structural adjustment programme were social unrest.

I think that the Prime Minister has a golden opportunity, not—as the Leader of the Opposition rightly said, and we are going to debate it a little later—to let that get worse. Go now and tell them, "Fifty per cent of our commitment would go to

Rent Restriction Act
[MR. HUMPHREY]

Friday, February 5, 1993

you and the other 50 per cent to the people of Trinidad and Tobago." It would defuse the problem. This side has constantly offered our hand of co-operation to the Government to solve problems of this country. The Government does not seem to be interested in the offer, not prepared to share power. We do not want power. It is not power that we want. We want to be able to solve problems. All of us want to pool the resources and experience we have in solving problems.

I hope, with this intervention, that we can see something coming out of Government's action, and, hopefully, we can hear something during the course of this debate, in response to the few things I have said. I feel very depressed for Trinidad and Tobago at the present time, because I do not see any change in the approach that is resulting in increasing pressure being imposed on all of our people, with a tiny exception of the very rich; the pressure does not affect them, they have enough wealth to alleviate the hardships of life. But the vast majority of our people are under increasing pressure, and I appeal to the Government to respond positively to what I have suggested.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

LNG PROJECT

The Minister of Local Government and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Madam Speaker, I seek leave of the House at this time to make a statement.

Assent indicated.

Hon. K. Valley: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I do appreciate the indulgence of the House. I am authorized to make the following statement.

The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (NGC) issued a press release earlier today announcing that the company has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with three major foreign companies to develop an LNG Project based in Trinidad and Tobago. The LNG Project, Madam Speaker, is the liquefied natural gas project. The three companies are:

- (i) Cabot LNG Corporation, a Fortune 300 company, based in Boston and the largest and oldest LNG importer in North America;
- (ii) British Gas Trinidad Incorporated, which is a subsidiary of British Gas PLC, one of the world's largest integrated gas companies, and
- (iii) Amoco Trinidad Limited

bringing to this partnership access to tremendous resources, worldwide, through the Amoco Corporation.

The companies will be evaluating a project with a design capacity of approximately 300 million cubic feet per day, with its output targeted at markets in the northeast United States through the LNG import terminal owned by Cabot LNG's subsidiary, Distrigas of Massachusetts Corporation (DOMAC) and at other potential markets in the Caribbean and Western Europe.

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has given its provisional approval to the utilization of reserves of the East Coast Marine Area in such a project. If the market demand is sufficient, it is envisioned that additional liquefaction capacity would be added utilizing gas reserves from the North Coast Marine Area.

The proposed LNG project would require an investment of approximately US \$1 billion, and could be in production by 1997. Growing and potential demand for long-term secure supplies of natural gas in the northeast United States, the Caribbean basin and Western Europe make this project particularly appealing at this time.

Madam Speaker, the implications for such a project, if realized, are tremendous. The investments which will come almost entirely from the foreign participants will approach US \$1 billion. The construction activity associated with a project of this size and the preparation of the infrastructure will generate, during the construction phase, thousands of jobs. The Government has earmarked the La Brea/Brighton Industrial area as the site for this project.

This project is further welcomed in the light of the recent announcement by Amoco that that company has started producing natural gas and condensate from the Flamboyant Platform which was installed some 38 miles off the east coast in December last year.

The new gas well is currently producing at the rate of 60 million cubic feet per day and is expected to produce, eventually, at the rate of 80 million cubic feet of gas daily. Approximately 2,000 barrels of condensate, that is liquid petroleum, is also being produced by this well per day. This represents technical achievement never attempted before in the local petroleum industry.

The Government would keep this honourable House informed of any further major developments relating to this project.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Sudama: Madam Speaker, I just want a clarification on the Minister's first statement. Firstly, whether, in that arrangement, the price at which the gas

LNG Project
[MR. SUDAMA]

Friday, February 5, 1993

will be transferred to this consortium has been agreed upon. Secondly, whether the National Gas Company, of which Dr. Kenneth Julien is Chairman, will, in fact, be the purchaser of this gas for transfer to this consortium.

Hon. K. Valley: Madam Speaker, as I said, all that has been signed is the Memorandum of Understanding to look at the feasibility. Three partners are involved in this project and one would expect that they would be the owners of the gas.

RENT RESTRICTION ACT
(Re-enactment and Validation)

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I rise to support the motion brought by the Member for Point Fortin with regard to extending the Rent Restriction (Re-enactment and Validation) Act, 1991, for a further three years. I intervene in this debate in order to clarify certain issues that the Member for St. Augustine has raised, particularly about the mobilization of resources in the construction sector in this country.

The Member for St. Augustine presented a very idealistic and Utopian concept with regard to the mobilization of domestic resources. He spoke about market forces and the fact that this motion being brought here to extend the Rent Restriction Act was an admission of failure of the system. But, one must recognize that at the present time, there is a severe imbalance in terms of the supply and demand of units in the housing sector.

To put it simply, there is great demand and inadequate supply. If market forces were allowed to operate, the price for rental of housing units could reach astronomical proportions. While this Government would like the market to operate, because of the severe imbalance at the present time it is necessary to continue this Act to restrict the rents of certain properties.

Madam Speaker, we care about people, and I am surprised that the Members on the other side seem to have some difficulty in accepting that restriction of the levels of rentals in the country is a good thing. I would ask the Members: Would they, therefore, project that we should allow rentals to reach any level? Is that what they want?

The Members opposite have a very convenient approach to matters in this House. Quite often one gets the impression that they object for the sake of objecting. Because, here is a measure that certainly will help poor people in this

country, but they are objecting. But, anyway, as I said, the Members on the other side give the impression that they object to anything for the sake of objecting.

3.40 p.m.

Let me deal with the concepts that the Member for St. Augustine advanced about mobilizing the vast resources of the country: in quarries, sand, gravel, construction equipment, concrete, pre-stressing facilities, and the many factories that manufacture building materials such as steel, galvanized sheeting, pvc piping, blocks, etc. What he continuously overlooks, is the fact that somebody has to pay for this. If you are to reactivate equipment that is demobilized, there is cost attached to it. Who is to pay for the fuel and spare parts for this equipment? Who is to pay the operators? Money does not grow on trees. One gets the impression from the Members on the other side that one can simply wave a magic wand and, suddenly, all the quarries and inactive equipment in this country would spring to life and operate on their own without anybody paying for this.

In addition, the building materials that are manufactured in this country are manufactured at a cost. It costs the owners of these factories money to manufacture these materials. Therefore, if these materials are to be transferred into the construction of housing then somebody must pay the cost. What the Member for St. Augustine continuously overlooks too is the fact that national revenues have declined considerably in the last 10 years. The oil revenues in particular are half of what they were 10 years ago in 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Humphrey: Madam Speaker, I ask the hon. Minister whether the state has the power to create money and whether he understands that concept.

Hon. C. Imbert.: Madam Speaker, the state cannot create money. The state cannot print money. I assume this is what the Member is asking me.

The amount of money in circulation must correspond to the national assets. One cannot have national assets of \$50 billion in cash and proceed to print \$100 billion in paper money because the money would become worthless. Other countries have tried that and the parity of their dollar has gone from \$1.00 equivalent to the US dollar, to \$10,000, as in some of the South American countries. These ideas are just totally unrealistic.

In addition, the idea of telling the international financial institutions that we will pay only that proportion of our debt that we feel like paying, is another Utopian and idealistic concept. There are other countries which have learned to their horror that that just does not work. Some South American countries had

Rent Restriction Act
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, February 5, 1993

adopted the policy some years ago of apportioning five per cent of their total exports towards debt servicing and of telling the international financial institutions that that is all they will pay. Do they know what happened there? Some of those countries were overrun by revolution in a very short time. Their economies collapsed. The Member is well aware of the countries that have fallen prey to this misguided policy, and this Government will not get involved in that sort of irresponsible behaviour.

While oil revenues today are half of what they were in 1982, Government's expenditure, especially on wages and salaries, remains the same. We have a situation where when there was a boom in the economy, the Government had additional revenues available to it to build housing units and, indeed, the PNM Government did build housing units. As a matter of fact, up to 1986 over 50,000 public housing units had been provided, under the PNM administration, throughout the country.

Mr. Sudama: Would the Member give way to a question? Could he indicate to this House at what cost was 50,000 housing units provided under their administration?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, the point I am making is that when additional revenues were available to the state, it could have engaged in massive housing construction. Obviously, the answer is a lot of money, but the money is no longer available. We have a situation today where over 60 per cent of our national income must be dedicated to paying inescapable wages and salaries for public sector workers and for inescapable debt servicing; two-thirds of the national income must be used for that. The little that is left over must go towards maintaining the country's stock of infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, I refer to the Utopian concept that the Member for St. Augustine spoke about, that is, mobilizing all the quarries in the country. It would appear to me that the Member has no experience or knowledge of the cost of operating a quarry. A simple thing as an access road for a quarry must be maintained and it costs money to do so. Who is going to pay for the electrical power to operate the quarry equipment? Where is this money going to come from? I ask the Member for St. Augustine: Are you advocating that the Government take over all private enterprises in this country, commandeer private lands and equipment, take them for the state's use and force private people to provide their equipment and materials free of charge to the state? Is that what you are advocating?

Mr. Humphrey: The answer to that question is no.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I ask again: Where is the money going to come from to mobilize all these resources? Who is going to pay for the gravel and the equipment? The Member said that T&TEC will provide the electricity. Who is going to pay T&TEC to provide the electricity?

I hear this message from the Member for St. Augustine, over and over. But there is not a single country in the world where resources in the construction sector, which is a sector that consumes money, can be mobilized without somebody paying for it. I just wish to stress that this concept that the Member has about mobilizing resources just like that—you go outside and say, “you supply the gravel and sand; you bring your tractor,” and the people would do it for free—is just not realistic.

3.50 p.m.

I wish to deal with another matter. The Member spoke about providing a starter loan of \$10,000 to people to build their houses, and that somehow, by some magic, again, perhaps by the wave of a magic wand, this \$10,000 loan would be converted into a \$50,000 investment value. The Member had the absolute irresponsibility to suggest that private citizens should go on the roadside and ferret away government materials, just like that. Go on the roadside and if you see a pile of gravel, that is to be utilized for fixing roads, repairing drains, paving rivers, the very same thing that the Members on the other side complain about all the time—his suggestion was let people just go and take them. The Member is advocating theft.

Mr. Humphrey: It is difficult to sit down and endure the nonsense that the Member for Diego Martin East is spewing. I stated a reality, that in LIDP materials were delivered and there was no direction for the use of those materials. Those materials disappeared because citizens helped themselves to them.

Hon. C. Imbert: Is that a point of order?

Mr. Humphrey: That is a fact of life, not something I am advocating. Correct yourself!

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I am glad the Member for St. Augustine has admitted that he is advocating theft of government materials.

Mr. Humphrey: Madam Speaker, on a point of order. I never admitted any such nonsense. That is a fact of life, and he is the Minister responsible for it. He is the one who is encouraging it by not managing his office properly.

Hon. C. Imbert: It is exactly this sort of disregard for law and order which during the tenure of the Member for St. Augustine resulted in the breakdown of respect for the rule of law in this country, and there were people going into government property and taking it over because the Member for St. Augustine told them, "Go ahead. Take it." He is advocating theft. They have a right to property. They could walk into any building that they see and just take it over. That Member over there is responsible for the problems of this country today with regard to the unlawful takeover of state property. He is responsible because he said, "Go and take it. It is yours."

This is exactly why in many instances the Government's system cannot function. God help this country, if that Member is ever in power again, because it would be a complete free-for-all. It is precisely because of this retrograde thinking that people believe they have a right to steal materials purchased by the Government and allocated to maintaining the infrastructure of this country. It is precisely because of that retrograde, irresponsible, Utopian, idealistic, completely unrealistic thinking.

All I can say is thank God the PNM is the government of this country. I know that the people of this country believe in responsible government; that is why they voted for the PNM in 1991, and that is why they will vote for the PNM in 1996, or whenever the next general election comes. This Government believes in a responsible and practical approach to solving the problems of this country.

We recognize that during the last five years, the former administration had the unenviable record of not having built one single house in its five years in office, a record of which they are proud, I understand. This has placed an even greater burden on the present administration, because the demand increased over those five years. No houses were built. There was not one single house! That was their policy. They built no houses. I have never heard of a housing policy that was, "we will build no houses," but that was their policy.

This Government believes in a multisectoral approach to the problems. The Minister of Housing is engaged in implementing a Squatters' Regularization Programme, and we are continuing with the development of lots, and the construction of houses using funding obtained from the Inter-American Development Bank, the very international institution that the Member for St. Augustine would like us to abandon our responsibilities to.

If I may be allowed to read about the PNM's housing policy from the manifesto, page 30 states:

"Reactivation of a comprehensive approach to housing, recognizing that land development on its own does not address the needs of most citizens;

Implementation of a broad range of policy instruments, such as:

provision of fully serviced lots;

construction of apartments;

construction of starter houses and fully furnished units;

provision of adequate community facilities in public housing developments;"

All of these were ignored in the last five years, while they pursued some—I do not know, that was not Utopian, that was simply misguided pie in the sky, as my colleague has pointed out. I continue with other financial incentives from page 30 such as:

"provision of low-interest housing;

mortgage loans;

ensuring the availability of funding for private home construction and ownership;

tax incentives for home maintenance

aided self-help housing programmes."

We believe this is the only way to deal with the problem. One cannot spend more than one has. It is precisely that sort of thinking that has brought this country to where it is. The idea that you can spend more than you have or that you can borrow more than you can repay. That is where the former administration took us. What we are going to do—

Mr. Sudama: Inform this House who borrowed over the last 30 years more than they could have afforded to repay and why we are in this debt crisis. Who was responsible for this?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, the Member for Oropouche was part of a government that doubled the national debt in the last five years. I think he knows very well who borrowed all the money. I do not have to go into that.

Anyway, I will ask the Member for St. Augustine to be more realistic. I mean, he has some good ideas but, they are not practical. He is obviously unaware that the National Housing Authority is owed over \$50 million in arrears, by persons

Rent Restriction Act
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, February 5, 1993

who are just not paying rent. If people do not pay their rents, then less money is available to repair plumbing systems, drainage systems, sewerage treatment facilities, roads and so on in housing developments.

4.00 p.m.

Every time the Member for St. Augustine talks, you get this concept of trinity dollars, printing money, waving wands and housing units will appear from nowhere, people will somehow find money to pay, although they are unemployed, and so on. I would ask him to desist, however, from advocating theft. He has already caused a serious problem in this country with regard to the illegal takeover of state property.

Mr. Robinson: It is improper to impute to a Member advocating theft. That is saying that the Member is guilty of criminal conduct.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, perhaps that is one of the reasons why the Member for Tobago East dismissed him. I do not know.

I would ask the Member for St. Augustine to, please, be responsible in his public utterances. Please do not tell people to go by the side of the road and take up government material for their personal use. That is one of the ways by which the government system and respect for the rule of law in this country break down.

Finally, I commend the mover of the motion. I believe it is necessary to help the poor people of this country.

Mr. Humphrey: I want to thank the hon. Member for giving way, but the question I want to ask him is, if he really sat down to write that speech? He is reading his speech. Did he really sit down to write that nonsense?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, while the Member was speaking, I jotted down some notes. Every time he comes with this trinity dollar concept. I have to try to put some sense into his head.

I commend the motion. The continuation of the Rent Restriction (Re-enactment and Validation) Act is necessary to help the many poor people in this country who cannot afford the rents that would obtain if pure market forces were allowed free rein.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Miss Pamela Nicholson (Tobago West): Madam Speaker, today I really did not come here to take part in this debate, but after listening to the nonsensical

arguments postulated by the Member for Diego Martin East, as he always does, I thought I must rise.

He said in his discourse that what the last government—if I remember rightly—was doing was 'spending what one does not have and borrowing what one cannot repay'. I want to send him back to the UWI library to do some home lessons and to know that that did not arise from any other government but the People's National Movement.

Even when you look at the address to the nation last Monday by Finance Minister, Wendell Mottley, in the *Trinidad Guardian* of Friday January 29, 1993 you see:

"A number of successive Governments have employed different short term strategies to shield our people from the worst effects of our poorer circumstances. To sustain the level of services to which you had grown accustomed the Chambers administration was forced to utilise savings that the country had accumulated during the boom years, and when that was exhausted we borrowed abroad."

You created the problem. You borrowed.

Madam Speaker: Can we have the page of the newspaper?

Miss P. Nicholson: *Trinidad Guardian*, Friday January 29 1993, page 9 and the article is, "Let us work together for a brighter future" and the spokesman was the Finance Minister, Wendell Mottley.

In other words, I am just trying to inform and educate the Member for Diego Martin East by letting him know the facts of the matter so that he would not come back and make that argument. The whole crisis situation, from an economic perspective, that we have in Trinidad and Tobago was created by the People's National Movement and against that same argument made by his own Minister, the Member for St. Ann's East, Finance Minister, Wendell Mottley.

Mr. Imbert: On a point of order. The Government is on record as pointing out that successive Governments financed the deficit.

Madam Speaker: Are you disputing the article?

Mr. Imbert: She is misquoting the article. She has not read the whole article

Miss P. Nicholson: Madam Speaker, that is not a point of order. I am quoting a statement that was made. Let him sit, please.

Madam Speaker: He has a point of clarification, not a point of order.

Mr. Imbert: The Member is misleading the House. She is misquoting the article. What the Minister of Finance has pointed out is that after one administration used savings the other administration, their administration, borrowed money.

Madam Speaker: What he is trying to say is that there is a misinterpretation of the word "we"?

Miss P. Nicholson: I appreciate the pious parson, the Member for San Fernando East and his peril today, so he is going out to take some breeze—too much heat.

Let me repeat what I said because the Member for Diego Martin East is incorrect in what he says. This is Minister Mottley:

"A number of successive Governments have employed different short term strategies to shield our people from the worst effects of our poorer circumstances. To sustain the level of services to which you had grown accustomed the Chambers administration was forced to utilize savings that the country had accumulated during the boom years, and when that was exhausted we borrowed abroad."

Mr. Imbert: Read the next sentence.

4.10 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

Miss P. Nicholson: Madam Speaker, I am sure that the Minister of Finance would not engage in that discourse. That is what he implied. I listened to him on the television when questions were put to him and he showed very clearly that there was where the crisis started.

One thing I must say is there is a little honesty in them and you could pick one or two persons who, when confronted with the facts of life, do not fool the people. He is speaking the truth. I am not going to waste time with the Member for Diego Martin East. He belongs to another grouping that I do not like to talk about. You notice over the last two weeks I sat in my seat and I meditated. I said, "Let there be peace on earth", and I did not take him on.

Madam Speaker, let us get serious about the matter. What I wanted to do was to correct what he was saying. The whole crisis, from an economic perspective, came out.

[Interruption from the gallery]

Madam Speaker, could you address the gallery, please.

Madam Speaker: I am very disappointed with the members of the public gallery. Those of you who wish to listen to the proceedings of this House have to conform to the rules of this House, and that is that you do not misbehave in the public gallery by clapping, interrupting a Member or indulge in any form of misbehaviour at all. If you do, I am afraid you will have to be put out of the House. The Member is entitled to make a contribution and to do so without interruption.

Miss P. Nicholson: Madam Speaker, with due respect, I want to point out a bald-headed lady with shades.

Madam Speaker: I do not think that the Member ought to degenerate to that level. I have just warned the members of the public gallery and I think the Member ought to carry on with the debate.

Miss P. Nicholson: I am saying so because she consistently disturbs me.

Madam Speaker: I have warned the gallery. Therefore, if she persists, I would have to take action against her.

Miss P. Nicholson: She does it every week, when I am walking by or anything. She is very disturbing.

Madam Speaker, I will not let emotional behavioural patterns of people who do not understand or have the intellect to really cope with certain problems—

Madam Speaker: Exactly.

Miss P. Nicholson: It is only emotion that they can work with.

Madam Speaker, the point that I was making is that he is incorrect to say that, and he must do the correct thing. He also made a statement—I saw some contradictions in his argument in that he said, if I remember him rightly, that over 50,000 houses were built by the People's National Movement—am I correct?

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Miss P. Nicholson: And then they are arguing now that they do not have any money, so they cannot do what they did then. Am I correct?

Madam Speaker, I wrote what he said. I want to tell him that during the period that the last Government served, the same argument that he is making was made then. But I want to show him something. Let me inform him about the cost at

Rent Restriction Act
[MISS NICHOLSON]

Friday, February 5, 1993

which they built their houses over the last five years that they served before they came back into office:

- 1981, \$130 million
- 1982, 603 ";
- 1983, 530 ";
- 1984, 385 ";
- 1985, 201 ";

When the heat of the decline really came on the Government in 1986, they were able to afford only \$42.1 million. Because of that, they could not continue in the same vein.

So the amount of money that was spent on houses between 1981 and 1986, was over \$2 billion.

Miss Bhaggan: And only 50,000 were built?

Miss P. Nicholson: Madam Speaker, what we were able to spend from 1987 to 1991, was only about nine per cent of that amount, if so much.

Madam Speaker, most of those funds had to be spent on completing the project that was started at Cocorite. We also had to do tremendous repairs at Maloney and Malabar, where those houses have some basic fundamental weaknesses and can collapse at any time because the floors are resting on each other like a pack of cards. I can give them the report; I am sure I left the report in the Ministry of Settlements and Public Utilities. Minister Lasse would know about that. A study was also done by Cariri.

Mr. Jurai: Would the Member give way to a question? Could she state who built those houses that were collapsing?

Miss P. Nicholson: I am not on a personality scenario, but those houses were built by the People's National Movement and at that time the Minister was my hon. Friend, who is very honest today, and that is the Minister of Finance, the Member for St. Ann's East.

What I want to do is just to educate the Member for Diego Martin East and tell him that he must do his home lessons properly before coming to the House. Madam Speaker, when we went into Government—the Member for St. Augustine argued what our approach was. It was against the background of no money,

against the background of what we thought the country needed at the time, that that approach was made. I still feel that the approach is a very sound one.

As a matter of fact, when I read the task force document, I realized that they are just following what the National Alliance for Reconstruction postulated. I have spoken several times to the Minister of Housing, the Member for Point Fortin, and he always tells me I am speaking the truth; he is just implementing my programme. If he is honest, he would say that here, today. Up to last week we chatted and he said that: "I looked at the task force document and there is very little change."

Dr. Lasse: I normally do not like to stand and interrupt speakers, but I need to put the record straight. I spoke with the Member for Tobago West on many occasions and I told here that this government is interested in looking at what was good and continuing it, and what is not good, discarding it. That has always been my policy.

Miss P. Nicholson: That is not very much different from what I said, only the latter part. But I know that he must defend himself.

When you look at the task force document, basically, they are not saying anything different from what we said. Right now the areas that are being developed under the People's National Movement, re the land programme, were all started by the National Alliance for Reconstruction. The whole concept is agreed upon.

Right now, the IADB funds that are being used for settlements in the country are as a result of all the hard work done by the National Alliance for Reconstruction, my Ministry. For three years we worked on the programme. We got the approval, which I think, was signed by the former Prime Minister. All the work, as far as squatter regularization and all the foundation work, was done by the National Alliance for Reconstruction—meeting the people, going to the communities, forming community groups in all the areas. The PNM knew nothing about that.

We did a pilot project at Rock City, Laventille—I am sorry that the Minister of Public Utilities is not sitting here, because when those people were threatened by a business company, he came to me at the Ministry, and I immediately tackled the matter. He gave me some information; we went to the people, we sought assistance to give them some time and then we met the people involved. I used to be at Laventille night after night. Ministers from the NAR Government went up there to serve the people of Rock City.

Rent Restriction Act
[MISS NICHOLSON]

Friday, February 5, 1993

We formed a co-operative, then we borrowed money from the Co-operative Bank, bought the lands, and then the people were settled and they were just supposed to pay a certain amount every month. I only hope that they are keeping up the good work that I started with them. I only hope that the Member for Point Fortin, the Minister of Housing, will visit them to see that they continue to operate at a high level. It is that approach that we are saying should be used in the squatting areas.

The National Housing Authority had set up a number of community groups all over the country: Maturita; Bamboo Settlement No. 3; Malick; Bagatelle; Waterhole Phase II; Sovereign Trace, Laventille; Embacadere; New City, Valencia; Blitz Village; Pleasantville; Zone B, Arima; Upper Leon Street, Morvant; Wardens Road, Point Fortin. This was to service something like 2,600 families.

Right now, the IADB programme also does a part of the squatting project, and one of the projects—it should be almost completed now—Bamboo Settlement No. 3 and I think it is Maturita, in Arima were started when I left there. They should be completed by now. If they did not start, at least the contracts were given out.

So what I am trying to say, Madam Speaker, is that you never had that kind of work addressed to squatters in this country. What was addressed to squatters is “the police coming to push down the houses.” The country faced that situation for several years. One has to give credit to the Member for St. Augustine, from whom the idea emerged, as to how that situation should be addressed. You must give him credit for that.

It came out that one could not resolve the squatting situation in the country by Act No. 20 of 1986 which the People’s National Movement were forced to enact because of the pressures of the people of the day, led by the Member for St. Augustine. But nothing could be done because the Act called for the people going to a tribunal from a singular level. What needs to be addressed, and we started it and it was going beautifully... As a matter of fact, I think, a Bill for the Regularization of Tenure (State Lands) was already on the Order Paper—this is my speech here on that Bill, and this was to resolve the squatting situation, and give legal status to the work we were doing—when the people of the country decided that the time had come that the previous government should be removed. One cannot act against the people. I say thanks for that. It was tremendous hard work. I should like to see how somebody else would take up the challenge. But it

was the first time that the whole squatting situation was addressed in the country; and it was under the National Alliance for Reconstruction. All the documents are there.

So right now half of the work for the squatters is being done, by the IADB, that is the unit under the Ministry of Settlements and Public Utilities, and the other half by the National Housing Authority. The facts are here. Copies were left in the office, and I would recommend to the Member for Point Fortin that he give copies of all the documents to the Member for Diego Martin East, so that he could educate himself, and when he comes into the House he could say something sensible.

As a matter of fact, when I met Minister Lasse on the first day, I told him, "Minister, your platform is set. Everything has been done and you should just be rolling." I told him that if there is a Minister in that government who should really produce, it should be the Minister of Housing and Settlement, because all the background work was done. I am not saying everything was complete. I am saying the major work that took three or four years to do was complete and he should just be rolling, I told him that.

Madam Speaker, I just want the country to know that to build the houses that the People's National Movement built, they had to have money. In the five years, that is 1981 to 1986, over \$2 billion was spent on the houses that the People's National Movement built, whether they were constructed properly or not. There were endless problems and so on. But they built them; one cannot say no. The stock is there. What did we do? We completed the project at Cocorite. We also built a 28-flat building at Bath Street.

Mr. Allum: It was finished already.

Miss P. Nicholson: It was finished? Bath Street was built by the NAR. The whole programme came out of my idea. After we were working on the land development, we recognized that there had to be a different approach from the urban—

Dr. Lasse: Can the Member for Tobago West state the date on which the Bath Street apartments started?

Miss P. Nicholson: Madam Speaker, I cannot remember the date, but I believe that started in 1990, the 28-flat building at Bath Street began in 1990 and was completed before I left there. The only thing might be drains outside that were left to be completed. It was constructed under the NAR. I am not going to argue that because I know that is a fact of life. That was one area.

Rent Restriction Act
[MISS NICHOLSON]

Friday, February 5, 1993

When we recognized this urban scenario, although we had very little funds—the Mahabir Lands programme, the contractor had also started. I do not know how far he got in that one, because I think that that contract was given out in 1991. The whole approach came from the NAR; all the background work was done. One recognized that in the urban areas, there were not the lands available to make use of as you were able to use in the suburban and other areas of Trinidad. These are facts; they are there.

Madam Speaker, thousands of lots should be available by now: Bon Air should be ready. If it is not ready, it must be as a result of the slackness that has taken place over the last year. Couva should be ready.

Dr. Lasse: Madam Speaker, on a point of clarification. I think instead of allowing the Member for Tobago West to mislead the House continually, I want to state categorically that under her tenure the policy which she tried to introduce was just not working. It is only within the last year, when this administration introduced what we call “affordability”, that all these lots were available and people came for them. Only ten per cent of all the persons who had registered for lots from the time the NAR were in office to the time they left—only ten per cent—came forward. Today there is as much as 65 per cent in some cases and 85 per cent in others.

Miss P. Nicholson: Madam Speaker, as usual, the PNM loves to manoeuvre and I will have to clearly do some documents and send them to the press so that the country and the people from the East-West Corridor would know the truth.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.05 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Miss P. Nicholson: Madam Speaker, to bring back the discourse on course, I should like to state that when the NAR Government went into office we were flooded with endless complaints from the poor and needy of the East-West Corridor. Many of them were paying for properties without buying them. For example, you had the situation in Malabar where the walls of the houses were made from gypsum board, which is something like cardboard, so that when the rains came and soaked through, it just flooded the homes. The people were on the march stating that they cannot and will not pay the prices that they were called upon to pay for those properties. I am very sorry I did not bring my documents here today. When those houses were evaluated by a team of competent people, the prices were cut by, at least, half of what the people were paying before.

You also had a situation at Malabar where some houses were on a river bed—endless water—so anybody who received those houses had to leave and we had to push them down. At La Horquetta there were a number of houses which I ordered to be broken down because from the roof to the foundation area was poor—you just could not stay in them. Nobody could be in them. Most of these people were taken from the hills of Laventille and Morvant and put into those houses.

A number of these people also said that they were given the houses. It was not a situation where you know you have a mortgage to pay. As a matter of fact, when I instructed the Permanent Secretary to communicate with NHA when we saw the debts that were owed to us, many of the people when, called in, would tell you, 'I was given this house by Minister So-and-So; or Representative So-and-so got this house for me'. I am not here to raise these issues today, but because of certain points that were raised earlier, I had to do so. I just feel that this is not the time to be discussing these things but one has to remind people because their memories are very short and that is why many times they are misled and misguided. When people would have had to pay over \$50 million, collectively, one had to take an approach from a social perspective, when one recognized that employment was also a problem with some of them.

What I wanted to stress was the quality of work that was done on those buildings for our \$2.1 or \$2.2 billion. It was atrocious. Then when we came we had nothing. So we had to come up with a creative approach where we decided that people would end up becoming independent and self-reliant. That is why I was saying we had to congratulate the Member for St. Augustine for the Sou-Sou Land approach. When we decided to develop the land we said, "well you know if you have \$1,000 you pay that down, and every month you pay a certain sum." What was really happening was that the people were paying for just the development of the land and we felt that it was absolutely necessary to change the whole attitudinal structure of the society. People must not be left dependent and must not be enslaved in certain thinking so that certain people have them totally dependent on them. People must be free.

At that time and even now, I always remember *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* written by Paulo Freire. In his book, this is what he was saying: when you educate the people who are not educated, they cry out that this is freedom because they then are able to make independent decisions. But when the people are not educated, they are kept enslaved from an emotional perspective and they keep running behind certain people because they believe everything that these people are saying and they are totally dependent; they cannot reason for themselves. I

Rent Restriction Act
[MISS NICHOLSON]

Friday, February 5, 1993

always read his book and I always tell people that it is a very good book that all politicians must read. It opens up your society when the people become knowledgeable, when they are able to think for themselves; when they have an independent mind.

Madam Speaker, this was the approach to the kind of programme we were doing with the land development. We were saying develop the lands first and after the people pay for those, you know, like the Sou Sou Land approach, \$1,000, and as they get more they pay, then you will take on the building of homes and they themselves would build their homes with some of the very ideas that were read here this evening. We had the same self-help approach in building, where the designs of the houses—and they are there in the NHA—were shown to the people who could not have afforded more than a certain amount and you could give a certain amount and they would use their sweat and pay for that little.

For example, the Government was really functioning as a facilitator and that is the only way it can function. Even now, if we are to come out of this dilemma that we are in, you have to be a facilitator; you cannot subsidize. We said, “you would pay for the land development.” When the developments were costed, the lowest price was something like \$12,000—\$15,000 going up to \$30,000.

5.15 p.m

Today there is a turnaround to bring back these people into this dependency syndrome scenario. It is just stimulation and motivation that is needed. Because when someone pays for that land which was developed and he was a part of that whole developmental process—he belongs to a group that worked for it and did the payment himself—you have an independent, self-reliant, proud individual, feeling proud that, "I paid for my land; I was part of this developmental process. Lands that I could not own before, I own now."

That was and is the approach that one should follow. That is why I said earlier, that is one of the approaches we used with the squatter regularization. One of the pilot projects we did was at Rock City, Laventille. Minister Marshall is here to tell the truth and to attest to what we did at Laventille. I used to be up there nearly every night, working with the people. When other Members felt afraid to go up to Laventille, I was never afraid, because I always worked with the masses.

The people recognized the importance of having someone like me around because they got at Rock City what they never expected to achieve. The businessman was pushing down the lamp-post. They went and squatted on the

people's land, and they were putting up electricity without any approval, and when they saw that light came at the end of that tunnel, they felt very happy that they had a Minister who could come and have meetings with them, from night to night, organize them into a co-operative and work with them to see that they own these lands.

It was the same approach with the development of lands. So when I hear people talking about, going to the IADB and the lands that were to cost \$12,000, \$15,000 or \$30,000, you now have those lands costing \$5,000 to \$10,000, so you are going back to the whole subsidization syndrome that you are arguing against. If the real cost is \$15,000, work with the people from the Sou Sou Land approach and let them pay their \$15,000.

This is what Minister Mottley once called for. When you listen to his discourse, he is now seeing that what the NAR was saying is the truth and the correct thing. He is conceding. Minister Marshall openly conceded. Listen to what Minister Marshall said:

"I am prepared, particularly in the case of the Public Utilities to take the kinds of decisions that must be taken even if it means implications for my own political career because somebody has to take the bull by the horns, particularly in terms of WASA."

He goes on:

"To be in opposition and criticizing the government programmes is easy, but when you are in the driver's seat and you have to take those decisions, that is what differentiates the big men from the little boys. And I am not saying that now."

Listen to him. He is really reneging on his former position but you have to congratulate him for being honest. He said:

"And I am not saying that now."

While people, including himself, had problems with the NAR Government, you at least had to give them credit for accepting the responsibility of managing the country and all that went with it. They may have embarked on a course that many of us disagreed with, but at least they accepted the challenge."

He disagreed with it because he did not understand; he did not know:

It is a total turnaround, because he was once saying, "Not a man must go", but he recognizes that what Minister Nicholson was doing in Public Utilities and

Rent Restriction Act
[MISS NICHOLSON]

Friday, February 5, 1993

Settlements, at that time, now that he is confronted with the battle, was the correct thing and he was doing the wrong thing by playing the lieutenant of the guerrillas. But what I like about him, is that he is straightforward—just as I am—and he is truthful and honest, and that is the kind of individual I can work with. I cannot work with dishonest people. When you hear them, they do not have any knowledge of what they are saying. They have not educated themselves on what they are coming into the House to talk about.

I do not get up here unless I know what I am talking about and I really did some research so I know something about it. I should like to advise the Member for Diego Martin East—not because he is experiencing some heat in the country today—that it is better to keep quiet than to get up and talk nonsense and put yourself in more heat. Do not do that. I am sure if he did not get up here this afternoon, I would not have had to get up. By now, the Member for Point Fortin would have finished the debate, because I find that it is a simple motion asking for the extension of the Rent Restriction (Re-enactment and Validation) Act, 1991 (No. 36 of 1991) for a further three years.

I did not come here this evening to talk on that. I came to talk on the Prime Minister's statement. I was well-equipped. That is why I have Minister Marshall's document here, because it is that battle I came for. But I had to rise, after listening to the Member for Diego Martin East. He must recognize what we had to cope with when we came in here. He is boasting about the 50,000 houses. The representative for San Fernando East always does that and always says we did not build, but they never told the people—

Mr. Manning: If the hon. Member is suggesting that my assertion is incorrect, would she be kind enough to let us know how many houses were built in their time?

Miss P. Nicholson: Allow me to make my point. He has an opportunity to reply.

What I am saying is, when they do that, they do not put on the other half of the matter, that they had \$2.1 to \$2.2 billion to build these houses with. They spent that. They really wasted \$1 billion of it, because of the quality of work that was done. If another approach were used, where the people themselves were involved and allowed to build their own homes, design it for themselves—they would watch it and they would feel proud.

Another example I can give you—because one of the things this Government and Members of the Opposition do not recognize is that as a facilitator, we met with a number of financial institutions in this country and the Bill was brought to

the House and it was approved, where they offered millions of dollars to people and the interest at that particular time was 8, 8.5, to 9 per cent. It was very low at the time, as against 13 to 14 per cent. They do not recognize that when people go and borrow that money and build a house, that is a house that was built under the policy of the Government.

So that if 1,500 people took loans and built their homes, you created that opportunity for those people. Because if they could not have had the money at that low interest rate, they might not have done it.

Mr. Manning: I thank the hon. Member for giving way, Madam Speaker. The argument started in response to an assertion that the PNM constructed 50,000 houses in its time. The question I ask in response to that assertion is: How many houses were constructed by the government of which she was a part?

5.25 p.m.

Miss P. Nicholson: Madam Speaker, I am telling you that those people who got the 1,500; because we did not believe—and I still do not believe so—that the Government should actually...

Mr. Humphrey: Madam Speaker, I ask the Member for Tobago West: how many houses were constructed on the New Range project on the aided self-help approach?

Miss P. Nicholson: That was my next point. Based on the Sou Sou Land concept, over 100 acres of lands was bought in Tobago, just by organizing the people; the rank and file, the masses. The same masses that they do not educate, we educated them and organized them into a co-operative and so on. I think—I cannot remember the direct figure—it is roughly over 500 lots there. They bought it for over \$2 million. In three months' time, we were able to raise \$2 million with those people and we sold the lands based on the same idea that I was talking about.

Each individual got their lot for \$7,000. Today, I would like to take Prime Minister Manning, Member for San Fernando East, to visit that place. *[Interruption]* You, you, I would carry you!

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

Motion made, That the Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. *[Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh]*

Question put and agreed to.

Miss P. Nicholson: Madam Speaker, today, one has over 100 houses there, and most of the people are the rank and file, the masses. If one sees these houses, Madam Speaker, real sweet. Just like what the representative for St. Augustine was saying. They raised a certain amount of money and they used that community, camaraderie. When they were ready for the foundation, one would see a whole village going down to lay that foundation there. Then, one would see brothers and sisters there the next week running up the blocks and so on; beautiful homes, just like those of any middle class individual who would struggle and spend \$250,000 to build, they would build it for \$70,000 or \$80,000. That is the idea that we, and the representative for St. Augustine, had.

One of the problems, Madam Speaker, and I want to point this out, that we had, was the whole bureaucratic structure that kept back the land development. I know we were not able to get through with all of it, and I only hope that the Member for Point Fortin, Minister Lasse, would be able to really overcome them. Because, where we had our problems, was at the Planning Division level—those people who have to pass plans, this local government, WASA has to give approval etc. That was the problematic area.

Our approach was to use the governmental institutions legally, as against what the previous Government did. If they wanted to build 200 houses at Malabar, and it was state lands, they just took the state lands and went and built the houses. They got no—

Mr. Manning: No, no. Madam Speaker, on a point of order. The Town and Country Planning Act authorizes the Minister to take certain decisions. If the Minister exercises the authority that is vested in him under the law, how could that be described as illegal?

Miss P. Nicholson: Madam Speaker, what I am saying is factual. Because a lot of the problems we were confronted with on behalf of the same people in Malabar, Maloney and La Horquetta with regard to the sewer system, the drainage and everything, emerged out of that situation. When one called in WASA and the other institutions they said "Those things were not built with our approval, people just built them and then afterwards they came and told us something just to have us come and look at it." Those are the facts, I am not telling fibs. I am not here for that. I am here to support the Government in whatever it is doing here today. Because this Government needs a lot of support and direction, and whatever little experience I have—it may be little—I am prepared to give it. Whatever little support that I can—

Mr. Manning: Madam Speaker, I graciously accept the offer, but I merely want to ask the hon. Member whether she considers herself an elder stateslady?

Miss P. Nicholson: Madam Speaker, I do not know how to differentiate, because even though it is "elder", I like youth.

Madam Speaker, the point I am making is unless, with due respect to my hon. Prime Minister, he recognizes what is taking place—today he got just a little of the pepper. The seeds that he sowed at a particular point, he is now reaping thereof; and it is now backfiring. But, I am prepared to forgive him and company.

Some Ministers I can watch in their faces now and say I am prepared to forgive them, and to come together with them to save the day. I would not like to see us go into certain kinds of situations that we experienced before—1970. In 1990 they were all part of the guerrilla grouping. They were mole, mole-Manning, general underground, and when he came on the surface, he was the pious pastor walking along. But, you see the Lord—you cannot fool him baby; you cannot fool him. The Member was with the guerrilla group. Some of the Ministers who are sitting here today were with the guerrilla grouping. Some were lieutenants; some were generals. There was one on the ground, a lieutenant who was not afraid and he would come forward and march with the rest. One had the sergeants all over the place; some are even dancing on the road today.

Mr. Manning: Madam Speaker, it is all quite entertaining, and it would have been much better if it were accurate, but, unfortunately, it is not. I think the hon. Member is getting carried away.

Miss P. Nicholson: Madam Speaker, I am not tied up at all; I am very distinct. You see, I was in the middle of one of the areas functioning in the last Government that much of the business was around with "Not a man must go" and "Too low rates not paying anything for T&TEC". I was there. But let us not get away in that area.

What I was really trying to point out is that we are at a situation today where what is needed is total co-operation, communication, assistance and so on, to save the day in this country. What we have to be thinking about is the welfare of the people, not the welfare of the mole Manning or the lieutenant Marshall. I am not getting personal, really, but, at that time that is how I saw them. And what we have to think about is not party, but about people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, that is why I am of the opinion that when one comes to the House to talk, for example, on this Rent Restriction Act one should be prepared. I

Rent Restriction Act
[MISS NICHOLSON]

Friday, February 5, 1993

do not feel that the Member for Diego Martin East should rise to speak on a topic on which he is not equipped. That is why I got up this afternoon. We must get up and talk on what we are acquainted with when we believe it is beneficial to the House.

I really rose, Madam Speaker, to correct him. Firstly, to inform him that the houses he is talking about—those that were built over the period 1981—86—cost \$2 billion; very poor work. Right now, if there is a slight eruption along the East-West Corridor, one can see those high rise buildings in Maloney collapsing. The Cariri study showed it very clearly, that the floors are resting on each other like a pack of cards. One needs millions and millions of dollars to repair those buildings. The people are living there by the grace of God. Those buildings were very poorly structured, water all over the floors and so on. Right now, and even when we were there, the country did not have the money to do the work. It is a serious problem.

The money was spent, but Minister Imbert, must know that the quality of work was not up to standard. And, the poor people, for whom I know we cared, were thrown into them, their moneys demanded and no quality work. You had it all over. Malabar, as I told you, gypsum board, and they paid over \$100,000 for such a house. Prices had to be cut. They had a situation with the houses at Flagstaff. Those were for middle-income people, over \$300,000 or \$400,000. Nobody could have taken them. People did not go into them until we addressed the situation and had to cut the prices when the value of the homes was taken into consideration.

5.35 p.m.

So, when people are talking about the NAR government not doing anything, our time was taken up dealing with that; resolving the problems for the people. Especially the lower income people. We finished off the Cocorite area.

It was under the NAR Government—and I stand my ground; they can say what they want. We built a 28-flat building at Bath Street.

When I left there—Is the Member still opening his mouth? Is he not ashamed of himself? All the problems of the day in a certain direction surround him. Pray and ask for penance.

Then you have the Mahabir lands. I am sure that the contract was given out and those houses were started. I came here today to defend those areas in the debate of the Prime Minister's statement. That is why I can reply to some of the

things that the Member said. I also want him to note that all the work, in respect of the IADB loan was done under this former Minister and everything was prepared and left there, whether it was the lands that were developing, or what.

We knew that a certain amount of that money should have gone for people to get loans to build their homes. I think it is the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company which is the institution that should deal with that financial aspect, so that when they have their lots they could go and get their loans at an average price and to build—I do not know what the position is now. They were encouraged to build affordable homes. There is also the squatter regularization; the work began there also with us. Much background work was done. Half of the squatter projects are under the IADB programme and the other half under the National Housing Authority. It is a good thing I turned to this book. I will give the prices of those houses that I said I could not find the figures for. Schedule of revaluation of NHA housing units. Seven Major Estates:

Area	No. of Buildings		Original Cost	Present Cost
Valencia	251	"	\$140,822	91,933
Malabar			168,769	83,500
Bon Air	1,261	"	106,206	72,150
La Horquetta	3,449	"	96,269	54,367
Maloney	1,450	"	133,995	67,667
Edinburgh 500 Chaguanas	411	"	131,914	55,250
Lisas Gardens Couva	512	"	151,449	85,000
Flagstaff				
(one bedroom)			165,000	130,500
(two bedroom)			295,000	184,500
(three bedroom)			450,000	243,000
Town house A			450,000	252,000
Town house B			470,000	355,500

Rent Restriction Act
[MISS NICHOLSON]

Friday, February 5, 1993

(I think it was started by Mr. Chin Lee and the other contractor was Mr. Emile Elias). I do not think I am telling fibs here. You could not see them. They were in hiding. The people were fooled and crying and marching. That particular grouping.

At Flagstaff a few people took up some. They paid probably for a few months and then decided they were not going to pay a single cent more. All the other buildings were there like white elephants. It was our creative thinking; the people were protesting the price based on the quality of the homes, and this was addressed. I only hope I have cleared the air for the Member for Diego Martin East in particular, and to remind the nation in general—and most of those homes as the Minister of Finance will tell you were built at a cost of over \$2 billion.

I also want to remind them that the IADB fund was acquired under the National Alliance for Reconstruction and most of the works that will continue; everything was in the programme.

I stress that what we were doing was working on the minds of the people. We wanted the people to move away from the dependency syndrome. We used to have community meetings every month—the National Housing Authority had the meetings and the people paid down their moneys month to month. They were to pay \$15,000 to \$30,000, I think. Today we are hearing \$6,000 to \$12,000. So the usual PNM scenario, the same people who are saying that they cannot subsidize WASA, the same Government that is saying that it cannot subsidize the port, the same government that is saying that it cannot subsidize the Public Transport Corporation, these same people are cutting the real price of the development work. The people agreed on the former price and they were going to respond. The only way these people would not have responded after I left was because of weakness.

I also want to stress that much background work was done. I think, I said a little earlier on that some of the problems that confronted us were the problems from the areas that you had to get approval for. Many of these programmes would have gone much faster and I would hope, and be very happy, if Minister Lasse would be able to overcome—at least most of those areas might have been addressed before I left there. I only hope that he will be able to overcome those problems, and can continue speedily along on the platform, the background, and on the foundation that was left there for him by Minister Nicholson of the National Alliance for Reconstruction.

I would urge and support the People's National Movement in all their work, especially, when I know that their programme is more or less within the confines

and the thinking of the National Alliance for Reconstruction so that at the end of it we would have independent and proud people getting their properties, and their homes and becoming self-reliant and can think independently, and would not be left any more within the confines and the trauma of that dependency syndrome. Thank you, very much.

5.45 p.m.

The Minister in the Ministry of Planning and Development and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, the motion before us seeks to extend the life of the Rent Restriction (Re-enactment and Validation) Act 1991, to give the Act another three years so that the situation involving landlords and tenants can be properly controlled.

The measure is designed, as its long title declares, to restrict the rents of certain premises, and the right to recover possession of such premises. Broadly speaking, such legislation which has been enacted in many Commonwealth territories seeks to reduce or eliminate the danger of overbearing terms and conditions being placed on tenants by landlords, and also seeks to give tenants some security of tenure.

The motion before us is one of necessity. It is one in which we feel this type of legislation must be allowed to continue, until a comprehensive system of legislation can be put in motion. If this motion is not allowed to pass, we would have a situation where rents will become exorbitant, and it is a situation where a government which cares—as my colleague says—cannot allow to subsist.

The history of this Act shows that the relationship between landlord and tenant is one which has always been somewhat emotional. It is one which has always been of tremendous importance, not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but also in several other countries of the world. Continually, the need for housing far outstrips the ability to provide housing. As has been said several times this evening, the PNM Government is well known for its ability to provide housing for the people of Trinidad and Tobago; it is also well known for insisting that people of all spheres must be taken care of. It is also well known for insisting on responsibility.

In February, 1990, in relation to this Act, it became necessary to have the Act validated because through effluxion of time the Act had lapsed and thus the Rent Restriction (Re-enactment and Validation) Act of 1991 was passed. By this Act, a three-year period was given for the provisions of the Act to be in existence. This three-year period will come to an end on February 23, 1993.

Rent Restriction Act
[HON. C. ROBINSON-REGIS]

Friday, February 5, 1993

It is with this in mind that the mover of the motion comes to the House requesting that the Act be extended for another three years. Over the years the population of the country has grown, as has the need for housing. This Act, whilst recognizing the right of the landlord to his premises, also protects tenants from arbitrary removal, by detailing the means of removal in section 14.

Although the legislation applies to certain lettings, including building land, dwelling houses, public and commercial buildings, there are some instances where, by order, such premises can be excluded from the Act.

Mr. B. Panday: Would the hon. Minister be so kind as to tell me why three years? Why not two? Why not 10? Why do we have to come every three years to revalidate this thing?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Prior to this, the Act was for a period of one year. The government at the time felt that a longer period was necessary. If we were to come to Parliament every year to insist that this section be revalidated, it would have been a situation where Members would perhaps find it even more difficult, because they do seem to have some difficulty even when they have to come every three years.

We have found that the three-year period which the 1990 Act required is a reasonable period. We feel that one year would be too short; three years would allow the Rent Assessment Board to do its job as competently as it has been doing.

In continuation, the essence of the legislation is twofold; to prohibit the landlord from recovering as rent more than the maximum permitted for the premises in question, that is the standard rent, and to prevent the landlord from charging fines or premiums when rental contracts are being agreed upon. Additionally, the landlord's right to recover premises is severely restricted once the premises come within the purview of the Act.

Section 15 of the Act, which clearly shows the need for housing, outlines the ability of tenants of premises which fall within the purview of this Act, upon death, to allow their families to stay in the premises, because the Act clearly recognizes that housing is at a premium. It is imperative therefore, that once the system of rent restriction exists and the boards are to function under the law, the legislation must be valid. That indeed is why the Minister of Housing has come before this House this evening.

5.55 p.m.

Madam Speaker, this system of ensuring that rents are kept at a reasonable rate is one which we should all support. We must ensure that the relationship of landlord and tenant is satisfactorily regulated and it is against this backdrop that hon. Members are asked to support this motion.

I thank you.

Mr. Maharaj: I would like to ask the Member a question. Since she has stated that it is the intention of the Government to bring comprehensive legislation, can she state when we will see this comprehensive legislation?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: We are trusting that it will be before the expiration of this three-year period. In addition to that, the Minister of Housing will deal with that question.

MOTION ON ADJOURNMENT

Madam Speaker: I am looking at the time. At 6.00 p.m. we have to suspend the debate for the Member for Couva North to speak on his motion. I wonder if now is not a convenient time, and then we can continue.

State of the Nation

Mr. Basdeo Panday (Couva North): Madam Speaker, I am prepared to wait for the Prime Minister since the motion involves him, but it really does not make a difference whether he is here or not. Does it?

This motion has to do with the nation reaching a dangerous level of dissatisfaction and unease and if something is not done about that dissatisfaction it is likely that this society would explode. This motion is obviously prompted by what took place around Parliament today, where thousands of workers joined to march around the Red House and the Parliament protesting—several unions protesting several issues. No government should have allowed the situation to deteriorate to a level where that kind of demonstration becomes necessary.

The more significant of today's demonstration was not the one that took place around the Parliament at 1.30 p.m., but the one that took place around this Parliament a little earlier in the morning. It must be the first time in the history of this country, as far as I am aware, that uniformed members of the Police Service have been driven to the point where they feel it is necessary to march.

State of the Nation
[MR. B. PANDAY]

Friday, February 5, 1993

My information is that some 400 policemen marched. When you reach that kind of situation, you had better sit up and take note or you are going to fall into a cauldron. I fear that this Government is taking everything smiling. The nation is sitting on a time bomb ready to explode and the Government goes around smiling as if it is business as usual and as if it does not care.

For example, the workers' demonstration today did not start a week ago; it has been on the boil for several months, even years. I have a few clippings here that go back to 1991. I would not read them all. Since 1991 the workers of WASA were threatening to go on a work-to-rule and that is in the *Express* dated April 9, 1991, page 12. The impact of structural adjustment on WASA and T&TEC is nothing new. Mr. J. O'Neil Lewis wrote about it in January 1993. But I think what broke the workers' backs was a statement by the Minister of Finance on January 26, 1993: "We are not stingy; we are broke." he said.

And in the report which appeared on page 10 of the *Express* of Tuesday, January 26, 1993, the Minister noted that 63 per cent of Government's total spending in 1993 would be gobbled up by debt repayment and repayment of public sector wages leaving very little to repair roads and schools and so on.

One would have expected that with these problems, which were rearing their heads for some time now, the Government would have taken steps to avert the kind of confrontation that we are having in the society. I understand that they are coming back next Friday in larger numbers. You see, when you thought you brought people last Friday to terrorize us, we brought ours this Friday and we have more people than you.

I am submitting that the problems we are facing with all these unions and workers have very little to do with the lack of money, as the Minister says in that article. It really has to do with the attitude of the Government. The workers of this country are not beasts. They can understand if you reason with them, but this Government has adopted an arrogance unprecedented in the history of this country. This is a bunch of never see come see Ministers who believe that the way to run the Government is to beat their chests and keep their noses in the air. Sometimes I feel that if the rain comes some of them would drown.

6.05 p.m.

Do Members on that side see what is happening in the Police Service? Why are the police marching? Does the Government know? Does it care? I am hoping that it will tell us today why the policemen of this country found it

necessary to march. If that is how you intend to respond to it, I have no problem. If you want to play mas from now, I have no problem. What I am saying is, the Minister of National Security is reported in the press as saying, "The buck stops here. This buck has been passing on for too long; I am going to deal with this matter." Fine. I have no problem with that. But before he begins to act in that high-handed manner, should he not talk to the unions, the associations that represent the police?

The acting Commissioner of Police is reported to have said: "I do not know anything about this hiring of this special adviser, the creation of five posts and the filling of the five posts from outside." Foreigners from the Yard and so on. The Minister replies by saying, "I did not know I had to inform them". That was his response. What can be more arrogant than that? "I do not know what the rule is that tells me that I must inform them. I do not know what order they expect me to obey to inform them, I am not supposed to inform them."

A Minister who is in charge of so important a portfolio must realize that if there is decadence in the police service, if the police service becomes dissatisfied, this is opening the society to enormous dangers. Therefore, you have to deal with the situation. He cannot stand up and beat his chest and say, "I am a big, bad John. I will do what I want. I will take off my gloves, I will beat up this one and terrorize the other", and so on. That is not the way. I think the Minister of National Security should be removed for that statement alone. He is causing—he caused what happened outside there today.

The failure to recognize the unions and the role of unions in this society is the basic problem with this Government. They want to ride roughshod over the workers, the unions etc; they do not want to have dialogue with them; they want to speak to them in a manner that they spoke to them for the past 30 years and expect them to just swallow it. I think they are making an awful mistake if they believe that they can rule the people of today as they ruled them for the past 20 to 30 years.

I am sure that many of us see with our own children who are exposed to so much information on the television, such a tremendous information revolution that people are more conscious now than they were long ago. I am sometimes surprised at my little daughter telling me things that I could not dream—she is about nine years old—I could not dream of saying things like that when I was 12, 13 years old.

Mr. Maharaj: They cannot believe you have a nine-year old daughter.

Mr. B. Panday: Of course, that was a little boast on the side there, but I did not think anybody would pick it up.

The point I am making—as a matter of fact, I will tell you something she told me the other day. She saw a Minister of the Government on the television and she said, “Dad, he is so big-headed that when he dies, his coffin is going to look like a lollipop”.

The point I am making is that all the unions are outside there today. The government is threatening to lay off people at WASA—it does not talk to the union. It is threatening to lay off people at PTSC—it does not talk to the union. It is threatening people in other parts of the public service—it does not talk to the PSA. It is threatening TTUTA as though they are children and not teachers. What does the Government expect? Does it know what the problems are? As I say, I hope before the evening is over it will tell me what the problems are in the police service. The Government is bound to know it. It must know it, I do not, I do not have the information.

The Government must not only tell us what the problems are, but what it has done to deal with the problems. Why has it become necessary to march around the Red House? Why is it that the PSA and the NUGFW, TTUTA, the Seamen and Waterfront Workers Trade Union—I have read something in the newspapers where Mr. Mungroo says: the government does not tell them anything; it does not speak to them, it does not have dialogue with them.

I can tell them now that there was a meeting of NATUC. The trade unions are coming together, and because they are coming together the Government should welcome that idea and should speak to them as NATUC. Speak to them as an organized body, so when they do so they give the organized body the responsibility for assisting in allaying the fears of the workers. Do not try to divide them by speaking to them separately—invite NATUC. If it is necessary to speak to them in that way, invite the National Trade Union Council in any event to accompany them. So that, what the workers are asking for, as far as I am aware—

Mr. Valley: Madam Speaker, just in an effort to follow the argument of the hon. Member for Couva North. A while ago he was suggesting that the Governemnt should speak with NATUC, the parent organization, rather than speak to the unions one-on-one. *[Interruption]* Oh, in addition to.

The point I am making is, just a while before he was making the point that we were not talking to the unions at WASA, nor PTSC, or what have you. I just want to know if he is contradicting himself.

Mr. B. Panday: If the Member for Diego Martin Central does not know whom to talk to at this stage, then we are in a bad way.

Mr. Valley: Madam Speaker, that is not the point. I am asking, quite simply, are we talking to people or are we not talking to people?

The Member was making the point that we were not talking to the unions at WASA or PTSC, but then he was counselling that we should not be talking to the individual unions, we should be talking to NATUC.

Mr. B. Panday: I feel awfully sorry for the Minister if he does not understand that. Do not ask me if he is talking to them; he should know that. Does he mean he is talking to them and he does not know? If that is the case, maybe that is why they are outside. Maybe that is how they feel—that he is talking to them and he is not there. Dialogue with them. They must find the mechanism for dialogue. Do not try to break them up; talk to them. Of course speak to them and invite NATUC. They have a gift and they are looking the gift horse in the mouth. The unions are coming together. When unions are fragmented, it is harder to deal with the industrial relations situation. Do they not know that? It seems that they do not know these things.

So what they should do is satisfy the need to talk, but they make sure they do so as one. They have got to find the mechanism for doing that. If they want me to tell them how to do it, I can. If they have to speak to WASA, call the WASA people, the WASA unions and so on, say that you would like to speak to them and ask them if they would mind if NATUC is there and extend an invitation to NATUC.

Mr. Valley: Madam Speaker, after all of that talk, I still do not know whether the Member is of the opinion that the Government is speaking to the unions one-on-one, that is, speaking to WASA union, PTSC union, or whether he believes that we are not talking to them.

Mr. B. Panday: My argument is they are not talking to them either jointly or separately. That is my argument.

Mr. Valley: I just wanted to make sure.

Mr. B. Panday: Make sure now. You are not talking to them.

Mr. Valley: So we are not trying to divide them.

Mr. B. Panday: No, he is missing the point. You see that is what happens with these “never see come see” Ministers. They see ghosts around every corner. Anything I say, they are suspicious that I have accused them. I am not saying that.

State of the Nation
[MR. B. PANDAY]

Friday, February 5, 1993

I am saying that they are not having dialogue with them; that is my argument, whether singly or collectively. They are not dialoguing. That is what I am saying. Of course, if there is WASA, they must talk to WASA.

What I am saying is that they have a gift and the gift is that the unions are showing signs of uniting and they can use that unity to foster their dialogue, push their dialogue further and have the assistance of the union in ending the kind of alienation that we see outside there today. That is what I am saying. Because NATUC try to embrace all the unions and if they are calling on, let us say, the Transport and Industrial Workers Trade Union to deal with matters with respect to the PTSC, they should enquire of them—let me teach them something about industrial relations this evening—“We should like to speak to you about these matters. We note that they are in a larger trade union body. Would you mind if they were invited?” You develop a sense of confidence. That is what they can do.

The point I am making is that if they refuse to have dialogue with the workers, this country is in serious trouble. With respect to the public servants, they cannot have dialogue with people if they put to them ridiculous proposals. It must be ridiculous to offer them, for all the money owed to public servants, \$75 million in 1994, \$100 million in 1995, \$100 million in 1996 and so on. We are talking about some 98,000 workers.

I said something else in the debate which carried us into the morning. I said that when money was flowing through the society like a dose of salts, when money was no problem and you spent money as you wanted, people were prepared to tolerate corruption, they were prepared, because there was so much money around: “Let them fellows tief nah man, at least they giving’ us a little ting.”

Today, when there are 150,000 people unemployed, when people are being retrenched day after day, when people do not have money to pay rent, money to buy food they will not tolerate even the smell of corruption. That is the point I was making to them when I said, on this whole question of corruption that they should deal—*[Interruption]* if people perceive that the Government is engaged in corruption, perception is often the reality in such circumstances and they will react in a particular way.

Now, I thought they were very callous when they were telling these workers that they have to fire them: 1,000 workers from WASA; 1,000 workers from PTSC; 1,000 workers at the Port. While they are telling these people they have to fire them because they have no money, they are also saying that they have to buy the

State of the Nation

Friday, February 5, 1993

Algico building for \$8.3 million. The point is, that is so callous, when Members of the Government have had an Algico connection in the past. It may be in the past, I do not know. I am not imputing anything, please; I am not saying that.

I am saying that in the teeth of their telling people that they have no job, they have to fire people and retrench them, they tell them that they are going to buy the Algico building to house Government offices. They are telling the police they do not have money to build a police station, they do not have money to buy vehicles for them to respond to criminal activity, but they are going to buy the Algico building for \$8 million. Do not be surprised if the junior officers in the army are in the march next week. But my argument is, how could they be so callous to even make a statement like that at this time. When we raised the matter in the House, what did somebody say? “We are going to pay over a period of 10 years.” The importance of that statement, the callousness of that statement, is Algico, and they should never have made a statement like that in the teeth of what is happening in the society.

The reaction that we saw outside today, Madam Speaker, is an indication that people are not prepared to sacrifice in these hard times when they feel that the Government is playing around with their money. Remember when I told them if they do not set up the institutions to make the people comfortable, corruption is being looked at and they are going to end up in trouble. I gave that advice at two o'clock last week Saturday morning.

I told them that I had done my duty, and that even if the people only perceive that there is corruption—perhaps two o'clock in the morning is not the time to give advice—but if people perceive that the Government is corrupt, they are not going to wait. They cannot buy any time to do anything. I must ask them to set up the institutions to let the people see that they are doing something so that their fears are allayed.

Does this demonstration not teach them anything? What do they think it means? How do they analyse what is happening outside there? That everybody is playing politics? I want to tell you that that is one of the reasons I declined to go for elections in NATUC. I used to be the First Vice-President. I said, “No, I am too deeply involved in the politics.” I told NATUC I do not want to be a vice-president with them. I wanted to carry the struggle inside. You know why? Because I do not want to be so callous; I do not want them to accuse the union of having Panday inside there playing politics. So I stepped down [*Interruption*] My friend, if you really do not know, I am arguing about what happened outside there today. Does

State of the Nation
[MR. B. PANDAY]

Friday, February 5, 1993

that not mean anything to them? I am saying that that is an indication that the nation is on the boil.

The Prime Minister rightly said that the honeymoon is over. He knows that all right. The honeymoon is over, what are they going to do about it? Are they going to allow workers to demonstrate week after week?

All that I ask in this debate is let us get the government to make a statement and say they understand what the problem is about. That is all we want: for them to understand what the problem is about, that they know why the workers of WASA were outside there today, that they know why the workers of PTSC were out there today, that they know why the workers of the Port were outside there, that they know why the workers of the Port were outside there, that they know why TTUTA and the public servants were outside there. I am telling you it is going to be bigger next week. It is going to be bigger next Friday because you know what is happening? People are beginning to see that that is it, that that is the only way they are going to get any response.

I raised the matter of the fishermen today not because I wanted to be obstreperous, or anything like that. I really wanted some information, because fishermen were coming to me and telling me that they have joined the demonstration because they have a grievance. What is the grievance? The authorities have suddenly stopped selling fuel for the trawlers to fish. Today, they confirmed that they cannot get their fuel from National Fisheries because some fishermen brought a case against the Government. They actually confess to spiting them. They are spiting fishermen because they brought a case against the government for maltreatment, and people's trawlers are outside there. People want to sell trawlers at a time when we have to encourage people to be self-employed?

All the trawlers are parked. One needs 50,000 gallons of fuel right now. There are three that I know about, parked outside and cannot work because the authorities are spiting fishermen for bringing a case against the Government. The Minister said that today, that they are not getting fuel because of the case they brought. I am amazed! If that is their attitude, this country is going to blow up under their feet. They cannot spite people like that. Did they speak to the fishermen?

In a democratic country, if you block the channels of protest, the peaceful channels of protest, you are inviting people to break the law and to violate the Constitution. If they are telling them that they are in the jungle, that no matter—

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member can begin to wind up, please.

Mr. B. Panday: Madam Speaker, I should like to make a suggestion—before I make my suggestion, bear with me for one moment. I want to show you what really bothers me. I know they are applying the description of “hypocrite” to me in the House, but let me show them what real hypocrisy is. I just want to read from *In Defence of the People’s Interest*. It is a series of articles written by Kenneth C. Valley and Morris E. Marshall. The one by Morris E. Marshall. *Setting the State for Social Unrest*”:

“There is no question about it, Trinidad and Tobago is in serious trouble. Gradually, the workers of this country are being pushed against a wall by an unconscionable National Alliance for Reconstruction Government.”

Just delete that and put “PNM” and you will see what I am saying is exactly what he was saying at that time. I am saying that now. I continue:

“Very soon, the workers’ patience will run thin and they are going to respond. I fear that the outcome may have far-reaching social and economic implications for the entire society.

It is not a situation that any patriotic Trinidadian or Tobagonian would encourage. However, it appears that the Government is deliberately setting the stage for such action and they are to be deplored for not seeing that their draconian measures are likely to bring about this unpleasant development.”

I am quoting, again:

“The current situation at the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) for example, is no doubt very instructive. On Monday last, thirty-seven (37) more workers were dismissed...”

Just change the figure to 1,000.

“making a total of 198 workers who, up to the time of writing have, unceremoniously, received the pink slip from the Authority.”

And incidently, these thousand people are going—I understand they are telling them that they will not get their terminal benefits right away; they will pay it over a period of time; sending workers away and telling them they are not even entitled to severance. They are breaking the law!

But let me go on:

“Over the last week, about 553 workers at the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC) also lost their jobs.”

State of the Nation
[MR. B. PANDAY]

Friday, February 5, 1993

I believe this is why the Prime Minister gave him this Ministry. He knew he could handle it. He was writing too much:

“It is to be made absolutely clear that, from the outset, the problem at WASA and PTSC had its genesis in the government’s irrevocable commitment to the demands of the foreign forces that approximately 4,000 workers be dismissed from these two utilities as a pre-condition for the approval of a Structural Adjustment Loan (SAL) of \$40 million from the World Bank.

In fact, the relevant Cabinet Minute (No. 1007) points out that with respect to WASA, “Trinidad and Tobago will be required to agree to phase out central government transfers to WASA except in respect of the financing of essential capital expenditure.”

I want to read this very juicy part here:

“Obviously, this callous and irresponsible decision does not take into account the far-reaching social and economic cost to the workers, their families and, indeed, to the society as a whole.

The fact that about 150,000 people are already unemployed seems absolutely irrelevant and unimportant to this NAR administration.”

Delete NAR, put “PNM”.

“Absolutely no thought, no caring for the plight of the people they were mandated to represent. Hunger, starvation, unemployment, crime are of no consequence.”

Run the dollars and the suffering workers of the country take the hindmost. Who is the hypocrite? That is all I ask: Who is the hypocrite?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, one minute more.

Mr. B. Panday: I always said I admired that Member tremendously when he came into this Parliament originally. The thing I admired him for most of all was his grasp and understanding of what was happening to the people in the East-West Corridor, that the dependency syndrome was reducing them to slaves, that whereas the white man, the massa, had reduced them to physical slaves, the government were reducing them to mental slaves. I was so proud of him when he said he was going to release them from this chain of oppression that was the dependency syndrome.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I call upon the government today to let us know what they intend to do about this problem. If they need a suggestion, I ask them to

call an economic summit of the nation to discuss the nation's problems and let the government, in conjunction with the people, come up with a plan of action for dealing with the problems that face us.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Wendell Mottley): Madam Speaker, these are, indeed, sober times and I will attempt to deal in the brief time that I am allotted, soberly with what is before us, without trying to raise alarms, but squarely to let Members of this House understand what the state of the nation truly is.

The present situation has its genesis, as I explained before the nation, in economic circumstances very largely outside the control of successive governments of this country. But the more immediate crisis in the public service—and I use that to include the wider public sector—had its genesis in 1987 in that budget when, as you will remember, Madam Speaker, COLA was cut, and merit increases suspended. That situation was complicated in 1989, when there was a 10 per cent cut in public service salaries.

The result of all of that was an accumulation of arrears that presented itself to the government when we assumed power in December of 1991 to the point where we have calculated that—even apart from the matter of the merit increases which is a more difficult matter to quantify and which, in any event, is a court matter—but purely on what is the basis of the award of the court, amounts to a calculation of outstandings of TT \$2.022 billion.

Therefore, when the representatives of the workers insist, as they are now doing, on payment of at least 40 per cent of that in 1993, it represents an unbudgeted payment of over \$800 million.

Now, as I carefully explained on television that night, the country borrowed over a long period of time in an attempt to shield the population from the worst effects of our poorer circumstances so that we have effectively used up in large measure our borrowing capability. So to come and deal in one year with \$800 million in unbudgeted expenses to deal with a 40 per cent settlement of \$2.022 billion implies one of two alternate courses, since the borrowing route is not available.

6.35 p.m.

It means that we must come to the population with a steep increase in taxation in that amount. To yield \$800 million in additional taxation in 1993 to deal with that settlement, would, by way of example, cause us to have to raise VAT from the

State of the Nation
[HON. W. MOTTLEY]

Friday, February 5, 1993

present 15 per cent to somewhere between 25 and 28 per cent, if that were at all possible. Of course, as we all know, this is the season of the donkey and the donkey just cannot bear that much load. So that, in our estimation, even if the Government were so ill-advised as to go to the population for \$800 million more in VAT, it would just not be possible to be borne.

There is another solution that I must put before you. In Zaire only a few days ago, General Mobuto, faced with similar clamours from sections of his public sector and the Opposition, had recourse to printing brand new, crispy bank notes that were issued to meet the particular demands. And, of course, I need not tell you what happened. Immediately after those bank notes were issued, all produce in the markets dried up and the whole economy was reduced to barter and generally to breakdown. I do not have to spell it out to intelligent Members of this House and the wider national community that such economic alternatives are just not available to or advisable for Trinidad and Tobago.

Quite apart from the inflationary consequences, there are also the balance-of-payments consequences. I have, in earnest, tried to explain the functioning of the Trinidad and Tobago economy to many in this country and it is clear that during this difficult period of high debt service, we have to garner all the resources that are available from the different avenues to meet our balance-of-payments commitments. So to support the levels of imports that are absolutely essential to the functioning of this country—from spark plugs for motor cars to wheat for National Flour Mills, to dividend payments that have to go abroad, to any variety of things that the population requires; travel overseas etc—where foreign currency is required, we have to garner that foreign exchange to meet these commitments. We gather it from exports of goods and services, particularly oil. All of us know of the less than happy times for the oil industry in Trinidad and Tobago until quite recently.

Therefore, we are attempting to garner resources from drawdowns on loans from the IDB, the World Bank, supported by our export earnings, and other sources of foreign exchange earnings. It should be clear to all that if we set about massive inflationary government spending through printing of bank notes and such ill-advised devices, we would gut our potential to meet our demand for foreign exchange.

Mr. Sudama: Could you give way to a question?

Hon. W. Mottley: Not just yet, I do not want to break my train of thought, I will accommodate the questions afterwards, Madam Speaker. Therefore, what I am trying to put to the House is that—

Mr. Sudama: Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister is misleading the House. Nobody has suggested the printing of bank notes as a means of solving the problem. Nobody has suggested that. Where has he got this idea from?

Mr. Humphrey: As the trend of thought has been broken already, would the Minister give way to the question now? Madam Speaker, there is a provision of the national Constitution that says all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are entitled to equality of treatment from any public authority. You understand that principle? The Government has creditors abroad and at home. Some of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who are creditors to the Government are the banking institutions, insurance companies, and so on. But they are corporate citizens and under our Constitution are entitled to equality of treatment. The public servants, the police, the military and all the public workers are entitled to the same equality of treatment. Is not one option available for consideration—sharing of the commitment of payment, so that people, in fact, are treated with equality or with equity?

I think at the same time the Minister should respond to what I had proposed, that you consider reducing the amount that we are paying to the foreign creditors. The World Bank recognized that social upheaval was a possibility of the Structural Adjustment Programme. If we are now getting hints that it is in the making, Madam Speaker, it is extremely important that the Government consider options to put a break on it as early as possible.

Hon. W. Mottley: Yes, Madam Speaker, if I could respond to the hon. Member for St. Augustine, there are options which I am trying to narrow down.

Mr. Humphrey: There are more than two.

Hon. W. Mottley: All right, I will discuss with him the other ones that he has raised here. He has raised the possibility of essentially some domestic debt rescheduling. That is an option that we have. Domestic debt rescheduling is an option. We had begun some discussions on this matter. We have not entirely exhausted it, but there are difficulties, especially because of the high rates of interest prevalent and I think the hon. Member for St. Augustine will know the compound effect of these.

On the foreign side, let us be straight. We have explored every possibility of debt forgiveness, and so forth, and it is not available. It is not available mainly because Trinidad and Tobago is viewed, from overseas, as a wealthy country, even in the conditions in which we find ourselves. Therefore, they say, "You are only struggling, taking 30 per cent of your Government spending and servicing

State of the Nation
[HON. W. MOTTLEY]

Friday, February 5, 1993

your debt; look at Jamaica where it is over 50 per cent," or whatever it is. Therefore, they are not giving us the forgiveness as, for instance, they have given Jamaica.

We do not qualify under any of the terms for debt forgiveness. We have tried; we have gone and discussed the matter with lobbyists, etc. and there is one slight avenue where, possibly, we could get some Ex-im bank forgiveness. But that is the only area. Therefore, I would like to say to Members on the other side, through you, Madam Speaker, I understand their earnestness and appreciate their concern. They are citizens of this country and they understand the pressures, but please, gentlemen and ladies, understand that we have approached and sought to see if there is a possibility of debt forgiveness for Trinidad and Tobago and outside of the possibility of some Ex-im bank forgiveness, we have not met with any success.

The only other alternative, then, is unilateral walking away from your debts. That has another connotation—you then have to bear the consequences of that, the consequences which I have gone, to great pains, in another forum to explain to every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Jurai: Have you considered devaluation?

Hon. W. Mottley: Devaluation does not earn foreign currency.

6.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker, I am coming back now to the central issues. In other words, what I have said is that there are no easy ways out. The money is owing. The demand for 40 per cent payment in 1993 is there; it would cost \$800 million. I cannot make room for it by walking away from debts or by getting debt forgiveness, I cannot make room for it by taxing the population more, and I cannot make room for it by borrowing \$800 million more, because I have already shown the population the consequences of borrowing and borrowing, which eventually catches up with you. Therefore, I have exhausted the alternatives. I do not know if the Member for St. Augustine would want to throw up another one.

The facts are, as I announced in the 1992 Budget Speech, that on the issue of the public service—and that includes all; the PSA, the policemen, the nurses, public servants,—the Government would implement the award of the Special Tribunal with effect from March 1, 1992. We did that. COLA of \$280 per month was consolidated with salary, and two per cent was added to the consolidated figure. Additionally, the cost of living allowance was restored, using the formula

given in the Special Tribunal award. The cost of implementing that in 1992 was \$441 million, which was borne largely by increases in taxation on the population, especially gasoline taxation. Those are facts. Excise taxes were considerably increased to bear that cost. The cost—because it was only 10 months in 1992, in 1993 now, we have to bear it for 12 months—is escalated at \$520 million this year, and for every year thereafter. So that the public sector workers have been fairly dealt with.

In our manifesto on page 53, we stated, among other things, that the PNM will settle this issue by first dealing with the current matter, which is what I have just talked about. Then on the issue of back-pay, we said clearly in our manifesto, by:

"- entering into negotiations with the representative unions with a view to arriving at an amicable arrangement for the payment of the arrears, bearing in mind the general acceptance that the arrears cannot all be paid in cash at this time."

We clearly said that.

Mr. Humphrey: You also said you will create jobs and stimulate the economy.

Hon. W. Mottley: I am coming to that, Madam Speaker.

So that we do not have the capacity to meet that in 1993/1994. We implied that in the manifesto. When we came into Government and we saw the numbers squarely, we went out there last year and said we could not see ourselves meeting this in 1993/1994; and I have just explained why.

It goes further than that. We entered into dialogue. We had discussions at ministerial level with NATUC and with the public service unions. Two separate dialogues were going on. We explained those matters to the unions in great detail. We presented charts, figures, data. All of that is known to the unions and it is not to say that they are unaware of the economic situation in the country.

When we came to the individual problems inside the separate utilities, we said that within the context of the economic picture that I have painted, we cannot continue to subsidize these utilities the way in which we have done before. We continue to subsidize, but our pockets are just not big enough to have almost unlimited subsidy.

So we said that those boards must devise plans by which they can become self-sufficient for the benefit of the wider national community, because the

State of the Nation
[HON. W. MOTTLEY]

Friday, February 5, 1993

service that was being provided, was being hamstrung by the fact that they could not have ready access to capital and, therefore, could not get out there and deal readily with the problems raised with Members, like the Member for Oropouche, in his constituency, because the capital sums were just not there, either directly accessible, or available through the banks. Therefore, if those utilities were to become self-sufficient and viable, then they could generate the capital to better serve the population and ultimately secure the livelihood, the standard of living and job security of the workers involved.

We said the boards must devise those plans and then meet with the respective unions. Those plans were based not just on workers; they had to deal with levels of efficiency. The Ministry of Finance had to eat debt and help them restructure their balance sheets. All sorts of things had to be done. Rates had to be looked at. Where rate increases were felt to be justifiable, then we would increase them. It is not just that workers were being singled out as the only cause of inefficiency in the utilities. Clearly, they are not. Management has a great part to play; central government has its part to play. We are all part of this business of sacrificing to get these utilities going again. Because underpinning our export thrust and so forth, are necessarily efficient ports, water authorities, electricity utilities, and so forth.

These plans the boards came up with. As only a part of the general solution is the question of workers. The boards have now to discuss with those workers and their legal representatives, their unions, what has to be done to effect those plans. I must say that it is a very painful matter at any stage in a nation's life to have to sever workers. We understand that. Therefore, even in the straitened financial situation that we are in, we have to find ways to try to get the severance payments that are required.

More than that, we have to see how we can discuss with the workers how we can get them the kind of counselling as to how to deal with their severance package, and then how we can get them retrained and re-equipped, and what kinds of contract arrangements, especially if, as a result of those utilities being better able now to embark on capital projects, how these same workers could become small contractors to the same utilities to effect capital improvement programmes, laying meters, changing leaking water mains, etc., throughout the country. It is not only WASA. There would be similar opportunities at the Port, PTSC, and so forth.

We understand only too well that a successful transition in these utilities is vital for the stability of the country and for the very economy that we are trying to

restructure and set right. For any government, it goes without saying that where there is severance there could hardly be political gain. Therefore, these are painful matters that we have to discharge in carrying out our wider responsibility of running this country's affairs. It is extremely painful for all of us on this side, and in these circumstances, we honestly go before the population and put all the facts before them. All the facts have to be laid on the table at this time.

Let me give the assurance, Madam Speaker, that any severance would be done in conformity with the collective agreements and the Severance Benefits Act. That is an assurance that we give this Parliament.

6.55 p.m

Madam Speaker, there were some other matters raised, such as, the Algico building. The Algico building is being acquired after a long process. The facts are that for more than one year the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs has been homeless. We have advertised in the newspapers for space—I do not have the clippings here, but they can be brought—and several companies and private individuals offered their buildings. After a long process, that particular ministry zeroed in on the Algico building and it was selected as the best site for all manner of reasons. It is a very well constructed building, properly located, and because the Government was not able to come up with—

Mr. Maharaj: Madam Speaker, could the hon. Minister tell this House how long that building was up for sale and whether a purchaser could not have been found over that period of time?

Hon. W. Mottley: I am not in a position to say at this time, but I can get that information for the hon. Member.

The building was purchased for \$6.3 million and because the Government, in its present stringent financial situation, could not meet the payment, it is therefore financed for us, I believe, over 10 years at 12.5 per cent. Those are the facts, Madam Speaker. *[Interruption]* Madam Speaker, the sum is \$6.3 million.

The facts are that there is great irony in the situation that we confront at this time, and I must bring it to the attention of Members, in that, among the demonstrators here this afternoon, were those who face the threat of severance, because their respective utilities and tangentially, the Government, just do not have the money to meet ongoing salaries. Among them, also, were workers whose jobs are secure, but who are seeking backpay of \$2 billion.

State of the Nation
[HON. W. MOTTLEY]

Friday, February 5, 1993

It is these very matters that indicate that Trinidad and Tobago has to seriously take stock, that there is a case of the lion and the lamb and that there is a third sector outside of that. Even when I say that we took \$500 million in taxpayers' money to settle a court award that is ongoing—it is not \$500 million, and stop; it is \$500 million every year hereinafter. There are those who are unemployed and who, by several different government unemployment relief programmes, will not be getting more than \$150 million in budgetary allocations this year and henceforth. Those are the unemployed, and there are those who are to be severed and there are those who are contemplating back-pay payments of 40 per cent of \$2 billion in 1993.

Madam Speaker, I lay the facts on the table only to say that these are serious matters; that, clearly, this country in 1995, a period when debt service drops radically, when we would have broken the back of the debt as a result of present sacrifice, when the energy sector will begin kicking back earnings that will see our national Treasury rise considerably again, and when as a result of several of the restructuring exercises that we have embarked upon, will see growth in the economy and an increase in employment. But, like the Members on the other side, nationals, all of us, who are concerned, we have to arrive at that day and hold the society together intact in the meantime.

We share their concerns and we are addressing them, Madam Speaker, but I should like the national community to understand that we do not have money like water, we are not irresponsible and we cannot, therefore, print money to meet any claim that is made upon us. Also, to tell the national community that we are in dialogue.

The facts, such as I have presented here this evening, are not unknown to the trade union leadership and we will be embarking upon a serious programme of getting this information out wider than that, to tell the workers also that we have put a position with the CPO on the backpay issue, it is a negotiable position, and the CPO is the best agent to negotiate, not Ministers. The Ministers can deal at policy level. If, at a certain stage the CPO wants new instructions, he can come back in to us. The matters are not closed. But, we have a Government to run, a country to carry forward, and dragging, kicking and screaming we will carry Trinidad and Tobago forward to the brighter horizon that I clearly see in the future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

State of the Nation

Friday, February 5, 1993

Motion made, That the House do now adjourn to Friday, February 12, 1993 at 1.30 p.m. [Hon. K. Valley]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.03 p.m.