

Leave of Absence

Friday, November 8, 1996

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, November 08, 1996

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have today received communications from the Member for Port of Spain South, Mr. Eric Williams, to the effect that he is ill. He is accordingly excused from attending today's sitting.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended December 31, 1993. [*The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended December 31, 1994. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
3. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of the Airport Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the years ended December 31, 1987-1990. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
4. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of the National Carnival Commission for the year ended December 31, 1989. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
5. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of the National Carnival Commission for the year ended December 31, 1990. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
6. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of the Legal Aid and Advisory Authority for the year ended December 31, 1995. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
7. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of the Global Pre-Investment Programme-550/OC-TT for the year ended December 31, 1995. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
8. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of the Southern Roads Development Project for the year ended December 31, 1995. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]

Papers 1 to 8 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee

9. Green Paper - A Policy Agenda for the Public Service of Trinidad and Tobago Towards a New Public Administration. [*The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. W. Mark)*]

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS

(Presentation)

Ombudsman's Report (Seventeenth)

The Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the following report:

The Report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament appointed to consider and report on the 17th Annual Report of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the functions and duties of the Ombudsman and to make recommendations for a more effective machinery for the Office of the Ombudsman so that Part II of Chapter 6 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago can be given effect.

Integrity Legislation—Green Paper

The Minister of Labour and Co-operatives (Hon. Harry Partap): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the following report:

Report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament appointed to consider the Green Paper on Integrity Legislation to receive and consider the comments of members of the public on the said Paper and to submit its recommendations to Parliament thereon.

Report on the Constitutional and Legislative Arrangements for Tobago

The Minister Extraordinaire and Minister of Tobago Affairs (Hon. A.N.R. Robinson): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the following report:

Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed by Cabinet to consider, review and report on the Report on the Constitutional and Legislative Arrangements for Tobago.

Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis (Arouca South): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the last report just laid, before any consideration is given to that report I would like to move a motion in accordance with Standing Order 25(1).

Leave granted.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE—TOBAGO
(EXTENSION OF TIME)**

Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis (*Arouca South*): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,
Whereas on September 20, 1996 the House of Representatives resolved that a Joint Select Committee be established to consider the report of the committee appointed by the Cabinet to review the Constitutional and Legislative Arrangements for Tobago, and Members were so appointed from the House of Representatives on October 04, 1996;

And Whereas on September 24, 1996 the Senate agreed to a similar resolution and Members were appointed from the Senate on October 01, 1996;

And Whereas the Joint Select Committee did not, in my view, complete its deliberations;

Be it Resolved that this House agree to the immediate establishment of a Joint Select Committee comprising the same Members to continue the work of the former committee and report to Parliament on a date to be determined by the Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that all of us in this House share the view that we must give high priority to devising legislative, constitutional and other types of formulae for dealing effectively with the relationship between the Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly, and particularly issues involving Tobago.

1.40 p.m.

I am sure we are all agreed in this House that it is imperative that whatever arrangements, legislative or otherwise, are made for Tobago, that these arrangements must exist in such a way as to give Tobago and the people of Tobago their rightful due, without rupturing the unitary state of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is imperative that whenever the Parliament, either as a whole or in a committee, is asked to deliberate on any issue, that the deliberations are allowed to continue, or allowed to exist in an atmosphere where we all feel that Parliament's work is done to the best of the ability of the parliamentarians and is done in such a manner as to create the best result.

Mr. Speaker, the Parliament and the representatives who sit here, represent the people of Trinidad and Tobago and as such, the business of the people is of the utmost importance and an issue such as this, which involves constitutional changes and other types of legislative changes to the structure of the Parliament and the

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structure, to some extent of Government, it is imperative that we must do our work well; we must do our work without undue haste; and we must do our work in such a way as not to create the impression that we are attempting to meet a date or a deadline, rather than attempting to achieve what is best, given all the circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, we are living in a democracy, and the issues involving Tobago must be carefully dealt with and properly aired; and we on this side are of the view that the people of Tobago, and particularly their representatives, with specific reference to their representatives in the Tobago House of Assembly, must be given an opportunity to have a proper and considered input into whatever legislation is decided upon for Tobago, for the Tobago House of Assembly, and the mechanism through which that assembly will function.

It is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that during the deliberations of the committee, even though the issue of meeting with the Tobago House of Assembly was raised on several occasions and, indeed, on one particular occasion it was raised as a motion which was seconded, the motion was never put to the vote; and Mr. Speaker, I am sure we all know that once a motion is seconded, it must and should be put to the vote. Unfortunately, this was not done and it would appear as though we had unilateral decisions being taken. This is unfortunate because it was clear from the deliberations that several members of the committee felt that it was imperative that the committee as a whole meet with the Tobago House of Assembly.

There was even some concern that there would be meetings with the people of Tobago. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, when the last PNM administration dealt with this matter, there were meetings with the Tobago House of Assembly and meetings throughout the length and breadth of Tobago, talking with the people of Tobago to arrive at a negotiated position with regard to the legislation.

This is going to be legislation that will affect our Constitution; legislation that will affect how our Parliament is set up, and how it functions; and any legislation such as this must be properly considered. It may be that some members of the committee have forgotten what the hon. Prime Minister and Member for Couva North said to the members of the Assembly on Wednesday April 10, 1996, regarding the Government's so-called commitment to Tobago and to the THA and, Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I quote:

“The Government of the UNC/NAR is sensitive to the needs of Tobago. We regard the existing arrangement as untenable and have therefore moved swiftly

to make the necessary alterations. We have appointed a committee to review the THA Act and prepare a Draft Bill to reflect the decisions of House Paper No. 6 of 1978; and indeed the aspirations of all even-minded residents of Tobago. I have been reliably informed that the work of this committee is proceeding apace. Upon the completion of the Draft Bill the Assembly will have ample opportunity to proffer its comment thereon before it becomes a matter for Parliament.

Mr. Chairman, my Government is also deeply concerned about the availability of certain critical services to residents of Tobago, in particular those services which are dispensed by Government departments and other State agencies....”

Mr. Manning: Who is talking there?

Mr. Maharaj: Rowley!

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, I continue:

“...we subscribe to the initiatives of the previous government to provide a broad range of these services in Tobago.”

Mr. Speaker, clearly this indicates that the Member for Couva South, the Prime Minister, did give an undertaking that upon the completion of the Draft Bill the Assembly would have ample opportunity to proffer its comments before the matter becomes a matter for Parliament.

1.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we are of the view that this is not what is taking place. The Assembly has not had a proper opportunity to proffer its comments or to meet with the committee that is making its report to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. We remain firm in our view that it is imperative that such a meeting must take place before any report can properly come before Parliament and before Parliament can be asked to deliberate on the legislation that is anticipated.

Mr. Speaker, we also note that the Prime Minister stated that he subscribes to the initiatives of the previous government to provide services in Tobago, and we are suggesting that he should also subscribe to the initiative undertaken by the PNM administration of meeting with the THA and of meeting with the people of Tobago before this Parliament arrives at any kind of decision with regard to the legislation.

I will repeat, we are committed to ensuring the best for Tobago and the best relationship between the Central Government and the THA and we do not feel that

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through haste we can achieve what is best. It cannot be that the only thing that is of importance is meeting a deadline. It must be that what is important is achieving what is best for all concerned.

I am asking that this Parliament consider establishing a joint select committee comprising the same Members to continue the work of the former committee and report to Parliament on a date to be determined by the Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Seconded by Mr. K. Valley.

Question proposed.

The Minister Extraordinaire and Minister of Tobago Affairs (Hon. A.N.R. Robinson): Mr. Speaker, I must begin by complimenting the Opposition on putting its "best face forward", [*Desk thumping*] and I hope that Members who follow will maintain the standard that has been set by the content which has emerged from her presentation. I had expected Members opposite to applaud that statement.

Mr. Speaker, to me this is a very historic day for I have had the honour to be at the beginning of a process which started almost 20 years ago in the year 1977, when a Motion was moved in this House that Tobago should be granted internal self-government. Almost 20 years ago! That Motion, in an amended form, was approved and referred to a joint select committee of this Parliament and that was the proper process to be pursued—by way of joint select committee.

I happened to be one of the 12 Members of Parliament who sat on that committee in my capacity as a Back-Bencher and I want to name the Members. I want to show how the Opposition is trifling with this Parliament and trifling with this country. I want to name the Members of that joint select committee which was appointed in the year 1977 and reported in 1978.

The Members were:— Mr. C.A. Thomasos, who was then Speaker of the House as Chairman; Mr. Kamaluddin Mohammed, Member, who was a minister; Mr. George Chambers, Member, who was a minister; Mr. Overand Padmore, Member, who was a minister—all members of the PNM—Mr. Raffique Shah was a Member of the Opposition; Mr. Selwyn Richardson, Member and Attorney General; Mr. John Donaldson, a minister; Mr. John Hamilton-Holder; Mr. B. Ojah-Maharaj; Mr. George Bowrin, Member of the Opposition; and Miss Louise Horne who was a Member of the Senate.

There were 12 members appointed and I happened to be the sole member from Tobago, as a Back-Bencher. That joint select committee reported and its report was printed as House Paper No. 6 of 1978. It made a number of recommendations and I shall read some of the recommendations made by that committee. It is very important, because this whole debate which will continue until this legislation is disposed of, this entire debate is about faith with the people of Tobago and faith with the national Parliament. That is what is the issue—faith with the people of Tobago and faith with the national Parliament. Because the national Parliament in 1978 adopted, by unanimous vote in both Houses, this report of the joint select committee printed as House Paper No. 6 of 1978. I read from the report:

"The preponderance of opinion therefore favoured some form of governmental structure with appropriate Constitutional and/or other legislative safeguards to ensure its permanence."

The first point was it was unanimously agreed that the structure set out should be constitutionally entrenched and have constitutional or other legislative safeguards in order to ensure its permanence.

2.00 p.m.

"Such a structure should be designed to remove the deficiencies referred to above and to achieve the following objectives:-

- (a) the effective co-ordination of the various services of the central Government in Tobago;
- (b) promotion of liaison and co-operation with the Elected Body in Tobago and to institute and maintain consultation with that Body especially with respect to Budgetary proposals for the Development Programme as well as the operation of the state-owned enterprises which serve Tobago—viz. Sea and Air communications;
- (c) policy formulation and implementation by the people through the democratic process in terms of the functions herein described."

It goes on later to talk about the powers and functions for the people of Tobago:

"The powers and functions exercisable by the Tobago Island Council, will encompass the following: —

- (1) Finance (except foreign borrowing)
- (2) Economic Development

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- e.g. (i) agriculture
- (ii) industry
- (iii) tourism
- (3) The Environment
- (4) Infrastructure
 - e.g. (i) Internal communications
 - (ii) water
 - (iii) electricity
- (5) Physical Planning
- (6) Community Services
 - e.g. (i) education
 - (ii) health
 - (iii) sport
 - (iv) culture
 - (v) arts.
- (7) Such other subjects as may be added.

Your committee discussed the appointment of special Committees and agreed that in view of past experience, Committees should not be specified in the legislation but it should be left to the Tobago Island Council to appoint such Committees as may be deemed necessary."

This was a unanimous report of the Joint Select Committee, unanimously approved by the House of Representatives and the Senate. This was a new covenant with Tobago. These matters should have been settled in the early years of independence but they were not. Why were they not? Because Tobago had confidence and faith in the country that the country would treat Tobago fairly. But it turned out to be otherwise. Consequently, there had been agitation throughout the length and breadth of the island and in this Parliament in order to have some machinery set up even to discuss the matter. The matter was exhaustively discussed over a period of months. There was one Member from Tobago on the joint select committee and yet there was unanimous agreement in terms of the powers and the functions I have stated before this House.

Pursuant to this report and acceptance by both Houses of Parliament, the Government appointed an independent technician, one of our most distinguished lawyers, Mr. Lionel Seemungal, to prepare legislation to give effect to this report. Mr. Lionel Seemungal proceeded to do his job and reported back with draft legislation. It was torn up and thrown aside. That party opposite, the PNM, proceeded to use its one-party majority to pass legislation through this Parliament in the form of Act No. 37 of 1980, which did not reflect, which derogated substantially from the powers and the functions which were agreed to by both Houses of Parliament.

Tobago never accepted it. It does not accept it and will never accept it. I happened to be the Chairman of the first Tobago House of Assembly. I shall reserve to a later stage any reference to the Member for San Fernando East, because I anticipate some provocation this afternoon. So I shall not be prematurely drawn. I shall reserve my fire on that basis.

Suffice it to say, it was the good sense of Prime Minister George Chambers and his selection of two ministerial negotiators, one, Mr. Errol Mahabir—the best negotiator this Parliament has seen—and the other, John Donaldson. They came and we entered into discussion and had an amicable settlement under which certain powers and functions were conceded to the assembly. Thereafter things went smoothly until another personality appeared on the scene, to whom I shall refer at another stage, possibly on another occasion.

All this related to the initial stages of this exercise. I now refer to the terms of reference of the Cabinet committee to which reference has been made. On January, 11, of this year, the records of Cabinet showed that this Government appointed a committee to review the existing constitutional and legislative arrangements for Tobago and I recite the terms of reference as follows:

- "(a) To review all documents pertaining to the matter of constitutional and legislative arrangements for internal self-government for Tobago; and
- (b) to prepare a draft bill to give appropriate effect to the Report of the Joint Select Committee of both Houses of Parliament printed as House Paper No. 6 of 1978."

So the document which came to this Parliament was the report of that committee whose terms and reference made specific reference to the fundamental document in this matter, which is the report of the joint select committee of both

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Houses of Parliament, printed as House Paper No. 6 of 1978. This was the beginning of the new covenant between Trinidad and Tobago in independence.

I want to try to get the country to understand that it was the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago who said in no uncertain terms, with great clarity and great dramatic effect, that "Tobago exchanged the neglect of United Kingdom imperialism for the neglect of Trinidad imperialism."

2.10 p.m.

Dr. Williams stated that in the report of *Hansard* on Friday, June 07, 1957 at page 1927. What we are seeing today is a rise of neo-imperialism and this is what this Government is determined to avoid. This is why this new legislation was to be brought before the House and placed for review with the report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, the report of that committee was received on Friday, September 13, 1996; Cabinet's decision was taken on January 11, 1996. Everybody knew that the term of the current Tobago House of Assembly expires in the first week of December and election is due on December 9, 1996. In fact the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has already issued writs for the election. Nomination day has already been appointed as the 18th of this month. The population of Tobago is at this moment gearing up for the election. Interested political parties are in the process of selecting their candidates and making other preparations for the elections legally due on December 9, 1996.

The Cabinet acted expeditiously on the receipt of this report. It was Thursday, September 19, 1996; on the 22nd—two days later—the report of the committee was published in two Sunday newspapers; the *Sunday Express* and the *Sunday Guardian* and on October 3, 1996 the report was published in the *Gazette* together with the two Bills. On September 20, 1996 the documents were laid on the table in the House of Representatives and in the Senate on the September 24, 1996. On October 1, 1996 the decision to appoint the Joint Select Committee was taken in the Senate, and in the House of Representatives on October 4, 1996.

The inaugural meeting of the Joint Select Committee, initiated by this Government, reverted to the process of a Joint Select Committee and not one of one-party-rule. *[Interruption]* It was this Government, and I am very happy to hear the Member for Arouca South now espousing the cause of the Joint Select Committee which her party repudiated. She is new to the whole process and I do not criticize her. I think she is very innocent as her face looks. She has no

knowledge of the history of this matter; the historical depth or the emotions. At one stage the Parliament almost exploded on that issue, and I pay tribute to one of your predecessors, Mr. Speaker, the deceased Mr. Thomasos who was presiding at that time. He exercised the utmost skill and discretion in order to avoid an explosion which would inevitably have taken place in this very Parliament; within these walls.

Mr. Speaker, originally, the Joint Select Committee was mandated by both Houses of Parliament to present its report on October 15, 1996. That time frame was extended to November 5, 1996 meanwhile, the Joint Select Committee met. The Joint Select Committee was able to complete its consideration of one of the two Bills, and that was the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill. One will see from the report that there was unanimity in respect of the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill which provided for voices as of right of Tobago in the Senate of the Parliament, and also for the entrenchment of the Tobago House of Assembly in the Constitution.

Let me make it clear to the country that what Tobago fears most is that the relationship between the two islands will continue to be a matter for party politics so that they never know what structure of government they are working and living under. One day a party comes in and the leader of the party does not like the representatives, the assembly or the people of Tobago, and they can change the law by themselves. Tobago is afraid of that because air communication is controlled from Trinidad; sea communication is controlled from Trinidad. After 9.00 p.m. when the last plane flies over, Tobago is isolated from Trinidad and there is an expanse of water between the two islands. To get most of the services one has to come to Trinidad. Electricity is controlled from Trinidad and water is controlled by the Water and Sewerage Authority which has its headquarters in Trinidad.

Tobagonians, looking at the world around them and seeing how some characters behave in some newly independent countries, fear that this can come to genocide by the cutting off of these services at some time. A party in power or an individual can put the inhabitants of Tobago at risk in respect of their lives, without water, electricity and air or sea transport. All of those are controlled in Trinidad.

So, let us not have contention about the relationship between the two islands. Let us take that out of party politics and so entrench Tobago's rights in the Constitution; right to representation in Parliament, in the Senate and the House of Representatives. That was conceded. It was conceded to entrench the House of

Assembly in the Constitution So, the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill is ready to be passed without dissent.

Mr. Valley: Why did you not consult with Denoon? That is the only question we want answered.

Hon. A.N.R. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, is that the point for the Member for Diego Martin Central? The Member said he wants me to talk to Denoon. Well, it only shows how little he can be satisfied with. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] This Parliament is not of such matters, Mr. Speaker. This Parliament is about the relationship between Tobago and Trinidad. This Parliament is about the laws that will be passed. This Parliament is about this report of the Joint Select Committee.

So, as stated, the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill was agreed to without dissent, with certain amendments. The other Bill that remains is the Tobago House of Assembly Bill and, as hon. Members will see from the report, most of the provisions of the Tobago House of Assembly Bill have been agreed to. The point they are making is that the Tobago House of Assembly has not been consulted or we should talk with the assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the Tobago House of Assembly has been involved at every stage in the discussions and the whole evolution of the struggle of Tobago for better recognition and fair treatment in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. At every stage the Tobago House of Assembly has been involved.

Mr. Manning: What new converts. We set it up.

Hon. A.N.R. Robinson: I am happy to see the new converts to the Tobago House of Assembly.

Mr. Manning: We set it up.

Miss Nicholson: Since when you love Tobago?

2.20 p.m.

Hon. A.N.R. Robinson: I am happy to see the converts to the Tobago House of Assembly. They opposed the institution and continue to oppose its powers and functions vigorously. The point I am making is that the Tobago House of Assembly has been involved in every phase. They referred to the minority report, appending two bills which they negotiated with the Tobago House of Assembly. A Central Government, negotiating with a subordinate, and presumably they wanted to bring those bills as negotiated documents for acceptance by this Parliament so

that this Parliament has no role whatever. That is what the intention was. They wanted to come and say, Oh! we agree with this in the House of Assembly and, therefore, this is it.

The Joint Select Committee took into account all of the documents. Public comments were requested, and several copies of the documents were sent directly to the Tobago House of Assembly and it submitted comments in writing. I want to impress upon the population, apart from numerous discussions over the years, the House of Assembly on these particular matters submitted comments in writing. We had those comments. We took those comments into account in our deliberations in the Joint Select Committee. It is totally untrue to say that in any respect we did not take into account the views of the Tobago House of Assembly. I have the documents before me today. We received the documents on October 23, 1996 signed by the Secretary to the Tobago House of Assembly and I will read the letter.

“Dear Madam,

Amendment to review the Constitutional and
legislative arrangement for Tobago

At the Finance and General Purpose Committee of the Tobago House of Assembly, (1992—1996) held on Thursday, October 17, 1996, a review of the Draft Constitutional and Legislative Arrangements for Tobago was undertaken by the Committee.

Attached as Appendix 1 is a list of the recommended amendments that should be made to the Draft Bill.

Submitted for your necessary action, please.”

There is no request here for any meeting. It submitted its comments in writing. We took those comments into account. Most of them were accepted. They were comments of a minor nature because they demonstrated almost total satisfaction with the Bills which had been prepared by the committee.

I received another letter—and this is very important. I want the country to know this. This letter was from a PNM member of the Tobago House of Assembly and he was the person who wrote asking that I as Chairman would arrange for the Joint Select Committee to meet the Tobago House of Assembly. I will give the terms of that at a later date. But let me say this. The letter was copied to the Chairman of Assembly, which was a bit of an insult. The letter was sent over the head of

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the Chairman of the Assembly, and just copied. It was not signed by a single other member of the assembly. I have not received any other communication from any other member of the assembly, only the PNM member. The only person in the assembly I am aware of who has made a fuss was the PNM member of the assembly, so one can understand. Elections are due on December 9, and the last thing they would like is elections so every effort will be made to postpone and obstruct the elections. But elections are already called, writs are already issued, the President has already acted. Do you not have any respect for the President?

Mr. Speaker, there are several stages to which Bills must pass before they finally become law, and the object of the Members opposite is to delay the proceedings so as to create confusion. Having created confusion in their own party, there is an attempt now to make confusion in Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Tobago settle matters, they speak and even when one seeks to ignore the voice of the people of Tobago, the voice of the people will prevail. [*Desk thumping*] In this debate I initiated, and as I said nearly 20 years ago, I made it clear that internal self-government for Tobago will stay on the national agenda until it has been achieved. I told them whether they voted for it or against it, it would stay on the agenda until it is achieved. It is the right of the people of Tobago. They are not begging for anything. They are saying this should have been settled as part of the Independence compact. If it was not settled then, then it was settled some 15 years after, it was settled in 1977 and should have been settled in the compact made with the people of Tobago by both Houses of Parliament. That is the foundation on which this Government stands.

I compliment hon. Members on this side of the House who were in Opposition and who supported all along the case of Tobago for fairer treatment in the unitary state of Trinidad and Tobago. Today, in Government they are keeping faith with their commitment to the people of Tobago by initiating and supporting the process by which agreement can be reached which would be satisfactory to the people of Tobago. If those opposite oppose it then, they account to the people.

One talks about meeting the Tobago House of Assembly. Mr. Speaker, my first official act, when I assumed this portfolio as Minister Extraordinaire and Minister for Tobago Affairs, was to invite the Tobago House of Assembly to a meeting. I travelled to Tobago to a meeting with the Tobago House of Assembly where members were present including the Chairman, Mr. Denoon. I greeted the members of the Tobago House of Assembly in a very informal manner. It was not a formal meeting and I made it clear to members of the Tobago House of

Assembly that as Minister and Member of Cabinet, I was available to the Tobago House of Assembly for any assistance they may want. I made it clear I would not interfere in any way in the business of the Tobago House of Assembly, that they were free to call upon me when they required. They have done so on occasions, but not as often as I would have liked.

2.30 p.m.

At present, I have two substantial matters involving the acquisition of land. In one case it is for industrial development and in another for tourism development and the settlement of villagers. I assisted with the provision of drugs for the Regional Health Authority in Tobago and several matters involving other issues concerning the Tobago House of Assembly. We have been working on having services which normally could be obtained only in Trinidad located in Tobago, so that people would not have that trouble and expense. Two weeks ago, one man who suffers from cancer told me that he has had to travel every fortnight to Trinidad in order to obtain treatment. He has to travel by air; he cannot travel by sea because of his condition. It costs \$246 every trip by air alone. This does not include the taxi fare.

They can laugh because they do not feel these things, but people who reside in Tobago feel them. When they have to come for interviews and get the letters after the interviews have taken place, they have no chance of getting the job. They hear billions and billions of dollars being invested here in Trinidad, but not one job in Tobago can be obtained from those facilities which are set up. When it costs \$500 to come to see a football match in the stadium; \$1,000 to go to Mount Hope and when they cannot go to the university because they cannot pay to board in Trinidad, it hurts! They are deprived of these careers and facilities.

The people of Tobago do not laugh at these matters. They are deadly serious and have been very patient over the years. Any other island in Tobago's position in the Caribbean would have acted in a different manner already. Tobagonians are famous for their hospitality, calm temperament, peace and readiness to receive strangers. That is why it is such a beautiful island for the development of the hospitality industry. On another occasion we would talk about the opportunities available for development; the neglect of certain areas because of over-concentration on certain sectors, and how this tremendous imbalance developed in the living standards and quality of life on both islands.

On this occasion let me emphasize with all the strength that I can, that we took into account all the views expressed in the matter by the Tobago House of

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Assembly. This Government has absolutely no objection whatever. It is not true that any motion was not put. Let me give the whole truth. An amendment to the motion was put by the Attorney General. It was agreed that the whole matter would have been considered by 11.00 a.m. on Monday. If one is going to meet people one must know for what one is meeting them. One would not be going to shake their hands, look at their faces or hug and kiss them. The Government would be going with issues if they are to be resolved and discuss specific matters as the case may be. All sides agreed that the matter would be left over until the following Monday morning.

We went on to other business and at 10.00 a.m. on Monday there was no quorum. We had completed the bulk of the work and were to report to Parliament. Meanwhile, the entire schedule for the rest of the year for keeping faith with the people of Tobago requires that the matter be disposed of. We have no doubt whatever that the outstanding matters in the Tobago House of Assembly Bill can be resolved within this House and the Senate. All it needs is a seriousness and commitment to keep faith with the people of Tobago. The matters can be resolved. We can keep to the schedule and keep faith with the people of Tobago and have the elections as required. There is no reason why the matter cannot be settled after nearly 20 years in abeyance.

I understand how Members opposite feel that a new government should come in and be the principal source of settling a matter which has been a thorny issue for such a long period of time. The mere fact of bringing the matter to a joint select committee—I emphasize this—shows that we did not seek to go it alone. We brought the matter to the Joint Select Committee which considered and agreed on the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill. The Joint Select Committee considered and agreed in respect of most of the other provisions of the Tobago House of Assembly. What is left can be settled in a manner which would allow the orderly progress of the people of Tobago; orderly holding of elections and the constitution of a new assembly on the basis of the new laws. That is what the people of Tobago would like to see. They would like to know on what basis the elections are being held and a new assembly constituted on the basis of the new laws. They would always have opportunities to talk to the new assembly. This assembly is an outgoing one. It is in an election period.

Mr. Manning: You do not talk to them.

Hon. A.N.R. Robinson: What are you talking about? They have not identified the issues. There are no issues.

We have their submissions in writing. He is trying to create further obstacles to orderly progress, settlement and peaceful resolution within the legislative and constitutional framework. I mentioned that we are confident that the remaining issues can be resolved. It is on that basis that we are asking the House not to accept this motion to defer this matter, but to proceed expeditiously and seriously in order to keep faith with the people of Tobago.

Thank you.

Mr. Patrick Manning (*San Fernando East*): Mr. Speaker, I joined this Parliament in 1971, one full year after the hon. Member for Tobago East took his leave of the People's National Movement. I make the point to inform you and hon. Members that I never had an opportunity to work with the hon. Member for Tobago East prior to my coming into Parliament, except on two occasions.

2.40 p.m.

To me, the hon. Member for Tobago East is someone whom I have known only from a distance. I was one of those who was prepared to accept much of what I have heard about the qualities of the hon. Member, much of those views generated by the Member himself—by his attitude and so forth.

The first opportunity I had to work directly with the Member for Tobago East was briefly in the year 1981 after Dr. Eric Williams had died. Whatever else may have been said to the national community about what transpired when the hon. Member for Tobago East walked out on a meeting that I was chairing, I had an opportunity for the first time in 1981, based on my own exposure to him, to come to some kind of conclusion on the attitude and disposition of the hon. Member for Tobago East. What I would say to this Parliament, Mr. Speaker, is: "All that glitters is not gold."

The second occasion on which I had an opportunity to interface with the hon. Member for Tobago East was in the Joint Select Committee, the report of which is today the subject of deliberation in this honourable House. I, too, as is my colleague from Tobago East, am a former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Whatever else may be said and whatever views we may hold of each other, I feel that persons who held that portfolio in the past—not to the exclusion of others, of course—shoulder a greater measure of responsibility than others to ensure that we conduct our parliamentary affairs in a proper and effective manner.

The verbatim report of the deliberations of that Joint Select Committee should be published for the benefit of the national community. I sat here and I could not

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believe the extent to which the hon. Member for Tobago East was prepared to go to prevent the committee from meeting with the Tobago House of Assembly. It was my first real exposure to the Member for Tobago East and I came away from those meetings absolutely amazed. In fact, at the end of one of those meetings I took the opportunity to talk to the hon. Member for Siparia, the hon. Member for Couva South, the hon. Member for Tobago West and other Members who were there. I made the point that politics was one thing, but I could not see them subscribing to the attitude emanating from the hon. Member for Tobago East. At one stage the discussion in the Joint Select Committee became quite heated because neither my colleagues nor I was prepared to sit down and allow ourselves to be manipulated by the chairman of a committee whose intent became more and more obscure as we continued the deliberations.

Mr. Speaker, on no less than five occasions the matter came up. What is the problem in meeting with the House of Assembly? I would like to remind the hon. Member for Tobago East that it was he, in this very Parliament, who pointed out that whether we liked it or not the Tobago House of Assembly represents the only elected body in Trinidad and Tobago that is representative of the people of Tobago. That is the view of the Member for Tobago East, to which, incidentally, we on this side of the Parliament subscribe.

The Member for Tobago East, however much he would like to suggest otherwise is elected only by the people of Tobago East. The Member for Tobago West is elected only by the people of Tobago West. The House of Assembly, comprising as it does 12 elected representatives and four nominated persons, is the only legislative body which is truly reflective of the people of Tobago. I therefore ask the question: If a joint select committee of Parliament is meeting to discuss the business of Tobago, to discuss new arrangements—as the hon. Member for Tobago East has put it, to discuss a new covenant between the people of Tobago and the people of Trinidad—how, I ask, in God's name, can we justify not meeting with the members of the Tobago House of Assembly?

The hon. Member spoke about written communications. I am in no position to say what private discussions may have taken place between the hon. Member for Tobago East and others in Tobago. All I can say is that I was a member of that Joint Select Committee and I consider myself—and I speak on behalf of my colleagues also—to have been deprived by the antics of the Member for Tobago East, in some instances supported by the hon. Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago, of the face to face consultation with the Tobago House of Assembly in

circumstances where the legislation which has been laid in this Parliament is very different. It has been the subject of major change from the bill which would have been sent to the assembly and in respect of which a committee of the assembly made some comments and forwarded them to the Member for Tobago East.

In all of this, Mr. Speaker, we have to look at intent. I listened to the Member for Tobago East speaking again today. He made reference to the administration of Dr. Eric Williams in 1977 and what that administration did. He made reference to the negotiations which took place with the assembly, with two ministers of Government at that time—Mr. Errol Mahabir and Mr. John Donaldson—and he was very loud in his praises for the ministers. I wish on their behalf to thank him very sincerely for his kind gesture. He made reference to the foresight and generosity of the country's second Prime Minister, Mr. George Chambers.

Mr. Speaker, the records will show that the country's fourth Prime Minister led an administration, which had negotiated with the Tobago House of Assembly, amendments to the Constitution and a new bill; and the country's fifth Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Couva North, Mr. Basdeo Panday, however much we disagree, and we disagree fundamentally with the provisions, is today bringing legislation to Parliament on behalf of his Government, to improve the relationship between Trinidad and Tobago as they see it.

2.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the only Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago who is not in a position to say what action he took to improve the relationship between Tobago and Trinidad, is the country's third Prime Minister, the Member for Tobago East. *[Desk thumping]* It speaks volumes because there are those among us who feel that because they may possess the gift gab that is to say, because they may be able to speak well, they feel they can justify every foolishness that they do, and it will go down in history. The Member seems to be an historian, I am very concerned about how history sees him. History is going to record him—and I will tell you how they are going to record him on the Tobago issue.

History is going to record the hon. Member for Tobago East, and the country's third prime minister, as the only one in this country who did nothing, and I will repeat it, who did absolutely nothing positive to settle the relationship between Tobago and Trinidad.

Mr. Speaker, he had a majority of 33 at one stage until he unceremoniously threw out of his government, the Member for Couva North and his colleagues.

Mr. Panday: You like to make mischief.

Mr. P. Manning: I am not making any mischief, that is a fact.

Miss Nicholson: That is part truth.

Mr. Valley: You cannot throw him out, that is why you have to support this.

Mr. P. Manning: And just a word to my honourable colleague, the Member for Couva North. The pettiness and vindictiveness of which we have heard much in relation to my Friend, I can now speak from first hand evidence since I came into contact with it for the first time in the Joint Select Committee.

I want to tell the Members on the other side that they are Members of the Government and they could take the position, smile and under-estimate the significance of what is being said today if they wish and do so at the peril of Trinidad and Tobago, because the matter is not ended. When the legislation comes here for debate, that would be an entirely different matter and then they will begin to see.

Mr. Maharaj: You agreed to it.

Mr. P. Manning: Who agreed to what?

Mr. Maharaj: You agreed to the Constitution being amended.

Mr. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, just for the record, we have a minority report in which we have our own Constitutional (Amdt.) Bill and our own draft legislation. Just for the record so that the Member for Couva South cannot now succeed. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, I want to alert my colleagues on the other side that this is not a matter that one ought to consider purely in the context of partisan politics in the way the hon. Member for Tobago East is trying to play and they may end up saying “Lord, Lord” but yet not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. That is the risk that we run. In trying to agree to certain things, what in fact they are supporting is pettiness, vindictiveness, hate and spite.

Let me alert the Member for Couva North, in case the Member for Couva South did not tell him, that as soon as the gentleman gets what he wants, he will be in a position to repay you a little debt because so far, he has repaid everybody. He has repaid Mr. Denoon a debt when he refused to have him come—he does not want to see him at all. All I am saying to him is that a word to the wise is sufficient.

Mr. Speaker, 33:3 are the facts. I can only tell you how I see it . I was disgusted at one stage to see the attitude of some of them on that side and I want to compliment the former Sen. Moore-Miggins who had the courage of her conviction to take a particular stand, and since it deviated from the party line, to tender her resignation. You see, she too felt that enough was enough.

I want to raise for the consideration of Members opposite another aspect of this issue. I sat here and was subjected, like my colleagues and this entire Parliament, to a tirade from the Member for Tobago East and he was talking about an election, and that everybody knows election in Tobago is due on December 9, 1996. If I misquote him, let me know please? Everybody knows that the President has already signed a writ, is what the hon. Member for Tobago East was saying. He also said that they are selecting candidates and Tobagonians are expecting an election. That is correct, and perhaps the only thing he has said with which I can agree without reservations.

I ask one question: Why is it that the Government chose to pursue a strategy that led to time constraints in deliberations on a matter as fundamental and as significant as this? We knew from the start that when we made the request to meet with the Tobago House of Assembly that he will postpone and postpone and then say that we do not have time so the committee cannot meet with them. The final meeting of the Joint Select Committee was an aborted meeting. It did not take place because there was no quorum, yet there is a report here. The hon. Member who markets himself as one of the bastions of democracy used a most undemocratic approach in bringing a report to this Parliament in circumstances where the final meeting of the committee did not take place. That is what we have to face. I wish the faster the people of Trinidad and Tobago realize that, the better, because they are doing something else.

I do not want to get into the Bill yet, but I want to put this Parliament on notice that they have put some things in that Bill that cannot be considered purely a matter for the people of Tobago. Some of the things which they have put into the Bill are matters for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. For example, the composition of the Senate, how one treats land that is owned by the state, the whole question of raising revenues in Tobago and so forth. When we come to that debate we will talk about that.

What bothers me about the hon. Member for Tobago East is that the impression is given that "I am holier than thou" and that his one regret—because he talks about the Member for San Fernando East. Let me assure you, Mr.

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Speaker, I would never have done that. I would never have conducted a joint select committee of this Parliament in the way in which it was conducted by the Member for Tobago East because it is the wrong thing to do.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the election date is December 9, 1996, and using the fact that an election is due on December 9, 1996, actions have already been taken by the Government, of which he is a part, to hold the election. We are not afraid of any election in Tobago, or anywhere for that matter—but do not come and say that there are time constraints, and therefore we cannot do this or that.

Mr. Speaker, even if it means that we are doing things that will result, not only in bad law, but in conflict between Tobago and Trinidad; but the person who has been talking most about pacifying and setting up proper arrangements is the one who has been at the core for a long time of stirring up conflict between Tobago and Trinidad—that is what he has been doing, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The hon. Member for Tobago East—and I regret that I have to take this approach this afternoon. Mr. Speaker, in the committee we begged, please do not treat us like that, that is not the way we operate, this is a committee, a motion has been put, seconded and had to be considered. On the fourth occasion we said we would meet at 11 o'clock another day. Mr. Speaker, ask the Minister what the outcome of that has been. I want everybody to take note. Those who have eyes to see, let them see and those who have ears to hear, let them hear. That is what happened in the Joint Select Committee.

As a member of that committee, I was deprived from consulting with the Tobago House of Assembly on the legislative and constitutional matters that formed the subject of this report, as a result of the machinations of a former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, somebody from whom one would least expect it, the hon. Member for Tobago East.

Mr. Speaker, he should not now come and tell us that an election has been called. Mr. Speaker, let me ask the Parliament a question: Under what law will the election be held in Tobago? Will it be held under the old Tobago House of Assembly law or the new one? [*Interruption*] If it is called under the old law, under which one will it be held? Do you understand, Mr. Speaker? All these questions are relevant. Having regard to some of the things in that legislation, does the hon. Member for Tobago East as well as other hon. Members opposite not feel that this population has a right to know?

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I have learned over the years—because we have made errors on that too, but we have learned from those errors—is that whenever legislation which requires a special majority is coming to this Parliament—that is to say, legislation that offends the Constitution—we ought to take special care how we pass legislation of that nature. One should never proceed in indecent haste because one has the opportunity then to repent at leisure. I say that, Ladies and Gentlemen, from my experiences in this Parliament, and however important one might consider it, that is the worst possible thing one can do.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Tobago East made the point in his contribution, and quite rightly so, that all this started in 1977 and the hon. Member said he was there. However, he puts it in such a way as to give the impression that he alone was there. He did not actually say that, but he gave that impression. *[Interruption]* Yes, you were there, hon. Member for Tobago East, I am in a position to attest to that because I was there, too. The hon. Members for Couva North, St. Augustine, Oropouche were there. Several of us were there. If I remember correctly, Mr. Speaker, I think you were there too—at least for part of the time. Even if we shared the same views at one period during that period and different views at another, so what? That is what democracy allows, Mr. Speaker. We were all there and therefore the hon. Member for Tobago East—*[Interruption]* Do you want to talk? Mr. Speaker, when I asked for the hon. Member to give way during his contribution, I got a lot of gun talk that he will deal with me later or next week and so forth. *[Interruption]* Do you want to talk? Okay, please speak.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I appeal to you once more to direct your utterances to the Speaker. Whether or not there are utterances from Members on the other side, I suggest that one seeks to make his point through me and I will deal with it. As has been pointed out, when one takes his seat without anyone rising, one may misinterpret it as meaning that one is through with his contribution.

Mr. P. Manning: Except when one operates through you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for your advice.

In 1977, the Members for Couva North, St. Augustine, Oropouche, Tobago East and I were Members of this Parliament, when it unanimously passed—

Mr. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I was not a Member of the Parliament in 1977, I do not want to be drawn into this controversy.

Mr. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry if I ascribed an experience to the hon. Member for Oropouche to which he cannot properly claim. I now begin to understand why, in another relationship, he is being described as a “Johnny-come-lately”. However, I ascribe no such thing to the Member for Oropouche.

Mr. Speaker, the Joint Select Committee of 1977 passed a resolution and, as the Member for Tobago East said, it was unanimous. I agree, I voted for it. You were there, Mr. Speaker, and voted for it too. Arising out of that, the Government of the day took steps to translate into legislation, the report of that Joint Select Committee.

When the Government studied the legislation, a number of things became much clearer. Suffice it to say—and this is the point that the hon. Member for Tobago East leaves out all the time—that Act 37 of 1980 was a culmination of events that began when the Motion was moved in Parliament in 1977. For those who are not aware, Act 37 of 1980 was unanimously passed by this Parliament. The hon. Member for Tobago East voted for it. That is what this Parliament is not being told, Mr. Speaker. We saw it as a culmination but we always knew, and everybody knows, those kinds of things that have been subjected to the evolutionary process are of necessity. The Act must be put in place; it must be left to operate and at an appropriate time, thereafter, when there is enough experience in the operation of that Act, one would review it and make adjustments as dictated by one’s experiences under the previous legislation. That is the way Parliaments operate.

The hon. Member for Tobago East went so far as to virtually eradicate all memories of the original Tobago House of Assembly Act. All this talk about unanimous in 1977, excludes the unanimous in 1980 when the law was passed. The whole Parliament agreed to it and therefore it was our view that those issues had come to an end. We had translated the will of the Parliament, as best we could, into legislation and Parliament was satisfied with that legislation to the point where it was unanimously accepted by all Members of the Parliament.

Mr. Robinson: That is the reason Mr. Chambers had to fire the Member for San Fernando East.

Mr. Valley: That is the same reason the Member for Tobago East fired John Humphrey.

Mr. P. Manning: And the same reason he fired Mr. Panday. *[Laughter]*

3.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister Extraordinaire, Member for Tobago East, speaking on this matter talks about his initial contact with the Tobago House of Assembly in 1996 and the fact that the Tobago House of Assembly indeed, had consulted with him over the last year, even though not to an extent that he would have liked.

Mr. Speaker, I draw your attention to 1992 when the then Prime Minister and Member for San Fernando East visited Tobago and addressed the Tobago House of Assembly with the kind leave of the Members of that Assembly. I made certain commitments to the Assembly. Mr. Speaker, if the Members of the Assembly are prepared to be forthright on this matter they would say that the relationship between the Tobago House of Assembly and the Central Government has never been better than it was in the years 1991—1995. *[Applause]* That is the reality of that situation.

Mr. Speaker, I have no such complaints that they did not consult or utilize the services of the Prime Minister to the fullest extent. The Chairman of the Assembly on behalf of the assembly, always had access to the Prime Minister, he merely had to call and I responded. If any problem arose, sometimes we were able to work out those problems on the telephone; on occasions it would have taken a little longer and the process was a little more involved but on every occasion we were able to work out to our mutual satisfaction, any issue of disagreement that arose between the Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly. And I ask: Who is the obstructionist in bringing proper relations between Tobago and Trinidad in this Parliament? And, who in this Parliament are the persons seeking to do the thing right?

Mr. Speaker, the Members of the Joint Select Committee were circulated a document which sought to put all the relevant documents in one volume and when one looks at the document two important documents were missing from the volume. They were the negotiated arrangements between the Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly in 1995 which led to the Agreement between the Government and the Tobago House of Assembly, signed by the Members of the Assembly on the Constitutional (Amdt.) Bill which did not require a special majority and a new law updating Act No. 37 of 1980 which itself did not require a special majority either.

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Therefore, the Senators and even some Members of the Government to this day are not aware of contents of those two documents that were negotiated between the Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly. They just do not know. Then he talked about intent; he talked about democracy, and he did it in the best language. I want to remind this Parliament that all that glitters is not gold—we just do not know what are in those documents.

So we took the opportunity in disagreeing fundamentally with the report of the Joint Select Committee to write a Minority Report which was signed by all Members on this side of the Parliament and we included it in the Minority Report—it is not a question of us just disagreeing with what had been advanced but we put an alternative on the table which we know is acceptable to the Tobago House of Assembly on behalf of the people of Tobago which is the only body that can speak authoritatively. In that way, we put in our report, the negotiated arrangements between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Tobago House of Assembly. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis (*Arouca South*): Mr. Speaker, I was not there in 1976, 1977 nor 1978 but my intention is—and I am sure it is the intention of the Members on this side—to ensure that history would not be unkind to us and to ensure that we, in this Parliament would not be unkind to the people of Trinidad and Tobago by making decisions in undue haste.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Tobago East stated that there were no dissenting views when it came to the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill and I want to disagree with that. There were several dissenting views and concerns that whenever we come to debate this matter more would be said on that particular issue. They are called dissenting views because the Constitution which was set up indicating certain specific issues as they relate to the composition of the Parliament is now being amended in a peculiar way and in such a way that must, of necessity, concern all of us.

We, on this side are intent on keeping faith with the people of Tobago. I am repeating the words of the Member for Tobago East. We are intent on keeping faith and we have been of that intention for over 20 years and history would show that we have made every effort to ensure that legislatively and otherwise attempts are made to ensure the best relationship between Tobago and Trinidad. I repeat, it was only the period 1986—1991 that nothing was done with specific reference to ensuring a proper relationship between the people of Tobago and the people of Trinidad.

The Member for Tobago East raised the issue of House Paper No. 6 of 1978 upon which he says, his Government is attempting to base the legislation that will be designed for the relationship between Tobago and Trinidad.

3.20 p.m.

He described what was done during the PNM administration. It was a Resolution moved by the hon. Kamaluddin Mohammed, and Mr. Speaker, the Resolution said in part, and I quote:

“...all proper and necessary steps should be taken to accord the people of Tobago internal self-government in such measure as will not be contradictory to the Constitutional reality of the Independent Unitary State of Trinidad and Tobago.”

And it went on, and again I quote, Mr. Speaker:

“The following matters should be taken into account:

- (a) the views of the majority of the People of Tobago;
- (b) the cultural, financial and economic realities and potential of Trinidad and of Tobago;
- (c) the impact of any such change on other parts of Trinidad and Tobago.”

I repeat, in particular (a), Mr. Speaker: “the views of the majority of the People of Tobago”. If the Member for Tobago East says that the THA is representative of the people of Tobago, then if House Paper No. 6 of 1978 is to be properly translated and form the basis of whatever legislation is to be put in place, the views of the majority of the people of Trinidad and Tobago must be taken into consideration.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that only through a proper meeting with the Tobago House of Assembly can these views be properly aired and, indeed, perhaps even with meeting the people of Tobago. We must not be constrained by numbers, Mr. Speaker, and when I say by numbers, I mean by deadlines. We must, at all times, do what is best in the circumstances and best for our people, the people of Tobago and the people of Trinidad, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And immediately I am concerned, because perhaps, it was a Freudian slip or, perhaps, it was a matter of a true feeling, Mr. Speaker, when the Member for Tobago East expressed what to me seemed disdain for what he called ‘a subordinate government,’ and our having to meet with ‘a subordinate government’.

Mr. Speaker, I am concerned when I hear things like that. The Member for Tobago East said that I am an innocent, and to some extent—

Mr. Panday: We do not doubt that that is true.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: As it relates to politics, I am an innocent.

Mr. Robinson: On these matters.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Perhaps in matters related to some extent to Tobago. But, Mr. Speaker, when I hear some of the things that the Member for Tobago East says, my innocence is removed daily. It is removed with a certain amount of hurt, as I realize what manner of personality occupies the Tobago East seat; and Mr. Speaker, we all know when innocence is removed with a certain amount of pain and hurt, it is a time of worry and a time of concern; and sometimes a time of trepidation.

Mr. Speaker; I know, often times, we on this side are told that we do not know anything about Tobago, and are asked since when we have a concern for Tobago. But, again, history has shown that we have always had a concern for the relationship between Tobago and Trinidad; and I have a particular concern for Tobago because of my marital relationship, Mr. Speaker, and because of that, if perhaps for no other reason, I want to be part of a Parliament which ensures that the best is done for Tobago in all the circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot be guided by a situation where one person appears to want to have things done with undue haste, and without true consultation with the representative body for Tobago. We cannot be a party to a situation where things are done for expediency, rather than for doing it right and for doing it, again, for the people of Tobago and for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We cannot stand by and not attempt to ensure that what is best in the circumstances is what comes forth from this Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, I am of the firm view that the best that can be done, under the circumstances, would be to set up another Joint Select Committee comprising the same members, and Parliament giving a time within which these deliberations can be fully and effectively completed.

The Constitution is involved; the relationship between Trinidad and Tobago is involved; in fact, all of us are closely involved in this situation, and we must do what is right and not what is expedient.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3.30 p.m.

The Minister Extraordinaire and Minister of Tobago Affairs (Hon. A.N.R. Robinson): Mr. Speaker, let me assure the hon. Members of this House—

Mr. Valley: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The point of order is that a Member—

Mr. Speaker: To which Standing Order are you referring?

Mr. Valley: Standing Order 33, Mr. Speaker, which allows a Member to speak only once in a debate.

Mr. Speaker: I will draw your attention to Standing Order 34(2).

Mr. Valley: 34(2). Just for my guidance.

Mr. Speaker: No. If it is a point of order that a Member who has spoken is speaking again and you refer me to Standing Order— Which one is it?

Mr. Valley: Standing Order 33.

Mr. Speaker: Standing Order 33 says, under "Time and Manner of Speaking":

"A Member desiring to speak shall rise in his place... No Member shall speak unless called by the Speaker or Chairman."

Standing Order 33 what—(1), (2), (3) or (4)? Because that does not seem to apply.

Mr. Valley: I am sorry. Well, I cannot stand while you are standing, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Standing Order 33 what?

Mr. Valley: It is 33(3), Mr. Speaker.

"...no Member shall speak more than once on any..."

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Except that I would draw to your notice Standing Order 34(2) which states under "Right of Reply" and this is what we are dealing with:

"A Minister or a Parliamentary Secretary may conclude a debate on any motion which is critical of the Government, or reflects adversely on or is calculated to bring discredit upon the Government or an Officer thereof."

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, just for my own guidance. There is a precedent in this Parliament that this is not in conflict with Standing Order 33(3), that this may

not be the same Minister, that 33(3) still stands, that no Member of the House can speak more than once on a debate, and that is a precedent of the House.

Mr. Speaker: No, no! Precedent, as you know, is made by the Speaker. The whole point is, *May's Parliamentary Practice* has to do with precedent and precedent comes about when something is new. I am saying whether or not a previous Speaker had ruled, rightly or wrongly, what I am ruling is that what is now being attempted is under the relevant Standing Order 34(2), and I am ruling that the Member may, in fact, reply under 34(2). I, therefore—

Mr. Valley: All I am saying is this is not new and this matter came up and there is a precedent.

Mr. Speaker: I am on my legs. You know that what you are doing is not right. All I am saying is that I allow the Member to speak and reply under 34(2). You may proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Bereaux: Injustice!

Hon. A.N.R. Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will not be—

Mr. Speaker: Just one second. The comment that has just been made by the Member is not appreciated. That is not the way to do it and I would—

Mr. Sudama: Put him out!

Mr. Speaker: The comment which has just been made by the Member about injustice is not the done thing. There is a way in which one could question what the Speaker does. It is very simple and all I have done is I have ruled. The Member for Diego Martin Central had got up on a point of order; he had referred me to a particular Standing Order; I have looked at it; I have dealt with it; and according to the Standing Orders you may just have to accept that. You may come with a substantive Motion.

Mr. Valley: We will do that.

Mr. Speaker: Well, you may do that but you do not threaten me with that and you do not speak when you are sitting.

The Member may continue.

Hon. A.N.R. Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to assure hon. Members—

Mr. Valley: One would expect that a Member who has been in the House for so long would know what is wrong.

Mr. Maharaj: You behave like a little child when you do not get what you want.

Mr. Valley: It is the principle.

Hon. A.N.R. Robinson: I would like to assure the hon. Members of this House and, in particular, the hon. Member who spoke, that I intended no hurt, but in the process of the cut and thrust of politics, sometimes there is hurt and it is all part of the process of growing up.

I was very interested indeed and somewhat flattered to hear the proposal that the matter be referred to the same Members who constituted the Joint Select Committee and that the Member for Tobago East should again have the honour of chairing that committee. Mr. Speaker, after hearing what was said by the Member for San Fernando East, you could understand how puzzled and nonplussed I was that the proposal should come from that side that I should occupy the same chair.

In fact, at the conclusion of the Joint Select Committee, those Members who were present on the Monday morning, all paid tribute to the manner in which proceedings had been conducted—Senators and Members of the House. It seems to me that it is somewhat destructive of the argument that the matter should be referred to the Joint Select Committee which is supposed to have been so terrible, whose chairman was so terrible, so incompetent and so destructive, as was represented by the Member for San Fernando East. But one is not surprised at the contradictions.

You would notice, Mr. Speaker, the scant regard paid to the resolutions of this House in 1978 and the printed document which was circulated and, in fact, constituted one of the main documents debated in Tobago all these years. You will notice, also, some scant regard paid to the length of time it has taken to have this matter settled. You would notice, also, the allegation as it was put, the only person, the only head of government, only one of the four or five Prime Ministers, who did nothing for the relationship between Trinidad and Tobago, was the Member for Tobago East.

I do not think the people in Tobago would swallow that because they know that the economic relationship is even more fundamental than the political relationship and they know, for 30 years, they were promised by the PNM a deep-water harbour which they never got under the PNM. When they got the deep-water harbour, it was described as a duck pond and the Member for San Fernando East went all over this country saying that the Prime Minister of the country, who was a

Tobagonian, was spending all of Trinidad's money in Tobago. That was his campaign. They have forgotten that. They have forgotten also that Tobago was promised an airport. International links they never got for 30 years under the PNM. They forgot that it was obtained during the time that the Member for Tobago East headed the government of this country.

Those are things that mean very much to the ordinary Tobagonian—the cost of goods, transport of goods, prices, the capacity to move from one island to another in a unitary state. These things mean nothing to the Members opposite, but those who reside in Tobago and not who are merely married to Tobagonians; those who reside in Tobago, including Trinidadians. I make no distinction; I talk about those who reside in Tobago and one will find that the people who are perhaps most actively protesting against the conditions existing in Tobago are Trinidadians who live in Tobago. So there is common cause. Once you reside in Tobago and you experience the problems that a resident encounters, there is a common bond which binds you together.

3.40 p.m.

I am married to a Trinidadian. Most of my time is spent in Trinidad. My children are Trinidadians. I have resided in Tobago; I have a residence in Tobago; I have a residence in Trinidad and I live in both places and I know conditions in both places, so I am in a position to be able to add some contribution to the debate of this kind which relates to the relative conditions existing and the structures which give rise to those conditions in respect of the two islands.

I want to make this point also. It is very important that the national community should know. In 1978, I did not say that the Member for Tobago East was the only Member of Parliament from Tobago when this matter was initiated. I did not say that. What I said was, the Member for Tobago East was the only Member of the Joint Select Committee of 12. I am stressing the point, because whereas in 1978 the Member for Tobago East was the only member for Tobago in a joint select committee of 12, in 1996 there is a vast difference. In 1996, there are five persons from Tobago, two from the House of Representatives and three from the Senate on the Joint Select Committee—five out of 12. That five out of 12 include the Member for Tobago East and the Member for Tobago West, both Cabinet Ministers. I want to emphasize that. The Joint Select Committee consisted of the Member for Tobago East and the Member for Tobago West, both Cabinet Ministers. You tell me in this Parliament, who speaks for Tobago except the Member for Tobago East and the Member for Tobago West? Tell me, in the Cabinet, who

speaks for Tobago except the Member for Tobago East and the Member for Tobago West? You tell me. *[Interruption]*

Do you see the disrespect they have for the Parliament? They do not even understand their constitutional position. When I spoke about a subordinate body, I meant constitutionally, the Tobago House of Assembly at this time has no place in the Constitution. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I want you to believe me when I tell you that I will not allow the House to continue like this. For a Member of Parliament to have an aside while another Member is speaking is acceptable, but for Members to continue constant interruption and heckling on an issue that the Speaker has dealt with, I feel is in bad taste; just sheer bad taste; puerile. I appeal to you that I be not forced to adopt measures which the Standing Orders permit me to use.

Mr. A.N.R. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, are they saying that the Member of Parliament for Tobago East and the Member of Parliament for Tobago West, both Cabinet Ministers, have no constitutional significance? Are they saying this? Are they saying that they cannot speak for Tobago? Then which of them opposite speaks for Tobago? If anything is secession, it is that attitude!

The Member for Tobago East is accustomed to the abuse which was heaped on him from the very beginning when this matter was mooted, but he was able to see the very people who abused him accept most of his ideas in the Joint Select Committee report. I have no doubt about the force of the ideas that we present from this side of the House. I have no doubt, whatever time it may be, these ideas are bound to be accepted because they are valid; they are recognized all over the world; they are accepted by people who have a concept of democracy and equality. Those opposite are the most backward you can find. That is why the people of Tobago are so apprehensive about not having legislative and constitutional safeguards which exist everywhere in the world where communities such as Trinidad and Tobago are together, which was recognized in 1978 and which is expressed in House Paper No. 6 of 1978.

What we are proposing is nothing strange or new. It is something accepted all over the world; it is something accepted by this Parliament. But even when they agree to something, as they did in respect to the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill, you are now hearing they did not agree. But it is documented by the staff. It is the staff that prepares the reports from verbatim notes. I did not write this report. None of the Members of the committee wrote the report. It is from verbatim notes that this report was written.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for giving way. Might I point out to the hon. Member that the minority report presented states quite clearly and I quote:

"We must state from the outset that we disagree with several of the clauses presented in both bills and indeed with the approach taken by the committee to arrive at its conclusions."

Miss Nicholson: You did not say that at the meetings.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: We certainly did, Mr. Speaker, and I am sorry to now speak to the Member for Tobago West, but if she would look at the verbatim notes she would see the disagreement. I suggest that she does so.

Hon. A.N.R. Robinson: You notice, Mr. Speaker, that those are generalities; there is no particular statement on which we disagreed throughout this whole debate. There has not been one reference to anything that they disagreed with—notice that—and that is in the minority report which they put in. Then the Member for San Fernando East spoke about bills which they had the opportunity of introducing to the committee which they never did. What the Joint Select Committee was considering was the Guya Persaud Report which did not have documents appended to it. If they wanted to introduce a document they were free to do so, but they did not do so. Yet they are criticizing us for not doing so.

The Guya Persaud committee reviewed all the documents. The Tobago House of Assembly prepared a report and draft bill. We considered the draft bills in the context of public comments which were received after the bills were published. So at every stage there was opportunity for comments and these comments were taken into account. So if Members now want to go back on what they had done, we cannot help that; it happened before in the history of Tobago. That is Tobago's history. That is what Tobago has been experiencing all of the time—promises broken, commitments made and not honoured, absolute lack of faith.

3.50 p.m.

This is why I say that this debate is about keeping faith with the people of Tobago. That is what this is all about. This legislation is about keeping faith with the people of Tobago. So we have no hesitation whatsoever in rejecting the Motion that has been moved for the reference back to the Joint Select Committee and in effect, for the disruption of an orderly process and the promotion of confusion.

Question put:

The House divided: Ayes 10 Noes 18

NOES

Maharaj, Hon. R. L.

Panday, Hon. B.

Persad-Bissessar, Hon. K.

Robinson, Hon. A.N.R.

Humphrey, Hon. J.

Sudama, Hon. T.

Maraj, Hon. R.

Nicholson, Hon. P.

Rafeeq, Dr. The Hon. H.

Khan, Dr. F.

Singh, Hon. G.

Nanan, Dr. The Hon. A.

Partap, Hon. H.

Mohammed, Dr. The Hon. R.

Singh, Hon. D.

Ramsaran, Hon. M.

Sharma, C.

Ali, R.

AYES:

Valley, K.

Draper, G.

Imbert, C.

Lasse, Dr. V.

Robinson-Regis, Mrs. C.

Narine, J.

Griffith, Dr. R.

Bereaux, H.

Joseph, M

Sinanan, B.

Motion negatived.

**STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE
(Presentation)**

Mr. Gordon Draper (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the Report of the Standing Orders Committee of the House of Representatives 1995—1996 Session.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE SYSTEM

The Minister of National Security (Sen. Brig. The Hon. Joseph Theodore): Mr. Speaker, on May 23, 1996, Cabinet agreed, in principle, to the introduction of a nation-wide emergency response system which would commence with the police service as a 999 system and be extended to the fire service as well as provide for medical emergencies.

The requirement is for a modern integrated system which, at the same time, meets the different operating agencies' requirements for primary security and control. The system supports both analogue and digital communications and provides all the features necessary for public and national safety operations. The system will permit the different security agencies to communicate as and when required.

In this regard discussions were held with Borde Communications and their overseas principals, Motorola Incorporated, on a proposal for the implementation of such a system which would include all the radios, electronic equipment, repeater stations, infrastructure and vehicles required for the system. The vehicle identified in the proposal, the jeep Cherokee was selected by Borde/Motorola who, through Associates Leasing Company, a vehicle fleet management company used by Motorola had received a qualifying proposal from Chrysler/Jeep and had incorporated it as part of the total system.

In pursuance of Cabinet's decision that "Borde Communications/Motorola and TSTT be requested to develop/refine their submission for the system", Borde Communications/Motorola submitted a subsequent proposal dated June 11, 1996 and advised that:

"The quantity (sic) 100 Jeep Grand Cherokee vehicles contained in our previous proposals and which are an essential element of the total solution will be provided independently to the Ministry and are not quoted for in this final proposal."

The main areas of activities are recognized under police work and communication. They include responding to emergency calls from the public; taking appropriate action to resolve calls; reporting on the outcome of each call and communicating with the response centre located at the police stations.

Accordingly, Cabinet was again approached on August 15, 1996 for approval for the Ministry of National Security to enter into a contract with NIPDEC for the supply of the necessary equipment to establish a nation-wide Emergency Rapid Response System and 100 vehicles that were part of the proposal.

NIPDEC identified the local agent for the Chrysler jeeps and entered into a contract with Platinum Motors Limited on October 3, 1996 for the supply of the vehicles. NIPDEC continued to negotiate with Motorola and Borde Communications and a contract was signed by the parties on October 21, 1996 for the supply of the electronic equipment, radios and civil works.

NIPDEC has advised that in seeking to acquire the required vehicles they approached Chrysler International Corporation, the manufacturers of the jeep Cherokee, who referred them to Interamericana Trading Corporation, the appointed Caribbean region distributor for Chrysler International Corporation based in Barbados. Interamericana Trading Corporation advised that Platinum Motors Limited was the authorized agent for Chrysler vehicles in Trinidad and Tobago and directed that liaison be established with the company. Acting in accordance with that information, NIPDEC entered into a contract, dated October 3, 1996 with Platinum Motors Limited.

Investigation of the firm, Platinum Motors Limited, arising out of allegations of impropriety reported in the media, has revealed that the managing director of the company, trading under the business name of Singh's Auto Rental Company Limited, had approached the Chrysler Corporation since July 1991 to secure the dealership to sell right-hand drive jeep Cherokee vehicles manufactured by that corporation in Trinidad and Tobago.

However, since right-hand drive vehicles were not being produced by Chrysler Corporation at the time, correspondence between Singh's Auto Rental Company Limited and Chrysler Corporation continued during the period 1991 to 1996.

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Interamericana Trading Corporation, Caribbean regional distributor for Chrysler International, has confirmed that the company represented by Ishwar Galbaransingh, registered as Platinum Motors Limited is the authorized dealer for Chrysler Jeep and Dodge vehicles in the territory of Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I do not know whether some of you have heard that statement before, but I have not, and I am sure the *Hansard* reporter had not heard it, therefore, it was a bit difficult for her to get it and, indeed, for others who are interested in this.

4.00 p.m.

**NARIVA SWAMP
(ILLEGAL OCCUPATION)**

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Dr. The Hon. Reeza Mohammed): Mr. Speaker, I wish to apprise this honourable House of recent developments in the Nariva Swamp and to state this Government's policy.

The Nariva Swamp is located in south-east Trinidad and represents this country's largest wetlands. It occupies approximately 6,200 hectares, and is comprised mainly of palm swamp forest, highland forest, and the largest area of herbaceous vegetation in Trinidad. It is one of the most expansive wetlands in the Caribbean and has the most varied vegetation of all wetlands in Trinidad and Tobago. It is specially important to a large number of water fowl resident there. The swamp sustains a population of: anaconda, manatee, molluscs and crustacean and serves as the spawning ground and habitat for several species of fresh-water fish.

As a result of human activities, particularly the illegal developments in the marsh, at the Kushiro Conference in Japan (1993), the Government of this country formally requested the inclusion of the Nariva Swamp in the Montreux Accord—a subset of RAMSAR sites, in need of priority conservation worldwide.

Occupation in the swamp began in the early 1980s and large-scale clearing of lands, particularly for rice cultivation, commenced around 1987. This has continued apace with increasing acceleration to the present time. The activities include the clearing of 1,400 hectares for rice cultivation; squatting in the Bush Bush Wildlife Sanctuary, as well as the proposed National Park area; diversion of waterways; creation of drains; construction of roadways, crossings and other Standing Order structures; illegal hunting activities, and the erection of camps and sheds for a

variety of purposes. This has resulted in the loss of approximately 25 per cent of the total acreage of the swamp.

Following recommendations in the 1970s by the Food and Agricultural Organization for the development of the swamp, successive governments have continued to implement developmental activities in the Plum Mitan area (Block A), in accordance with the overall objective of regularizing 398 hectares through the grant of agricultural leases.

In 1986, 53 farmers were issued with Probationary Tenancy Agreements in an effort at this regularization.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, as part of its development programme for 1996, would lease 175 plots ranging in sizes from 1.2—4.0 hectares. By the end of the year, construction will be completed on eight kilometres of gravelled roads; five kilometres of earthen roads; 20 kilometres of earthen drains; 12 cylinder crossings; and five sluice gates in the Block A area. Additionally, 1.5 kilometres of the Perimeter Channel and 1 kilometre of secondary drains in the area will be desilted this year.

The planned development of Block A is scheduled for completion in 1977. Thus, the present Government's wetlands policy governing the swamp seeks to permit small-scale rice production in Block A while, at the same time, providing more effective protection for the ecological values of the wetlands.

Mr. Speaker, on November 01, 1996 three 4000 gallons per minute water pumps were installed and commissioned in blocks 1—4 of Block A bringing 480 hectares into production. This will accommodate 230 farmers. It must be pointed out that these pumps were purchased over a decade ago but were never installed.

The 1,400 hectare Block B, also known as the Bishe Bois Neuf area, is located south of Block A and is contiguous with it. Farmers who occupy Block B are illegally occupying state lands. These large farmers expanded deeper into the swamp despite adverse publicity and attempts to remove them. The removal of vegetation and the digging of drainage channels for rice cultivation in an *ad hoc* manner may have impacted negatively on the ecosystem of the swamp.

It is to be noted that the entire Bishe Bois Neuf area (Block B) has been totally transformed from its original vegetative cover to intensive large-scale rice cultivation. Significant interference to the natural hydrology is evidenced by the existence of

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several man-made channels. It is also apparent that the rice growing activities in the swamp may impact on the resident wildlife.

It is also to be noted that the Nariva Swamp was declared a prohibited area in May 1993. Under the regulations of the Forest Act, entry to the swamp must only be made with the approval of the Director of Forestry, and this approval is provided under specific conditions.

There is an obligation for Trinidad and Tobago to manage the swamp as an international wetlands site to promote sustainable utilization for ecological, socio-economic and scientific purposes. In this regard, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has decided that future loss of the swamp must be terminated immediately. Moreover, measures will be undertaken to ensure that approved activities in the swamp are carried out within a wise use framework.

As a first step to achieving this goal, this UNC/NAR government of national unity has succeeded where past governments have failed in removing the occupants of Block B of the Nariva Swamp. The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, through the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, has acquired grant funding from the Convention for Wetland Bureau (RAMSAR) to carry out an environmental impact assessment for Block B of the swamp. It is expected, therefore, that this exercise will be undertaken very shortly. It was imperative that all activities in this area be immediately terminated and the commissioning, execution and interpretation of an environmental impact assessment be undertaken with dispatch.

Mr. Speaker, once the environmental impact assessment is completed, based on the conclusions therein, recommendations on the future development of the Nariva Swamp will be submitted for the consideration of the Cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

FINANCE COMMITTEE

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That that this House resolve itself into Finance Committee to consider matters relating to the 1996 accounts.

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, under Standing Orders 64(1) it is provided that the Finance Committee meetings of the House of Representatives should be held in private.

In those circumstances, I am constrained to ask the strangers and all the people in the public gallery to vacate their seats for a short while as this meeting proceeds.

Thank you.

4.10 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

4.20 p.m.: *Sitting resumed*

The Minister of Finance and Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. Speaker, I wish to report that the Finance Committee has met and has considered several matters relating to the 1996 accounts.

Further, I advise that the report of the Finance Committee would be presented to the House of Representatives on Tuesday, November 12, 1996.

Thank you.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House proceed as follows:

- (1) Motion No. 5 dealing with the Senate amendments to the Motor Vehicles Insurance (Third-Party Risks) (Amdt.) Bill.
- (2) Motion No. 2 to adopt the report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament appointed to consider and report on the seventeenth Annual Report of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the functions and duties of the Ombudsman and to make recommendations for a more effective machinery for the office of the Ombudsman so that Part II of Chapter 6 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago can be given effect.
- (3) Motion No. 3 to adopt the report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament appointed to consider the Green Paper on Integrity Legislation, to receive and consider the comments of members of the public on the said Paper and to submit its recommendations to Parliament thereon.
- (4) Motion No. 6 to adopt the report of the Standing Orders Committee of the House of Representatives (1995—96) session.

Agreed to.

**MOTOR VEHICLES INSURANCE
(THIRD-PARTY RISKS) (AMDT.) BILL
Senate Amendments**

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That the Senate amendments to the Motor Vehicles Insurance (Third-Party Risks) (Amdt.) Bill listed in the appendix be now considered.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 7:

Senate amendment reads as follows:

Delete clause 7 and insert the following:

“Section 7 amended. Section 7 of the Act is amended as follows:

- (a) by repealing subsection (1)(b) and substituting the following:
 - (b) consist of an undertaking by the giver of the security to make good, subject to any conditions specified therein, and up to the amount, in the case of any motor vehicle or licensed trailer, of not less than three hundred thousand dollars in respect of each such motor vehicle or licensed trailer any failure by the insured or any person driving or using the motor vehicle or licensed trailer with the consent of the insured or the consent of the person authorised by the insured duly to discharge any such liability as is required to be covered by a policy of insurance under section 4 which may be incurred by any of the persons aforesaid.”
- (b) by deleting the words “two hundred thousand dollars” and substituting the words “three hundred thousand dollars”.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 10:

Senate amendment reads as follows:

Delete the word "other" occurring in the last line of subsection (8) and insert the word "higher".

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS
(Adoption)
Ombudsman's Report (Seventeenth)**

The Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament appointed to consider and report on the seventeenth Annual Report of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the functions and duties of the Ombudsman and to make recommendations for a more effective machinery for the Office of the Ombudsman so that Part II of Chapter 6 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago can be given effect.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

Integrity Legislation—Green Paper

The Minister of Labour and Co-operatives (Hon. Harry Partap): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament appointed to consider the Green Paper on Integrity Legislation to receive and consider the comments of members of the public on the said Paper and to submit its recommendations to Parliament thereon.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

**STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE
(Adoption)**

Mr. Gordon Draper (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion:

Be it resolved that the House adopt the report of the Standing Orders Committee of the House of Representatives (1995—96) session.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

Mr. Speaker: The sitting of the House will now be suspended for half of an hour.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I must also thank Members for their indulgence. I beg to move that the House now stand adjourned to Tuesday, November 12, 1996 at 1.30 p.m.

I had indicated to the Opposition Chief Whip that the Government intends to have sittings on a daily basis, from Tuesday, to have the Report of the Finance Committee, the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) Bill and the report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to report on the Constitutional and Legislative Arrangements for Tobago, debated. The Government will be asking the House to take note of that report. We shall also be proceeding expeditiously with respect to the Tobago House of Assembly (Amdt.) Bill and the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill.

It would seem that if we sit on a regular basis from Tuesday, the House would be able to complete its activities in these matters by November 26. Some days we would sit from 10.00 a.m. or 10.30 a.m., some days at 1.00 p.m. or 1.30 p.m. We shall deal with it as time goes on. From Tuesday we shall be sitting every day, at least until November 26 or 27, or until we complete these matters. I thought I

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should mention this so that Members would be fully prepared. They should also be prepared to walk with their toothbrushes and toothpaste.

The Parliament is to be prorogued on November 20; we expect to reopen on November 21, and there will be no ceremonial opening.

Mr. Bereaux: I would like an explanation. First, I must say that I am gratified that we are promised that Parliament will be working. I am on too much holiday. I heard the hon. Minister indicate that we were going up to November 26 and yet he said Parliament will be prorogued on November 20. He has lost me.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. Member for La Brea were paying attention he would have noticed what was to be debated. The Report for the Joint Select Committee will be debated before the Parliament is prorogued; the report of the Finance Committee, the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) Bill, the Tobago House of Assembly (Amdt.) Bill and the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill will also be debated and we expect to complete them by November 26. We can sit longer if we decide. We have no problem.

In respect of the hon. Member's comment that he is happy to see the House sitting, may I announce that this House, in this session of Parliament, did more work than the PNM administration did in its four sessions.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before I put the question of the adjournment of the House, I wish to indicate that I have given leave to the Member for Diego Martin Central to raise a matter, "The continuing decline of the Trinidad and Tobago dollar", and I have given leave to the Member for Diego Martin East to raise a matter on the adjournment, "Questionable circumstances surrounding the Award of a Contract to Platinum Motors for the Supply of 100 Cherokee Jeeps to the Government for use by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service". I now call on the Member for Diego Martin Central.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned to you, we are asking that Mr. Imbert's Motion be taken first.

Mr. Speaker: The difficulty I think was that there is a flight to be caught by the Minister who is to reply.

5.15 p.m.

Trinidad and Tobago Dollar (Decline of)

Mr. Kenneth Valley (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Speaker, you would recall that on October 21, 1996, or somewhere thereabouts, I sought to raise this matter

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as one of urgent public importance because at that time, we had experienced some three weeks of decline of the Trinidad and Tobago dollar *vis a vis* the United States currency. In fact, the currency has appreciated to roughly \$6.06 to date. What we need to look at however, and as I had mentioned to the Minister earlier, is that there are certain issues which arose out of this situation for which we need to get answers.

First of all, you would know that in an effort to get the currency to appreciate, the Minister of Finance instructed, cajoled, threatened, or what have you, state companies to buy the Trinidad and Tobago dollars.

Hon. Member: Where you got that?

Mr. K. Valley: Where I got that? What do you mean? The Minister of Finance made that statement. In fact, he called Caroni, Caroni did not have, he called National Gas Company (NGC) and NGC told him yes but they would have to put it in different tranches.

One of the questions which arises from that, Mr. Speaker, first of all is whether the Minister was operating a cartel, and whether there was collusion. If in fact, we were telling key players in the market to buy TT dollars knowing that the joint action of these companies would have the effect of appreciating the currency, such that they would make a gain because the US dollar was being sold at TT \$6.21, the ordinary man did not have that information. In fact, here is the Minister of Finance with his state enterprises cornering the market as it were, and I do not know who else he might have told to sell at that time because they were taking action to make sure that the rates go back down. So we have the state companies and other friends making a profit.

The second question, Mr. Speaker, is if the Minister of Finance could have taken that action when the rate got to \$6.21, why could he not have taken similar action to prevent the embarrassment to the hon. Prime Minister to ensure that the rate did not move beyond \$6.00? Why could he not have asked the same state companies to put some of their US dollars in the market instead of having the Prime Minister make a statement on one day that the rate is as solid as a rock and nothing was happening, and the next day the rate started to decline?

Mr. Speaker, we have to ask these questions because if one reads what is happening in the national community, I think there are a number of persons who believe that in fact, the rate was manipulated to ensure that some persons made profits in the situation. Therefore, I think we ought to give the hon. Minister a

chance to explain his actions, to show the national community that they were logical and in the best financial interest of the country, and were not designed to get the state companies or any friends to make money out of the situation. So this is really a chance to allow the hon. Minister of Finance to explain his actions to the national community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. Speaker, when I saw this Motion on the adjournment, and unfortunately I only saw it for the first time this afternoon when I attended today's sitting, I really thought that the recent events would have made this totally irrelevant, particularly because I am sure you have been vindicated in your ruling that this really was not a matter of urgent, national, or of any kind of importance—*[Desk thumping]* and therefore, I was hoping that I would have been able to impress upon the Member for Diego Martin Central that we could have dispensed with this if he would withdraw his Motion.

Obviously, the other side seems to be so pre-occupied with the zombie which they see as corruption, which I know must have hurt and haunted them over the four years they were there, that every time they open a book, they see the word "corruption". *[Interruption]*

Member for Diego Martin Central, you have had your say, would you mind. They know how they had been able to afford their friends opportunities to make money so that they seem to think that every time something happens, somebody is creating an opportunity to make money.

If there was an opportunity to make money, it would not have been 1 per cent and 2 per cent. People do not make money at 1 and 2 per cent when the exchange rate changes, they make money when the money is floated from \$4plus to \$5.65. It is then money is made, Mr. Speaker. *[Desk thumping]* And I can assure you that there are quite a few PNM friends who are walking around boasting that they are the ones who made the money. It is the PNM people who boast so that when there is a slight adjustment to the money—

Mr. Valley: You were there.

Hon. B. Kuei Tung: I was there, but they did not tell me anything about it. They used to treat me as an outcast, Mr. Speaker, that is one of the reasons why I had to leave *[Laughter]*. I was the only non-Member of Cabinet in Cabinet, so that

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I had no choice. Rather than stay there and suffer the indignity of not knowing what was going on, I preferred to leave, but I saw that today, having admired the dignity of one ex-member of the Senate, that you would have admired the dignity of my leaving also. Just imagine, two years later I am fired, two years later they have suddenly found a note. The previous prime minister has a record. He fires by FAX instantly, and he took two years to tell people he fired me. He is not sure where he is. *[Interruption]* I know I was fired, I was in Government with you, you are now out of Government. I fired you all, I am the one who fired all of you. *[Laughter and desk thumping]* Who fired who?

Mr. Speaker, I really thought that this would have been nothing more than a non-issue, instead we are being told that the Minister of Finance called state enterprises. I want to inform this honourable House that this Minister of Finance spoke with no state enterprises throughout this entire exercise. Instead, what I did was some research through—I better not say through whom, Sir. The research was done where it was determined that certain state enterprises had accumulated a number of US holdings and it was the Central Bank who had impressed upon them the effect of their actions, the Minister of Finance had absolutely nothing to do in talking with any of the—

Mr. Valley: *[Inaudible]* What did you do with the research, you put it in your pocket?

Hon. B. Kuei Tung: Well, I had it researched.

Mr. Panday: You are grasping at straws.

Hon. B. Kuei Tung: Mr. Speaker, all of these suggestions about friends and who made money, there is really little opportunity to make money and certainly, if the state enterprises have made money, it is because of their own financial dealings and that was their opportunity to bring themselves towards profitability.

Mr. Speaker, I really believe that there is nothing here to answer.

Thank you, very much.

Platinum Motors (Contract)

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin East*): Mr. Speaker, we have just heard a dissertation from the Minister of Finance about his friends and lack of friends and lack of knowledge and so forth.

The Motion on the adjournment is entitled “Questionable circumstances surrounding the Award of a Contract to Platinum Motors for the Supply of 100 Cherokee jeeps to the Government for use by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.”

We heard today, a statement from the Minister of National Security, and for some reason, we have not been provided with that statement. We are still waiting for it, but I took some notes and forgive me if my notes are not totally accurate.

5.25 p.m.

The Minister said that Cabinet agreed some time in May, 1996, that Borde Communications, which had submitted a proposal for a communications system to deal with some rapid response programme that the Ministry of National Security was about to set up, had indicated in their proposal to supply radios that they would only use these radios in Cherokee jeeps; *[Laughter]* that NIPDEC was then instructed, by Cabinet, to identify the local agents and to negotiate with them; and that checks were made with some Inter-American Motors from Barbados to find out who were the agents for Chrysler; whether there were any local agents and who were the suppliers of Cherokee jeeps and so forth.

Eventually the Minister said, it was confirmed, after all this “tra la la”, that Platinum Motors Limited is the authorized agent for Cherokee jeeps. He said that the Managing Director, Mr. Ishwar Galbaransingh, had approached Chrysler since 1991 but right-hand driven vehicles were not available.

Mr. Speaker, they take this country for fools! They think people are stupid! Let us put this matter in perspective. *[Interruption]* The records in the Registrar of Companies indicate that the document for Platinum Motors Limited was filed with the Registrar of Companies on July 9, 1996—it is strange that Cabinet agreed in May, two months before, to some proposals for radios that could only be used in Cherokee jeeps—by Mr. Russell Huggins, Attorney-at-Law of No. 38 Dundonald Street, Port of Spain.

Mr. Panday: Do you know him?

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes.

The named subscribers and directors of the company are Ishwar Galbaransingh from Farm Road, Valsayn Park, also a director of Singh’s Auto Rentals and Nadine Seepersad of Hubert Rance Street, Vistabella. Who are these people, Mr. Speaker? Let me read from the *Hansard* record of September 20, 1996. In the debate on the Customs (Amdt.) Bill, I made a statement as follows:

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“The police are soon to get 100 Cherokee jeeps coming from the agency of the business associates of the Minister of Finance, without tender! Instructed by somebody! How strange? Before the election of 1995, the police used to drive Land Rovers, Isuzu jeeps and so forth. Funny! Now they are going to be importing Cherokee jeeps through the agency of the investors in the UNC Government— “The boys...”

Mr. Speaker, the platinum club.

I also made reference to a building which is soon to be rented by the Customs Division of the Ministry of Finance, a building soon to be acquired by the business associates of the Minister of Finance. This is what the Minister of Finance had to say:

“Mr. Kuei Tung: I wonder if the Minister would give way? I believe it is unfair, Mr. Speaker,...”

And he was red in the face and stamping the floor—

“...for the Member for Diego Martin East to come here and make these kinds of allegations without any evidence.”

He called them “allegations,” Mr. Speaker.

“...I am convinced that the Minister does not have such evidence.”

Mr. Speaker, on September 20, 1996, the Minister of Finance denied any knowledge of Cherokee jeeps being imported by a company owned by his business associates.

Who are these people, Mr. Speaker? They are Russell Huggins, former PNM Minister, close friend and business associate of the Minister of Finance; Ishwar Galbaransingh, a known UNC financier, Chairman of TIDCO, close friend and business partner of the Minister of Finance; Nadine Seepersad, a close personal friend of the Minister of Finance—that is public knowledge, Mr. Speaker, the lady in question is a close personal friend of the Minister of Finance. As a matter of fact, until recently they were very friendly.

In the face of such evidence on September 20, 1996, the Minister of Finance denied all knowledge of Cherokee jeeps and Platinum Motors Limited. He said he did not know who the directors and the shareholders were, but two of them are his business partners and one a female friend of his whom he has known for years. Cabinet took a decision in May, 1996, as confirmed by the Minister today, that

Cherokee jeeps would be used. Very curious, Mr. Speaker! Then we heard that he did not know who were the agents for Platinum Motors Limited.

Mr. Speaker, there was an advertisement in the *Daily Express* newspaper dated October 16, 1996 which says:

“Platinum Motors Limited has been appointed as sole agent for Chrysler International Corporation, the new Dodge Chrysler Jeep.”

One just had to read the newspapers, one did not need to check with the Interamericana Corporation in Barbados.

More importantly, on October 13, 1996, Platinum Motors Limited advertised in the *Daily Express* for a service manager, a parts manager, a sales manager, an accountant, mechanics, electricians and a personal assistant to the CEO. I would like to know, Mr. Speaker, have the procurement rules changed in Trinidad and Tobago since the UNC came into office? Do they take the people of this country for fools? Mr. Speaker, one had a company that was not registered until July, 1996, two months after the Cabinet decision. The directors and shareholders are UNC financiers and friends of the Minister of Finance. They have no track record, no parts department, service department, no employees. How did they get the contract, Mr. Speaker?

I repeat, have the procurement procedures in this country changed? That is what I mean by questionable circumstances. Was it insider trading? When the Cabinet meeting was over, did the Minister of Finance tell his friends: “We just agreed that Cherokee jeeps would be used for the police, go quickly and form an agency?”

I want the Minister of National Security to answer certain questions because I am not satisfied with his explanation here today. He is not involved in all this manipulation, I think he is simply a pawn; used and abused. Could the Minister of National Security say, since when does one ask a company to supply radios and then tell them: “tell me what kind of vehicles are to be used with the radios”. Or, “what is the best vehicle to use with these radios?” Mr. Speaker, that is not done anywhere else in the world. One had to get the vehicle and then install the radio in the vehicle! One does not put the vehicle in the radio! [*Laughter*] Scandalous, Mr. Speaker!

I would like the Minister of National Security to tell me why—I am not blaming the police—the Government has switched from Land Rovers, Isuzu Troopers,

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Toyota Land Cruisers and Nissan Patrols to Cherokee jeeps. I submit, Mr. Speaker, that now there is another brand of vehicles in the police service, one would need to train more mechanics, and to put more systems in place because one would now have an additional brand of vehicle. I repeat, why did they switch from Land Rovers and Isuzu Troopers to Cherokee jeeps? Were they in agreement? Why have they switched from low-fuelled consumption, economical, diesel-powered vehicles that have a fuel consumption of 25 per cent of a gasoline engine to high fuel consumption, gasoline-powered jeeps? Was there some sort of study done on the economics of the operating of these vehicles? Is the fuel cost not important to the Ministry of National Security? Is it because a UNC financier is the sole agent for Cherokee jeeps? Why was the contract given to a company which had no staff and was only registered in July, 1996? How, in fact, did this company even qualify to supply vehicles? This is a company whose directors have experience in renting cars.

Even though, as the Minister of National Security indicated, they had communicated with Chrysler since 1991, that was not the only company. Many companies in Trinidad and Tobago have been corresponding with Chrysler in an attempt to become the agents for Chrysler jeeps. That is an irrelevant statement, Mr. Speaker. Why was this contract awarded to a company that did not exist prior to July, 1996? Could the Minister explain if the procurement procedures in the Ministry of National Security have changed since the UNC came into power?

5.35 p.m.

I consider this to be highly improper, notwithstanding the denials of the Minister of Finance, clearly a bold-faced and shameless man, to come in to this Parliament and say that he knows nothing, but business partners and female friends are the directors and shareholders in the company, publicly consorting with these people all over Trinidad for the last two years but he comes in the Parliament and says he knows nothing about it and the Member for Diego Martin East is making scandalous allegations.

Mr. Speaker, before I am finished, this is just the tip of the iceberg, the Government is taking the population for fools and I am disappointed in the Member for Couva North who is trying to condone this kind of scandalous corruption. Since I made my statement about that Customs building, a company called Key Development Limited has been registered by the same Russell Huggins

and is continuing its efforts to get a contract to rent that building to the Customs Division, a division of the Ministry of Finance which reports to the same individual who denied all knowledge of it on September 20, 1996.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of National Security (Sen. Brig. The Hon. Joseph Theodore): Mr. Speaker, I would like to reflect on what the Minister of Finance said earlier, it seems as though the Member for Diego Martin East is seeing “ghosts” and “spirits” behind every door.

Mr. Speaker, when I came to the Ministry of National Security in November last year, the police were not only completely dispirited; they had no transportation and certainly had no will to deal with crime. One of my major jobs—*[Interruption]* no, the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister at one time and that is when the thing turned “ole mas”—the only ministry that had three ministers and was in chaos. I found that the public was complaining that the police were not responding, you call the police and they would say that they have no vehicles—*[Interruption]* Since you know so much about this thing you should have been the Minister of National Security—you have missed your calling. Mr. Speaker, I beg your pardon. It is obvious that the hon. Member had other ambitions, I know he was interested in law at one stage.

The need for the emergency response had to do with an offer we received from Motorola whose local agents are Borde Communications. The offer was in the form of a package which included equipment, infrastructure, civil works and vehicles. Mr. Speaker, I would like to read a letter from Motorola, dated November 06, 1996 signed by the Manager of the Government and Public Safety Markets. It says:

“The project was developed jointly by Borde Communications and Motorola and was based on the principle of providing a total system solution which included communication equipment, vehicles, services and civil works. It was our intention to construct the project so as to be eligible for Exim Bank or other United States funding in order to qualify for low-cost funds and the United States Government Grants.

In this context, Motorola/Borde contacted Associates Leasing Company, a vehicle fleet management company used by Motorola to assist with soliciting quotations from several qualified vehicle manufacturers. A qualifying proposal

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was received for Chrysler Jeep Cherokee vehicles which was incorporated as part of the total system solution.”

As it stands, when we were negotiating with Borde Communications/Motorola in June, Borde Communications/Motorola submitted *[Interruption]* It is all here, I trust the Member was paying attention because I assume he would ask questions on these points when I am finished.

Accordingly, NIPDEC was requested to arrange for the supply of 100 jeep Cherokees in accordance with section 20A (1)(c) of the Central Tenders Ordinance, as amended by Act No. 3 of 1993. NIPDEC has advised that in seeking to acquire the required vehicles they approached Chrysler International Corporation, the manufacturers of the jeep Cherokee, who referred them to Interamericana Trading Corporation, the appointed Caribbean region distributor for Chrysler International Corporation. Interamericana Trading, by letter dated September 17, 1996 advised that Platinum Motors Limited was the authorized agent for Chrysler vehicles in Trinidad and Tobago. Acting in accordance with that information, NIPDEC entered into a contract with Platinum Motors Limited.

The matter of the contract being to a company that the hon. Member claims was registered in July 1996 is simply that, prior—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, on a point of clarification, it is not a claim; I went to the Registrar of Companies and perused the documents myself before coming to Parliament.

Hon. J. Theodore: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if one could get a quote from these documents but until I see these documents I refer to it as a claim. I have no reason to doubt the hon. Member.

As it stands, the same gentleman, Mr. Galbaransingh, has been in touch with Chrysler Corporation since 1991; the fact that he changed the name of the company is not a dispute here. *[Interruption]* He is the agent.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote from another piece of correspondence that was sent to NIPDEC, on their request. Mr. Noel Garcia, the Managing Director of National Insurance Property Development Company, wrote to the Interamericana Trading Corporation in Barbados to establish the *bona fides* of this company and to find out just which company was registered as the agent for Chrysler Motors.

5.45 p.m.

“With reference to your letter of today, we are pleased to advise you that Platinum Motors Ltd. is the authorized agent for Chrysler vehicles in Trinidad and Tobago”.

September 17, 1996.

Mr. Panday: Everybody is corrupt. All of them corrupt.

Mr. Imbert: After the fact.

Hon. J. Theodore: After the firm became registered. Let me clarify something here. Mr. Speaker, if I may—

Mr. Imbert: He does not know.

Hon. J. Theodore: Cabinet was approached in August, 1996 for approval of the Ministry of National of Security to enter into a contract with NIPDEC for the supply of 100 jeep Cherokees in accordance with section 20A(1)(c) of the Central Tenders Board Ordinance, as amended by Act No. 3 of 1993. At that time, NIPDEC sought to find out just who the agents were for these jeeps in Trinidad and Tobago; and to accomplish that, Mr. Speaker, they wrote to Interamericana Corporation and that is the reply they got.

Another question that was raised, Mr. Speaker, was—I think I answered this—how could you deal with a company that sells radios to buy vehicles? Mr. Speaker, as it turns out, and as I pointed out to the hon. Member, the package that was offered included 100 vehicles. The intention was that everything would come from the company on contract. What would have happened, Mr. Speaker, had those vehicles come from the United States, bought by Motorola, is that we would have lost the warranty on the vehicles; we would have had problems with the service back-up and repairs to the vehicles. Motorola advised us that it would be simpler and more economical for us to source the vehicles locally.

Mr. Imbert: You see, he is saying that again.

Hon. J. Theodore: At that point we sought to find out who were the local agents and we gave this job to NIPDEC who, through their correspondents—

Mr. Narine: We had no agents at that time.

Hon. J. Theodore: If you remember, Mr. Galbaransingh has been communicating with Chrysler since 1991.

Mr. Imbert: So have many other people.

Hon. J. Theodore: And funnily enough, although it has been said that many other companies have been in correspondence, it is strange that the company we approached is the one that had been given the agency.

Mr. Imbert: It is strange.

Hon. J. Theodore: It could have been another company. It could have been Neal and Massy. *[Interruption]* I am afraid I am not into mind-reading, or crystal ball gazing.

Mr. Panday: 'Crystal balling'.

Hon. J. Theodore: The point is, I think we can all recall, Mr. Speaker, that once upon a time there was a 999 system in Trinidad and Tobago which I think most young people are not even aware of because it seems to have disappeared and has gone out of use.

We are attempting to provide security to the public who, during the PNM administration, became very concerned about crime and their safety and security. They are crying out for police response. Mr. Speaker, when we checked the availability of serviceable vehicles in the police service we discovered that there were 271 unserviceable vehicles lying in the barracks. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Please continue.

Hon. J. Theodore: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we checked on the availability of serviceable vehicles that the police had to deal with public complaints to which they were not responding, we discovered that there were 271 vehicles, which were not working, parked up in the St. James Barracks

Mr. Imbert: That is not the point.

Hon. J. Theodore: The point is we needed to respond and give the country a rapid response that would satisfy their demands because, unlike any other country, they expect the police to come when they call. We do have a problem. So when we dealt with Motorola and we were offered this package *[Interruption]* we found that leasing 100 vehicles during the course of this year has only partially satisfied the demand for vehicles that are required by the police. Of the 271 vehicles, Mr. Speaker, 111 have already been written off and will soon be auctioned. The remaining vehicles are yet to be repaired and when they are, they will supplement the fleet that is out there.

Mr. Panday: If they want you to fight crime—

Hon. J. Theodore: Mr. Speaker, we are short of transportation because stations that should have maybe four or five vehicles are operating with two or three. It would have been unfair, we found, to implement this 999 system to utilize the existing vehicles and further deplete the fleet of patrol cars that the police use. Hence, we felt that the 999 system should be a dedicated response system with its own fleet of vehicles.

Hon. Member: We are not arguing about that.

Hon. J. Theodore: The matter of the 100 vehicles was done through NIPDEC in accordance with section 20A(1)(c) of the Central Tenders Board Ordinance, as amended by Act No. 3 of 1993.

Hon. Member: They set up everybody. They set them up.

Hon. J. Theodore: I really see no point in proceeding, Mr. Speaker, because what the hon. Member is seeking to find out is about statements he made on September 20, 1996 which I have no intention of addressing; and the matter of the company being registered on July 9, 1996. Companies are registered almost on a daily basis and I see nothing wrong—

Mr. Imbert: After the fact.

Hon. J. Theodore:—with a company being awarded—

Mr. Imbert: After the contract was awarded.

Hon. J. Theodore: The contract was awarded, in October, to Platinum Motors.

Hon. Member: There is not any service department.

Hon. J. Theodore: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member says that if he had to decide whether this company would have been given the agency, he may not have done it. But if Chrysler Motors, an international corporation, is prepared to accept the qualifications of the company and give them the dealership, that is good enough for me.

Hon. Member: They have no qualifications; no staff; nothing!

Mr. Panday: They are grasping at straws.

Hon. J. Theodore: So the important thing is here, Mr. Speaker, that regardless of the qualms and queries from the Members on the other side, I am satisfied, and the Government is satisfied, that we are providing an extremely important service for the people of this country, and whatever has been done to date has been done by the book and in keeping with the tenders regulations that exist in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Imbert: No way!

Mr. Panday: Grasping at straws. They are drowning. Drowning men grasping at straws.

Mr. Imbert: What about the fuel bill?

Hon. J. Theodore: I cannot comment on that. I do not know about the fuel bill.

Most of the police vehicles—if you are worried about the fuel bill—are gas vehicles. Mr. Speaker, one of the complaints from the police service themselves, was that previous administrations were simply buying cars from the showroom that were meant to be private cars—vehicles that could not stand up to the rigours of police work, going out on a 24-hour basis. Normal police vehicles are driven by three sets of drivers working on a shift. So the vehicles do not belong to any one particular driver which, in itself, puts pressure on an ordinary vehicle that is driven by a family where there are, maybe, one or two drivers who look after the vehicle.

5.55 p.m.

One of the considerations that we accepted with the Cherokee jeep is its sturdiness, the fact that it is a four-wheel drive vehicle and it is proven to be suitable from Motorola which based its experiences with other similar systems throughout the world that the vehicle was suitable for this job.

Mr. Speaker, these vehicles are going to be posted to approximately 20 stations throughout Trinidad and Tobago and they will be manned on a 24-hour basis, therefore, the amount of time for servicing will be limited and we feel that we need to get away from the private car syndrome that the police have been suffering from with the vehicles being unable to stand up to the rigours of continuous police work. I am quite satisfied that these vehicles will be able to do the job. I am sure the Members on the other side will claim that they did think about it previously; I am sure that they may have had a similar offer from Motorola; they had the ideas; it is to their credit; but to the credit of this Government of national unity, we are doing something about it. [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. Speaker, I would like to close by saying that I am grateful for the opportunity to have raised this issue on the 999 system. I would like to thank the hon. Member and tell him that, of course, vehicles will also be stationed in his area and I hope that he will welcome their presence, and that all the people in this country will benefit from this Emergency 999 rapid response system. My information is that the equipment should be arriving in Trinidad by the end of the year and we hope to have the system up and running by May, 1997.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.58 p.m.