

*Leave of Absence**Monday, August 4, 1997***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Monday, August 4, 1997*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to advise that I have received communication from three Members of this honourable House who have asked to be excused from today's sitting: the Members for San Fernando West, Diego Martin West and Diego Martin East. They are accordingly excused.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) BILL

Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 1997. [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made, That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings.[*Hon. B. Kuei Tung*]

Question put and agreed to.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House proceed with Motion No. 1 on the Order Paper dealing with the report from the Finance Committee; the second reading of the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (1997) Bill; the Pounds (Amdt.) Bill, 1997 and the Summary Courts (Amdt.) Bill, 1997.

Agreed to.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(SECOND)**

The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved

That this House adopt the Second Report (1996—1997 Session) of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad

and Tobago on proposals for the expenditure from public revenue which were not included in the Annual Estimates, 1997.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to report that the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met on Thursday, July 31, 1997 and agreed to a number of proposals. The proposals included a variation of the 1997 original appropriation in the sum of \$205,432,174 and an increase to the 1997 original appropriation by \$142,371,338.

Given the increase mentioned above the 1997 appropriation will now be \$12,055,616,970. The increased sum of \$142,371,338 is reflected under the following Heads of Expenditure: Head 03, Judiciary, \$672,840; Head 13, Office of the Prime Minister, \$6,447,863; Head 16, Central Administrative Services, Tobago, \$461,000; Head 18, Ministry of Finance, \$10 million; Head 22, Ministry of National Security, \$36,100,000; Head 26, Ministry of Education, \$36,273,436; Head 28, Ministry of Health, \$34,231,260; Head 41, Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs, \$3,850,000; Head 42, Ministry of Local Government, \$3,380,998; Head 44, Ministry of Public Utilities, \$953,941; Head 50, Ministry of Tourism, \$10 million.

Mr. Speaker, I would now provide some details for the need for these increases. With respect to the Judiciary in the sum of \$672,840, at present the Supreme Court operates with the use of a computerized system that is known as the Judicial Enforcement Management System (JEMS). This system was implemented three years ago and is now in desperate need of upgrade. Failure to upgrade this system would seriously impair the work of the Supreme Court.

The new upgraded JEMS software package is incompatible with the existing AS/400 computer which is currently in use at the Supreme Court. To benefit from the new technology as well as increase the storage capacity and speed of processing, the Computerization Committee of the Supreme Court has recommended that it would be more cost-effective to lease the RISC AS/400 computer and the peripherals. The monthly cost of TT \$84,105 is required to make the lease payments for this upgraded computer facility.

Funds were not provided in the 1997 estimates to meet the lease arrangement which is estimated at \$925,155 covering the period February—December 1997. However payments for February to April, 1997 were met from within the Supreme Court's 1997 budgetary allocations. The department, however is unable to identify funds to continue meeting these payments for the period May to December, 1997.

Supplementary funds in the sum of \$672, 840 are therefore required to meet payments for the period May to December, 1997.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to Head 13, Office of the Prime Minister represents an increase in the sum of \$6,447,863. In the first case the University of the West Indies Students' Guarantee Fund was established in 1995 with \$5.7 million and this sum, at the time, represented 50 per cent of the value of loans and accrued interest for the academic years 1993—1994 and 1994—1995. According to the terms of the Trust Deed, the Government has covenanted with the trustee under the banks, firstly to pay further sums to the trustee to maintain the guaranteed fund in the sum not less than one half of the total amount outstanding in respect of the principal and interest of loans made by the banks to students under the Loan Fund Plan or such other proportion thereof as may be recommended by the actuarial report. The value of the fund as of March 31, 1997 is \$13,032,948.

As a result it will be necessary to increase the fund by \$3,407,122 to ensure that the fund value remains at 50 per cent of the total balance on the student loans.

Supplementary funds in the sum of \$3,407,122 are therefore required for this purpose.

1.40 p.m.

Outstanding Liabilities to the employees of Cariri for the period 1978—1989:

The board of management of Cariri took a decision to withhold the payment of increments for the period 1987—1989 because of the financial position of the institute. The matter of the withholding of these increments to staff during the years 1987—1989 was referred to the Chief Personnel Officer and the Personnel Department. In examining the above mentioned issue, it was noted that since Cariri is not a statutory authority, it was not covered by Legal Notices Nos. 9—14, dated January 23, 1987 which authorized the suspension of increments paid to employees in the public service. Accordingly, the withholding of increments due to its staff under the provision of section 28: Salary Adjustments/Performance Award of the collective agreement was deemed illegal. Therefore, the sums owed should be paid.

The liability for the period 1987—1989 amounted to \$2.4 million. However, the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute Association indicated a willingness to accept a reduction of the liability for the period 1987—1989 from \$2.4 million to \$1.2 million to facilitate early settlement of this matter.

On July 16, 1997 Cabinet agreed *inter alia*, that the reduced liability to the Cariri staff of \$1.2 million be paid as early as possible. Supplementary funds in the

sum of \$1.2 million are therefore required to effect payment of the reduced liability since no provision was made in the 1997 Estimates of Expenditure for Cariri to liquidate the debt.

Finally, an increase in tuition fees of students of the University of the West Indies who are nationals of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, on July 18, 1996 Cabinet agreed *inter alia*, that tuition fees paid by nationals of Trinidad and Tobago pursuing courses of study at the University of the West Indies except in the case of students at the Medical Sciences Complex, should be increased from 15 to 20 per cent of the economic cost for 1997—1998 and 1998—1999 academic years. Subsequently, the Students Guild argued strongly for a more gradual increase in the fees as the students had not budgeted for the increase. As a result, Cabinet agreed that nationals of Trinidad and Tobago should pay 17 per cent of the economic cost for the academic year 1997—1998. This would create a shortfall of \$3,346,801 of which the University of the West Indies is required to contribute \$1,506,060 leaving a deficit of \$1,840,741 million. No provision was made in the 1997 estimates for this expenditure. Supplementary funds are therefore required in the sum of \$1,840,741 to meet Government's contributions to the expected shortfall for the 1997—1998 academic year.

With respect to Central Administrative Services, Tobago, there is an increase in the sum of \$461,000. In the first case, there were repairs to the Meteorological Tower at Crown Point, Tobago in the sum of \$220,000.

On June 26, 1997 Cabinet agreed *inter alia*, to the provision of supplementary funds in the sum of \$220,000 to the Central Administrative Services, Tobago to facilitate repairs to the tower at Crown Point which had suffered serious structural damage as a result of the earthquake in April 1997. The tower houses the weather radar. Funds were not provided in the 1997 estimates for this expenditure and supplementary funds in the sum of \$220,000 are therefore required.

Continuing with respect to the Central Administrative Services in Tobago, payment of revised allowance to postal agents with effect from January 1, 1996—an increase in the sum of \$241,000. On February 6, 1997 Cabinet agreed that postal agents be paid revised allowances for Flat Basic and Rent Allowance with effect from January 1, 1996. The Memorandum of Agreement was signed between the Chief Personnel Officer and the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Workers Union on January 21, 1997. The additional cost in meeting the payment for the period January 1996—December 31, 1997 is \$391,000 but funds in the sum of

\$150,000 are available under the relevant votes in the 1997 allocation thus leaving a deficit of \$241,000. Supplementary funds in the sum of \$241,000 are therefore required to meet this deficit.

Ministry of Finance —\$10 million. National Disaster Relief Fund: On March 6, 1997 Cabinet agreed *inter alia* to the establishment of a National Disaster Relief Fund in the sum of \$10 million. The fund will be the source of funds which will allow for the granting of assistance to victims of national disasters. On May 22, 1997 Cabinet also agreed to the appointment by the Minister of National Security of a coordinating committee to manage the administration of the National Disaster Relief Fund, the specific terms of reference of the committee to be as follows:

1. To recommend to the Prime Minister when a national disaster should be declared.
2. To provide the direction and support to a technical committee and to report to the Minister of National Security.
3. To establish procedures and guidelines to determine the qualification of applicants in respect of payments from the National Disaster Relief Fund.
4. That upon the declaration by the Prime Minister of any event as a national disaster, the Minister of National Security, on the recommendation of the coordinating committee, approve assistance up to the sum of \$25,000 to families who are the victims of such disaster.
5. That all assistance in excess of \$25,000 be approved by Cabinet.
6. That secretariat services including, *inter alia*, the processing of application for assistance from the National Disaster Relief Fund, be provided by the National Emergency Management Agency.

The Minister of Finance has already signed the necessary Order to amend the First Schedule to the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69:01, by the addition of the National Disaster Relief Fund thereto.

It is therefore necessary to appropriate the sum of \$10 million to transfer to this Fund.

Ministry of National Security—\$36.1 million. The implementation of the revised remuneration agreement to the protective services.

On July 17, 1997 Cabinet agreed *inter alia* to ratify the terms of the agreements reached between the Associations, representatives of the first and

second division officers of the police, fire and prison services as embodied in the Memoranda of Agreement dated June 4, 1997.

The additional cost involved in meeting payment of the revised terms for 1997 is \$116.5 million. It should be noted that in accordance with the conditions set out in the agreements, cash payments in respect of 1997 will take effect from August 1997 and are estimated at \$36.1 million. The arrears in respect of the period January to July 1997 will be paid in January 1998, provision for which will be made in the 1998 estimates. Funds were not provided in the 1997 estimates to meet cash payments for the period August to December 1997. Supplementary funds in the sum of \$36.1 million are therefore required to meet this payment.

Ministry of Education: \$36,273,436. Implementation of revised remuneration arrangements for members of the teaching service—\$33,550,000

1.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, Cabinet ratified the terms and the agreement reached between the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association and the Chief Personnel Officer as embodied in the Memorandum of Agreement dated May 15, 1997. Additional cost involved in meeting the payment of these revised terms for 1997 was \$67.1 million. It should be noted that in accordance with conditions set out in the agreement, cash payments in respect of 1997 would be met from the month of July to December and are estimated at \$33,550,000. The arrears in respect of the period January to June 1997 which was estimated at \$33,550,000 would be paid in January 1998 and provisions for that would be made in the 1998 estimates. However, funds were not provided in the 1997 estimates to meet the cash payments with respect to 1997. Supplementary funds in the sum of \$33,550,000 are required to meet this payment.

Furthermore Mr. Speaker, under the Ministry of Education, there is an increase in the subvention to Servol for the Adolescent Development Training Programme in the sum of \$2,723,436. In 1997 a request totalling \$6,223,436 was submitted by Servol for inclusion in the 1997 Estimates of Expenditure for the administration of this programme and the amount of \$3,500,000 was provided.

In 1987, Servol was asked by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to disseminate its development training programme throughout Trinidad and Tobago. To this end, Servol was able to source funds from overseas foundations to acquire and erect buildings, purchase equipment, and pay part of the salaries of instructors with a clear understanding that the Government will ultimately pay the operating costs of this programme.

For the years 1994—1996, sums totalling \$3.5 million were provided to Servol annually for the administration programme. In 1997, the same amount has been provided. Servol has over the years, and recently by letter, indicated that the salaries of the instructors needed to be upgraded, new equipment needed to be purchased and obsolete ones needed to be replaced.

They have expanded the programme over the years, and additional funds in the sum of \$2,723,436 are required in 1997 to continue to further expand the work of Servol. At present, it administers skill training programmes in the following locations: Arima; Chaguanas; Diego Martin; El Socorro; Fyzabad; Independence Square, Port of Spain; Morvant; Palo Seco; Spree Simon in East Port of Spain; Sangre Grande and Forres Park.

Under the Ministry of Health, an increase in the sum of \$34,231,260 was made. In the first instance, the Regional Health Authorities need an increase of \$30 million. The provision of supplementary funds in the sum of \$30 million is required to meet the ongoing cost of decentralization of the health services to the Regional Health Authorities.

Under the Health Sector Reform Programme, the administration of the health services has been transferred to the Regional Health Authorities with a view to improving efficiency and effectiveness. The Ministry of Health has found it necessary to seek additional funds to allow the Regional Health Authorities to liquidate some outstanding bills, as well as to provide resources associated with additional operating expenditure of the authority.

Under the same Head, Ministry of Health, there are revised terms and conditions of service for nursing and allied personnel for an increase in the sum of \$4,231,260. Cabinet ratified the terms of agreement reached between the Chief Personnel Officer and the Public Services Association and revised terms and conditions of employment for the nursing and allied personnel in the Ministry of Health as embodied in the Memorandum of Agreement dated May 4, 1993. The cost to be incurred in respect to the implementation of the Memorandum of Agreement is estimated at \$4,431,260, funds were not provided in the 1997 Estimates of Expenditure for this purpose and supplementary funds in the sum of \$4,231,260 are therefore required.

Next, under the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs, there is an increase in the sum of \$3.485 million for improvement works on the facilities at the Queen's Park Savannah.

In January, 1997, Cabinet agreed *inter alia* that priority improvement works on the facilities at the Queen's Park Savannah be undertaken at an estimated cost of \$6.35 million. It is proposed that these improvement works be undertaken since, firstly, there will be more comfort for patrons in aesthetic surroundings. Secondly, it will facilitate the National Carnival Commission's rental of the facilities at rates which will earn much needed revenue throughout the year; and, thirdly, the country's international image will be enhanced.

In addition, the improvement works proposed will result, firstly, in an annual savings and it will no longer be necessary to rent chairs for the grand stand area during the carnival season and on other occasions such as the Best Village Programme and the Independence Day Parade, and, secondly, having to demolish the forecourt stand for the Independence Day Parade and reconstruct it thereafter.

Savings in the amount of \$2.5 million were identified from within the budgetary allocation in the 1997 Estimates of Expenditure to effect some of the improvement works. However, the sum of \$3.58 million is required to settle outstanding bills.

Mr. Speaker, in the Ministry of Local Government there is an increase in the sum of \$3,380,998 for the Solid Waste Management Company Limited (SWMCOL). In 1979, a joint venture firm undertook a consultancy contract for the Government to develop a solid waste master plan for Trinidad and Tobago. One of the recommendations of the plan was the establishment of the Solid Waste Management Company Limited. Subsequent to the completion of the consultancy, the firm made a proposal to Solid Waste for further work and in June, 1981 a contract was entered into for a project entitled "Implementation of Solid Waste Emergency Clean Up Programme". The contract was terminated on August 22, 1985 as the Solid Waste Management Company Limited was not satisfied with the performance of the firm.

Arising out of the termination of the contract on March 11, 1986 the firm submitted claims totalling \$2,204,422 to Solid Waste Management Company Limited for all works carried out up to August 22, 1985 which was the termination date of the contract. The claims were never fully accepted by the Solid Waste Management Company Limited. The firm made several representations to that company's management and board of directors to arrive at an amicable, non-legal resolution of the outstanding claims.

In October 1992, the firm commenced arbitration proceedings in accordance with the terms and conditions of the contract. The matter was referred to Cabinet

and on November 28, 1996, Cabinet agreed *inter alia* that in order to avoid considerable legal costs to the Solid Waste Management Company Limited, it should take steps to settle as soon as possible, the arbitration proceedings instituted in October 1992 and claims arising therefrom, which were estimated at \$3,380,998.

On February 20, 1997, Cabinet further agreed *inter alia* to the payment of the sum of \$3,380,998 to the firm in full and finalize settlement of all outstanding claims in connection with the termination of the contract awarded to the Solid Waste Management Company Limited, on August 22, 1985; and that the said sum of \$3,380,998 be paid to the firm no later than March 6, 1997.

2.00 p.m.

No provision was made in the 1997 estimates to meet this expenditure. In order to make payment to the firm by the date specified above, funds were utilized from the Solid Waste Management Company Limited's 1997 budgetary allocation. An amount in the said sum is therefore required to replenish the Solid Waste Management Company Limited's 1997 allocation.

Under Head 44- Ministry of Public Utilities there is an increase in the sum of \$953,941: In the first instance, payment of contract gratuities to staff of the Public Utilities Commission in the sum of \$174,100.00. Since the retrenchment of its staff in 1994, the Public Utilities Commission has been operating with a skeleton staff of 10 persons, pending the enactment of new legislation which will establish the proposed Regulated Industries Commission. All persons presently employed are on contract and some of the contractual periods are due to expire in the year 1997. The estimated cost for the period of contract gratuities to the staff of the Public Utilities Commission is \$174,100.

Funds were not provided in the 1997 estimates to meet this expenditure and supplementary funds in the sum of \$174,100 are therefore required.

Under the same Head: Employment on Contract of staff to the Public Utilities Commission in the sum of \$779,841. The Public Utilities Commission has been operating since March 1994, as I said before, with a skeleton staff of 10 officers. These officers, apart from an advisor, are all non-technical. They are therefore unable to deal with an issue as complex as the application from the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission for a rate increase, which application is now before the Public Utilities Commission.

Pending the enactment of legislation to establish the proposed Regulated Industries Commission, Cabinet, on July 19, 1997, agreed that the undermentioned

staff be employed on contract in the Public Utilities Commission to be transferred to the Regulated Industries Commission upon its establishment:

- 1 Executive Director
- 2 Assistant Executive Directors
- 1 Legal advisor
- 12 Public Utility Analysts

The estimated cost of the above for the period August 1 to December 31, 1997 is \$779,841. Funds were not provided in the 1997 estimates to meet this expenditure. Supplementary funds in the sum of \$779,841 are therefore required for this purpose.

Finally, under Head 50: Ministry of Tourism: The Tourism and Industrial Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (TIDCO), there is an increase in the subvention of \$10 million. The sum of \$35 million was provided in the 1997 estimates under recurrent expenditure for TIDCO to meet its operating expenses. Of this amount, TIDCO has allocated \$10,147,000 towards tourism marketing activities. However, Tidco's proposed cost for marketing activities for 1997 is \$29,931,414 which is broken down as follows:

| Proposed Marketing Activities | Revised Cost |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| | \$ |
| General | 21,849,054 |
| European | 3,278,160 |
| Northern American (USA) | 2,512,000 |
| Canadian | 408,200 |
| South American | 1,570,000 |
| Co-operative Initiatives | 314,000 |
| TOTAL | \$29,931,414 |

As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, the amount allocated in 1997 was \$10,147,000 giving a difference of \$19,784,414.

Furthermore, TIDCO has highlighted that:

- (a) The marketing strategy of Trinidad and Tobago should be changed from the creation of awareness among the trade to targeted consumer advertising of destination. This will require the use of the mass media and the development of new advertising.
- (b) The marketing expenditure for 1997 for selected Caribbean destinations which are our competitors, is a great deal higher than that of Trinidad and Tobago. It is important therefore, to match these countries if we are to compete successfully with them in attracting tourists to our shores.
- (c) That certain new initiatives must be supported in 1997:
 - (i) the promotion of cruise ship arrivals and home porting;
 - (ii) the new airport;
 - (iii) development of the South American market;
 - (iv) Air Caribbean daily service between Barbados and Tobago; and
 - (v) marketing of domestic tourism.

Funds were not provided in the 1997 estimates for this additional expenditure. It is therefore recommended that an additional sum of \$10 million be provided to facilitate the marketing thrust.

Mr. Speaker, I move on to the variation of the 1997 original appropriation in the sum of \$205.43 million: A review of the performance of the 1997 Public Service Investment Programme (PSIP) was undertaken by the Ministry of Planning and Development as at April 30, 1997. It was found that some of the projects had performed well, while others had experienced low levels of expenditure and low performance. Following the exercise, the re-allocation of funds among programmes and projects were recommended to allow those which performed well and are in need of additional resources to proceed by transferring funds from those which are not likely to meet their targets.

The variation of expenditure totalling \$205,432,174 only affected the Development Programme. The following programmes and projects have been increased and decreased, and explanations for the variations have been circulated to Members with the Finance Committee agenda:

2.10 p.m.

| HEADS & MINISTRIES | PROJECT/PROGRAMME | INC. \$Mn | DEC. \$Mn |
|--|--|------------------------------|----------------------|
| 15 - Tobago House of Assembly | All projects which are being implemented in Tobago but were previously funded under ministries in Trinidad have now been allocated to the Tobago House of Assembly | <u>38.66</u> 38.66 | - |
| 17 - Personnel Department | Scholarship and Training Programme | <u>2.00</u> 2.00 | - |
| 18 - Ministry of Finance | Construction of Infrastructure at Port of Spain | <u>46.63</u> 5.75 | - |
| | Purchase of Training Facility - Marksman Academy | 0.80 | - |
| | Refurbishment of Trinidad House | 1.00 | - |
| | Upgrading of Pointe-a-Pierre Refinery | 39.08 | - |
| 30 - Ministry of Labour & Co-operatives | Improvement to infrastructure and purchase of equipment | <u>1.00</u> 1.00 | - |
| 36 - Ministry of Housing and Settlements | Almond Drive, Morvant | <u>56.55</u> 6.65 | - |
| | Couva North Phase IV | 13.00 | - |
| | Shelter Construction Financing Facility | 29.00 | - |
| | Development of John John and East Port of Spain | 3.00 | - |
| | Construction of core houses for residents of Demerara Road, Wallerfield | 4.90 | - |
| 41 - Ministry of Community Development Culture and Women's Affairs | Construction, extension and Refurbishment of Community Centres | <u>0.88</u> 0.88 | - |
| 42 - Ministry of Local Government | Drainage works, Trinidad | <u>27.58</u> 0.55 | - |

| HEADS & MINISTRIES | PROJECT/PROGRAMME | INC. \$Mn | DEC. \$Mn |
|--|---|----------------------|-----------------------|
| | Upgrading and improvement of Local Roads and Bridges | 16.20 | - |
| | Recreational Facilities | 1.83 | - |
| | Refurbishment of Public Buildings | 9.00 | - |
| 43 - Ministry of Works and Transport | Construction of Jetty at San Fernando | <u>3.20</u> 3.20 | - |
| 44 - Ministry of Public Utilities | Upgrading of water distribution system | <u>25.45</u> 4.50 | - |
| | Priority pipeline projects | 10.95 | - |
| | Reconditioning of Buses of the PTSC and purchase of spare parts | 5.00 | - |
| | Replacement of pumps and other equipment | 5.00 | - |
| 51 - Ministry of Public Administration and Information | Public Sector Institutional Strengthening | <u>3.48</u> 1.60 | - |
| | Acquisition of Assets of A.V.M. (Caribbean) Limited | 1.88 | - |
| 26 - Ministry of Education | Construction of Mason Hall Government Secondary | - | <u>8.40</u> 4.00 |
| | Construction of Primary Schools | - | 4.40 |
| 28 - Ministry of Health | Health Sector Reform Programme | - | <u>25.15</u> 25.15 |
| 36 - Ministry of Housing and Settlements | Calder Hall, Tobago | - | <u>0.012</u> 0.012 |
| 43 - Ministry of Works and Transport | Rural Access Roads | - | <u>163.7</u> 3.70 |
| | Airport Infrastructure Development | - | 150.0 |

| HEADS & MINISTRIES | PROJECT/PROGRAMME | INC. \$Mn | DEC. \$Mn |
|--|--|----------------------|----------------------|
| | National Highway Programme | - | 10.00 |
| 46 - Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs | Construction of a 50 metre Swimming Pool in Tobago | - | <u>1.62</u> 0.12 |
| | Construction of Indoor Sports Hall, Tobago | - | 1.50 |
| 50 - Ministry of Tourism | Tourism Action Plan | | <u>6.55</u> 6.55 |
| | | <u>205.43</u> | <u>205.43</u> |

Mr. Speaker, before I close I had promised, in the Finance Committee, to provide some details with respect to two matters: In the first case, the increase in allocation, under Head 36, the Ministry of Housing and Settlements. You would recall that there was an item of \$3 million under the development of John John and East Port of Spain and this is for the payment of consultancy fees to undertake the assessment of the housing stock, the state of existing infrastructure and to carry out the needs assessment survey among residents and to prepare a new redevelopment plan. Mr. Speaker, I have been assured that the Minister of Housing and Settlements would provide further details during the debate.

Secondly, an increase in allocation under Head 43, the Ministry of Works and Transport, with respect to the reconstruction of the San Fernando Jetty and the development of the harbour front.

With respect to the proposed new location of 115 squatters from San Fernando Waterfront, a preliminary survey conducted by the National Housing Authority of the 115 squatters identified 43 of the structures as homes or boat sheds. A more detailed survey is underway by the National Housing Authority, to determine the extent to which the squatters in the waterfront area of San Fernando are connected to the fishing industry and to identify areas to which individual squatter families would be relocated. The current survey has identified the availability of 20 lots subject to verification in Pleasantville. The research is underway to identifying additional lots.

A committee has been established by Cabinet to implement the decisions contained in the report of the committee appointed by the Minister of Works and

Transport including the relocation of the squatters. The Cabinet-appointed Committee includes a representative of the Ministry of Housing and Settlements.

In closing, I wish to remind Members that this Bill would increase the 1997 original appropriation by \$142,371,338. The total amount to be appropriated for 1997, would therefore be \$12,055,616,970. With all of this I wish to assure this honourable House that we shall still end the year with a surplus.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Hedwige Breaux (*La Brea*): Mr. Speaker, I join the debate on the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) Bill, 1997 and the Motion involved. The Bill proposes to increase the appropriation for the year 1997 by \$142,371,338.

On the occasion of a debate of this nature, for the totally uninitiated, it might appear to be a pure question of settling the accounts, moving a sum from one subhead into another. On closer examination, a matter of this kind is really the acid test.

2.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, during the budget debate, we were wont to hear from the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism high sounding phrases like total quality nation. Basically, a number of statements and promises were made to the national community which, in my opinion—and sometimes having regard to the propensity of this Minister to play with figures—the Government had no intention of carrying out. More importantly, the question of a variation of appropriation is not merely the moving of figures from one head to another. It tells its own story. In respect, it is either that a particular occasion has arisen for which the Government did not plan—and in most cases that shows a lack of planning—or, it could show that although the Government made one statement in its budget presentation, when it came to dealing with priorities, the Government shifted its priorities in midstream.

What one sees in some cases is that it shows, additionally, a total disregard or incompetence of the Government to manage certain areas of the economy. What one sees, in particular, is that when these things happen there are ripples, and there is a ricochet effect in the national community. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in respect of the health services in this country. The hon. Minister was very

clever in dealing with the increases. He pointed out that there was an increase of some \$34 million in respect of the health services, but, in fact, the net increase is \$9,081,260. With regard to the Ministry of Health, the original estimate was \$671,574,648, and the revised provision was \$680,655,908; an increase of \$9,081,260.

Mr. Speaker, let us look at where these increases are. There is \$4.23 million in respect of allowances, and current transfers, as he indicated, are \$30 million. It is said that God is in the details, and when we look at the details, we see that in the development programme over which the Minister glossed, there were several decreases in expenditure. There was \$25.15 million in respect of the development programme: human resources support, \$5.15 million; technical support and training, \$10 million; and physical infrastructure, \$10 million. One should note that most of these came from the variation of appropriation in the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP).

An allocation of \$72.93 million was made in the 1997 PSIP for this project. The project is the Health Sector Reform Programme. As at the end of June, expenditure was \$4.95 million. Key elements of this project have not been implemented due to the fact that the Ministry of Health has been unable to fulfill all the conditions precedent to this first disbursement. A substantial amount of the sums in the Health Sector Reform Programme—70 per cent—comes from an IDB loan. It is not money we have to raise from taxation. It is money from a loan. We could not get it because the Ministry of Health—the Ministry of incompetence that causes an injunction to be brought against doctors—was unable to fulfill all the conditions precedent to disbursement. All they had to do was their jobs, and we would have the money.

This impacts both project implementation and project expenditure. Of particular importance is the fact that many key technical advisory staff, inclusive of the staff from the project administration unit, have not yet assumed duties and are, therefore, unable to advance implementation of the programme's major and interrelated components. Mr. Speaker, I shall get back to this point, but it is a clear indication of a serious dereliction of ministerial responsibility. That did not come from me. That came from the Minister of Planning and Development, the Member for Oropouche. This is his assessment of his fellow Minister's performance.

Mr. Speaker, I want the national community and this honourable House to understand the seriousness of the omission and non-performance, and what it has caused this country. I want to go back to before the Public Sector Investment

Programme. Both in the Medium-Term Policy Framework of this Government, 1996 to 1998, there is an indication of the seriousness of the health reform programme. It says:

“Central to the entire reform process is the development of the human resource base. A planned programme of training and retraining of staff will be undertaken to enhance the performance of new roles and meet deficiencies in specialized skills...”

Yet, \$5.1 million was not utilized at all in respect of training human resources.

Additionally, there is another technical support and training \$10 million decrease. That is \$15 million taken away from an area, yet in the Medium-Term Policy Framework, it is said:

“Central to the entire reform process is the development of the human resource base.”

I keep chastising this Government time and again for its ambivalence, but the evidence is quite clear as to its plain non-performance.

2.30 p.m.

I quote from the *Public Sector Investment Programme* (PSIP) of 1996, page 26. It says:

"101. The vehicle for major new initiatives is the Health Sector Reform Programme (HSRP) which aims to effect comprehensive reform of the existing health care delivery system. Implementation is programmed to take place over a six-year period at an estimated total cost of US \$170.9 million. The IDB is expected to provide Trinidad and Tobago with a loan of US \$112.0 million to assist in the implementation of the programme. Formal negotiations, which were previously scheduled for late 1995, have been delayed at the request of the new administration to permit a review of the programme."

So they delayed it, fine. They came into office they delayed it and they reviewed the programme.

Mr. Speaker, that was in 1996. I quote again from the PSIP of 1996, page 26:

"100. Ten million dollars will be spent on the completion of three existing projects: the upgrading of health facilities at Arima, Mayaro and the continuation of the commissioning of the San Fernando Hospital extension."

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We will come back to San Fernando shortly, but they also said the Sangre Grande hospital and the rebuilding and refurbishment of various health centres. You will see Sangre Grande appearing again, that is once. Year one, where they spent almost nothing, 1996. Remember, it is a six-year programme. Now year 2, 1997, and again they come back. I quote from the PSIP 1997, page 28:

"116. The Health Sector Reform Programme will be advanced significantly in 1997 with commencement of loan funding from the IDB."

That is what they said. The quote continues:

"The entire programme is estimated to cost a total of US \$192 million to be expended over a period of seven years and seeks to:"

The amount of money has gone up, but they have reviewed it. Well, they lost the first year in 1996, so they had to add a year to it. Not only did they lose it by going forward, they put on an additional year to the six, so seven years from 1997.

I want, particularly, to read what this Health Sector Reform Programme (HSRP) had to do.

- "116. (a) improve and expand the physical infrastructure of the health services;
- (b) improve management systems;
- (c) strengthen health sector policies and planning;
- (d) build institutional capacity through human resource development;"

Again, they were to do these things, but they removed five million from the human resource. The quote continues:

- "(e) re-orient resources and services towards primary health care;
- (f) re-organise and restructure the administrative structures; and
- (g) rationalise existing health services."

Mr. Speaker, from time to time, one hears on the news about the doctors working to public service hours in the south. They talk about the infrastructure and the administrative structures and a lack of it. Here is a Government, having money already negotiated, waiting to be signed and a failure to take the loan. What gross

dereliction of duty! Criminal negligence! As I am on the point of criminal negligence, lest I be considered to be too harsh upon the Minister, I want to point out that the same reason these very doctors—I will deal with one other point before I get to that.

The PSIP 1997, page 28 says, and I quote:

"117. (h) initial operationalisation of the RHAs; and..."

The hon. Minister was very clear when he came forward and he said that they had put \$25.15 million more with respect to getting certain functions transferred to the Regional Health Authorities (RHAs) and, therefore, money had to be put in the RHAs. That money need not have come from another source. It was there in the IDB loan and if the Government, the Minister, the Caligula's mule, had done what he was supposed to do, we would not have had that \$25 million coming from elsewhere, from taxpayers funds. We would have paid it eventually, but it would have come from the IDB loan.

Mr. Speaker, more importantly, the very Minister of Health himself indicated—I read the report in the *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper—that part of the problem with the senior doctors in the San Fernando General Hospital and their working to public service hour was because they mistrusted the new system and as a result of that, there was a problem. The problem also had to do with pay—but if the system and the RHAs were operationalized, then it is reasonable to expect that we would not have had that problem with the doctors.

I am very incensed about the situation as it exists, simply because on Tuesday last, Neil Thompson of Quinam Road, Siparia, a constituent of mine, was injured in an oilfield accident, an on-the-job accident. Because of the particular situation as it existed with the doctors working to their contracted hours, and this Government not seeking to put measures in place so there could be doctors at the San Fernando General Hospital—at the same time there was a crisis at Mount Hope—my constituent had to be taken to Port of Spain and on his way there, although he was talking to people while he was being transferred between Coora Field and San Fernando, he had to be taken to Port of Spain. In an attempt to take him to Port of Spain, travelling on the back of a van, he died. The death of Neil Thompson must be placed squarely on the doorstep of this Government and, in particular, the criminal negligence and the dereliction of duty of the Minister of Health.

Mr. Speaker, let us go further to the PSIP of 1997, at paragraph 117 and I quote:

"The core elements contained in the programme are as follows:

- (a) upgrading and equipping of five (5) regional hospitals at Port of Spain, Mt. Hope, San Fernando, Sangre Grande and Tobago;"

Again, Sangre Grande is now a recurring decimal. They put it in their PSIP, they have great and grandiose plans and do absolutely nothing in respect of trying to carry out those plans. That is it. The quote continues:

- "(b) the refurbishment/construction and equipping of ten (10) district health facilities...Arima, Couva,"

Arima was mentioned in paragraph 100 in the PSIP of 1996; again, mention was made of upgrading of health facilities at Arima, Mayaro and San Fernando as well. So you see, these places are recurring decimals. I hope the hon. Member for Arima will join this debate so that his constituents could hear the way he took away their vote and gave it away to a Government that is so incompetent and has no concern for the Arimians. The quote continues:

- "(c) the upgrading of health centres throughout the country;
(d) the adjustment of the skill-mix under management of the Public Sector and the Regional Health Authorities (RHAs);"

Mr. Speaker, again, the mention of adjustment of the skill-mix. One would recognize that part of the concern of the doctors is that the persons whom they supervise in the regional health authorities, the younger doctors, the junior doctors, were better paid than themselves. The reason for this disparity in the terms and conditions of employment of the doctors was that one group of doctors, the senior doctors, are under the public service regulations and they deal with the CPO in respect of terms and conditions. The junior doctors are under the regional health authority and they deal with that authority in respect of terms and conditions.

2.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, if they had done their duty under this particular provision and if they had this money that was there, then we would not have had the festering problem which we now have. Then, this Government is incompetently and callously taking a sledge hammer to crush a nut. The Government got an injunction to send the doctors back to work in perpetuity. They also lost it, anybody would have.

The point was that the Attorney General's people related to him. It was so new that the thing was wrong, I do not know if that is why they did it. They fought the injunction on behalf of the doctors and won. I wonder, is it that they got a call

from England where the Attorney General was performing well in the Privy Council—I understand that he ought to be congratulated on winning that matter—saying, "Listen that is nonsense they doing there. You better go and fight the case to win it for the doctors!"

I do not want to get into the situation concerning education but everywhere that this Government runs the education—Caligula horse, this time—Mason Hall Primary School, it would not build it—is that in Tobago West or East?—Mason Hall Secondary School, but I am not going to worry about that because they have competent representatives and I am going to leave them to handle that—but I am saying that in every area the Government failed to perform and where they have removed money, they tend to attack the persons who stand up to them, through injunctions. They brought an injunction—this one, the three-legged horse—Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, I take that back—the Member for Nariva was responsible. He took out the injunction against the teachers. Thus one can see what is happening.

We have a situation where, whenever the Government—through its own negligence, incompetence and mismanagement—removes money and prevents the public servants from doing their job and does not treat its employees properly, they move to the law and seek to attack them. I do not want to go off this matter at this time because I want to deal with the question of incompetence in its entirety.

The key elements of the project have not been implemented due to the fact that the Ministry of Health has been unable to fulfill all the conditions. What are the conditions that it could not fulfill—the signing by the Ministry of Finance of the Memoranda of Understanding. I am sure that the Minister of Planning and Development has some Machiavellian agenda in respect of health and finance. I know he wanted to be the Minister of Finance. I know the Minister is going to reply, and will tell me why he did not sign the memoranda so that we could collect the money and do what the doctors wanted done in order to organize the regional health authorities properly, so that, at least we could be on the road to getting some proper public health service.

I could very well see why they had to take a particular period to hire staff for the unit. I see the Member for Princes Town and the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources are not here, but if they perform—and I have no different reason to believe that the Minister of Health or the Minister of Planning and Development would want to perform in the same manner as the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, since they have to move people from

sixth or wherever, to put them first—I can see why hiring in the Project Administration Unit (PAU) would take such a long time.

Mention was made of the hiring of a consultant firm to support the PAU. I know their predicament and understand it very well. This is an Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) loan. The IADB puts certain conditions in respect to the hiring of consultants. Thus, whereas it might be easy to identify a consultant, it is extremely difficult for them to manipulate and manoeuvre in the same way they did with the Cherokee jeeps and the Airports Authority's contracts, because there are certain conditionalities which must be met.

Then there is the signing of the contract, that has to be a joke. The Minister competing with Sprangalang.

Mr. Maraj: I know Sprangalang, I would not have anybody bad talking him.

Mr. H. Beraux: No, I am not bad talking him. Sprangalang and Tommy Joseph are very good for giving jokes. Nicky Crosby might be more in his particular style. "The signing of the contract between the Ministry of Health and the National Insurance Property Development Company Limited (Nipdec)". Nipdec is a wholly owned subsidiary of the National Insurance Board which is controlled by the state. Therefore, the Ministry of Health and Nipdec have to sign a contract and that contract is now one of the main conditions that the Ministry of Health finds is keeping back the loan. Himself to himself! The Government and the government-controlled company did not sign a contract, so the poor people in Trinidad and Tobago cannot get a better health service; so Neil Thompson must die; so the doctors on strike. What is going on, Mr. Speaker? This is a comedy of errors. If it was not concerning the livelihood of people and the well-being of the citizens of this country, I would be able to laugh. I would use it in some play. I would ask the hon. Member for Naparima to use it in one of his plays.

I understand why the hiring of the health sector reform advisor would give them a problem. I could only judge a person by his record. This is a Government that moves people from sixth and puts them first when it is going to hire and this is the same IADB so that they could not use the IADB as an excuse this time. Therefore, I could understand why whoever the Minister was or whoever might have wanted to influence him to do this, could not. This time they got the message long in advance that the IADB was not prepared to be used as a scapegoat for nepotism and political patronage or featherbedding.

I want to deal further with the engaging of an approved firm of independent public accountants to carry out the audit. We have in the accounting profession,

the big eight I think they are called, Price Waterhouse, Coopers and Lybrand, Panel Kerr Foster and a number of others. I can rattle them off. All of those firms would be acceptable to the IADB.

This Government is coming here to tell us that the reason they could not get the loan was because they had to take time to employ an approved firm, but the big eight are known, and well-known to the Inter-American Development Bank which would approve them quite easily. That could be done even though one may have to send out tenders; that is an easy thing.

2.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Members have not identified anything. Nothing! I submit that none of the things here should take any length of time for a minister, a ministry, or a government that was serious or competent and wanted to carry out his or her oath of office without fear or favour. I want the Members to tell me, this honourable House, and by extension the national community, what else was in the mortar beside the pestle. It cannot be these reasons. They have to come better than that; come with something else.

Mr. Speaker, they have said that up to June of this year they have only spent \$4.95 million of the \$72 million originally allocated and earmarked and they only moved away \$25.15 million. Even if I am generous, I say that they will spend just as much as they did in the first quarter. That only amounts to \$9 million out of an allocation of \$72 million. As I said, this is a classic example of incompetence and mismanagement. I have here a statement from the doctors. When you see these persons agitating and becoming semi-militant you have to look, not at them, but at the source of their problem which is the fact that the Government has not done its work. I want to read these points but I will come back to that.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to get back now to what Government has done with the money which was taken. Look at where it was put. The sum of \$1.6 million has been allocated to buy AVM television so that Keith Telesford could use it as a propaganda machine so that when the Members of the Opposition speak in this honourable House, this Telesford—journalistic prostitute—does not permit the voice of the Opposition to be heard. He is somebody who moves.

Dr. Mohammed: You are criticizing the press.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Do not worry, I will say what is correct and what is the truth.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we speak in this honourable House, Mr. Telesford just says that we raised a Motion and then he allows the Minister to parrot whatever is untrue. That is just one of the areas. Let us look at what the Government has utilized the money to do. There are only two areas that had anything to do with health. Funds were transferred all over the place, to the renovation of Kent House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I now understand why the Member for Caroni East was trying to interrupt; he realized I would come to him. Government took the funds to deal with transport. The Minister comes here all the time and boasts about how much work is being done in respect of transport but the health money is taken to buy spare parts for the buses, then the Minister tells me he is managing properly. The Government is mismanaging because, in the first instance, it came with an inadequate budgetary allocation and had to get \$5 million to assist with that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was incorrect with respect to AVM. It was \$1.8 million and not \$1.6 million. You take from housing to give to public administration—multisectorial services. This Government, in its performance in respect of health, has been the cause of all the problems and I have to thank the Member for Oropouche for identifying succinctly, the impropriety—and when I say so I do not mean in any dishonest sort of way, but I mean proper management of the health facilities in this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to touch on another matter in respect of the Ministry of Works and Transport. I noted that there was a decrease in allocation of \$163,700,000. I know the Member expected me to talk about the airport but I am not going to deal with that. I am talking about the question of access roads and the removal of money from these roads.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my constituency has been most improperly treated and unfairly discriminated against in respect of the roads of the entire La Brea constituency. [*Desk thumping*] I have pointed that out in respect of the area from Siparia to Erin where you have the operations of Petrotrin with heavy equipment. No work is being done on the roads at all to the extent—[*Interruption*] I live in that area. When dishonesty speaks, I pay no mind to it.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, every 200 yards you travel along the San Fernando Siparia/Erin Road you find a large pot hole, to the extent that a month ago a taxi

driver plying the route collided with a truck which moved to avoid a pot hole on the corner adjacent to Santa Flora police station. The taxi driver is still in the intensive care unit.

When I speak here and I see a decrease in money in the Ministry of Works and Transport, I must take objection. Further, on the area from Aripéro to Gonzales, where my constituency borders the constituency of Point Fortin, that road is also in a horrible condition. The excuse is always being used that those roads are in La Brea and that constituency, because of the particular geological situation, cannot have good roads. Nothing is further from the truth! It is just a question of making the right effort.

When you have persons like the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre who removed money from road improvement in La Brea and put it in Murray Trace in the constituency of Fyzabad, that is why I have to comment on this problem. Even when they come into La Brea and try to do some token work, they operate and do it only in the areas where their friends and supporters live. I want to make this abundantly clear, and I want to emphasize, that the Road Improvement Fund which all road users pay, is a tax on gasoline and, in accordance with provisions that brought that fund into existence, the hon. Minister of Works and Transport was supposed to report to this Parliament every six months.

Since this Government has been in office, he has not reported. So, in fact, they are in breach of the conditions under which that money is being collected. [*Desk thumping*] That is the kind of disregard that they have for the population. My mother told me that anywhere you have smoke you have fire. I am putting this country on notice that there is serious impropriety going on with respect to the use of the Road Improvement Fund.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. H. Breaux: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is serious impropriety going on in respect of the Road Improvement Fund. [Interruption] I would not pay any attention to the statements or the comments being made by the hon. Member for Caroni East. I want to get on to another area under the heading: The Prime Minister's Office.

We have two areas where the Government has had, and properly so, to put money into the UWI Students Guarantee Fund. This fund was established in 1995

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with \$5 million—50 per cent of the value of loans. The Government has had to put money into this fund. Additionally, there was an increase in tuition for nationals, who were students of the University of the West Indies, and the Cabinet has agreed to put \$1.8 million in it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, whereas I understand, empathize and agree with the Government and the Cabinet in terms of allocating funds to support our students in the university, the Government is again displaying ambivalence.

In this honourable House quite recently, an hon. Member was shown to be indebted in excess of \$24,000 to the Student Revolving Loan Fund. That Member was only one of a number of persons who have been in arrears, not indebted. We all owe but when you owe, do not pay and call it silly, I have a serious problem. *[Desk thumping]* I have a serious problem with such a person holding ministerial office in Trinidad and Tobago.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Where will the ethics start? Anybody will owe. Many people owe and are concerned about their inability to pay, but they make attempts to pay. They write the bank, they do all these things. Countries owe. The great United States of America, Russia and a number of countries owe. Trinidad and Tobago owes and makes attempts to pay its debt on time.

Mr. Speaker, when I see a Member sitting in the Cabinet of this country, who is owing and has in arrears \$24,000 and calls it silly, I say it is a question of the abomination of desolation sitting in the Cabinet. *[Desk thumping]* I do not care if this Government wants to pay scant remarks to it but, in my view, any minister of government should be made to pay or make arrangements to pay immediately.

3.10 p.m.

So, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to make that quite clear. As we are on that point, as I said earlier, the behaviour of this Government in respect of its mismanagement of the PSIP allocation, or failure to capitalize on it and to use it properly is what has caused the crisis in the health sector. I am not saying that we would have had a health sector that is perfect at this time. It did not start with this Government and it will take time to do it, but if they are on the right track, if they have the loan which somebody else arranged and they are not doing anything about it, I am saying that they are to blame.

When they take a sledge-hammer to crack a nut and try to treat the senior doctors in this country—not only to lock them up, if they believe to lock up the

doctors and seize their assets—I want to read a few lines from what the doctors have said indicating that in the teachers case, the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives obtained an injunction under the IRA in the Industrial Court. The IRA provided for the law relating to all industrial action in Trinidad and Tobago. Industrial action by public sector essential services workers is not a criminal offence but an industrial relations offence. The doctors were not taking industrial action but confining themselves to the civil service regulations under which they are employed.

This country, Mr. Speaker, is a signatory to the ILO convention. Evidence of this is seen in terms of the way they treated the doctors. Doctors have always been willing to discuss and mediate with the state in good faith but the state has sought to use terror tactics, blackmail, intimidation against the doctors to compel them to perform contracts of personal service. Evidence of this is seen from the penal clause attached to the *ex parte* order to “seize our assets if we do not comply. We are advised by our attorneys that this is not the penal clause to be used in injunctive matters in the high court.” Mr. Speaker—

Dr. Mohammed: Who signed that letter?

Mr. H. Bereaux: I would not tell him because I know how vindictive they all are. And any man who—I am going to ease him up this time but if he keeps interfering with me he will find out.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am saying that when you deal with this Variation of Appropriation Bill, when we look at this Bill and we hear the contribution of the hon. Minister and we hark back to the statements which he made in the budget and, even now when he came, there would still be a surplus. I am glad there is a surplus but I want him to remember that even the additional money he has put forward here, most of that would have been because of the inflation brought on by the fall in the TT dollar against the US, so, he is not fooling anybody about what it is.

Mr. Speaker, with these few words I want to say that I cannot, and we on this side will not give our support to the provisions of this Bill unless there are serious amendments.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Health (Dr. The Hon. Hamza Rafeeq): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be given the opportunity this afternoon to respond to some of the issues that have been raised by the Member for La Brea, and to share with hon. Members here and the national community some elements of the Health Sector Reform

Programme. However, Mr. Speaker, I would not descend to the depths that the Member for La Brea has done because I believe that the health of the population of this country is too important to be politicized. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, from the moment the decision was made—and this is some time ago by the previous government—to embark upon health sector reform, the stage was set for a number and variety of conflict situations. The Health Sector Reform Programme in which we are engaged is a very large and ambitious one and probably the biggest being undertaken in any part of the world at this point.

There is no doubt, Mr. Speaker, that in any process of change there are always problems or difficulties that must inevitably arise. We must view this against the background of how our health sector has operated traditionally, with the expectations of the population on the one hand, and the degree of influence certain categories of staff in the health sector have exerted in the past on the other. Match those against the goals and objectives of the reform, and we begin to understand the basis for some of the conflicts that we are experiencing today.

We recognize that the health sector is, indeed, a very sensitive area because it deals intimately with life and death. It is, therefore, not surprising that problems in the health sector easily become the focus of national attention.

The objectives of the Health Sector Reform Programme include efficient delivery of service to the population, a shift from expensive hospital-based care to primary care in the community, and greater accountability. As we grapple with complex management and other issues to bring about the reform and achieve the objectives, we will continue to take whatever steps necessary to ensure that the basic needs of the population for health care are served.

Mr. Speaker, the Government signed the Health Sector Loan with the Inter American Development Bank on July 12, 1996 and our target date for satisfying the conditionalities prior to first disbursement was July 12, 1997. However, Mr. Speaker, even with the best intentions and a lot of hard work there are still some outstanding matters which are being pursued vigorously and which we hope to conclude shortly. We have sought and received an extension from the Inter American Development Bank for three months.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform hon. Members of some of these outstanding conditionalities:

Firstly, the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Health as the executing agency, the Ministry of Finance and the Tobago House of Assembly with respect to the execution of the project in Tobago. Difficulties

were encountered due to the Tobago House of Assembly having been involved during the period subsequent to the signing of the loan in two sets of elections and being unable to meet with the Ministry of Health to work out the details of the agreement. In addition, the recent changes in the Tobago House of Assembly Act greatly affected and influenced the ability of the relevant parties to develop the agreement, as prior to the passing of the 1996 Tobago House of Assembly Act, all parties were uncertain about the powers, roles and responsibilities that would be vested in each.

Since February 1997, much dialogue has occurred among the parties and on July 08, 1997 an agreement was signed between the Tobago House of Assembly and the Ministry of Health, which agreement was then submitted to the Ministry of Finance for signature.

Secondly, the hiring of the staff for the Project Administration Unit. Pursuant to the procurement procedures under the IDB Loan Agreement, the Ministry of Health placed advertisements both locally and internationally for the positions in the Project Administration Unit. The time cycle for receipt of responses, short listing of candidates and so forth, took a long time. The actual interviewing and evaluation process for the candidates short listed spanned a period of several weeks. The Central Tenders Board has now awarded contracts to all members of the Project Administration Unit, that is, the Director; Manager of Finance; Health Infrastructure Procurement Officer; and Local Procurement Officer.

3.20 p.m.

The contracts for all of these individuals have been prepared by the Chief State Solicitor and so far one has been executed. It is expected that the others will be executed by August 15, 1997. It is to be noted that in the meantime the Ministry of Health has arranged office accommodation and procured office equipment and so forth, for the Project Administration Unit operations.

Thirdly, the hiring of a consulting firm to support the PAU: The requirement in the loan contract agreement is that the Ministry of Health enter into agreement with a consulting firm which shall provide technical assistance to the PAU in selecting, contracting and supervising technical services, in accordance with the terms of reference and procedures agreed with the bank.

The Ministry of Health advertised locally and internationally according to IADB procedures but was unsuccessful in receiving suitable responses. As a consequence, an alternative approach was sought when it was determined that it

would be difficult to get the required skills in a firm. The IDB has since agreed that as an interim measure, a Technical Assistance Support Unit comprising individuals with requisite skills, be contracted to provide necessary support services to the Project Administration Unit.

The advertisements were placed both locally and internationally and I am happy to report that the Central Tenders Board has made awards to three individuals selected. The contracts for these individuals are being prepared by the Chief State Solicitor and it is anticipated that they would be executed on or before August 30, 1997. I am sorry I cannot provide the names because I was not involved in the selection process.

Fourthly, there is the Ministry of Health agreement with NIPDEC for provision by the letter of technical assistance to the Project Administration Unit in selecting, contracting and supervision of civil works and related good and services of the project on an as-needed basis.

The development for the scope of works for this agreement was very important and it depended on the cycle for infrastructure development which the Ministry of Health intends to undertake under the Health Sector Reform Programme.

You may recall that the original time-frame for Phase 1 of the Programme was five years, not six, as mentioned by the Member for La Brea. This has been extended to seven years. As a consequence, the infrastructural works and other projects under the Programme have to be rescheduled over the seven-year period. The restructuring of the timetable with the IADB for infrastructural works was not completed until recently. In addition, the Ministry of Health was exploring with the IDB the possibility of utilizing funds under the multi-sectoral pre-investment fund to procure the design consultancies for the Polyclinics/Enhanced Health Facilities. This was agreed to in 1997. These two matters impact on the scope of works for the NIPDEC agreement, in that:

- (i) procurement of designs for the Polyclinics and District Health Facilities will not form part of NIPDEC's scope of works; and
- (ii) consideration to be paid to NIPDEC and details of the scope of works can be determined now that the sequence of infrastructural works has been developed. At the present time these matters have been worked out between the parties and the Ministry of Health and NIPDEC and the contract will be signed on or before August 15, 1997.

The Agreement on a firm of independent public accountants as auditing agency for the Health Sector Reform Programme has been prepared by the Chief State Solicitor and the award has been made by the Central Tenders Board to a local independent accounting firm. This contract will be executed also on or before August 15, 1997.

Hiring of a Health Sector Reform Advisor has given us no end of problem. Firstly, in order to satisfy the IDB procurement procedures, advertisements were placed both locally and internationally. Two persons fulfilled the criteria and both were interviewed. One was found to be unsuitable in terms of skill and it was agreed to hire the other because of his skills and experience. Having gone through the process, the IDB raised objections to his nationality in that he was not a citizen of an IDB country. This was subsequently resolved and negotiations began for a contract. These negotiations through the Central Tenders Board are now in its final stages and we are hopeful that he will be contracted by the end of August.

Because of these delays, some of the projects did not get off the ground as early as we had anticipated, hence the reduction in the allocation in the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP).

Despite the fact that the Ministry of Health has not yet fulfilled the conditions prior to first disbursement of the loan funds under the Health Sector Loan Agreement, a number of projects/activities under the Health Sector Reform Programme are being undertaken at the present time. One of these is the Unique Identifier—Population Registration System.

This project which falls under the Health Sector Reform Programme is the precursor to the proposed National Health Insurance System and is being undertaken by the Ministry of Legal Affairs in conjunction with the Ministry of Health. One of the outcomes of this project is the development of a unique identifier by which each citizen in Trinidad and Tobago will be uniquely identified from birth. This unique identifier will be able to allow the health sector to follow the individual's health profile throughout the life cycle and allows for the generation of a database on the health profiles of all persons.

The Ministry of Legal Affairs has already hired a project manager for the project and has advertised and received proposals for the supply of the computer hardware and software for the project, as well as for project management services. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Legal Affairs are in the process of finalizing a Memorandum of Understanding with respect to the execution of the population registration system.

Polyclinics and Enhanced Health Centres: The Health Sector Reform Programme includes an overall health services plan (the National Health Services Plan) which shows the desirable configuration and quantities of services required. As part of the emphasis on the development of primary health care in Trinidad and Tobago, the plan envisages that 13 district health facilities will be built and equipped over the next seven years. These district health facilities will be offering 24-hour services in many cases and would be able to deal with a large proportion of the cases which at present are treated at the Accident and Emergency Centres of the major hospitals. By this development, the shift to primary care will be initiated. The Ministry of Health has already commenced the process through the Central Tenders Board for the tender by design consultants for these district facilities. It is anticipated that designs will be completed before the end of 1997.

The Ministry of Health and NIPDEC will be concluding a contract shortly for NIPDEC to provide assistance in the procurement of supervisory consultants and contractors for the construction of these district health facilities.

Next, we have Ambulances: One of the projects which will be undertaken early in the Health Sector Reform Programme is the development of the National Emergency Ambulance Service. This project is an important component of the rationalization and improvement of services under the Health Sector Reform Programme. There will be a pilot project of the National Emergency Ambulance Service in the South West Regional Health Authority (SWRHA) to test the system before full implementation nationally.

The National Emergency Ambulance Service will support and coordinate with Accident and Emergency departments nationally and with designated district health facilities and polyclinics. Advertisements were already placed internationally and locally for the National Emergency Ambulance Service Development Manager but so far, these have not borne fruit.

In the meantime, the Ministry of Health has developed specifications for the purchase of 10 ambulances at a cost of \$2.5 million and tenders for these will go out shortly. These ambulances will be integrated into the National Emergency Ambulance Service.

Community Care Project Programme: This programme aims to transfer suitable elderly persons and children, including some who may be mentally and physically disabled and who are at present inappropriately institutionalized in hospitals, to community care. The programme will be undertaken in conjunction

with the Ministry of Social Development and to this end the Memorandum of Understanding in respect of programme implementation has been signed by the respective ministries. Advertisements were placed internationally and locally for a Community Care Director who will head this project.

Human Resource Development and Training: A major objective under this heading is the increasing of management and technical capacities and skills of individuals working in the health sector. In addition, focus is being placed on changing the attitudes of health workers to be consumer/client oriented and to promote initiative.

Training programmes to achieve these objectives are being undertaken already. The Directorate of Quality Management has over the past two years conducted a number of training courses for various levels and categories of staff and has implemented some critical steps toward improvement of the quality of service in the health sector and the attitudes of health workers. These include the establishment of the complaints desks at all major institutions.

Training of health workers to increase their management and technical capacities and skill is also being undertaken. On-going projects include the training of nurses in district health visiting which is being facilitated by the University of the West Indies; training of Public Health Inspectors in Public Engineering, also being done through the University of the West Indies.

3.30 p.m.

The Ministry of Health and the University of the West Indies are at present developing a training programme, at diploma level, for medical practitioners to develop their skills in family medicine and primary health care. The programme is anticipated to commence in 1998.

Mr. Speaker, in specific reference to the problems with the doctors at the San Fernando General Hospital, I am to inform hon. Members that the human resource issues in the Health Sector Reform Programme are very complex. In our new thrust in health sector reform, the patient is the centre and focus of health care and not any one category of staff. The entire health team, including the patients, is important and we recognize within the team that the doctors have a vital and integral role to play.

It is envisaged that during the reform process, all employees in the health sector would be employed by the respective Regional Health Authority. The Regional Health Authorities would be able to set terms and conditions of

employment for their employees within the parameters of Government subvention to the health sector and to the RHAs in particular. In the meantime, however, employees of the Regional Health Authorities, who are in the minority, working alongside employees of the Government employed by the Public Service Commission, perform the same duties. This arrangement has led to varying degrees of conflict on a number of issues including remuneration packages.

During the tenure of the last Government, the Minister of Health sought to address some of these difficulties by amending the Constitution to allow for the Public Service Commission to delegate some of its authority to the RHA at the discretion of the Public Service Commission. This, however, did not materialize since after discussions between the Public Service Commission and the Ministry of Health, the Public Service Commission expressed its unwillingness to delegate any authority at this point in time. This was by the previous government.

Mr. Speaker, the challenges therefore remain and we must seek new and innovative means of addressing them. Meanwhile, there is a perception—an erroneous one at that—that with the decentralization process and the RHAs coming into being, the Regional Health Authorities have almost unlimited resources and are capable of satisfying financial demands that the Government could not. In reality, the Regional Health Authorities, with the exception of the Central Regional Health Authority to a certain extent, do not earn any money and must depend on Government for all its revenue. This means that any negotiations for salaries and other emoluments must take place in the context of the parameters that have been set by Government.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, in the present situation most of the doctors in the health sector are employed by the Public Service Commission and any negotiations for terms and conditions must be dealt with between the Chief Personnel Officer, on behalf of the Government, and the Public Services Association, on behalf of the doctors. This is the point we have been attempting to get across to the doctors at San Fernando General Hospital. That is, while a review of their compensation package is necessary, the avenue for doing so is through the Chief Personnel Officer and the Public Services Association. The Ministry of Health has done all it can to facilitate this process and will continue to do so in order to further this process.

It is unfortunate that the doctors, without having given the process an opportunity to work, engaged in action which, in effect, endangered the safety and lives of a large section of our population.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the nurses and all categories of staff who performed admirably during the recent impasse to ensure the safety of the patients under their care.

I also take this opportunity to make one final announcement to Members of this honourable House that the time has come for us to utilize more fully, and efficiently, the facilities at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex at Mount Hope.

In an effort to achieve this, I now announce these three initiatives:

- (i) The surgical department at the Caura Hospital has been transferred to Mount Hope and patients are now being seen and attended to there, free of charge. [*Desk thumping*]
- (ii) Very shortly, same-day surgical operations will commence at Mount Hope in an effort to decrease the backlog in surgery at the Port of Spain General Hospital. [*Desk thumping*]
- (iii) Before the end of this year, the paediatric services will be transferred from Port of Spain General Hospital to Mount Hope.

Mr. Speaker, Mount Hope has a 200-bed paediatric facility which has so far been largely under-utilized. I propose, based on the best technical advice, to transfer the paediatric services from Port of Spain General Hospital to Mount Hope and give to the children of the nation, particularly those who reside within the East/West Corridor, access to care in a modern, well-equipped and centralized facility. In making this announcement, I implore the Members of Parliament for the constituencies along the East/West Corridor to support this initiative and to sell this to the members of your constituencies since this move can only redound to the benefit of the children who comprise, incidentally, about 30 per cent of the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the health sector is going through a period of transition. During this transition period, as I mentioned, we are, and will continue experiencing, turbulent moments. We recognize that we must as far as possible minimize these occurrences and their duration so that the population we serve is not inconvenienced. However, I remain convinced that we are on the right track and at the end of it we will have a vastly improved health sector.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Eric Williams (*Port of Spain South*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to join this debate, really, to pose three or so questions to Members on the other side. I do not propose to be extraordinarily long with them, but I think they are questions that really require answers which I expect we would get today—today, as the hon. Minister just said, being a wonderful day for the Government to make statements. If that is the case, it is also a good day to have answers to questions which have not yet been properly answered in the past. So, without further ado, I would get into those questions. In fact, as usual, these are questions that have come to me from several of my constituents. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, I hear my name being called: in what context, I have no idea.

Mr. Maharaj: I give the Member the assurance that it is in a very good context.

Mr. E. Williams: Good. As long as it is cleared with my leader.

3.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the first has to do with Head 36: Ministry of Housing and Settlements. You will recall that I began to ask questions of the hon. Minister of Housing and Settlements about the \$3 million on the last day of the budget debate. I now see under New Project No. 291, the development of John John and East Port of Spain. This matter is one that has been rather contentious for some time; in fact, ever since the change in government. The change in government occurred at the same time that I entered this august Chamber.

I was guided on some of the history at the time by the former Minister of Housing and Settlements under the PNM. Unfortunately, I am no longer able to be guided in that manner and it is regrettable. I have to wonder whether I was properly guided in the first place but I can only assume so, because at the time the hon. Member was very sincere in his guidance. I thank him for that. I have a little problem understanding how he can associate with some people given the guidance he was giving me. But notwithstanding that, I must go on. There have been discussions and plans to develop the John John East Port of Spain area for some time. As I understand it, the former Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams, my late great name sake, developed a plan under his regime. In fact, the lands in the area were purchased for the National Housing Authority (NHA) so that NHA is the owner of many of the lands in the area, and development began.

The Old St. Joseph Road was changed into what we now know as the Flyover from the Highway coming into Port of Spain. At the time it considerably eased the

congestion in the area. That was a part of the plan to develop East Port of Spain. I think it was a good one and today we are seeing the benefits of it. The building of the Riverside Plaza and its car park were also part of that plan. There was a particular style of building that was taking place. Rather recently, the building which now houses the Ministry of Housing and Settlements—the architectural style—was built in a particular way as a part of that overall expansion and national development. One cannot do everything all at the same time. There was a development plan. I was so guided by the Member I spoke of and other Members in the past. I can only take their word given what I have seen myself.

Mr. Speaker, there was a fire in the John John area in 1992 and coming out of that there was a promise to build a high density unit, if at all possible, to house those who were displaced by the fire on the same site that the fire occurred. In fact, the then Minister of Housing and Settlements under the PNM was able to tell me that the representative for the area, the late hon. Morris Marshall, had a bet with some of the residents and one gentleman in particular. I have said in this House before that that gentleman is beside himself from time to time because he was not able to pay off the bet to the hon. Mr. Marshall in that the building was actually built—the Cook Street apartments popularly called the John John Towers.

Those buildings under the PNM—and just to restate the policy as I was advised by the then Minister of Housing and Settlements that in his best judgment those buildings were going to be put out for lease purchase where the payment would be based on the means of the individual and that preference would be given to the fire victims and then thereafter to residents of the John John area, and pensioners for instance, would have had to pay a little over \$100.00 per month. Hon. Member, please correct me if I am going wrong. I am merely trying to put back into the record those things which the Member told me. The fire victims would then be accorded some sort of facility; those who had not already been placed. In fact, some had been placed in other NHA properties but several of them were making requests to come back to the John John area. Based on a sliding scale of a person's means he or she would be allowed a long term lease/purchase option of the order of as much as 40 years. The point was that even if a person were elderly at this time, or as an individual, that person did not have the means to qualify for that, either his or her immediate or extended family could be added to the mortgage and they would then qualify and the apartment would stay in the family over a period of time. In fact this approach has been in place at the Bath Street flats, the Powder Magazine flats and other NHA facilities. So much for the history of it. There was a change in Government and, consequently, as one expects, a change in policy.

The incoming hon. Minister of Housing and Settlements signalled very early in his tenure that he wished to work closely with all Members of Parliament in the development of their area. In fact, I was invited to lead a delegation of not more than 10 persons to have a meeting with the Minister. That meeting was held on March 20, 1996. I was very delighted to accept the invitation and to attend the meeting to discuss, among other things: the discussion of various approaches to the development of the general Laventille West area. A letter dated March 11, 1996, was sent to me as Member of Parliament, Port of Spain South. The letter was wrongly addressed. At that time, the hon. Minister of Housing and Settlements said he wanted to work closely with us, there would be consultation, he would set up a committee, he would develop a fund for the area and so forth and that this Member of Parliament and others would be an integral part of that committee. That was accepted in good faith.

Subsequent to that, however, the word came out that the John John Towers were to be sold to the footballers because the people of the area were too poor and could not afford the exorbitant price of the towers. The price which was quoted was the construction cost; that is to say, the economic value that went into the construction of the facility. Whereas I was pointing out that my advice from the previous policy was a way that involved a social conscience being put into the way in which those apartments were to be sold.

Be that as it may, when there was the discussion, and the statement of the sale of the towers particularly to the Football Association through the auspices of Mr. Jack Warner, what was said at the time was that the apartments would be sold for \$3 million and that the Government would put into the budget of 1997 a matching \$3 million for the development. One got the impression that it was for the immediate development of the John John area. One could imagine my surprise when in my budget contribution I asked and I quote from *Hansard* of December 18, 1996:

“I would like the hon. Minister (of Housing and Settlements) to indicate when he speaks, where in the budget documents are the \$3 million matching fund which he says the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism will put into the budget to assist in the development of John John?”

What was said is that we were going to start building a particular type of core house that would have been appropriate, in the Minister's respectful view, for the residents of the area. In fact, at that time there was no \$3 million appropriation and

I see now we are dealing with a \$3 million appropriation. I can only assume it is the same thing we are speaking of.

3:50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, from the comments which I have heard earlier from the hon. Minister of Finance, this \$3 million is to go basically for consultancy fees, to reanalyse the housing stock, to do a needs assessment and a number of other things that all have to do with consultancy fees. There are several questions which come as a result of that. The \$3 million which was promised for a development fund to benefit my constituents, but certainly, to enhance the city's sky line and to provide proper housing and services to the citizens of this country, apparently seems to be going entirely to consultants.

I have nothing against consultants, they are professionals practising in their field, but I am aware that there have been several studies that exist in the Ministry of Housing and Settlements including, but not limited to, the one which I attended, which was at a rather grand press conference held on March 20. There are several plans in the ministry already for the development of East Port of Spain, so why are we not having these funds go directly to the implementation of these plans as opposed to re-doing the entire matter. The people of John John are asking when are they going to move forward. Several of them came to me and I had to think about it myself.

When the towers were being offered for \$3 million which would be put with this additional \$3 million to make \$6 million to begin development—I do not think that \$6 million was by chance because the cost of building the towers was approximately \$6 million, or a little more, for the 23 units. If they were being offered to the football association for \$3 million, and I must add, not without some controversy—and I understood that proposal has since gone the way of many others—that meant that the actual cost per unit was in the vicinity of \$130,434 per unit.

Mr. Speaker, why I have to harp on this is because several residents came to me saying they own a certain amount of money. In fact, the mean income of those who approached me is of the order of \$2,500 per month, some are civil servants and others are in the private industry, they are clerical persons, police officers and so forth. If the government were to offer them a reasonable facility, they are prepared to commit themselves into a mortgage type situation, or lease purchase so that they could play their part in raising the \$3 million, in other words, for the sale of the towers that would go to the \$3 million which the Government would put.

As they understood it from the Minister's statement, the \$6 million would be parlayed almost immediately into the implementation of building plans for the area of John John. In fact, quite a number of artisans said to me they want to work because they would see themselves as building their own community. They were happy about what the Minister was doing and were willing to put the \$6 million to work. Community groups came to me to identify sites which I understand were communicated to the hon. Minister. In fact, the first persons who were to benefit were even identified.

There are some wooden decanting units which were built there and were meant to be temporary, but because of a number of inefficiencies over the years, they have become semi-permanent habitations and are in need of repair. In fact, they need to be demolished, so the persons who are living there were identified by the community, to me as well as to the hon. Minister, as those who should benefit first from this \$6 million development, and they could build on a particular site which is opposite the Spree Simon Relief Centre at Picton Road, if Government were to acquire it. High density houses could also be built there and those persons could move in, the area could be demolished and the money raised from the sales of those units could be used for building in the other areas. In fact, it is a type of construction which I understand is called "leap frog" construction. When one looks around the John John area, there is precious little open space, in fact it is a high density area.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister promised on a number of occasions that we would have a \$6 million fund to develop the John John and East Port of Spain areas and if \$3 million is going towards consultancies, that means we would have to wait even longer for the Minister's promise to come to fruition. I have been requested to ask the hon. Minister when he intends to get on with the development of the John John area as promised with the \$6 million, bearing in mind that those persons whose names were submitted to him, and who have complained that they feel they have been treated with scant courtesy, are waiting to play their part if the Government were to be reasonable, not to offer something nebulous as I have seen in the ad, with no set minimum price and no criteria given for selection, or precious little for persons to go on. They are confused and feel very insulted, but they are still willing to work with the Minister given their current means to do their part for the development of John John. They are acting very responsibly, but they are also pointing out that in the interim the John John towers seem to be deteriorating as buildings which do not have people living in them do. The Minister should be aware of that.

It is a simple request, the development needs to continue, and we are willing to work with the Minister. I, as the Member of Parliament for the area and the constituents of John John look forward to the Minister's statement on what he plans to do with the development, and to working with him.

4.00 p.m.

The second question I have is for the Minister of Public Utilities. I have noticed that under Head 44 that the hon. Minister is speaking about a new project under subhead 09, I believe, it is item: New Project No. 001, the refurbishment of the PTSC bus fleet and the purchase of spare parts to which he proposes to transfer \$5 million.

Before I go on, Mr. Speaker, let me say one other thing to the Minister of Public Utilities. I have noticed that he is following the plan left by his predecessor rather closely. There are some minor hiccups, as we saw in a recent document, which spoke of the vision of Severn Trent being lost and some remedial work which had to be done. I hope that is back on track.

However, what I find curious about the \$5 million for the refurbishment of the PTSC bus fleet and purchase of spare parts is that this Minister had been on record—he came to this House and he had been in a number of other places—claiming that the PTSC was—I do not want to cast aspersions—not managed in an optimal manner previous to his arrival. He also then embarked on a programme of, shall we say, changing of managers at the PTSC to get a better managerial team in place. In fact, while the method employed was not palatable to many in the society—certainly to Members on this side—the objective fell in line with a previous policy, that is to say, to wean the PTSC off the national treasury and to make it more self-sustaining, self-financing and indeed profitable, if that were possible.

We looked on, but we complained bitterly of the means that were employed in an attempt to make the PTSC more viable. We hoped against all hope that while this was a painful way, it was, in my respectful view, not necessarily a humane way. In fact, it was a way that intended to create some divisiveness in the society along certain particular lines. Be that as it may, Mr. Speaker, the Government has to govern. We could speak about it, we could bring the matter to the fore; we could give our opinions, our warnings and our advice. Some were taken, some were ignored and we moved on ahead. But here we are asking to have \$5 million put back into the supposedly optimally operating utility, the Public Transport Service Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, that flies in the face of weaning that particular utility off the state. In fact, it may have been that this is some advice we want to suggest—part of the problem with the PTSC fleet as it exists today, is that the capital expenditure in the existing fleet was made, maybe, a decade or so ago. The fleet has a particular life-span so that it is approaching the time that one should go through—it is a natural attrition process—an upgrading of the PTSC fleet and now is the time to start doing that.

In fact, the \$5 million could have been more optimally utilized to provide some sort of Government guarantee to assist in getting the PTSC to go into the commercial money markets to start doing just that. If one keeps buying spare parts to merely refurbish the existing fleet, that is to ignore the fact that the fleet is aging and it is at, or soon going to be beyond, its expected lifespan. We are wondering if this \$5 million is being optimally used to do this. In fact we would submit that it would be better to attempt to begin to purchase new vehicles for the fleet.

Finally, there is one other issue that I would like to raise. It is one that I started to raise recently but I want it put on the record again. Many of the residents of the Newtown and Woodbrook areas are deeply aggrieved at the proposed closure of the Woodbrook Health Centre. Many of the elderly, some of them infirmed, are asking that some consideration be given to their plight. To have to travel from their area to the St. James area seems not to be justifiable. In fact, many of them are not mobile so that it would introduce an additional hardship on them. In addition to which they have pointed out that when schools are reopened the Woodbrook Health Centre presents itself as a primary health care facility in the area, should any injury occur to any child in any of the several primary or secondary schools, not to mention many of the commercial establishment and public service offices in the area. Mr. Speaker, if some consideration could be given to even opening the facility on a part-time basis, that would be appreciated.

With those few points, I have attempted to bring to the attention of this honourable House some of the concerns of, particularly, my constituents and perhaps other colleagues as well. I have attempted to do so in good faith and to present them as faithfully as I can to this honourable House. Again, I can only ask, on behalf of my constituents, that statements be given on these matters so that they could digest them and, maybe, develop some level of comfort with the direction that this Government is taking.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Housing and Settlements (Hon. John Humphrey): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the Member for Port of Spain South did not give the whole history of the plan for re-developing East Port of Spain that his late predecessor initiated in the 1970s. Indeed there was a plan for redeveloping East Port of Spain which is still there. As part of the changing of the face of this very depressed area of the city, the state acquired considerable lands in the John John and Picton areas for re-developing and never, in fact, went any further. The lands were acquired, the people were compensated, titles were transferred and it was just left in abeyance. Over the years those very people who received financial compensation stayed where they were and became squatters on state lands.

The PNM Government—I do not know what they thought they were doing for the people of East Port of Spain—following a fire that occurred in John John on Cook Street, erected a building comprising 23 two-bedroom apartments. Where the people lost their little shacks where they were squatting on state lands, the PNM government built apartments that cost almost \$300,000 per unit. They made promises that the apartments would be distributed to the poor before the election. The fire occurred in 1992 and before they were distributed to the PNM activists, no doubt, in the area, an election was called. The PNM lost the election and therefore the PNM government never distributed the apartments.

4.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, when we came into office we found that too much money was spent on the buildings and the cost of the units far exceeded what the people of that area could afford. *[Interruption]* You are asking about San Fernando. Do you want to ask about John John?

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way. Does the hon. Member believe that a government has the responsibility to adhere to any commitment made by a previously duly elected government entered into in good faith?

Hon. J. Humphrey: Yes, definitely, as we, in fact, lived up to the commitments in Ramdial Mahabir Trace, where those units had been distributed, and the very people who were the beneficiaries of that distribution, were the ones who were housed, but no commitments had been made for the John John units. Commitments might have been in the mind of the Leader of the PNM and once Prime Minister, but there were no commitments made for the John John apartments.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way, again. Indeed, we had publicly committed those apartments to the fire victims of John John in the first instance, and then to other categories of people from John John. It was a public commitment given by us.

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, a Prime Minister of a country would have to be totally irresponsible to make a public statement and commit taxpayers' money in that manner. When I became Minister of Housing and Settlements there were no allocations of those apartments made by the National Housing Authority. None whatsoever! In fact, the so-called fire victims who were supposed to be the beneficiaries of that building, were not being considered.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, that is not correct.

Hon. J. Humphrey: They were being considered in his mind but it was not in policy, it was not in documentation, it was nowhere to be found. If the PNM had won the election, they could have pursued the policies that they were committed to; that is, to squander the taxpayers' money where there was a critical housing shortage: have a few beneficiaries. They were prepared to give away the buildings, at the cost of the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago for the sake of perpetuating themselves in power, distributing those units that cost inordinate sums of money for little or nothing to people who were committed to active participation in politics, PNM style. Put that in your pipe and smoke it! They did not win the election. They are now on the side of the Opposition and they would stay there, certainly for the rest of my life time. It is the most hopeless Opposition we have ever had in this Parliament. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, you would recall that when a proposal was made to the Prime Minister that those apartments could be used to house the national football team, and the Trinidad and Tobago Football Association and Concacaf had expressed an interest in purchasing at the value of the building, not at the cost of it, there was a hue and cry and a virtual media frenzy over the so-called John John Towers, and for some strange reason, branches of the media aligned themselves with the PNM Opposition with the hope that the propaganda would affect the Government. At that time, we heard it openly expressed that the Government could not last more than a few months and the PNM party, with their friends in the media, sought to bring the Government down and thought that the so-called John John Towers was a means by which that could be accomplished.

The Member for Port of Spain South—although he was invited in good faith to participate in the improvement of the constituency he represents—turned around

and joined in the chorus of vilification, and it descended to the very worst levels, meeting in his constituency consistently, night after night, and promoting a racist line against the Minister of Housing and Settlements. Mr. Speaker, you do not expect a responsible Minister of a responsible Government to participate in that kind of behaviour. I had been in politics, perhaps, for as long as he has been alive and I have practised service to the people, using a certain standard. When the Member for Port of Spain South descended to his level of politics, I took a decision that I was no longer going to communicate and consult with him in terms of serving the people he is supposed to represent in East Port of Spain. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Hon. J. Humphrey: Even though the Cabinet had taken a decision to sell the apartments to the Trinidad and Tobago Football Association, because of the media frenzy—I describe it as a frenzy because we saw again with the Airports Authority that they were only waiting for an opportunity to get into a feeding frenzy like a bunch of sharks that go crazy when there is food. So we advertised for sale to the general public for those who may be interested in purchasing the units but we did not put a price. What we did was that we advertised the cost and we described them.

Mr. Speaker, we got a great deal of pressure from the Member for Port of Spain South, when it was known that the buildings had been advertised, to give his constituents an opportunity to purchase them. In fact, we yielded to that pressure, although we had advertised and gave a time limit for those who were interested and we extended that time to facilitate the Member for Port of Spain South, who would come to this honourable House and who had gone on the airwaves and published in the press, how his constituents were ready, willing and able to purchase the buildings. All we did was presented the facts; what they cost, what they were, where they were, photographs and so forth.

In response to the advertisements, five people out of the population of 1.3 odd-million applied. One person offered \$100,000.00 for one apartment and the prices went down to \$90,000 and one person offered \$15,000 for an apartment that cost almost \$300,000. If that indicates how the Member for Port of Spain South and his supporters are thinking, then it demonstrates what they were about as a Government.

4.20 p.m.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I want it to be placed on record in this House that this particular Member of Parliament does his utmost to serve without regard

to political affiliation, race, creed, and—I want to repeat—ethnic origin. I am speaking of myself. In fact, on one occasion, when a delegation from the Sea Lots area went to the Minister—just to mention how well I try to do it—of the delegation 10 or 20 per cent claimed to be affiliated to the People's National Movement and, in fact, the majority of them were either NAR or UNC supporters, but after their meeting with the Minister, they have had cause to change their minds. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, let us get back to the question. He wants to know about the status of the John John apartments. The status is that Concacaf has confirmed its interest in purchasing the units at an agreed price which two independent valuers valued. I believe that they want the units to convert them into an apartment hotel so that visiting teams and our own national players, when they need accommodation at home, can have that accommodation.

On the question of the \$3 million revolving fund for the improvement of John John, I do not know where the Member for Port of Spain South got the impression that \$3 million was being used to pay consultants. That is not correct. The National Housing Authority (NHA) has done a detailed survey analysis of that area, especially the occupied area which NHA owns which was acquired back in the 1970s. This was done with a view to rebuilding that whole face of the Laventille hill, from the water tanks all the way down to the towers.

In terms of uplifting that part of the city, there are several things being considered. In fact, the Prime Minister is on record as having given the assurance that the Brian Lara Promenade will be extended all the way up to Riverside Plaza. This will add to the improvement of the environment. We have hired a firm of architects that has done a study on using a construction type to redevelop that area of the city, reduce the unit cost considerably, and to bring the cost of housing accommodation down to the affordable reach of the people of that area. It is a type that is attractive to the National Housing Authority because it is a system, first of all, that is technically very sound, very economical, and it enables the people themselves to have an input into the construction so that they can add value through sweat equity.

To clear that area for redevelopment, one has to first build other accommodation, because one cannot expect to tell the people to leave their homes to clear the site so that one can redevelop it, without housing them in alternative accommodation. The National Housing Authority has identified a parcel of land owned by the Authority at Paradise Hill in Morvant, and we are designing a high-

density/medium-density complex to provide 200 units which will be used to relocate those in John John and Picton while we redevelop that area. They will be given a choice. If they choose to stay in Paradise Heights they can, or if they want to return to the John John area, they can do so.

The concept is of a condominium, based on the fact that the state owns the land and there is not sufficient land to accommodate all of the families in single-family dwellings, so it has to be a medium-density type of construction. Instead of portioning off the lands to the residents, we will approach the development in condominium style where the land will be consolidated and owned by the community, and the buildings are to be erected in a garden-type environment with green belts serving all of the units. The units are deliberately being designed, not only for the residents to make an input into their construction, but also to enable them to have economic activity on a cottage industry approach so that they can earn a livelihood to pay for their accommodation.

Mr. Speaker, I consider it a pilot project where, if we get co-operation from representatives of the people and from the media, and we do not use petty politics and, especially, racism, we will be able to establish in that section of South-West Laventille a model community. If it succeeds, we will then have a formula for redeveloping all of the depressed suburbs of Port of Spain and other areas of the nation as a whole. Port of Spain is a particularly difficult problem, because very little genuine emphasis has been put on the development of the city. In fact, the PNM regimes in the past deliberately set out to destroy the city by moving its residents out of the city into what has been described as the East West Corridor which is really a suburban spread of the city.

They have taken the people out of Port of Spain and put them to live on the East West Corridor in dormitory type communities. They have not provided any supporting services for those communities which, therefore, retain an umbilical dependent relationship on Port of Spain. The result of that is that everybody has to commute for services. They have to get on the roads to send the children to school; to go to work; and to do the shopping. To do everything, they have to leave the dormitory communities to go elsewhere for the supporting services required. This has put a tremendous burden on the roads and we are now faced with traffic jams, but it does something else.

The city of Port of Spain goes to sleep at night and wakes up in the morning. I cannot think of another city in the whole world that does that. There is no nightlife. There is no residential population to support the city. In fact, Mr.

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Speaker, the only people left in residence of Port of Spain are the very poor and depressed. We have to do something about that. The Government cannot, on its own, reverse that trend. It can only do that with the support of the citizens of the country. For example, we have to attract the private sector into investing in apartment complexes as is done in other cities of the world. We have also got to improve the facilities of the city.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Member is going to be any length of time, I will indicate the suspension of the House at this stage.

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, I think we should take the tea break.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.07 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, when we took the tea break, I was dealing with an approach to upgrading the living standards of our poor in the society. I was describing how we are approaching the redevelopment of an area of East Port of Spain as a pilot project. Of the \$3 million fund Cabinet has approved for this purpose, only part of that fund is to be used to pay for professional services and, without those services we cannot, in fact, do any development. The services that are being paid for right now are the services of a firm of architects and engineers who are designing, first of all, the Paradise Heights Complex, providing 200 units.

The next project will be the design of the units at Picton Hill. What is hoped is that when we bring the unit cost down to the affordable reach of the average worker, the participants themselves will pay towards the acquiring of their homes, so the fund will expand. In that regard we are designing a product especially for the low and no-income groups which the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company will manage. I am not at a stage where I can announce the details of that product, but it is deliberately being designed to enable the poor in the society to access resources for housing their families. A lot of reform is required to enable this, but discussions with various agencies have been going very well indeed and indications are that the reform will be palatable. So that deals with the \$3 million fund.

During the Finance Committee, the Member for San Fernando East had asked a question and I have the information for him. It pertained to the relocation of squatters on the San Fernando foreshore at King's Wharf. In fact, a committee has been established and, it is really a committee that is trying to redevelop a section of that foreshore to enable a ferry port to be established as the first stage of a long

term reclamation project for the west of San Fernando. That reclamation project is going to expand the area of San Fernando considerably. Eventually, about 3,000 acres of new land can be reclaimed. So this is the first stage in that process.

We have identified an area for relocating those families whom we could not readily relocate within the vicinity. There are not many families and that area is in Pleasantville. Many years ago the National Union of Government and Federated Workers developed an area of land putting roads and water. I believe that land has been sitting there unutilized for 13 years, and the union has indicated a willingness to join with us to use part of that for relocating the squatters on King's Wharf to enable the project to go ahead.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that project in San Fernando has demonstrated something that I think all of us should note. The City Corporation of San Fernando is PNM-controlled and the mayor is a PNM member who was appointed as an alderman. The PNM-controlled San Fernando City Corporation is working in close harmony with the Government and the community and they are demonstrating that when you can achieve unity and harmony, you can, in fact, get the development. That development will redound to the benefit of everyone.

Before I take my seat, I want to remind the Member for San Fernando East that one of the very first things that was done by our Prime Minister on taking office was to invite the Member for San Fernando East to discuss the possibility of unifying the political resources of the respective parties in the interest of building this national community of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to remind the Member for San Fernando East that that invitation remains open. If, as the leader of the People's National Movement, and as the official Opposition, he persuades his colleagues, I know they will all accept. We can, in fact, close ranks in the interest of developing Trinidad and Tobago and cut out the petty squabbling and the very destructive partisan division that is emerging.

Mr. Speaker, some of us on this side, including myself, were members of the People's National Movement. I was a member of the People's National Movement when the Member for San Fernando East was a mere lad. The reason I joined the People's National Movement is because it was a people's movement toward building a nation. Unfortunately, the movement went astray, but we could put it back on track.

With the cooperation of the now leader of the PNM, if he would respond to an invitation of the Prime Minister to join in a Government of national unity, I believe we would be able to rally the resources of our nation. With the God-given natural

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resources that we have, we could improve the quality of our population to the extent of making our country a virtual paradise on planet earth. I want to end with that point. I, for one, would be delighted to work with all Members on that side if we move the partisan divisiveness out of the way and get together in the interest of all of our people of Trinidad and Tobago.

With that, I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5.15 p.m.

Mr. Kenneth Valley (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I should start by informing the Member for St. Augustine that we are here, we are we, you are there and never the two shall join. We believe that in a democracy there must be a government, and an Opposition providing support when it appears normal to us, an alternative view in other situations and allowing the population to be the judge. We believe in that system and we do not believe that when we are elected we would want to jump ship. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Bereaux: Twenty years Panday in Opposition, he never jump ship.

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Mr. K. Valley: Once again I would comment on what the Member for St. Augustine has just said. I want him to remember that from 1956—1997 is 41 years and during that period the PNM has been out of government for seven years. We are accustomed to being in government and like Brian Lara every now and then we have to take a rest, but you can put money on the fact that whenever an election is called, we know clearly who would be the government. Hon. Member, you have made the point. You are accustomed to being in opposition politics. You were telling my political leader a while ago that you were around even when he was a lad, but you are very uncomfortable on that side and it can be seen whenever you speak. That is normal.

Mr. Speaker: I remind the hon. Member to speak to me.

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I will speak to you now.

I join this debate by starting where the Hon. Minister of Finance ended with an assurance to the House. He said:

"With all of this I wish to assure this honourable House that we shall still end the year with a surplus."

I would have preferred that the Minister would have demonstrated that to us in his presentation when going through the figures. I think it was only last week we got the report of the Auditor General for the year 1996.

You would remember that the Minister came with his 1996 budget which indicated estimated revenue of \$9,576.2 million, that was his original budget. When we look at the revised budget, coming closer to the fact, we see that the figure is \$9,566.4 million, extremely close. What was not in the original budget but in the revised budget, is \$1.1 billion that we got from excess oil revenues. Therefore, if that were to be discounted one would see that the revenues for 1996 were very close to the revenues for 1995. In 1995 the revenues were actually \$8,384.7 million. That is what gives me the concern. We have heard of no oil windfall or excess revenues for the year.

When we look at the budget for 1997 we see that we started with estimated current revenues of \$9,262.3 million and current expenditure of \$8,162.4 million, suggesting a current account surplus of \$1,099.9 million. From that, one has to take into consideration the planned capital expenditure for 1997 of \$1.7 billion. Right away, one sees clearly that there is a shortfall of some \$700 million and we are now talking about additional expenditure of \$142 million. Thus, we are really talking about \$842 million. The Minister may say that he plans to finance that from the capital revenue estimated at \$864.6 million for 1997. But one has to compare that with the \$64 million that was actually received in capital revenue for 1996 against a plan for \$220.6 million and the \$56 million received in capital revenue for 1995.

When we look at how the Minister plans to raise this capital revenue one sees first of all that he expects to get \$673 million from the sale of assets. I understand that it is from the sale of the 69 per cent interest in the methanol company which has already gone through. I would talk about that later on because one understands that that was the financing for the airport contract and we need to talk about it a bit more.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, the Government intends to have some \$79.1 million in grants. In 1996 they expected \$102.7 million and got \$60.5 million. They are expecting \$79 million in 1997 and there is no information here where those grants would be coming from, but if it has anything to do with any of the programmes where conditionalities have to be satisfied, one sees what is happening in the health sector and I am sure in other areas, because that is what you hear. Whether that is going to come in, is anybody's question.

Then there is supposed to be some \$94.5 million in extraordinary revenue and when we look at the details, we see that we are talking about unspent balances at TIDCO, \$49.5 million.

5.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I remember when we formed the Tourism and Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO)—the merger of the Industrial Development Corporation and the Export Development Company—there was some \$50 million that was transferred to TIDCO. Cabinet approved that those funds would be on a fixed deposit and TIDCO would be able to use the interest income from that account and that it would be unable to encroach on the principal without the approval of the Cabinet. It appears, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Finance plans to finance the budget this year by taking those funds away from TIDCO. One may want to note that.

Then there is some \$45 million of expected surplus from the Industrial Development Corporation pension fund. Mr. Speaker, again, we dealt with that and in my recollection, the amount that the Government was supposed to collect was much smaller than \$45 million. I am making the point that we are talking about \$864 million in capital revenue that is very “iffy”. The Minister in his wisdom, has reduced the estimate with respect to current revenue whereas last year or the year before—1994/1996—he was rather bullish, moving from an actual of \$8.4 billion in 1995 to an expected receipt of \$9.6 billion in 1996 and was helped by the grace of God because of what happened in the Middle East. For 1997 he is cutting that back to \$9.2 billion.

We have argued in the budget debate that to our mind, even that is excessive. I am making that point, Mr. Speaker, because when we look at the Report of the Auditor General, we see two things in particular. One, we note what is happening with respect to the overdraft. As a fact, when the PNM assumed office at the end of 1991, we met an overdraft situation of some \$2.6 billion at the Central Bank. The actual figure was \$2,597.8 million and over time we were able to reduce that overdraft so that at the end of 1995 when we left office that overdraft was \$1,069.9 million in surplus. [*Desk thumping*]

That deficit is reduced by surplus earnings on Government's operations. You may notice first of all, Mr. Speaker, that while in the one-year period (1994—1995) the overdraft reduced from \$2,084 million to \$1,069 million, in the period, according to the Central Bank report, between 1995 and 1996, the overdraft reduced by approximately \$400 million, from \$1,069 million to \$612.6 million. If

in fact we are not going to have surpluses, then it is likely that that overdraft situation would start increasing once more.

One would note, Mr. Speaker, that it is from 1994 one started hitting into that overdraft because, as you know, we came into office and the economy started turning around in September 1993. As a result of that momentum we were able to have surplus revenues and so reduce the overdraft at the Central Bank. My question is, what has caused this fall in the momentum? If we were able to reduce that overdraft by \$1 billion between 1994 and 1995, what caused that slow-down between 1995 and 1996 even after the Government had \$1.1 billion in excess revenues? What can we expect between 1996 and 1997? Is it going to stay put, is it going to increase? We have heard nothing with respect to the revenue side this afternoon. We got merely an assurance from the Minister that all is fine in the state of Denmark but for some of us, seeing is believing. Tell us what is happening.

Mr. Speaker, I was not happy with respect to the presentation of the Minister because, again, looking at the Report of the Auditor General, one notes and I want to read directly from the Report of the Auditor General. At 2.05 it says:

“The Public Debt at December 31, 1996 stood at \$17,418,001,463.76 as shown by the Statement of the Public Debt. The figure is \$1,090,094,510.34 or 6.67 % greater than the corresponding figure at December 31, 1995.”

At the same time we are having this excess oil revenue we are also increasing the public debt, that is, from 1995. That is in direct contradiction to what the Minister had us believing.

I think it was in May of this year the Minister came to the House to make a statement on the good performance of the economy. On page 7 he said:

“The stock of Central Government domestic debt contracted in 1996. As a result the ratio of domestic debt to GDP declined to 19.2 per cent in 1996 from 20.5 per cent in 1995. Following on a one-year absence, Government returned to the international capital market in 1996 and sourced US \$150 million on the Eurobond market. In view of the country's upgraded international credit rating, these funds were obtained at an interest rate of 8 per cent, the lowest rate ever achieved by this country on the international capital market. Notwithstanding this borrowing, the public sector external debt fell to US \$1,858.8 million at the end of the year...”

So in this statement we were informed that the domestic debt contracted, that the external debt fell but yet in the Report of the Auditor General we were

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informed that, in fact, the public debt outstanding increased by some \$1.1 billion. Could we ever have some truth with this Government? All we asked for is some degree of honesty and integrity with persons who are charged especially with managing the public purse. *[Desk thumping]*

Moving on, Mr. Speaker, I want to make the point that while we can find the \$142.4 million to give various ministries, I have to note the absence of any supplemental allocation to the Ministry of Social Development.

5.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we have had, in this Parliament, all types of talk with respect to poverty alleviation. On September 17, 1996, we were regaled in this Parliament by the then Minister Extraordinaire who told us about the setting up of a National Social Development Council on Poverty which would be dedicated to the attainment of the goal of poverty alleviation. It was to be launched fittingly on October 24, 1996—the declared United Nations Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Government what has happened with this National Council on Poverty? The reality is that, whereas in 1995, the Ministry of Social Development got 4.3 per cent of total expenditure, in 1996 that ratio dropped to 3.9 per cent and in 1997 it is 3.4 per cent.

We continue to make the point that we left an economy that was on the increase. Growth had returned to the economy. Any government coming in after should know clearly that the emphasis should be on poverty alleviation. Anybody living in Trinidad and Tobago would know that for some 12 years we had an economy on the decline.

In 1990 we had the Saddam Hussein effect but basically, between 1983 and the end of 1993, the economy was on a decline. Growth started around September and, thank God it has continued. If persons made sacrifices during that period, if, for example, public servants did not get a pay increase since 1983, if, as the information demonstrates, there are now more persons below the poverty line, then a caring government must know that it ought to commit increasing resources to poverty alleviation.

Mr. Speaker, the survey in the *Newsday* of Sunday, August 3, 1997 which was conducted by Dr. Deosaran states:

“Some 74 per cent of the public are dissatisfied with the way the Government is tackling poverty in Trinidad and Tobago.

Of the 353 households surveyed, the poll similarly revealed that 77 per cent of people were also dissatisfied with the way the Government was dealing with the cost of living.

Yet again 70 per cent of the sample were dissatisfied with Government's performance against unemployment.

Somewhat related to this (because of the high cost of imports), most people—61 per cent—were dissatisfied with the Government's handling of the dollar foreign exchange rate.”

Perhaps that is a bad word for the hon. Minister of Finance, given what he wants to do with First Citizens Bank. However, we will leave that for another time—taking the role of the Governor of the Central Bank.

Mr. Speaker, rather than ‘gallery’, which the Government seems to like, I ask if \$142 million can be found for other ministries, I think one ought to consider social development as a priority area. [*Desk thumping*] We have to do it.

In the budget speech on page 15, the hon. Minister gave the whole area of social services—about four paragraphs.

“Mr. Speaker, 1997 signifies the beginning of United Nations decade for the eradication of poverty and Government has formulated a holistic approach to address the issue of poverty and social displacement. For this reason the Government has established a national social development council”

That is the same council I was talking about a while ago. It has gone the way of all flesh. The gentleman has gone on to greener pastures and perhaps there is no one to deal with this very important initiative.

Four paragraphs on the issue of social services. While talking in this grandiose fashion, he allocated 3.9 per cent of the budget to social services, down from 4.3 per cent in 1995. We have to ask where are we going and are we serious?

Mr. Speaker, I turn next to my friend in local government. The budget provides increased allocation to Local Government at page 30 of the information which came to the Finance Committee. It is also in the schedule on page 20. Here we see various corporations are being allocated generally large sums—\$130,725 for recreational facilities, \$1,159, 000 for local roads and bridges. We say that is fine.

Then, corporations which are PNM controlled are receiving communication from the Ministry of Local Government. I want to put in the record a letter dated

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June 20, 1997 from the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Local Government to the Chief Executive Officer, San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation entitled: Development Programme - Supplemental 1997. It reads:

“I am pleased to inform you that approval has been given for additional funds under 1997 development programme for your corporation to undertake the following infrastructural work. (see attached appendix)

You will appreciate that ministry is making successful representation for additional funds and you are accordingly requested to submit, as early as possible, estimates for the approved additional projects.”

The attachments list certain projects. In other words, rather than the council identifying the projects which ought to be undertaken with the funds that are supplemented, here you have the ministry, meaning the hon. Minister of Local Government, dictating to the corporation the infrastructural work which the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation ought to undertake.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the areas—Aranguéz Branch Road resurfacing, Coronation Street resurfacing, Persad Lane, Quarry Drive. Here you have a corporation with a council elected by the people, but you have a minister directing the corporation where it should spend its funds.

5.45 p.m.

Mr. Singh: I thank the hon. Member for giving way. I just wish to place on record that no request for additional funding came from the corporation. As far as it was concerned it was not considering acquiring additional funds. The Ministry took the initiative and we provided the additional funds.

Mr. K. Valley: This is Alice in Wonderland, Mr. Speaker, it is getting more and more curious. What the Minister is saying is that the corporation did not request additional funds but he went to the Minister of Finance, to the Cabinet, to request further funds and then to direct the corporation on how those funds should be spent.

Mr. Assam: [*Inaudible*] —he was pursuing a general direction.

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I know that my Friend from St. Joseph would have said just that and I would just go to the Municipal Corporations Act, No 21 of 1990, section 269, which says:

“The Minister may give general or specific directions to any council in relation to Government policy touching or concerning any matter and it shall be the duty of the Council to govern its actions in accordance with any such directions.”

Mr. Assam: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Valley: Government policy. By no stretch of the imagination—and I am sure I can get the help of the Member for Couva South—can one say that specific directive to a council to build or to resurface a particular road can be considered a matter of policy.

You see, Mr. Speaker, the whole concept of the local government reform which was instituted by the NAR government and supported by the PNM, was that these corporations would have a higher level of flexibility and autonomy, as well as the responsibility for their actions.

Mr. Assam: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Valley: Opposed which Bill?

Mr. Assam: That same Bill you all opposed.

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, you understand why he is making all that noise? Because every project that they outlined here is in St. Joseph. But they can give you a hundred, they can give you a thousand, you cannot win. That is the reality of the situation. That is not the issue.

Mr. Assam: You can go to no part of your [*Inaudible*] she will get more licks than Ramrekarsingh. Lathi Mangay for her.

Mr. K. Valley: Talk about Lathi Mangay. You got two extra votes the last time, that will never happen again. [*Desk thumping*] [*Inaudible*].

Mr. Speaker: It is quite obvious that the Member for St. Joseph and the Member for Diego Martin Central are not particularly interested in listening to the Speaker this afternoon.

Mr. K. Valley: I am always interested in listening to you, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Please continue.

Mr. K. Valley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I am talking to you, I am on my feet, I do not know to whom that gentleman is talking. Mr. Speaker, I want to say to you that if any Member, whether he be from St. Joseph or anywhere else, really wants to know, he must come to Diego Martin Central. But really, Mr. Speaker, I think, and I make the point again, that people expect a certain type of behaviour from leaders. There is an expectation that if you are a leader, if you are in a position of leadership, then you must be an exemplar. You cannot, Mr. Minister,

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take away the powers of the council in this way. I am just telling you as a friend because we will fight you to the end on this issue. As long as money gets to a PNM council, it will spend it as the council decides and directs. I am sure you can never do that in Tobago, you cannot do it in San Juan/Laventille, you will not be able to do in San Fernando, and let it be known, you will not be able to do it in Arima because we will fight you to the end. Understand that. So that you can tear this up. *[Member tears up document]* Both of them, forget it, and that is a friendly warning. *[Desk thumping]*

There is not a council that can say I ever indicated anything like that when I was the Minister of Local Government.

Mr. Assam: How could you do anything when you were never on the job?

Mr. K. Valley: My record speaks for itself.

Mr. Assam: Bad record.

Mr. K. Valley: Health sector reform—I must admit that the Minister of Health is a person of whom I am very fond. He comes across as a gentleman. I have the highest regard for him. But, Mr. Speaker, when one looks at what is said here with respect to the health sector reform and listens to the Minister this afternoon, I really have to counsel him that we are not really interested in the storms you encounter. If you want the job we expect you to bring in the ship, and if you cannot bring in the ship then, Mr. Minister, you have to move aside and allow someone else to do it. That is the reality of the situation.

Mr. Assam: *[Inaudible]*

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. K. Valley: Many journalists are looking for you.

Mr. Assam: He did not want to move and the people moved him.

Mr. K. Valley: Move me? I got more votes. Only in today's newspapers I saw some little child died in the hospital. When we have people dying at hospitals—

Mr. Assam: You all have killed people with eggnog in St. Ann's.

Mr. K. Valley: —because of whatever problems, Mr. Minister, we cannot really listen to the excuses or the problems you are encountering.

I just want to tell you that you have asked for three months, on October 1, I will be putting a question on the Order Paper with respect to the health sector reform. That is all I want to say on that.

I want to talk a bit about the John John flats. You know there are some people calling my name. I want them to know that I do not play with dogs so just leave my name out.

Mr. Assam: You are an animal hater? Do you raise cats?

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we listened to the Minister of Housing and Settlements this afternoon and, so often, when we listen to some Members on that side what we hear quite clearly is that we have power coming through. He is making the point that you all should have given out the apartments before the election. Now you lose the election, we are in control and we will do what we want.

5.55 p.m.

I want to counsel the Minister, as I have tried with the Government on a number of occasions, not because he is in government he could mash up the place; that he could do what he wants. [*Desk thumping*] One would expect that Minister would know that, because when you try to do that, there are persons at the margin who would say, "Is so? Well, we go mash up the place for you." You cannot do that!

Mr. Assam: You are preaching violence.

Mr. K. Valley: I am not preaching violence; I am telling you about the laws of the world. This world is a very simple place—

Mr. Assam: You always preaching violence. It will fall back on you!

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am merely counselling the Government, that if you do "a", "b" will follow; if you do "b", "c" will follow. These are natural laws. So when you say you want to take the John John flats which were built for certain persons and give them to someone else, you are just courting trouble. You have to know that. [*Interruption*] I am hearing a little noise coming from pit.

Here you are talking about selling the John John apartments for \$3 million—23 apartments. It works out to \$130,000 for an apartment. If you can sell the apartments at \$130,000 to the Trinidad and Tobago Football Association, is it not

right that at least you can offer those same apartments to the people for whom they were built at around \$100,000 and give the people a fair chance to acquire a home? It seems so simple to me.

On November 8, 1996, I wrote the hon. Prime Minister requesting an audience with him on this matter. I took with me certain of my colleagues who are still here with me, and some others, whom I thought—let me leave that alone.

Hon. Member: Whom you thought could not be bought.

Mr. K. Valley: We sat with the Prime Minister and I left that meeting feeling quite comfortable because, obviously, the Prime Minister understood and I know he took certain actions. But as though there are some lobbyists who are extremely strong and they seem to have gotten to the Prime Minister, so we are hearing this talk about selling to the Trinidad and Tobago Football Association once more.

I would just counsel the Government that those apartments were built for the people; they need to give the people a fair chance to get their homes. In saying that, I feel I am on excellent ground, because the Minister of Housing, way back in 1982—Friday, September 17, 1982—spoke on a Land Acquisition Motion. This is the Member for St. Augustine—

Hon. Member: 1982?

Mr. K. Valley: He was in the House in 1982. He is here a long time. He was on the Opposition Benches. He was saying:

“It seems very peculiar to me that the Government can be so generous with the land of the people of Trinidad and Tobago for a small privileged group and so mean with the vast majority in providing areas for recreation of the poor masses.”

He goes on:

“In the constituency of St. Augustine, we have decided not to wait for Parliament to identify lands for acquisition. Where we find lands that are needed by the communities for recreation purposes owned by the State I am encouraging my constituents to occupy those lands for recreation purposes. If the Government follows later after we have made the preparation of these idle and vacant lands for recreation purposes and acquires them I will congratulate them for that.”

And they talk about preaching violence? That is not all. So I am on good ground. He goes on at 2.35 p.m.:

“They have no place of their own to live. But you see the spirit of the Constitution ensures, it guarantees, that every single one of our people must have a place to live. If you do not have your own place to live you cannot enjoy the principles that are stated here as endowed by our creator.”

He goes on, talking about the responsibility of the state. He says:

“Is the individual responsible for providing his own place of abode in strict accordance with the letter of the law or is the State responsible, the Government that manages the wealth of the people? Is it the Government’s responsibility to ensure that this social contract is abided by and that every single one of our people has a fixed place of abode?”

That is what I am asking him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The speaking time of the Member has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. K. Valley: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, especially the Member for St. Joseph.

The hon. Member for St. Augustine, as he was even then, continued:

“I argue that the responsibility is that of the society and not the individual. The fact that you have an economic system in operation throughout history that has denied the majority of our people this kind of security is irrelevant. Either you throw this away and maintain the economic system that gives the lion’s share of the social wealth to a few thereby denying the vast majority their fair share, or you change that system and put in place a more equitable one.”

So that I feel that I am on good grounds in arguing the case for the people of John John. I am saying that the intent, when that building was constructed, was first of all for the fire victims, and secondly, the people in that area. The Minister can get very good counsel from some of his new peers. But if he wants to give that to the Trinidad and Tobago Football Association, all I can do is tell him that if I were in his position, I would think twice about doing that; that is not the proper thing to do, especially given the price at which they are selling it.

Hon. Member: You are inciting violence!

Mr. K. Valley: I am not inciting any violence. If you jump from plane, you would die. Is that a threat or is that a statement of reality? I could threaten no one. I could walk all over Trinidad. Even in Arima I could walk without security guards. There are a number of you on that side who cannot walk without security guards in Arima. I dare anybody, even those people who feel they represent Arima, to walk without security guards in Arima.

I want to conclude by making the point that while it is known that from time to time a government has to return to the Parliament for variations in appropriations or to supplement appropriations, in concept, one can have very little difficulty with that, but when one comes, especially for a supplemental, one ought to give some information concerning the impact on the bottomline and perhaps even on the economy. Also, we would have expected the Government to pay some more attention to the area of poverty alleviation.

We made the point in the budget speech that by removing the deed of covenant which would normally have financed the NGOs and so forth, you are reducing a main funding mechanism from these NGOs, and that given the increase in poverty that is in the country at present, that was not the thing to do. But the Government went ahead.

6.05 p.m.

We note in the supplemental appropriation that there is approximately \$3 million going to Servol. I would argue that the net operating cost of Servol would very well have been lower had the deed of covenant mechanism still been in place because persons who would otherwise fund Servol using that mechanism, cannot now do so and, therefore, it now falls on the state.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the results of the Common Entrance examination came out about two to three weeks ago and we know that there are about 8,000—10,000 children who did not secure a position in a secondary school. While about 50 per cent of them may have a second chance at the Common Entrance examination, the other 50 per cent would have no place to go until age 16 years when they may go to a trade school.

I have been making the point that at this time we need to look at setting up a school for these children who were not placed after the second attempt at the Common Entrance examination—perhaps even getting NGOs to do it. To my mind

the post primary concept would not do because these are children who have already proven that they are not academically gifted. However, the fact that they are not academically gifted does not mean they do not have another gift; their gift may be in some other area. Therefore, we need to look at a widened curriculum where these young persons would be exposed to different things—not only skills but, perhaps, music and so forth—in an effort to identify where they have talent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I maintain that the job of the adult is to help the young person identify where he has talent and help him to develop that talent. That young person is going to benefit, but society is going to benefit much more. It strikes home when every Common Entrance period comes about and there are those children who would have no place to go until age 16, and we talk about street children, crime reduction and so forth. This is a time in our history, given the growth in the economy, when we need to set aside some funds and encourage NGOs' interest in that project.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we started a project of this nature in Diego Martin with 16 children, and there are now 102 children involved—this is after two graduations. This is what is needed throughout Trinidad and Tobago. It is important that we pay more attention to poverty alleviation. We ought not to be seeing a decreased percentage of the budget allocated to social services, but increased allocation instead.

The Member for Oropouche, when he was in Opposition, spoke about increasing old age pension to \$500 and the threshold limit to \$12,000. That could not have been done in 1992—1993, but we must now be in a better position to pursue those alternatives.

With those few words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you.

The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I must admit that the debate this afternoon took a bit of a surprising turn. I really thought that the debate would have had a little in-depth reflection and thought given to some of the numbers. However, I want to think that the debate, whilst it appears to have hinged on the political rather than on the financial numbers, may have had that genesis based on the fact that this Government intends to treat with the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and certainly the Members on the other side, with a large degree of openness and transparency to ensure that the details which are provided are so great and thorough that further explanation seems unnecessary.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that there are two critical elements to the matter before us in terms of this Motion. In the first case, we come after a review of the *Public Sector Investment Programme* to ensure that change in priorities—and that is the hallmark in my view of proper management—dictates that we encourage areas that seem to be doing very well and seek Parliament's approval to decrease expenditure in areas which do not seem to be doing quite as well. The reason for this is to ensure that the momentum that the economy has displayed continues.

The other area which formed the basis for this Motion is the increase in the original appropriation by \$742 million. As I indicated in my contribution to this honourable House this afternoon, in excess of \$100 million reflects settlement of a number of wage negotiations in the office of the Prime Minister, as regards CARIRI; the Ministry of National Security with respect, basically, to the settlement that was made between the protective services—police service, fire service and so forth; the settlement of the wage negotiations with TTUTA under the Ministry of Education, and, finally, a smaller sum with respect to the Ministry of Health with respect to nursing and aligned personnel.

So, in essence, Mr. Speaker, I seek the approval of this House to have in excess of \$100 million given to these various ministries so that they can carry out the agreements that have been made between the Chief Personnel Officer and the respective unions. It is imperative, therefore, that we honour these agreements and it is in that framework I presented this Motion this evening.

Mr. Speaker, some of the political thrust and parry might have been answered by some of my colleagues on this side, so I would not seek to take any more time of this honourable House in prolonging what must have been an agony on both sides to listen to some of the arguments that had, in my view, very little to do with the Motion before us.

Instead, I want to deal with a few of the matters raised by the Member for Diego Martin Central during his contribution this afternoon. I cannot help but continue to feel very sorry for the Member for Diego Martin Central because I feel more and more, every day, that his secret burning ambition to be Minister of Finance seems to be getting further and further from his grasp. The only way, I suspect he may very well realize this is the day he becomes the political leader of the People's National Movement—another burning ambition he seems to be carrying out on a daily basis. I only hope that the Member for San Fernando East

would understand his ambitions and understand that the Member might be prepared to carry out those ambitions by any means. *[Laughter]*

6.15 p.m.

I remember correctly the day the Member was appointed as a Minister in the Ministry of Finance, he could not believe that the then appointed Minister of Finance could have been chosen before him. The Member could not believe that he could have been passed over and not be the Minister of Finance, so that he continues to spend a great deal of time trying to impress his political leader, he continues to be a Minister of Finance in waiting. The Member sits and analyses numbers; he tries to take us through revenue numbers, capital numbers, what they produce, how they should be interpreted, things that I am sure my good Friend here says nobody on the other side understands, but they are always ready to thump the table at things which sound impressive without understanding.

Mr. Speaker, I informed this honourable House in the Budget presentation that I had anticipated a surplus of some \$269 million. Therefore, my request this afternoon for an extra \$142 million would mean that I should expect and anticipate a smaller surplus of about \$127 million and, therefore, it is because we need to protect our economic programme that I am assured that we will continue to meet the expenditure as expected but more importantly, that we can expect a budget surplus at the end of this year.

The one area which had me a bit concerned is an area I would like to clear up. As I indicated in the statement which I made on the state of the economy in this honourable House, the basis for my statement had come from figures provided by the Central Bank. If it were that last week the Auditor General has come up with another set of numbers with respect to the overdraft—and let me just inform this honourable House that in looking at a balance sheet an overdraft is merely one item and any change in any of the other numbers can very well bring about a change in overdraft. To suggest to this honourable House that a decrease in an overdraft is necessarily a good thing is to show how little understanding we have of interpreting balance sheets. I will not attempt to give this honourable House a lecture as other Members sought to do, because I do not believe I need to impress this honourable House with the work that a Minister of Finance can do. Instead, I will focus on one final comment.

I had indicated to the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central, during the budget debate, that the Government, because it wanted as a policy, to address the income tax approach with a more simplified system and with a more simplified tax

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return, it felt it necessary to remove the concessions that had been given to people who took out deeds of covenant.

Whereas the Government felt that it had an obligation to assist NGOs it further believed and still does, that because the upper marginal rates of tax are coming down, to use tax concessions as an incentive for people to spend money seems to be losing its impact because of the reduced rates of taxes, and, therefore, it really does not make sense getting into that debate. Suffice it to say that Servol had asked for the original sum of \$6 million and the Government had provided some \$3.8 million. The Government is now seeking to increase it back to the original request which Servol made even before they knew that the deeds of covenant were going to be removed. Obviously, the removal of the deeds of covenant had absolutely no effect on its operation and would not have necessarily reduced its operating cost.

Mr. Speaker, with these very few words, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to

Report adopted.

**FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND
VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) BILL**

The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act 1997, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, as this Bill deals with the same issues as raised in the previous Motion and having gone through all of its motions, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Clauses 1 to 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The Schedule ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be reported to the House.

House resumed.

Bill reported, without amendments; read the third time and passed.

6:25 p.m.

POUNDS (AMDT) BILL

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Dr. The Hon. Reeza Mohammed): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move

That the Pounds (Amdt.) Bill be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill has become necessary because the existing Pounds Act fails to adequately address the problems associated with the straying of animals. Recently, there have been a number of mishaps in the southern region, caused in particular, by straying cattle onto highways resulting in the loss of lives, personal injury and damage to property. There have also been a number of cases of damaged agricultural produce as a result of these stray animals feeding on agricultural crops.

In addition to this, there is the possibility of a serious tick infestation of animals in the county of St. Patrick. It is therefore extremely important to control the straying of animals and thereby prevent the spread of this tick infestation, not only by the impounding of these animals, but also by the enforcement of the provision of the Animals (Disease and Importation) Act, Chap. 67:02.

In light of this serious problem that is being caused by the straying of these animals in Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has sought to put the following mechanisms in place in order to control these stray animals.

Firstly, the inclusion of the water buffalo as a poundable animal which was never listed before. Secondly, the owner of any animal which has been impounded would become liable to pay the cost of keeping the impounded animal in the pound until the same can be legally offered for sale. Thirdly, the feeding fees for the impounded animal are to be adjusted to current costs, and any cost incurred in transporting the animal to the pound shall be paid by the owner of the animal which is a departure from the original Act.

Section 15A is inserted to give effect to this new provision, which provides for special conditions to be applied for vehicles transporting any animal to the pound to ensure road safety and the protection of the animal from injury. This also falls under the new section 15A.

The pound fees, seizure fees, and transport fees are being increased to act as a deterrent measure as per amendment to the schedules to the Act. Another deterrent measure that is being introduced is a system whereby impounded animals

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are to be tagged before they are released to the owner so that any animal so tagged, if impounded again, the owner must pay an extra fee before the animal is released.

These are some of the legislative measures in support of attempts to control the serious problems caused by the straying of animals. Recommendations from the Commissioner of Police and the Animal Production and Health Division of the ministry were used by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and the office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel to inform the drafting of the provisions of the Bill before this House.

The amendments which are before this House are intended to protect the agricultural sector, thereby safeguarding the livelihood of farmers, as well as to secure the safety of road users, redounding in overall benefits to the economy from the agricultural sector.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis (*Arouca South*): Mr. Speaker, my parliamentary colleague from Naparima is suggesting that I only make a brief intervention, but of course, it is a brief Bill and would require nothing but a brief intervention to deal with it. We on this side support this Bill. We note with interest that the original Act was enacted on March 7, 1876, and we see the importance that this Government places on agriculture because clearly, one of its plans in dealing with the situation is to ensure that animals are properly impounded and the fees are the correct ones.

We have heard nothing about an agricultural policy, and we have had no statement on what is happening in the agricultural sector, at least none which we can put any store on, but if it is of great importance to the Government which claims that agriculture is of extreme importance to it, then I can see why it was brought to Parliament at this time.

We have our concerns, however, with a report from the CSO that there has been an increase of over 20 per cent in food prices over the past year, we on this side feel that there is a need to talk about that situation and not about impounding animals. However, if it is creating a problem, then by all means deal with it, but we also need to have in this Parliament some statement about that increase in food prices over the last year.

There has been no statement on a report that there will be, in the future, the importation of meat from Latin American countries, even though we know that foot and mouth disease is endemic in several of those countries that have been listed, yet this Government is talking about importing meat from there. One has to be careful when those issues are being raised, because if no clear policy is made regarding the statement that meat will be imported from Latin American countries, and no assurances are given to the population that it may not be faced with that disease infecting our animals, then we may have a serious problem on our hands.

We are also concerned that there has been no statement regarding any intention by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to increase the livestock production in Trinidad and Tobago.

6.35 p.m.

At one point in time we did have a situation where our food import bill was largely supplemented by produce that was grown locally and by animals that were reared locally. We feel that the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resource needs to be open with the population of Trinidad and Tobago and talk to us about the situation relating to the food import bill as it now stands.

As I said before, we do not have very much to say on this Bill and you know, Mr. Speaker, whenever I contribute to a Bill in this House I usually say quite a lot.

Mr. Assam: You are saying so!

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: But it is the truth. I usually have quite a lot to say but on this occasion, the Bill is not anything that we can really talk about. Even though the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has not been doing much work, because of the negligible intent of this Bill, we support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Dr. The Hon. Reeza Mohammed): Mr. Speaker, in the interest of time I would simply make two comments on statements made by the hon. Member and at the same time I thank her very much for supporting this Bill.

On the question of the importation of meat from South America there is a national institution which is referred to as the National Organization for Epizootic and meat coming out of any country must have clearance from that institution before importation can take place, not only from a public health standpoint but also from the standpoint of zoonose, that is transmissible diseases amongst the animal

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population. There are some South American countries which have been cleared by the National Organization for Epizootic and it is within the framework of this clearance—those diseases which appear on Schedule A—that this Government has taken the decision to consider the importation of meat from those South American countries.

I also heard from the hon. Member that the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has not done anything [*Interruption*] thank you, Sir, that this Government has done very little since this Government came into office. I would like to point out the economic indicators in the *Review of the Economy* for 1996 and to inform the hon. Member that in 1996 the agricultural sector moved from negative growth of 4.7 per cent in 1995 to positive growth of 7 per cent in 1996.

Secondly, that the sector contributed \$608.2 million to GDP and furthermore, in 1996 we were able to import 37 tonnes of food less than we did in 1995.

As far as the 20 per cent increase in food prices is concerned, as indicated by the CSO, the hon. Member should know, even in her capacity as a lawyer, that when we signed the GATT Agreement in Marrakech, in 1994 we agreed to the removal of subsidies and so did the international community. As a result, as these subsidies on food items were removed on a schedule basis the cost of these items, by way of importation, naturally had to be increased. This is perhaps the reason we are seeing a reflection of the 20 per cent increase in food prices.

I would prefer that when a Member from the opposite side of this House stands, even in support of an amendment to the Bill by this Government, that they have their facts correct and they avoid having misinformation put into the record.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Clauses 1 to 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 6.

Question proposed, That clause 6 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Bereaux: Mr. Chairman, there is an indication in clause 17(b) that animals will be tagged after they have been impounded, the purpose of that is if the animals are brought back to the pound there would be higher fees. I do not know the way in which the animal will be tagged but I wonder if there is some penalty for the removal or attempted removal of that tag from the animals. If there is not, we would be passing a measure that could be easily circumvented.

Dr. Mohammed: The animals would be air-tagged.

Mr. Bereaux: I know, but could they be removed?

Dr. Mohammed: Yes, there is the possibility of the removal of the tag.

Mr. Bereaux: I think we should put some kind of penalty for the removal of the tags.

Dr. Mohammed: What do you suggest?

Mr. Bereaux: A fine of some sort.

Mr. Chairman: What is being suggested, Dr. Mohammed, is that you should consider at some later stage imposing a penalty for people who, in an unauthorized manner, remove the tags. I am sure you agree with that.

Dr. Mohammed: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Mr. Bereaux, that is an extremely good point.

Clause 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

6.45 p.m.

Clauses 7 to 9 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be reported to the House.

House resumed.

Bill reported, without amendment; read the third time and passed.

SUMMARY COURTS (AMDT.) BILL

Order for second reading read.

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

That a bill to amend the Summary Courts Act, Chap. 4:20, be now read a second time.

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This Bill is to provide for the appointment by the Judicial and Legal Service Commission of magistrates on contract.

This Bill is to give effect and implement a project which was started under the last administration, of a night court pilot project at Arima in 1995. This Bill has been brought before us to complement the Summary Courts Sitting (Amdt.) Order, 1995 which permitted the sitting of the Arima Magistrate's Court between the hours of 5.00 p.m. and 9.00 p.m. In the light of the success of that pilot project for night courts, the Summary Courts Sitting (Amdt.) Order, 1996 was made in January 1996 to introduce the sitting of night courts in Port of Spain, San Fernando and Sangre Grande. Night courts were proposed for those areas because those districts have a large number of outstanding matters. The night court in Arima was introduced as a pilot project, as I said, and it was very successful. It was then thought that consideration be given to setting up similar night courts in the other three magisterial districts on a permanent basis.

The Magistrates' Courts in Port of Spain, San Fernando, Arima and Sangre Grande sat from 5.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. from Mondays to Fridays, thereby helping to reduce the backlog of cases in matters such as criminal offences, traffic offences, civil proceedings, maintenance and ejection proceedings. Although use has been made of the existing facilities for the purposes of the night court system, there is need for more magistrates to service the night courts and the appointment of part-time magistrates has therefore become a necessity. Consequently, the Summary Courts (Amdt.) Bill 1997, is being introduced to fulfill that requirement. The essential amendments are as follows:

In clause 3(2), the Act is amended to include within the definition of "Magistrates," appointed on contract. A magistrate who is appointed on contract would possess the exact powers under the Summary Courts Act as other magistrates. He would be performing the functions in the night court as a judicial officer.

Clause 4 inserts a new clause 3(B). It says clause 3(A) in the Bill but may I mention that this is regarded as a typographical error and it was so regarded and treated in the other place. It should really be, "to insert a new clause 3(B) to provide for the appointment by the Judicial and Legal Service Commission of magistrates on contract on the recommendation of the Chief Justice."

The rationale for the appointment of magistrates on contract is to facilitate more flexible terms and conditions of service such as the employment of magistrates on a part-time basis. Due to the judicial nature of their functions, it is

appropriate that magistrates on contract be appointed by the Judicial and Legal Service Commission. Although the recommendation has been made by the Chief Justice, the appointment of magistrates on contract is by the Judicial and Legal Service Commission.

Mr. Speaker, I think I should mention that if this Bill is passed, in order to implement these provisions, there would be the need to provide—and those orders have already been drafted—an order under section 16 of the Judicial and Legal Service Act. This would, in effect, add to Part I of the Second Schedule of the Judicial and Legal Service Act, “Magistrates appointed on contract”. Therefore, that would make the magistrate a judicial officer under the Act.

There would also be an Order under section 5(2) of the Constitution (Prescribed Matters) Act. This would amend the Second Schedule to the Constitution (Prescribed Matters) Act by adding, “Magistrates appointed on contract.” The effect of this would mean that these magistrates would be under the purview of the Salaries Review Commission. I am mentioning these matters to indicate to Members that these would be the processes which would have to be completed in order to have this done, but these two matters cannot be done until this Bill is passed. It is a Bill which I do not think I need to go into all the questions of delays in the courts. I think that it has gone somewhere and perhaps I can give hon. Members some indication as to the kind of statistics we had from the night courts system.

The first sitting of the night court in Arima was on July 10, 1995. In 1995, the number of cases listed in the night court was 1,290. The number determined was: police cases, 225; private cases 679; a total of 904. There were 24 inquests completed.

In 1996, there were 1,640 cases listed. The number determined was: police cases, 190; private cases, 776; a total of 966. There were 14 inquests listed and every one was completed. The private cases included ejectment matters, domestic violence, obscene language and malicious damage; the police cases included traffic cases, assault and battery matters.

I trust that the Members in this honourable House would agree that the enactment of this Bill would go somewhere in making a dent in the backlog of cases which exists and for speedier justice in Trinidad and Tobago.

I beg to move.

Question proposed.

6.55 p.m.

Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis (*Arouca South*): Mr. Speaker, this is just a brief intervention. I am learning from the Member for Oropouche. I did not intend to speak, but—

We on this side are pleased that the Attorney General has brought this Bill, because we recognize that the night court system would indeed have brought success, and he has said that it has been largely successful. Mr. Speaker, there are just a few questions we would like to ask in terms of this particular piece of legislation. One of the questions is whether the magistrates contracted to work in the night courts would also be working during the daytime, or would they only be working in the night? If that is in fact so, would they be permitted to practise privately when they are not sitting in the court? We would like some clarification on that.

We also need to find out what system of support staff there would be for the extension of the night court because, of course, there would be a need for additional staff if these night courts are to work. I doubt that the staff of the Magistrates' Courts who serve during the day would also be serving at night. We on this side are asking whether any thought has been put into getting support staff for the extended night court system. Additionally, we raise the issue relating to the transportation of prisoners during the operation of this system. Recently, there has been a spate of escapes of prisoners who either have been in the court, or have been in the lock-up. We would like to find out whether there would be any special security put in place for prisoners who are brought to the night court.

Mr. Speaker, as I talk about security, I would also like to find out whether there would be special security for the magistrates who would be contracted to work in the night court. We have seen the killing of state witnesses, and since the magistrates would be the ones dealing with criminal matters on preliminary inquiry, we must take their safety into consideration. The possibility exists, not only with magistrates who may be working in the night court system, but indeed, with all our judicial officers who are pursuing the course of justice. If someone is contracted to work in the Magistrate's Court in the night, they may be more prone to being attacked. We are asking, therefore, whether there would be any special security personnel put in place to ensure the protection of the magistrates who are operating this system.

Mr. Speaker, we have also seen that most of the magistrates who now sit on the bench are female, and that is one of the reasons why the protection of these

persons who will be travelling at late hours of the night is of particular concern to us. Those are the areas of concern we have, particularly where we are seeing the rise in crime. The statistics have shown that there has been an increase in crime for 1996 and for the past 7 months of 1997. It is important for this system to work well, and therefore, we are asking these questions and hoping that we can get an answer from the Member for Couva South.

I thank you.

Mr. Roger Boynes (*Toco/Manzanilla*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a brief intervention in this debate. I must commend the other side for bringing this piece of legislation to this Chamber, and not playing political football with same. I also want to commend them for understanding and appreciating the initiative taken by the previous administration, the PNM, in introducing the night court concept into Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to mention briefly, that when this system was introduced on a pilot project basis in the Arima Magistrates' Court, there were a few problems one observed. In this regard, I wish to highlight one or two of the many cracks in the system so we would not make the same mistakes, and the system would, in fact, be better. One thing that was realized at an early stage was the problem of maintaining the functioning of this particular system. A proper infrastructure of the court needed to be put in place, because one found that the staff of the Magistrate's Court, after a while, stopped attending. I know that at that time, it was merely on a voluntary basis, but one has to understand that in order for this to work properly, there is need for proper staff. If it means running the night court on a full time basis, workers should come to work at night as though they are coming from 8.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m..

Mr. Speaker, another important thing is that we need to ensure that the bailiff serves the documents, because we do not want any wasting of time when one comes to the court to find that there has been no service of the summons on the defendant or the witnesses, as the case may be. One finds that the matter, inevitably, would have to be adjourned.

7.05 p.m.

In order to make this a more productive sort of venture, we are asking that the necessary infrastructure in terms of bailiff and all of these things are there; the functioning, the serving of documents, so that the matters can continue. For some of the matters we hope that the police officers would be there on a regular basis as

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they were on the pilot basis. One has to be very mindful that with respect to some of these matters—I know some of the police officers are usually on extended vacation. When a police officer goes on vacation sometimes it is for nine months or so, and that is one of the things that keeps back matters from being heard very swiftly. The whole spirit behind the introduction of this night court system is that there would be a very fast turnover of these proceedings that are, at present, holding up our court system.

Mr. Speaker, we are asking that we look at the infrastructure in terms of staffing. We also need to have them motivated because this is something we are using to actually speed up the wheels of justice in this particular country, so we want them to be motivated. This is something new, this is something to deal with the burden on the judicial system and every single one of them—the bailiff, the police officer, the prosecutor, the Justice of the Peace, the assistant Justice of the Peace—has a part to play in order to make this a success. We also need to ensure that the members at the bar, the attorneys—because some may be doing duplicitous work, some may be practising during the day, as well as during the night. We ask them to make it their business to attend the court both day and night if need be, in order to have these matters expedited and completed.

One also has to look at the court structure, especially in the Sangre Grande jurisdiction. At present the court is in absolutely no condition to house this particular system. The security at that court is lacking, the door is almost hanging loose and there is no air conditioning, the place is like an oven. One has to be mindful that the infrastructure, the building itself, must be in a condition whereby this process can be carried out in the night, as it were. I know work is being done at the moment opposite the court at a particular place to have the court moved. I only hope that the introduction of this system would work in such a manner that it would commence at the time when this new accommodation is made available for the people of Sangre Grande. It is very important and one has to be mindful of that fact.

Mr. Speaker, one also has to be aware of the transportation problem. I could be mistaken, but for approximately six months or more we have had a problem in the Sangre Grande Magistrates' Court with the transportation of prisoners. I saw 54 prisoners for the first time today after probably about six to nine months. The court was a mess! There was no place to put the prisoners. Absolutely none, whatsoever. We are saying that the infrastructure must be in place, the transportation system needs to be on such a regular basis that the matters are dealt with very swiftly and expeditiously.

With this simple intervention, I want to indicate that our position on this side is simply that we agree with the introduction of the night court system on a full-time basis as one of the means to expedite justice and to ensure that the judicial wheel is not clogged up.

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

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I am indebted to the hon. Members on the other side for giving their support to this measure. I will try my best to see if I can answer some of the points raised.

May I say at the outset, that in respect of the point raised by the hon. Member for Arouca South as to whether an appointee under this Act would be able to engage in private practice, I do not envisage that. It would seem to me, from what I said, that in any event, having regard to the order being made on the Judicial and Legal Service Act, whereby a magistrate on contract would be added to Part 1 of the Second Schedule. It would mean that that person would be a judicial officer and, therefore, I cannot see a judicial officer, whilst on contract, being engaged in private practice at the same time. I am sure that the Judicial and Legal Service Commission will ensure that, as a condition, this is not done, because a judicial officer cannot, at the same time, practise law. It is a point which has been considered and it is in that context that we had to ensure that the person will be classified as a judicial officer, apart from other reasons.

In respect of the support system, I have been told that in some of the courts there can be systems put in place whereby the staff would be prepared to stagger their hours so that the system can work. If necessary, there can be appropriate consultation with the Public Services Association so that one can get employees in order to have the back-up system working. I have been told that the courts have been functioning in some of these areas and they have been functioning quite well. The staff has been co-operating and there has been the commitment of the staff as well. With the number of members of staff, the system could work with this additional co-operation.

With respect to the transportation of the prisoners, as Members on the other side would know, there has been a vast improvement from the time they were in Government, of the prison transport system to now. I am just speaking the facts, I am not criticizing, but there is an improved prison transport system. I have been assured by the Ministry of National Security that it can have the existing system implemented in such a way that there will be necessary back-up facilities to ensure that prisoners are transported.

Summary Courts (Amdt.) Bill
[HON. R. L. MAHARAJ]

Monday, August 4, 1997

I would also expect the Members to understand that the night court would not only have jurisdiction in respect of persons who are not on bail and who have to be brought. The night court would have jurisdiction in respect of other matters, private and criminal, and matters in which people would have to be transported. It is not going to be a set up whereby, if for some reason, a prison van does not come on a particular night the whole court closes down.

The court functions from 5.00—9.00 p.m. With respect to the security, as Members on the other side know, there has also been improvements in this area, although one does not rely on polls, but one sees the added confidence of the police. I wish to give the assurance to this honourable House that the Government has taken these matters into consideration and the security of the magistrates will be ensured. As a matter of fact, I could understand if we were at a different time, probably one would be very concerned about security of magistrates and the lawyers in the court.

What has happened is that the system has been working and I wish to assure Members that there would be no problems.

7.15 p.m.

The hon. Member for Toco/Manzanilla asked about staff and I have dealt with that. He also mentioned the point as to the co-operation of all concerned and I agree with him. In a system like this, one would expect the co-operation of the Bar, staff, the police and the prosecutors. I think that people are recognizing that we have to co-operate and unite in order to get things done. I am sure with that feeling and philosophy we would have the necessary co-operation.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member also raised an important point with respect to the condition of the Sangre Grande Magistrates' Court. It is not related to this court alone, but I am sure that the hon. Member would recognize that these problems did not come overnight. We inherited some of them. In Sangre Grande we have decided that we are going to construct a new court and that is in the process of being done. There is going to be temporary housing of the Magistrate's Court. The Ministry of the Attorney General got Cabinet approval to have a person oversee these projects which include the Magistrates' Courts. There is going to be a total overhauling to provide air-conditioning facilities and to repair and refurbish them, not only at Sangre Grande but almost all of the other magistrates' courts. We recognize that it is important to provide the right setting in order to administer justice.

I thank Hon. Members again for supporting—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I did not want the hon. Attorney General to forget the point about security, particularly for the women, because we have a larger number of female magistrates on the Bench.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: I wish to assure the hon. Member for Arouca South that I would never forget the women. When I said that there would be security for the magistrates and I mentioned that at the present time the night court has been operating in some of the areas, there have been magistrates which I am told includes female and male and there has been the security. However, I wish to assure her that I would personally take steps to ensure that the Minister of National Security have the necessary arrangements put in place. The magistrates, in consultation with the Chief Justice, would make sure that they are satisfied.

If the hon. Member wants me to personally take care of them I would even offer to do so with her assistance. Mr. Speaker, when she spoke about "taking care", I thought that she was going to become a magistrate, so I had no problem in offering my services.

Thank you. I beg to move.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I am already secured.

Mr. Speaker: I wonder whether the hon. Attorney General would like the last retort printed in *Hansard*?

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Whatever I said I have no objection—

Mr. Speaker: No, not what you said, but the response from the female Member of Parliament.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: I did not hear what she said.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, you would read it in *Hansard*. It was nothing that was uncomplimentary.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3.

Question proposed, That clause 3 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, wherever it is stated 3A in clause 3, it is really 3B. It is regarded as a typographical error.

Mr. Chairman: Does that extend to clauses 3 and 4?

Mr. Maharaj: Yes.

Question put and agreed to

Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be reported to the House.

House resumed.

Bill reported without amendment; read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Friday, August 8, 1997 at 1.30 p.m. The Government intends on that day to debate Bill No. 9 on the Order Paper a Bill entitled, "An Act to amend the Venture Capital Act, 1994"; No. 6, a Bill entitled, "An Act to provide for the registration of charges on Motor Vehicles and for the amendment to the Bills of Sale Act, Chap. 82:32"; and then Motion No. 2.

In respect of "Protection of New Plant Varieties Bill", there would be an application that we intend to debate on that day, a consequential amendment, a one clause amendment. I do not think there would be any problems from the other side, but we would let them have a copy of it in advance.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.25 p.m.