

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Thursday, December 18, 1997*

The House met at 2.03 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS**

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, may I advise this honourable House that it is the intention of the Government to deal with the Motion on the Order Paper at the next sitting of the House.

Agreed to.

**APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

[THIRD DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [December 12, 1997].

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Dr. The Hon. Vincent Lasse): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution in support of the Appropriation Bill 1998 which was so eloquently presented by the hon. Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism on Friday, December 12, 1997.

Hon. Member: Irresponsible. Shut up!

Mr. Speaker: May I advise the Member for La Brea that walking out is one thing, but I regard as highly improper, utterances of the type you are making while the Member is on his legs. There is a limit to these things, please do not continue it.

Mr. Bereaux: The Member interfered with me—**Mr. Speaker:** I have not given you permission to speak. Please continue.

Dr. The Hon. V. Lasse: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, I rise to make my contribution in support of the Appropriation Bill 1998 which was so eloquently presented by the hon. Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism on Friday, December 12, 1997.

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This budget statement departed from the traditional presentation. It was unique in that it was down-to-earth, a man-in-the-street and friendly budget. Because of this, many of the so-called intellectuals were stumped.

As the hon. Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism stated, this budget provided an opportunity for all. A blue print for human development, savings and asset building. The *Trinidad Guardian* dated December 16, 1997 states:

“University economist, Trevor Farrell said yesterday the 1998 Budget presentation by Finance Minister Brian Kuei Tung reminded him of Iwer George.”

“This budget is to budgets what Iwer George is to calypso.”

He went on to state:

“When you listen to Iwer George, what you get is a sense of total simplicity, no deep technical sophistication...”

Mr. Speaker, one may ask the question: what is wrong with simplicity? Iwer George, who is from my constituency, is giving the dancing population what they want, while satisfying himself financially. However, in contrast to what was said by Dr. Farrell, two outstanding political scientists Dr. John Le Guerre and Dr. Selwyn Ryan made favourable comments on the budget.

Mr. Speaker, Dr. Le Guerre described the removal of the URP from the Ministry of Works and Transport to the Ministry of Local Government as a master stroke, and said that it was one of the most creative solutions we have had to date, of the recurring nightmare of what is the URP today.

It further stated:

“He said generally, the budget seems to be a budget that is premised on a new approach towards ‘the role of the budget in economic activity’”

Dr. Ryan on the other hand stated:

“...that the provision to assign \$25 million to allow single mothers to cope with our new economic realities is innovative and interesting and one which requires analysis and discussion.”

However, the distinguished Leader of the Opposition seems to have been opposed to these distinguished intellectuals because today’s *Daily Express* on page 2 states:

“Manning: URP shift a slap for Jamaat

Describing the shift of the URP programme from Works Ministry to Local Government as a 'penalty' on the urban areas in Trinidad and Tobago, Opposition Leader Patrick Manning said yesterday it was also part of Government's effort 'to distance itself from its friends,' the Jamaat al Muslimeen.

Speaking during the Budget debate in the House of Representatives, Manning charged that Government had engaged the support of their 'political allies from Mucurapo' in the running of the programme and having climbed unto the tiger's back, found it had become 'an unruly beast'."

Mr. Speaker, I am of the firm conviction that the Leader of the Opposition is again playing with the minds of certain individuals in an effort to score cheap political points.

Mr. Hart: How long have you arrived at that?

Dr. The Hon. V. Lasse: With reference to the allocation of \$25 million to single mothers, the Opposition Leader was also quoted as being against this.

Mr. Speaker, it was interesting to note that the Member for Tobago East was justified when he said that the hon. Leader of the Opposition was creating mischief by saying that the removal of URP was a conspiracy by Government to punish the people of Laventille.

There was widespread support for the budget which came not only as I mentioned from the man-in-the-street, but also from the Unit Trust Corporation, the Bank and General Workers Union and the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Commerce. But, as predicted and it was mentioned in the budget statement by the hon. Minister of Finance and Tourism, the pious Leader of the Opposition came to this honourable House yesterday, and with an outburst of fire, sound and fury, with emphasis on hate, spite and vengeance and, playing on the emotions of certain individuals, as it was said, to incite them to violence, utilized one-third of his presentation hurling insults at Members of this honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, I want to refer to another quote on the question of the budget debate in today's *Newsday*, December 18, 1997 pertaining to what was said by the Leader of the Opposition which states:

"He said the Minister failed to outline any plans or programmes to combat social scourges and crime.

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He added: ‘But then again...we are assuming that this Panday coalition of rejects and pick ups has a plan...The only plan we are able to discern is the plan to hoodwink, deceive and seduce the innocent and unsuspecting people of this nation.’”

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I am not aware that the Leader of the Opposition is suffering from amnesia. Normally, I would have ignored the Leader of the Opposition’s attempts to make cheap political points by mud slinging at those he considered his political opponents. However, I have waited patiently for almost one year for the hon. Member to step out of line in this Parliament, thereby providing me with an opportunity to put an end to this matter [*Desk thumping*] and to reply, so that it would be recorded in *Hansard*. As I said, Mr. Speaker, I stayed quiet for almost one year.

In the first instance, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition was rejected by me. I rejected his style of leadership and I walked away. As in Shakespeare, I decided not to be as Brutus. The hon. Member would have to exist with Brutus around him and I have decided to take my leave. As I said, this would be the last time I would comment on this. However, I beg your indulgence for me to quote from Jeremiah, Chap. 17, which is very relevant. It states:

“You shall loosen your hand from your heritage which I gave you and I will make you serve your enemies in a land which you do not know. For in my anger a fire is kindled which shall burn forever.

Thus says the Lord: Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his arm, whose heart turns away from the Lord.

He is like a shrub in the desert and shall not see any good.”

Mr. Speaker, of the person who is full of hate, deceit, vengeance and lust for power, it is said:

“In the midst of his days they will leave him and at his end, he will be a fool.”

[*Desk thumping*]

I repeat, Mr. Speaker, this is the last time I would make this comment because I have waited almost one year, so to do.

I shall now deal with the question of crime and I want to establish the fact that, in my humble view, Government is continuous, and one administration normally

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inherits from another administration; sometimes good, sometimes not so good. Therefore, for anyone to state that crime started only two years ago, and that police stations and vehicles do not solve crime, is absurd and, of course, ridiculous.

I have recent statistics from the Point Fortin constituency on the question of crime. Incidentally, I received this information only half an hour ago. What I am trying to do, Mr. Speaker, is to establish that police stations and vehicles do help to keep crime down.

In the Point Fortin constituency there was an area known as Gun Hill, until that hill was cut; there is now, a police post which was opened on June 20, 1996. There is also a new police station in Erin which was opened on March 3, 1997.

I got the statistics on crime in the Point Fortin area for the years 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1997. The number of crimes committed in 1994 was 340; it was reduced to 294 in 1995; 254 in 1996, and 207 in 1997. *[Desk thumping]* Murders: in 1994, one committed, one detected; in 1995, one committed, one detected; in 1996, three committed, two detected; in 1997, one committed, one detected.

With respect to robberies: in 1994, 120; in 1995, 91; in 1996, 69 and in 1997, only 28 robberies. *[Desk thumping]*

2.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I used these statistics to establish the case that, as far as I am concerned, the provision of police posts and vehicles helps to keep crime down. I shall deal with certain developments in the Point Fortin constituency before I touch on the environment.

With respect to education, at this time new government schools are being constructed in Erin and in Cedros. *[Desk thumping]* Earlier this year, I visited Icacos with the Minister of Education and plans are afoot to address the question of a school in that area. Next year, renovations would be done to the Cap-de-Ville School. Also, on two occasions, the Minister of Education and myself visited the Point Fortin Anglican School and plans are afoot to deal with that school which is 80 years old.

Concerning roads and bridges, four bridges are now under construction in the Point Fortin constituency. These used to be wooden and they are now converted into concrete. With respect to the water project, only last week, the Minister of Public Utilities and myself went to Cemetery Block Road to commence a water-works project.

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Mr. Speaker, a new wing has been added to the Point Fortin Hospital which was joint with the Atlantic/LNG Plant. A new emergency room has been established at the cost of \$270,000.

Mr. Panday: Mr. Speaker, Point Fortin never had it so good.

Dr. The Hon. V. Lasse: As far as I am concerned, a further \$1.2 million has also been allocated to resurface a road known as Warden Road in Point Fortin.

The environmental challenge facing humanity at the global level is one of finding ways of making growth and development environmental-friendly, one of reconciling in an unending process of striving for human progress which necessarily involves negative environmental impacts with an environment that is finite. So that divesting strategies to minimize the negative impact of progress on the environment constitutes today, not only a regional challenge, but, also a global one.

The environment has been placed on the front burner of the international agenda. This began prior to the Rio Earth Summit which was convened in 1992. This brought the global environmental challenge centre-stage and succeeded in catalyzing worldwide awareness of the importance of the environment in human development and human conditions. The key message coming out of that Summit of 1992 was that unless countries of the world managed their environmental capital more efficiently than in the past, the very existence of mankind would be in jeopardy. We already have some frightening signals of what would be in store for us—the likes of global warming, ozone depletion, bio-diversity loss and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, environment has now become everybody's business because we have to link the question of the environment to the question of sustainable growth, which has been said to be the path which allows humanity to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. What we are doing at our level, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would now read from the *Medium Term Policy Framework, 1998—2000*, at page 28. And it says:

“The promotion of sound environmental management practices underpins the Government's strategy for achieving sustainable development. High priority will be accorded to ongoing initiatives and the enhancement of legislative, policy, regulatory and institutional frameworks, and fostering environmentally responsible behaviour among all segments of the population.

In the administration of the environmental management programme, emphasis will be placed on ensuring that the process is conducive to development.”

Mr. Speaker, to show that the Government had intended to put the concerns of the environment on the front burner, as early as April 03, Cabinet appointed a Committee to make recommendations on a policy and administrative framework for the prevention and control of environmental pollution due to motor vehicle emissions.

It is said that the greatest amount of pollution—not only in Trinidad and Tobago but all over the world—came as a result of motor vehicle emissions. This Cabinet-appointed Committee dealing with pollution resulting from motor vehicles—I had the honour to be the Chairman—had to gather information and make recommendations in the pursuit of an initiative, comprising the following elements: the establishment of a policy and administrative framework for the prevention and control of environmental pollution due to motor vehicle emissions.

2.35 p.m.

We had to deal with the harmonization and strengthening of legislation to be used as a regulatory tool, and the development of an enforcement programme. In order to establish the fact that the Government had decided to fast track the question of the environment, following on the recommendations coming out of this committee, on Tuesday we launched a motor vehicles emissions control, and this was done at the police Traffic Branch at the Beetham Highway.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, the Government continues to work feverishly on the question of the environment, bearing in mind the importance of the environment to sustainable development. As I began my contribution, I decided to deal with three major items which I have covered, and at this point in time, noting the type of budget that has been presented by the Minister of Finance, I can only request Members on the other side to reason and not allow their emotions to run away with them, and to support this budget.

I thank you.

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin East*): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to enter this debate at this time. It is not pleasurable because of the budget, but because of the fact that I had originally planned to speak yesterday as the second speaker, but when I realised that the Member for Tobago East was following the Leader of the Opposition, I could not go through another presentation after the typical rambling and brambling for which the Member the Tobago East is famous.

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I would just say in passing that we were treated to a tirade of the ideas of the Member for Tobago East which are contained in some publication which I understand was a financial failure in that it did not recover the cost of production. I am really hoping for the day when the Member for Tobago East would come to this Parliament and say something sensible to which we on this side can respond but I will not be distracted. We on this side are aware of the purpose of the Member for Tobago East who is mandated to get up in this Parliament and rant and rave about illiterate savages in Laventille, swine and “jagabats”, hogs and dogs, carry on about the PNM's legacy of dependency and make vague—and sometimes not so vague—innuendos about incitement. That is the sole purpose of the Member for Tobago East—to distract us on this side with irrelevant nonsense. That is all I have to say about the Member for Tobago East. Irrelevant nonsense! One wonders what he does in his ministry during the day.

Let us deal with the budget. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has indicated in this Parliament, over the last two years, that, in his opinion, a budget statement should not give the philosophical base. The policy of the Government should not set the context for economic and fiscal policy for Trinidad and Tobago. That is his opinion, and that is what he has indicated last year and this year. This is why the budget is so bereft of ideas, and bankrupt of vision. It contains nothing. This is why Mr. Farrell could refer to the budget in quite a dismissive manner as being comparable to Iwer George's calypso “Bottom In The Road”. There is nothing in the budget.

The reason is—which the Member for Couva North will find out to his regret—that the Minister of Finance is just basically lazy. You see, that particular individual has a track record for finishing nothing. He spends his time, when he should be looking at financial affairs of this country, feting and carrying on all over Trinidad and Tobago. As a matter of fact, over the last weekend I had the unfortunate pleasure of the gentleman following me around like a blue fly. I was in the St. James area of my constituency, he was on the pavement drinking. I went down to Petit Valley, he stormed a children's Christmas party put on by one of my village councils. I went to Paramin as a patron of the annual Paramin parang fiesta, I met the three bandits,—Ish, Brian and Steve—drinking in Paramin, following me around like a blue fly.

Mr. Speaker: I know that the hon. Member does have quite a command of the English language, and I know that when he uses a word like “bandit” he must do so advisedly. But he will know that it is in exceptional circumstances that such a word should be used in this Chamber. I ask that it be withdrawn.

Mr. C. Imbert: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw the statement. I shall not refer to those gentlemen again as bandits. It is because of the penchant of the Minister of Finance for carrying on and drinking and feting when he should be dealing with the country's business why the budget is so bereft of ideas.

What are the budget measures? When one looks at the budget statement of 1997, what are we really saying? The only measure that has been announced in this budget to deal with the problem of undercollection of taxation, the growing problem of non-performance of the taxation system, is the reversion to the incentive regime put in by the People's National Movement administration in the 1991—1995 period. That is the only bright idea the Minister of Finance could come up with.

When one looks at the sycophantic outpourings of the columnists in the press who are biased towards the UNC, with regard to the measures that have been taken with regard to mortgage interest and pensions, I am ashamed. Let us look at the 1996 budget statement and you will see what sycophancy I am talking about. Let us go back in time. Let us see the measures announced in that budget. Let us go straight to the question of taxation. What did the Minister have to say? In addition to the basic deductible allowance, the taxpayer would be entitled to claim annually a further deduction of up to \$18,000 consisting of mortgage interest payments, interest on a loan for the purposes of financing construction of a house, contributions to an approved pension plan or annuity approved by the Board of Inland Revenue. What was the effect of this measure in 1996? It damaged the entire mortgage portfolio in Trinidad and Tobago. It destroyed the entire pension and annuity portfolio in Trinidad and Tobago.

We told the Minister at the time that mortgage loans are a long-term investment and people need to plan. When someone takes out a mortgage loan, it is for over a period of 20 to 25 years. When someone invests in a pension for their retirement, it is for age 55, or even 65. Therefore, when the Minister of Finance takes time off from his extra-curricular activities and spends five minutes on the country's affairs, and amalgamates mortgage interest and pension, he destroys the mortgage interest and pension portfolios in this country and makes a mockery of the savings and investment system in this country. We told him so. He carried on and beat his chest. He said that a geologist could not talk to a chartered accountant.

What did he do in 1997? He comes back into this House with his tail between his legs like a meek little child and separates mortgage interest and pensions and annuities and takes it right back to where it was in the PNM administration of 1995,

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demonstrating without a shadow of a doubt that he has no concept of monetary policy. Not a concept! The sycophantic UNC columnists praised the Minister for his vision in creating this incentive for savings in this country. The Minister takes it right back to where it was in 1995. He does not change one thing. He destroyed mortgage and annuity for one year, carried it back to where the PNM had it, and was praised for his vision. What nonsense!

This is why next year we do not know what to expect. Next year he may amalgamate it again. He may abolish the entire deduction for mortgage interest. He may throw pensions out the window. We do not know what to expect from this Minister. I have gone through his 1996 address and it is the most amazing hodgepodge of grandiose.

2.50 p.m.

Let me deal with his 1996 statement. What did the Minister have to say? I am not talking about the 1998 Budget Speech, there is nothing in it. Let me go to the 1997 Budget Speech and see what the Minister said he was going to do. You see, the Minister of Finance likes to boast about his brilliance in finance and management, but he is an incompetent failure in my book. What did he say he was going to do? Let us go to page 2 which says:

“We have been progressively creating an environment that would facilitate accelerated growth in investment...we have launched the Venture Capital Incentive Programme; and will soon do the same for the Securities and Exchange Commission. Regulations under the new Companies Act have been drafted and work on the proposed Mutual Fund Legislation has commenced.”

Did any of this come to pass in 1997? It is all fiction. Let us go down to the bottom of the page:

“As evidenced by recent arrests and convictions of drug traffickers and the crackdown on criminal activity, we are delivering on our promise to get tough on crime. The resulting high morale of the service justifies this strategy...We are also at an advanced stage in the establishment of a formalized Witness Protection Programme.”

The witnesses get killed, Mr. Speaker! That is the Witness Protection Programme they are talking about.

We had a witness for a convicted drug dealer, we had him in protective custody, he survived for two years. As soon as UNC came into power, what

happened? They killed him! Dead! But this Minister of Finance is developing a formalized Witness Protection Programme. It must be a programme to kill witness!

Let us go on. Page 4 states:

“The vision is for a balanced and equitable society where poverty and homelessness no longer exist, and where law and order is once more restored. We intend to bring back the old time days, when people enjoyed the comfort of their homes and were able to walk the streets without fear or anxiety.”

What utter rubbish! They are killing people black is white in Trinidad and Tobago. You cannot go outside your house, before a man cuts your neck. Listen to this, the classic irony. It goes on:

“We have to once more engage a sense of community and re-establish family values.”

What hypocrisy coming from a minister in the UNC administration. Family values! They just brought a Bill to establish relationships outside of marriage. You see, they have cocoa in the sun, that is why they brought that Bill. They do not believe in marriage.

Listen to the pompous Minister of Finance. Let us go to page 5:

“We will restructure Government’s expenditure to direct a larger share of resources to more urgent priority areas. This will entail a concerted effort to reduce the share in expenditure of wages and salaries and debt service payments.”

What is going on in these documents? The proportion of wages to goods and services has not gone down, it has gone up to unimaginable levels. Inefficiency of the highest order and I will deal with that specifically with the Ministry of Works and Transport. I have never seen such ignorance of the factors that are supposed to be taken into account to produce efficiency and productivity in the public service. Let us go on.

What does he have to say on page 6? He speaks of stability in the exchange rate. It states:

“Given the underlying strength of the economy, there is no reason why the rate should not stabilise at around current levels or appreciate with some fluctuation from time to time.” *[Laughter]*

Mr. Speaker, the exchange rate has dropped almost 20 cents since he made that statement and it keeps going. Lines at the bank!

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Listen to this, the pompousness, Mr. Speaker. Page 7:

“We are developing a Competition Policy for Trinidad and Tobago...”

That Government? Competition? The only thing they know about is to award tenders, sole, selectively, they do not know anything about competition.

“We are developing a Competition Policy for Trinidad and Tobago, and accordingly appropriate legislation will be ready for consideration by this Parliament by the third quarter of next year.”

But the third quarter is gone, we are in the fourth quarter. Where is the Competition Policy? The only competition is among the UNC activists for piece of the pie. Amongst themselves, Mr. Speaker.

Continuing on page 7 with regard to the PSIP, it states:

“The resources which Government will spend under the PSIP...will more than double to some \$1.7 billion.”

And he beat his chest again. He said previous administrations could not implement. We, the fantastic UNC will spend \$1.7 billion in 1997. We told them they could not achieve it, we told them so. Pie in the sky, fiction from the mouth of the Minister of Finance. So said, so done.

Listen to this. Page 8 states:

“In the area of transportation, priority will be given to rehabilitating significant sections of the country's main and secondary roads, and highways. In early 1997...”

Mr. Speaker, when I went to school that meant in the first half or the first quarter. It goes on:

“In early 1997, construction will begin on the long awaited overpass at the intersection of the Churchill Roosevelt and Uriah Butler Highways.”

The only overpass is those vendors trying to get out of the way before a car passes over them. That is all that is going on at that intersection.

“Those long frustrating hours spent in crawling traffic...will soon be a thing of the past. Similarly to relieve passenger congestion and to improve one of our gateways to international trade we will commence construction on the National Airport Complex.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to drainage, Government will undertake a Comprehensive Drainage Programme beginning with five projects aimed at easing the flooding problem in the country. These projects will address the flooding of the Golden Grove Road to the Piarco Airport area, and downtown Port of Spain and improve the sanitation of the St. Ann's river...The sluice gates in the Caroni Irrigation Area will also be rehabilitated and new tidal exclusion gates will be constructed...in the Oropouche Lagoon..."

I am not hearing from the Member for Oropouche; nothing has been done.

He went on to speak of the health sector and how some \$73 million will be spent in 1997. He spent \$13 million.

He carried on for about 10 minutes on this one, the National Library Project. He beat his chest about how the budget was out of the sync, funding was only in place for \$99 million, no estimate was made of running the Library, all kinds of things. On page 9:

"Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to advise this honourable House that a Redirected National Library Building will commence in 1997."

Maybe they intend to turn the sod on Christmas Day. I do not know, because all I am seeing outside there is pumpkin. That is all I am seeing, agriculture in the National Library Building. Let us move on.

"Mr. Speaker, Government will provide the appropriate facilities and mechanisms to ensure crime reduction and the efficient administration of justice. In 1997, we will spend \$64 million on improving facilities. The refurbishment of nine (9) existing Magistrates' Courts and the construction of two (2) new Magistrates' Courts in Sangre Grande and Port of Spain, as well as the Judicial Complex in Arima will commence in 1997."

The only expenditure in that Ministry is the construction of a new building for the Attorney General. I was most surprised. I did not see any Magistrate's Court in Port of Spain. Maybe they have one in Sangre Grande and I do not know, but what I saw in the papers this week, was the Attorney—

Mr. Speaker: I once more appeal to you hon. Members that it is extremely difficult for the Hansard reporters, to faithfully record things while that conversation continues at tones which are not soft, for many of us to hear. Believe you me, the people who have come here have come to hear the debate, not to hear the crosstalk, which is, in fact, disturbing the speaker and others. I ask you please, to refrain. If you must speak, please speak in softer tones.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your intervention.

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Mr. Speaker, the only action I saw in the Attorney General's department in 1997 was the turning of the sod for a new building. You know why that came to pass? You see, the Attorney General tried to snatch the Ministry of Works and Transport headquarters building. Fighting with the Minister of Works and Transport! One can understand why the Minister of Works and Transport has been emasculated in this 1998 budget, and I will come to that.

You see, it was an intense programme of attack in 1998. The Attorney General toured the building. He said, "Yes, there is where my staff would have lunch. This is where my office will be and on these three floors we shall put the Registry". This is what the Attorney General said. You know what happened, Mr. Speaker? The people in the ministry downed tools, the officers of the Minister of Works and Transport said, no way, for 20 years we have been working on this building, no Attorney General could come here and take this building, they shut down one time. Of course, the Prime Minister had to tell his Attorney General, "Cool it, stop trying to squat in a structure assigned for another ministry". Mr. Speaker, what was the result? Instead of dealing with the Magistrates' Court in Sangre Grande, we now have an open sewer leak in the court yard. Instead of dealing with that, to massage his ego the Attorney General redirects expenditure to a brand new building for himself, a monument to himself on St. Vincent Street. You think it easy? Then he said, "I will deal with that Minister of Works and Transport." The URP gone "waash" and the road fund gone "whoosh", and that is it. Leave the minister with nothing.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, let us move on to the construction of schools.

"Infrastructure upgrade in the education sector will continue with the construction and renovation of 35 schools;"

Thirty-five schools! Maybe he meant three! What was really done in 1997, Mr. Speaker?

We go on to page 9 where the unfortunate Minister of Public Utilities demonstrated, for yet another year, his ability to get his programmes off the ground while people suffered for lack of water throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Yet another year of non-performance from the Minister of Public Utilities.

You see, this Minister of Finance likes to make all kinds of wild and erratic statements. With regard to telecommunications, on page 10 it says:

"A competitive and effective telecommunications sector is critical to the growth of a vibrant economy. We therefore must take a serious look at the telecommunications sector to determine what role TSTT will continue to play..."

Consequently, there is need to re-examine the role of the telecommunications sector and therefore during 1997, the sector as a whole, including the role of TSTT, will be reviewed and rationalised.”

What was done in the telecommunications sector in 1997? All they rationalized were three cable television companies. That is all. Rainbow and the others came together. Empty outpourings, and they bought AVM to create their national propaganda station. That is all they did. Maybe that is what they meant.

3.05 p.m.

On page 10 of the 1997 budget it states:

"Our energy policy will take into account the declining level of domestic crude production..."

I will speak about energy later, a colossal failure in that Ministry.

"In 1997, emphasis would be placed on finalising a National Energy Policy..."

Where is it, Mr. Speaker, are they hiding it?

On page 11 it speaks about the retail petroleum sector:

"...we have developed a vision of the sector into the year 2002..."

This will be achieved within the framework of a liberalized and deregulated market."

It went on to state that this will be managed over a five-year period.

"In Phase 1, the market will be opened to local entrepreneurs only." They were speaking about selling gas stations to their friends, that is what they were talking about. But it did not come to pass because there are too many of them fighting for the pie in there. Therefore, whenever they come up with something, it is 1,001 UNC activists saying, "Give me piece". That is why they cannot get anything done.

Dr. Rowley: They created a shoulder for Dhanraj to drive on.

Mr. C. Imbert: Page 12—and the Minister's fetish with casinos:

"Mr. Speaker, we are targeting the higher end markets of Europe and North America in order to attract tourists who no longer regard casinos as an exotic facility of the past, but as an amenity."

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He carried on about his casinos. I think the "we" there refers to him and his friends because, where is the casino legislation? Is it that the Prime Minister reined in his errant Minister of Finance and said, "Look, watch yourself! Is it that they are now working out who would and would not be allowed to run a casino? Is that the reason for the delay? So no casinos in 1997.

I now turn to "culture". We heard a set of carrying on yesterday that the construction of facilities for artists has nothing to do with culture in some pieces coming from the Member for Tobago East. In the 1997 budget statement, listen to this:

"To facilitate the professional development of our artistes, Government has earmarked the Old Fire Station Headquarters for the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, and preliminary work on the construction of a centre for the Creative and Performing Arts on the Princes Building grounds will begin in 1997."

Not one piece of dirt moved on the Princes Building grounds!

Mr. Narine: Lies, lies, lies.

Mr. C. Imbert: It goes on to say:

"We shall also construct a national pan college or theatre for the development of the steelpan."

Member for Tunapuna, have you seen the national pan college? I cannot find it.

Mr. Hart: Not one thing!

Mr. C. Imbert: Page 16 of the 1997 budget speaks about law and order.

"Over the medium term, Government will provide the Protective Services with the necessary manpower, equipment, and vehicles to protect lives and property."

The only thing they did in 1997 was to give Cherokee jeeps from one of their friends to the Police. It goes on to say:

"...we will introduce a Traffic Warden System, commencing next year with pilot projects in the cities of Port of Spain and San Fernando. Traffic Wardens will also be required to enforce the provisions of the Maxi-Taxi Act No 6 of 1994, and legislation regarding..."

Nothing! One is trimming his beard in Laventille and the next one on the pavement in St. James [*Laughter*] and another one on the shoulder of the road.

Let us pick apart the figures of the budget and demonstrate the monumental incompetence of this Minister of Finance. Go to the *Draft Estimates of Revenue* for 1998. On page 6—and this is why the Public Relations-crazy Minister of Energy has suddenly gone silent. I have not heard from him for about six months. Do you know why? The figures tell a sorry tale of abysmal failure. The collection of taxes from oil companies in 1996 was \$1.9 billion. Do you know what the collection was in 1997? \$980 million, almost \$1 billion reduction in the collection of taxes from the oil sector in one year. They have thrown away \$1 billion in one year and the projection for 1998 is only \$955 million. From almost \$2 billion under the PNM, it has gone to less than \$1 billion under the UNC. They lost \$1 billion in the oil sector but they like to talk about performance, the Minister is meeting his budget targets.

What was his 1997 estimate? It was \$1.26 billion. What was the reality? The sum of \$980 million; a shortfall of \$300 million in income from oil companies. But you see that is good budgeting, good management, that is business acumen. You say that you are going to collect \$1.3 billion and collect \$900 million and that is good business; throw away \$400 million. Good business.

Mr. Valley: "Chinee" shop business.

Mr. C. Imbert: "Chinee" shop you say. What are they using an abacus?

Let us go to page 6, Value Added Tax. I remember for two years the Minister carried on about VAT. "It would strengthen the collection system; his figures are not wrong; he is the most competent Minister of Finance; he can collect more tax than anybody else; leave success alone." [Laughter] "If it is not broken do not fix it."

What was the estimate for 1997? It was \$1.65 billion. What did they collect? They collected \$1.55 billion. There was \$100 million shortfall in VAT collections. I saw some feeble excuse coming from the Minister in the newspaper about two or three weeks ago saying that he could understand why they are not collecting VAT. How come VAT collections are not meeting targets? If he would spend more time in the Ministry then he would be able to. Instead of going all over Trinidad and Tobago carrying on. Well, let us not talk about his globe-trotting.

Mr. Speaker, the only reason we have a surplus in 1997 is because "the Minister run and sell the Methanol Plant" and the IMF had said so.

Dr. Rowley: How much money was it sold for?

Mr. C. Imbert: US \$150 million, \$600 or \$700 million somewhere around there, because you never know with these fellows if these figures are correct. But I

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know that it is about \$700 million or so. The IMF indicated that that was the reason for the surplus. Around the middle of the year, the Minister realized that the taxes from petroleum were not coming in, he was missing a couple hundred million dollars and \$100 million from VAT, and he was not collecting from individuals or National Lotteries and so forth. All the revenues were down.

What did he do? He did not deal with the collections systems, or go in the Ministry and spend time. He did not do his job. He sold the methanol plant. What are they going to do next year? Sell the urea plant?

Hon. Member: "That sell already."

Mr. C. Imbert: And the year after that? They will sell everything in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Hart: They will sell the Red House.

Mr. C. Imbert: Next three or four years they will sell everything in Trinidad and Tobago to balance the budget, to excuse and disguise the incompetence of the Minister of Finance. That is the only reason we had a surplus in 1997. There is no other reason.

What annoys me is that there are allegedly educated people in the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago who could read figures just like me, who know that \$2 billion is more than \$1 billion [*Laughter*] who know that 1.6 is more than 1.5 and that the drop in revenue this year is hundreds of millions of dollars. They could see it. But they would not tell him anything or they cannot tell him anything. What hold does he have on these Ministers? What is going on? What sort of grip does this Minister of Finance have on his Cabinet colleagues that they cannot put him in line?

Mr. Hart: They cannot touch him.

Mr. C. Imbert: I would not speak about political investors and campaign funds.

3.15 p.m.

This document, *Draft Estimates of Revenue* is a testimony to failure, Mr. Speaker. What is going on in 1998 in terms of borrowing? What do we see? This brilliant Minister of Finance, is increasing borrowing in 1998 to \$3 billion. In 1996 we borrowed \$2 billion, in 1997 we borrowed \$2.35 billion. In 1998 he wants to increase borrowing by \$700 million. Therefore, the Minister of Finance is not just selling off all family jewels and selling all the areas in the economy that can provide an income stream for the next 20 years, but he is also mortgaging the future of the

children and people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I want to know why he is increasing borrowing in 1998 by \$700 million. Is that to balance the budget? What is it all about, Mr. Speaker? This Minister of Finance is a fraud. The Prime Minister will soon understand—

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36: One cannot impute dishonesty against a Minister.

Mr. C. Imbert: Dishonesty?

Mr. Maharaj: You said he is a fraud.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Attorney General has risen on a point of order as a result of the use of the word “fraud”. The word “fraud” can be used in all different circumstances and connotations. What I gathered he was saying was that he was not fraudulent in the sense that he has embezzled anything, but it was used in a context that suggested that the Minister of Finance is handling the finances of the country and as far as he was concerned he was not a good Minister of Finance. In this sense I certainly took it as his meaning, for whatever it is worth, he does not consider him a good or a proper Minister of Finance. I feel that, in the circumstances, that could pass. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I could not have put it better myself. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] Let me expand a bit. I consider the Minister to be a fiscal, monetary and economic fraud. Let me come off the Minister of Finance for now. I will return. He should not have followed me around last weekend. He should have stayed out of my constituency.

Let us go on and deal with the other fiscal, monetary and economic fraud in the UNC Administration, the Minister of Planning. Let us look at the Public Sector Investment Programme. Mr. Speaker, as the Leader of the Opposition has pointed out, the Public Sector Investment Programme for 1997 was a colossal failure. A testimony to the impotence of the Minister of Planning who has been surprisingly quiet over the last year or so. I do not know what the problem is. But let us go through this document, the Public Sector Investment Programme. I have never seen such weak and lame excuses in my life, Mr. Speaker. Listen to this, let me start with roads and bridges—you can hear the Minister pouring out his heart:

“A large allocation, \$308 million was made in 1997 for investment in upgrading of roads and bridges. However,

Mr. Speaker: The speaking time of the Member for Diego Martin East has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank those Members on the other side who were not so discourteous. Roads and bridges, page 6 chapter 20, PSIP:

“20. A large allocation, \$308 million was made in 1997 for investment in the upgrading of roads and bridges. However, only moderate progress was made in the implementation of these works and it is estimated that only \$1880 million or 60% of these resources will actually be utilized during the year.

21. The road improvement programme financed from the Road Fund facilitated further rehabilitation work throughout the country.”

I would love to know where.

“In contrast, implementation of the IDB funded National Highway Programme was considerably delayed as a result of the unanticipated mobilisation problems by contractors. Late in the year work commenced on the rehabilitation of 8 bridges and 7 main roads.....

22. Owing initially to difficulties experienced in managing the relocation of squatters within the right-of-way, the Southern Roads Development Project was also seriously delayed. Further delays arose because the bid prices received were substantially higher than budgeted. A sequencing of the implementation of the project is now being reviewed.

23. A decision was taken to defer preparation of preliminary designs of the proposed San Fernando/Princes Town Highway Project to 1998.

24. Preliminary designs were completed for the...interchange at the intersection of the Churchill Roosevelt...and works were commenced on both the east-and west-bound carriageways of the Churchill Roosevelt highway....”

What a joke, Mr. Speaker.

The extension of the Solomon Hochoy highway did not come to pass; the dualling of the San Fernando bypass did not come to pass; the overpass at the Churchill Roosevelt Highway never happened. The National Highways Programme barely got going. What we saw, was a public relations crazy Minister of Works, as indicated by the Leader of the Opposition, looking for some diversion after the Piarco Airport scandal. He called all his divisional leaders in the Ministry and said,

“Boys, I have to do something. I am under pressure so let us do something to get me some mileage in the papers, to get them away from that airport scandal. What does he do? He puts three lanes on a two-lane bridge on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway. Mr. Speaker, we now have, for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago, a Minister of Works in violation of the highways code. You see, there is a minimum lane width existing since the 1970s for lanes on highways in Trinidad and Tobago to facilitate heavy containerized vehicles and other heavy vehicles used for industry and construction. There is a minimum lane width and the Churchill Roosevelt Highway was designed for two lanes. All the bridges were designed for two lanes and a shoulder was added for emergency. This PR mad Minister of Works built three lanes until he hit the bridge, “bradap”! He said, “Oh shocks, I cannot pass here.” He painted three lines where there were supposed to be two.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

We have a Government which has wilfully created a traffic hazard on one of the nation’s busiest highways. Absolute madness! Somebody is going to run into that bridge, sue the Government and the Attorney General will have no choice but to award punitive damages in favour of the complainant. Taxpayers money, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Three lanes on a two-lane bridge. Gross negligence. That Minister should resign.

There is a bridge in Valencia I would like to talk about. We had earmarked the dualling of the Valencia bridge for 1996. One of the first bridges to be dualled under the national highways and rural access roads programme was the Valencia bridge. It was supposed to be done in March, 1996. Two years have elapsed. I read in the newspapers that, finally, after 24 months of incompetence and failure, they are finally going to build the bridge in Valencia. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the point I am making is that that bridge is a famous landmark because a number of persons have crashed into that bridge and lost their lives. That is why the PNM had made arrangements to construct that bridge in 1996. I am putting the Government on notice, they have created an identical situation on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway over the Aranguez River, and persons who die as a result of crashing into that bridge, their blood will be on the hands of the Minister of Works and the UNC “vaps” coalition Government. I am putting the Government on notice. Just because a minister has problems with his public image, is no reason for him to kill people in Trinidad and Tobago.

Let us move on to Social Infrastructure, page 9:

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“An allocation of \$171.0 million was made in 1997 to finance projects and programmes related to education and training.”

Listen to this. This is the moribund ‘para-dig-im’ Minister of Education:

“Despite the high priority assigned to the programme, implementation progress lagged substantially, largely owing to difficulties encountered in the preparation of architectural and engineering designs.”

What a feeble excuse. This document is replete with weak and lame excuses from the impotent Minister of Planning. “It is not his fault; it is the consultants’ fault; it is the public servants’ fault; it is the Ministry of Finance’s fault; it is everybody’s fault, but it has nothing to do with the Government.

Page 11, PSIP:

“An allocation of \$75.6 million was initially made to the Ministry of Health in 1997 to allow for the commencement of implementation of the Health Sector Reform Programme. Most of these resources were not utilized...”

I want to repeat that:

“Most of these resources were not utilized as delays occurred in the establishment of the Project Administration Unit—a key resource—”

We have the Minister of Public Administration brambling us all over the television carrying on about housing allowance and how the press was wicked and evil because the Government told them they were raising Ministers’ housing allowance by \$5,000. He carried on, on the television, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Why did the Minister of Public Administration not ensure there was a public administration unit in the Ministry of Health? People are dying at the hospitals, Mr. Deputy Speaker; doctors are on strike; they are wrapping people in brown paper; but we have to hear foolishness coming from the Ministers of Government as to why they are not dealing with the crisis in the health sector.

3.30 p.m.

Overall expenditure, \$22 million. Twenty-two million dollars in this document; thirteen in another document. Which one is correct? The fact of the matter is, the implementation was less than 20 per cent of what was budgeted. All of this from a silent Minister of Health, while people are dying of dengue all over Trinidad and Tobago and he says there is no dengue epidemic in Trinidad and Tobago. I opened the papers today and I saw somebody else dying of dengue. But it is only one person who died from dengue according to the Minister of Health. Or is it two? But every day for the last ten days, I have read about somebody dying of dengue.

So what is going on? Is he counting one at a time: one, one, one, one, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Only one death; two; one; two. That is all we are hearing—one death, two deaths. I have probably counted 10 people dying already from reports in the newspapers alone. I guess the press is just being evil and wicked and misreporting the dengue situation in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what have we seen in the Public Sector Investment Programme? Impotence, incompetence and failure. The Minister of Finance came here and boasted about his Government's implementation ability and one of the biggest excuses used in this, the most feeble of all, is that the airport project could not get off the ground, so if that is taken out, the implementation rate would be much better. Rubbish! You do not take projects out when checking the implementation rate. It is either you did it or you did not do it. That is how you check the performance of a government.

You cannot come five years from now and say you could not build the airport because of contracts, lawyers, court and all kinds of things. Nobody is going to listen. A government is measured on its actual performance. This is sleight of hand. This has no place in the Public Sector Investment Programme. They just did not perform. The reason why the airport was a failure is because there was corruption in the airport contract. They hustled the airport contract; Justice Deyalsingh reported that there was corruption and because of the public outcry, they had to stop the project.

But I would like the Minister of Finance to explain something to me because when one goes into the Development Programme, estimates for 1998, and one looks at the expenditure for 1997—I believe it is page 95, Head 43, if I am not wrong—one sees that \$100 million was spent on the airport in 1997. Every time I go to the airport, all I see are trucks hauling dirt. Have we bought \$100 million of dirt at the airport, Mr. Deputy Speaker? What was this \$100 million spent on? Did they give an advance payment to Galbaransingh's company? We need to know. Did they give Galbaransingh's company an advance payment of \$45 million? Or any amount for that matter? Did they give Birk Hillman fifty, or sixty, or seventy million dollars? The same Birk Hillman who was found guilty of collusion with Galbaransingh. We need to know. Is this a slush fund? I have to repeat what the Leader of the Opposition asked: Is this \$100 million in imaginary expenditure at the airport a slush fund for the UNC? We want to know.

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we see an allocation of only \$50 million—this is on an \$800 million project. In 1998, an allocation of only \$50 million. This is

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amazing. I saw that NIPDEC has been given the contract to administer the airport development, so that they spent \$100 million on nothing in 1997 and they are going to start building in 1998, but they will only be spending \$50 million. So that air and empty space cost \$100 million, but concrete and steel are going to cost \$50 million.

That is the creative accounting of the Minister of Finance and that is the business acumen of the Minister of Finance. He disburses \$100 million on air and empty space at Piarco in 1997 but construction to start in full swing in 1998, only \$50 million. Is that a typographical error? I think not, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let us go back to the Ministry of Education. I see the somnambulant Minister of Education taking notes—and that means he is a sleepwalker, by the way. Mr. Deputy Speaker, page 60, listen to this. In 1997 under primary schools—construction of Fifth Company Baptist; construction of Buccoo Government; construction of Castara Government; construction of Delaford R.C.; construction of Scarborough Methodist; Ebenezer Methodist; Farah Street Government; Bamboo Settlement Government; Malabar South Government; Beetham Estate Government; Maloney East Government; Chaguanas North Government.

What is the actual expenditure for 1997? Fifth Company Baptist—zero; Buccoo Government—zero; Castara Government—zero; Delaford R.C.—zero; Scarborough Methodist—zero; Ebenezer Methodist—zero; Farah Street Government—zero; Bamboo Settlement Government—zero; Malabar South Government—zero; Beetham Estate Government—zero; Maloney East Government—zero; Chaguanas North Government—zero.

Dr. Rowley: This is a zero Government.

Mr. C. Imbert: It is a zero Minister and a zero Government. *[Laughter]*

Page 61—construction of Gran Couva R.C.; construction of Indian Walk Government; construction of San Juan Girls' R.C.; construction of Edinburgh Government Primary; Valencia South Government School; Carapichaima R.C.; Longdenville Government; Cascadoux Government; Aripo R.C. Primary School.

The 1997 Revised Estimates: Gran Couva R.C.—zero; Indian Walk Government—zero; San Juan Girls' R.C.—zero; Edinburgh Government Primary—zero; Valencia South Government School—zero; Carapichaima R.C.—zero; Longdenville Government—zero; Cascadoux Government—zero; Aripo R.C. Primary School—zero. That is your performing Minister of Education.

Mr. Manning: And the performing Public Sector Investment Programme.

Mr. C. Imbert: Interfering with school textbooks and all kinds of things in the school system, creating chaos, but cannot build one school. I mean, it is replete.

Let me deal now with the Minister of Works and Transport whom they have emasculated. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the Minister of Works and Transport cut 100 ribbons in 1997 and turned sod 200 times in 1997, 99 of those ribbons were in the Unemployment Relief Programme and 199 of the sod turnings were in the Unemployment Relief Programme. What are you doing to the poor Minister of Works and Transport? He will have no ribbons to cut and no sod to turn in 1998. The man will withdraw; he will atrophy; his beard will grow longer; he will not be able to go to Laventille anymore; he cannot get a haircut anymore.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister does not understand what he has done to that public relations crazy Minister. Who is going to paint the tanks in Laventille now? But I understand and I can see the Attorney General cannot control his glee. *[Laughter]*

Hon. Member: He got rid of his enemy within the party. Is that a new hair style?

Mr. C. Imbert: You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they say they have two prime contenders for the leadership of the UNC when the Member for Couva North leaves the scene, whether by natural causes or otherwise. *[Laughter]* Two prime contenders for the leadership of the UNC: one is the Member for Couva South—

Hon. Member: With a new hair style.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, with a new perm. The other one is the Minister of Works and Transport, followed closely by the Minister of Finance and the Member for St. Joseph. This is my understanding. Those are the contenders, one, two, three and four. Two have no chance; the last two have no chance.

But you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Attorney General—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Diego Martin East, are you imputing improper motives to the Members of this honourable House?

Mr. C. Imbert: Certainly not, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What I am saying is that the Attorney General had to find a way to deal with the Minister of Works and Transport. You see, the Minister of Works and Transport had a plan. Through the Unemployment Relief Programme, he would employ all his supporters and activists

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within the party and take over the party at the national convention. But you see, the Prime Minister is smarter than that. When he learnt of the plot, he said Ministers cannot hold office in the party, so the poor Minister of Works and Transport took “basket”. He said, “Well, boy, I like cutting ribbons more than that, yes. Let me stay and cut my ribbons”. So he declined. He said he was not running for field officer or operations officer or whatever it was. The next thing you know is that the Minister of Works and Transport is no longer a member of the UNC party, and after that is done, *piece de resistance*, they take away the Unemployment Relief Programme, so he is gone. Then if that is not all, they take 50 per cent of the road fund away from him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is not a simple matter, because under the terms of the loan negotiated with the Inter-American Development Bank, and the impotent Minister of Planning and Development knows this, \$25 million or 50 per cent of the road fund must be sterilized as contributory funds from the Government to that road programme. So 50 per cent of the road improvement tax fund is sterilized for counterpart funds for the national highways programme and 50 per cent gone to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. What does that leave the Minister of Works and Transport with? Nothing! Stroke! Oh, stroke, Member for Couva North!

So that the Minister of Finance pulled the trigger and the Minister of Works and Transport no longer has access to funding in the Unemployment Relief Programme and no longer has access to funding from the road improvement tax. So what does he have? And this is why I talk of the monumental inefficiency displayed by the Minister of Finance. We have now to look at the Recurrent Expenditure to see what is going on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we created the road improvement fund in recognition of the fact that the allocation for road building materials and supplies in the Ministry of Works and Transport was far too small to achieve any level of productivity and efficiency. We enacted legislation in this Parliament which is now being breached with the non-reporting of the road improvement fund details and the placement of funds in another ministry for which it was not designed, but I will come to that yet another time. So we took \$50 million, and it was specific in the legislation that that money could only be spent on goods and services and could not be spent on labour. Why did we do that?

If you go to page 213 of the Recurrent Expenditure, you will see that the expenditure on wages and salaries in the Highways Division is \$89 million. It was \$85 million in 1997; it was \$100 million in 1996; for 1998, \$89 million. But when

we go to “Goods and Services” and we look under materials and supplies in the highways programme, what do we see? An allocation of \$2 million.

Dr. Rowley: What?

Mr. C. Imbert: So in 1998, on page 220—Sorry, it is less than \$2 million; my apologies. It is \$800,000; it was drainage I was looking at. So \$800,000 has been allocated for asphalt, aggregate and cement and all these road-building materials and \$90 million for wages. So what do we have there? A ratio of labour to materials of 90:1. How could a ministry possibly function if it spends \$90 million on paying people to come to work from 7.00 to 9.00 and \$800,000 is allocated for the whole of Trinidad and Tobago to fix roads and bridges and so on? They have destroyed the Minister of Works and Transport. They have destroyed him.

3.45 p.m.

When one goes through all of the divisions it is the same thing. In the Drainage Division—\$36 million for wages and salaries, \$2 million for materials and supplies, a complete over-balance. The Minister of Works and Transport will be totally emasculated in 1998. He will be incapable of functioning. They have killed him dead, dead, dead. Well done, Member for Couva South. You have dealt with enemy No. 1 in the party. You have mashed him up.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what do we have in this budget? A plethora of ramble and “bramble”, a surfeit—Am I pronouncing it correctly Member for St. Joseph? I was going to use Trinidadian and say plethora and surfeit, but for you, I will say plethora and surfeit of ramble and “bramble” in the budget, and “gambage” and “ole talk” about commitment to the poor and the underclass. What actually is going to happen in 1998? Precious little!

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they like to boast about the unemployment figures. Do you know in most countries in the world there is a parallel between the incidence of crime and the unemployment rate? So, how come crime is going up and unemployment going down? This is why I have to wonder if the purpose of the Member for Tobago East is to come with his bogus philosophy that there is no connection between crime and unemployment, but all over the world, in areas where there is high unemployment rate there is also high crime rate. Of course, according to the brilliant minds on the other side, there is no connection. The two happen independent of each other. “The people bad, they wicked, they have no home training, they grow up bad, single parents, their fathers leave them.” All kinds of

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things. I submit that there is something wrong with the unemployment figures as indicated by the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism because, there cannot be all this poverty and destitution in Trinidad and Tobago, but unemployment going down to the allegedly lowest levels in the last 12—13 years. I simply do not accept it. Tell that to the unemployed youths in Maraval, Carenage, Port of Spain, and in Laventille while you wine and dine on the pavement, and one would see how they would respond. It is truly as Iwer George's calypso, "Bottom In The Road". It typifies and signifies the essence of this budget. It is lacking in substance and ideas, bereft of imagination, vacuous in content, completely empty; that is how I can describe this budget.

The Prime Minister was not here when I made my introduction so I will go back to what I said at the beginning.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker, the reason this budget is so empty of ideas, the reason we have heard no philosophy, no statement of economic policy from the Government over the last two years, is because the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism is just basically lazy. Do you see that the Minister of Finance and Tourism spends his time in extra-curricular activities? He has no time to deal with the fundamental problems in the economy; he cannot address the shortfall in oil revenues. In two years there is a shortfall of over \$1 billion in the oil revenue under this UNC administration.

Mr. Speaker: May I suggest to the hon. Member that he winds up.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I was in fact, winding up. The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism, because he essentially, is a lazy man and cannot deal with the \$1 billion shortfall in revenues, he cannot deal with the hundreds of dollars in losses in tax collections; and the Member for Couva North will understand to his detriment, the monkey that has climbed on his back through the financing of his campaign in 1995.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Housing and Settlements (Hon. John Humphrey): Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin East started his contribution by stating that there is nothing in that budget; the budget is bereft of ideas; and that members of the press who praise the measures are sycophantic.

The Member also said that the Minister followed him like a blue fly. What does a blue fly follow? The Member for Diego Martin East should not deprecate himself

in that way. If the Member sees himself in that way, it is little wonder that he debated the 1996 Budget Statement for the 1997 budget when, in fact, we are meeting here to debate the 1997 Budget Statement for the 1998 budget.

Mr. Speaker, you allowed the Member to describe the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism and the Minister of Planning and Development as “fiscal, economic and monetary frauds”. Mr. Speaker, would you object to my calling the Member for Diego Martin East a fraud for his part in persuading the Inter-American Development Bank to finance a multimillion dollar road in his constituency which serves no agriculture?

Mr. Imbert: Of which I am proud.

Mr. Maharaj: You are a proud fraud.

Hon. J. Humphrey: Or would you allow me to call him a fraud for his part in the so-called Project Pride at Piarco, for which the then Prime Minister almost fired him?

Mr. Manning: Just for the record, that is not true.

Hon. J. Humphrey: Did the then Minister with responsibility for the airport Project Pride collect a bribe from Pegasus? We need to know.

Mr. Speaker: I wish to say to the hon. Member, that the question posed about whether you too could refer to him as “fraud”; in the circumstances which we have related, the answer is yes.

Hon. Members, one may think that I was wrong in having done what I did. I have made a ruling on a particular word and the acceptability of it in this setting. I will say what is good for the goose is good for the gander. In the setting in which you have used the word “fraud,”, if somebody you feel does not measure in terms of what he has to do, it is, I think, perfectly legitimate. I simply rose on the question of “bribe”. I have heard something about bribe. If, indeed the question is being posed: would the Member be correct to say that he took a bribe in respect of Pegasus? That will not be acceptable in these circumstances.

To ask the Minister the rhetorical question as to whether he took a bribe, as a Member of the honourable House, I rule that it will not be proper. In making your contribution I ask that you continue to do this, but I ask you please, let us not go down that line. Thank you.

3.55 p.m.

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, it was mere tit for tat.

If it is acceptable in this House to describe Members as frauds, would you accept that if the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism is a blue fly following the Member for Diego Martin East, then the Member for Diego Martin East likens himself to either carrion or faecal matter? That is what blue flies follow. In my opinion, the contribution of the Member for Diego Martin East on the 1998 budget fits the latter of the blue fly's preferences.

He started and ended his contribution by saying that there was nothing in the 1998 budget; it was vacuous and bereft of ideas. As Minister of Housing and Settlements I know that there is something in the budget which impinges very favourably on the population in terms of the provision of shelter. The 1998 budget describes itself as A Blueprint for Human Development, Savings & Asset Building. I support the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism with the 1998 budget in its entirety. I particularly congratulate him for the provision which he has made for the very first time in the history of this country, to enable the poor people of the country to access resources for building their houses. This has never happened before.

The PNM dispensation squandered the state's resources and used the meagre amounts of housing that they could provide for political patronage. The poor could not access shelter because they never provided any product through which the poor could access resources. How could anyone forget what they did in the dead of night? They took the wrecker squad, persons were emptied from the prisons and recruited with sledge hammers and axes to go into the poor areas with guard dogs, and sometimes policemen and soldiers were armed to the teeth to break the little houses of poor people and throw their meagre belongings in the rain.

The 1998 budget has made provision for income earners to enjoy more of their income in the provision of shelter for their families. Last year, a provision was made where \$18,000 of each of the husband's and wife's earnings, totalling \$36,000, went to mortgage interest payments, including lumping mortgage interest with other payments for pension and national insurance. This year, the Minister has applied that \$36,000 per household to income earners, to mortgage payment. They have that tax deduction. That is very tangible in this budget. Page 31 of the *Budget Statement 1998* states:

“One of the basic needs of any nation is shelter, moreso, acceptable and affordable shelter for all citizens, especially the lower income group.

A major obstacle encountered by the poor is inaccessibility to financing.

An innovative financing mechanism is being set up to assist these citizens.

Accordingly, I propose to raise a Tax Free Housing Bond in an amount of \$300 million and make these funds available for financing housing for this sector.”

If that were the only provision in the 1998 budget, then it should get the applause of the national community. I would deal with this in some detail.

I would go back to the beginning of the term of the Panday Administration, as Minister of Finance and the Minister of Tourism describes it. When this Government came into office at the end of 1995, it found a situation where there was no provision for poor people to access shelter. Very large segments of the poor in the society were forced to squat on both state and private land and build meagre shacks to shelter their families. It also met a situation where there was no reliable information on state land. It is quite obvious that if land cannot be managed, resources cannot be mobilized for properly planning the development of land, and if there is no data on the land, it cannot be made available for any purpose. There was no reliable data.

4.05 p.m.

I want to know what the PNM Governments did for the people of Trinidad and Tobago term after term. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order!

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, the very first thing we did was to realize that the poor were forced by circumstance to squat, and since most of them squatted on lands owned by the people of Trinidad and Tobago and managed by a government—state lands—we should regularize them and enable them to enjoy security on the land. We came to this Parliament quite early with legislation to enable that to happen.

I was able to represent Trinidad and Tobago at the summit called Habitat II in Turkey, and to stand proudly to say that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago recognizes shelter as a fundamental human right. Trinidad and Tobago was the first country to put that on record because it was a contentious issue to which even the great United States could not agree.

The resolution coming out of Habitat II is that the whole world has now accepted that shelter is indeed a fundamental human right. So, we have set about to achieve adequate shelter for all our people, recognizing that our Constitution

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requires that any government do that. That Constitution was brought into being on August 31, 1962, when this nation became independent under the first PNM Government, and it has not changed.

The terms of the Constitution have not changed. I have said this many times but it has not gotten through to the dunderheads who call themselves politicians in this country. Many of them sit on that side of the House today. The Constitution is the supreme law of Trinidad and Tobago and any other law that is inconsistent with it is void to the extent of the inconsistency.

The Constitution goes on to say that the material resources of the community should be so distributed as to subserve the common good. There should be adequate means of livelihood for all. In other words, any government which takes over the management of the resources of this country must abide by that principle. The PNM Governments, continuously, rather than abide by the principle of ensuring that the material resources of the community were distributed to guarantee survival—and survival for the human species requires food, clothing and shelter—impoverished the people who supported them in the elections, fooled them generation after generation, beat them into submission, kept them in poverty, and when they made the effort to provide for themselves, treated them with a level of inhumanity that nobody who calls himself civilized could forgive. In other words, do not stand and do anything for yourself. You must let the Government, run by the PNM party, do it for you. They kept those people in subjugation, subjection and dependency, but at last something is being done.

First of all, we have started an exercise, and have completed much of it, in identifying state land and putting the data into the computer in a digital mode where we can now pile on layer after layer of data and know exactly what the status of the land is. We now, therefore, know where all state lands exist both in Trinidad and Tobago. We have also made a decision about squatters on state lands who can be regularized and, in the process, have the potential to upgrade their living communities into middle-class type communities. In other words, if they have laid their lots out giving each other sufficient land, left room for roads and the development of drains, laid out their settlements in such a way that, over time, they can improve their homes and enjoy a decent living standard, they will be regularized.

That legislation has now been finalized, approved by Cabinet and is awaiting return to this Parliament. I will explain what will happen. Firstly, every squatter on state lands will enjoy what the legislation describes as comfort. Comfort is really a

political decision not to treat people inhumanely. If someone needs to be removed to upgrade a community, or if squatters are in delicate areas, river banks, watersheds and should not be there, in the national interest, they will be removed humanely by being relocated, and will not be removed the way the PNM regime removed them, by destroying their little shelter and by terrorizing and terrifying them and their communities.

Mr. Speaker, in the legislation, there will be identified all those areas that can be regularized and in those areas every single citizen who is there in a little humble dwelling that he and his family built, will have security of tenure—a 30-year statutory lease. With the passage of the legislation, everyone will enjoy a lease for 30 years. If within that 30-year period, they pay a meagre sum for the raw land, the cost of surveying and legal conveyancing, they will then be entitled to enjoy a 199-year leasehold title. That will satisfy 30,000 households instantly.

However we have not stopped there. The fund that the Minister of Finance has announced in this budget is a unique one and all the work that was required to put in place the facilities to enable the dispensing of that fund has already been done. We, therefore, can announce it in the 1998 budget.

The Minister of Finance will raise \$300 million in a special bond issue. He will have no difficulty in selling the issue because he will offer an attractive incentive. There will be no tax on the interest derived from the bond. The fund will be deposited in a special account with the Central Bank, which will release the money to the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company and the rate charged for the money will be concessionary and will guarantee that the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company, on on-lending, will enjoy a spread.

4.15 p.m.

Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance (TTMF) will then on-lend at different rates of interest charged to their lenders. The market rate at the higher end would subsidize the concessionary rate at the lower end and the principle which I had advocated some time ago, has now been accepted by the board and management of the TTMF, and the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago and this is how it would work.

Any poor person who can come to the TTMF with proof that he has some form of tenure—therefore, that the land is security and the Squatter Regularization legislation would ensure that—can borrow \$10,000 interest free. If he borrows \$20,000, he gets the second \$10,000 at 2 per cent interest; if he borrows \$30,000,

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the third \$10,000 is 4 per cent interest so it goes up in increments of 2 per cent for each \$10,000 which is borrowed.

Therefore, if a poor person borrows \$50,000 for his home, he has a piece of land and demonstrates he has title to that land, he pays 4 per cent interest on a \$50,000 mortgage.

Every single squatter householder who is regularized when the law is passed, can go to TTMF and show that he has security of tenure and he would be entitled to start his home.

Try to imagine what will happen. There would be a literal explosion of the homes of the poor. One cannot treat one group of citizens more favourably than another group, that is why it was so crucial that state lands are identified and determine what use they could be put to. In addition to those squatters who will enjoy security of tenure and who can access funding, the homeless and the landless can apply for land on the same terms and enjoy those same benefits and, therefore, every poor, landless, homeless, person will be in a position because of the Panday Administration to access land and resources to provide shelter. And the Member says there is nothing in this budget. That alone deserves applause from, not only the national community of Trinidad and Tobago, but the international community.

It does not stop there. In Trinidad and Tobago, persons with income have always been able to access mortgage financing for their homes and there are commercial banks which are considered as preferred mortgage lenders and who have applied for that status using their funds to finance home mortgages. There is also the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company which is a state-owned company that is in the same business but there is the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Bank which is a wholesaler, a bank which derives its funds through surplus funding of NIS and the commercial banking system and insurance companies and so forth which purchase the mortgages of the preferred mortgage lenders and the TTMF to put more money into the process.

I have discussed with the Home Mortgage Bank, the principle of financing for shelter and I got agreement that the commercial banks are ripping off their customers when they charge interest rates from the start of construction to the time of long-term borrowing. So from turning the sod, to the time the mortgage is negotiated, one is charged a rate of interest. The Home Mortgage Bank has agreed with me that they are going to adopt the principle that from turning sod to the end of the term, there would be one concessionary rate of interest because the Government subsidizes that rate. That has also been accomplished.

Only today in Cabinet, the decision was taken to concede to the requirements of the preferred mortgage lenders, and adjustments are being made to the terms, and I am very proud to be able to announce that the following decisions have been taken by Cabinet. Whereas in the past one could only access these funds that were subsidized by the state for building one's first home, it has now been agreed that principle would extend to the sale of existing properties. So it is not only confined to building one's first house, it now applies to the sale of any property which is on the market that meets the banks which I would announce.

Whereas the concession given by the Government was linked to the rate of corporation tax when it was announced, it has now altered that and has given the concession minus 100 per cent of the prevailing rate of corporation tax. Therefore, if the corporation rate changes, the concession remains the same.

There is also a change that would help more persons access shelter, because where there was a combined ceiling of husband and wife of \$6,000 that has now been lifted completely and the lenders can negotiate on the basis of their judgment of ability to meet the terms so there is no longer a restriction on ceiling.

The mortgage lenders have asked for a mortgage indemnity scheme and have given the assurance that if they could get that, they could then reduce their rates even further because it reduces the risk, and the Cabinet has agreed to accept the scheme, and details of a mortgage indemnity scheme are being worked out.

Under the existing arrangements, there are four loan categories which would be consolidated into three and they are: Up to \$150,000 the interest would be 8 per cent per annum; remembering the sliding scale from no interest at \$10,000 going up gradually so it is tabulated. One would see that Government, under the Prime Minister, with the Minister of Finance who is a brilliant chartered accountant and I believe that Members of the Opposition express *tabanca* every time they criticize him. The other band \$150,001—\$200,000 would be 8.5 per cent per annum and the third band, \$200,001—\$300,000 would be 9 per cent. We have gone up from \$250,000 to \$300,000. This means that prevailing prices can now accommodate middle class type accommodation where one may borrow at concessionary rates, so income earners have also benefited tremendously from the provisions of this budget.

Mr. Speaker, that is not the only thing which has been done. There is a tremendous need for housing because past regimes have not satisfied the requirements of the population for adequate shelter. The need has been assessed, and it is not easy to satisfy that need. It has been assessed that it is extremely

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difficult to provide 11,000 units per annum consistently for 10 years in this country. Of that 11,000, 40 per cent is what I describe as low and no income bands.

What the Government has decided to do is target that 40 per cent so that the state's resources would be used mainly for providing shelter to that 40 per cent. It has also decided not to ignore the rest and to use the resources of the state in partnership with private developers and anyone who owns his land and wishes to access the resources of the state in some form of partnership could do so. The partnership arrangement would not be limited to any kind of formula. It means if one has a piece of land and does not have the resources to develop it, he may come to us, we would sit with him and if we ourselves cannot find the resources, we would find a partner who has the resources to join with him. We would facilitate the private sector in delivering to all the banks in the housing market while concentrating on delivering to the poor.

The need is so tremendous that it cannot be satisfied in the areas of the country that are already served by infrastructure. We are all paying the price of a settlements pattern that is not rational. Too many persons have been put to live in too small an area, and the infrastructure is overburdened. Water cannot be supplied, sanitary facilities cannot be maintained, roads are constantly overcrowded and it is extremely difficult.

The past regime deliberately emptied the city of Port of Spain where persons could have walked from where they lived to acquire all their requirements, and it took them to the East/West Corridor into dormitory areas where the people have to leave their homes to get everything they need and return in the evening to cook their dinner and sleep, and that is irrational. That has to be countered, and a balance has to be achieved, but to do this, the country has to be opened up and new settlement areas developed for our population. One has to bear in mind that our people must produce to survive and, therefore, those areas must be comprehensive ones and must be approached so that they can be self-sustaining in economic support and provision of all the services which are required by persons.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.02 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, before the tea adjournment I was describing the irrational pattern of settlements which was imposed on the poor when the city of Port of Spain was virtually emptied, and persons were encouraged to move to,

what is now called, the East/West Corridor, where there are dormitory settlements with no supporting services for those communities and where the standard of shelter is inferior.

We are now doing an exercise on the four-storey blocks in Maloney. We realize we are going to have to do some drastic engineering restructuring to make those buildings safe. However, in order not to continue irrational settlement patterns, which is really highly unproductive and cost the society dearly—I described in the infrastructure, the traffic jams on the roads; the difficulty of supplying water and electricity, the difficulty of processing human waste and so forth—we are adopting an approach which would encourage people to come back into the city.

It is only the affluent who have chosen to live on the fringes of the western end of the city, so the suburbs of Port of Spain accommodate mainly the affluent. The very poor, however, have stayed on the fringes of the city and the conditions of their lives are so depressed, that it is little wonder that the People's National Movement is concerned that the Development and Environmental Works Division's handout is beginning to be removed to enable persons to stand on their own feet to break that dependency which the PNM has established, as I said, over several generations.

There is a pilot project in what is, perhaps, the most depressed part of the city, that is, South West Laventille, where the National Housing Authority owns a tract of land which was acquired in the 1970s, where the design approach is based on assuming that there is a spirit of community which exists in that area. We can, therefore, provide a vastly improved standard of shelter on the basis of the condominium principle, so that one could have a higher density, where each family will enjoy the exclusivity of a unit and where the buildings would be constructed in a virtual park atmosphere—green space is to be used for the enjoyment of the residents—and where the ownership would be in a collective condominium.

Mr. Speaker, if it proves successful—and our assessment has already indicated that the unit cost of shelter can be reduced to 25 per cent of the cost of what the PNM was delivering, bringing it within the affordable reach of most people—

Mr. Sudama: That is without corruption.

Hon. J. Humphrey: No, it is because of the system we are going to use. We are designing into that community, not only the residential component, but the cottage industry component; a component for social and cultural activities in the

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community, an area where they can have small shops and industries, initially aimed at the requirements of the very project. We would settle, in there, small factories to produce door frames and doors; window frames and windows, cupboards and wrought iron; the requirements which cost so much in completing a person's home, they would produce, themselves.

Mr. Speaker, in that way they will invest sweat equity and therefore their borrowings would be less. In the long term they would have to put less of their income towards the provision of shelter for their families, and more of their income towards improving their living standards. If that pilot project works, we believe we would have a formula for upgrading the living standards of the poor areas of the urban population.

In addition to that, we are redeveloping the city of Port of Spain. Trinidad and Tobago made a commitment to the Association of Caribbean States to locate its headquarters here. Cabinet has approved a proposal to build a complex of buildings for this purpose at the eastern end of King's Wharf. However, in designing this project, we are redesigning the waterfront of the city of Port of Spain, which would greatly improve the environment of the city.

We are also looking at the National Housing Authority properties in the heart of the city, with a view to redeveloping them to attract people with means, so as to bring back into the heart of the city a residential population and breathe new life into Port of Spain, the capital city of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. 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. G. Singh*]

Question put and agreed to.

5.10 p.m.

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, we are looking at improving the quality of life of the people of the capital city. At the same time, we are looking at improving the quality of life of all our people. In this regard, we have identified 13 growth poles which are really centres of population, that if approached in an orderly way, could satisfy settlements that already exist and enable them to grow so that the land that is idle in parts of the country can be used productively and can support human settlement. The lands that are already occupied, for example, on the East/West Corridor, can be properly designed and rationalized and the lives of the people who reside in those areas would be vastly improved.

In this regard, we have recruited 13 teams of specialists through the Joint Consultative Council of the construction industry, which is the umbrella organization that represents all the associations of the professionals in the construction industry including architects, engineers, land surveyors, quantity surveyors, urban planners, contractors and so forth. These teams of specialists would be paid by the state for doing the designs of these town centres and the road network would be rationalized with the intersections that are required, so as not to have the kind of traffic jams with which we have grown accustomed. We recognized that a number of additional cars would be coming on to the roads, again, because of the policies aimed at the poor, enabling poor people to acquire decent cars at a more reasonable price.

So this master planning is what is being done. Mr. Speaker, to enable this, a network of highways and roads would be provided. We have got a team of experts doing the master planning for that network. Gradually, we are putting things in place that would enable the rational development of Trinidad and Tobago for the enjoyment of our citizens. We are also putting policies in place that would enable the poor, for the first time, to have aspirations and become upwardly mobile.

In terms of housing and sheltering the poor, the ministry has taken a policy decision that only one standard would be acceptable in those housing projects with which the ministry or the National Housing Authority associates: a minimum lot size of 5,000 square feet; a provision where front walls and boundaries would not be permitted near the street alignment but would only be permitted on the house alignment which would give one a green belt in all these housing developments. There would be grass, trees, landscaping on both sides of the road and then the house front.

Between the rich mansions we would encourage the building of the humble starter houses. Aesthetically, it would be pleasing. When one drives through such an environment, one would see the trees, grass and the fronts of houses and one would not associate a humble starter house with a poor family. It would almost disappear as if it were an annex of a big house. It would have the potential of growing upwards and outwards in any direction and, therefore, that family can look forward to having a middle-class standard house in a middle-class standard housing development in time, without looking like a shack or a shanty at the beginning.

Therefore, these are the ideas that are, in fact, inspiring what we are doing in our ministry—Members would laugh—we have been talking about winning more

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space through dredging and reclamation, and we are actively engaged in doing this. We have got a serious problem in the Point Lisas Industrial Port Development Corporation Limited estate's space in Couva which has now been exhausted. There is no more space. The natural gas finds are abundant and more and more investors want to come to invest in the gas space industry. We, therefore, have to find more space. A study has been started with a view to creating more harbour space and land space for these industries, and to see whether it is feasible to reclaim some of that space.

At the same time, we recognize that the whole coast of Trinidad that embraces the Gulf of Paria needs to be developed for the future. All the good ideas that have been expressed overtime of any part on the coast on the Gulf of Paria, are now being taken off the shelves and out of the cabinets and being put before a group of experts to be assessed. We are, therefore, doing a master plan for the entire West coast of Trinidad where the harbours exist.

Mr. Speaker, under the Panday Administration, the future is a bright one, indeed. In fact, when we chose the symbol for the party that I am very proud to have been a founder of, being the rising sun, to spread light on a new day for Trinidad and Tobago, I think we chose the right symbol. That, in fact, is what this Government is bringing, with the help of all the interests in Trinidad and Tobago, a new day. That is why we are now being described as a tiger in this part of the world. The Prime Minister, admittedly, sees us as a cub at this stage but with the potential of growth into a tiger.

I realize that the Opposition is futile, frustrated and hopeless. It has no role, whatsoever, to play any more in this country. They might as well heed the call of the Prime Minister—I have said this on many occasions—to join in a Government of national unity and start behaving themselves by trying to be positive, instead of being perpetually negative. There would be no hope for them ever to see government again, if they continue being as negative as they are. In fact, their ranks are breaking up, the Leader of the Opposition cannot hold it together because he can offer nothing that encourages them.

Again, I end by inviting them to support the measures of the budget and if they cannot, in fact, take the decision to join with the Government in managing the affairs of this country and in leading those few people who look to them for leadership, then, at least, support the good measures of the Government and do not waste the time of this Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, before I sit, I wish you and your family a very Happy and Holy Christmas, and to the national community, a very bright and prosperous 1998.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Martin Joseph (*St. Ann's East*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to participate in this debate on a Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ending December 31, 1998. Before I do that, I am compelled to respond immediately to the comments made by the Minister of Housing and Settlements and hon. Member for St. Augustine, and to indicate that, with all due respect to him, he is out of place to be telling us on this side of the futility of our effort and our work as an Opposition, and to indicate that the hon. Member for St. Augustine exemplifies the thinking of those on the other side, which is that there ought to be no opposition in this country, and that if there is an opposition that plays its rightful role under the Westminster system to ensure that there is democracy in this place, we are out of place.

5.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the former Member for Tobago East visited these Chambers for the opening of this Parliament and indicated that his vantage point was a different one, and now he understood clearly and had a better appreciation for the role of Parliamentarians in ensuring the democracy. One of the things that distinguishes us as an Opposition—and as my friend from Toco/Manzanilla said, the Government in waiting—is that, unlike them when they occupied these benches, we do not oppose for opposing sake. We see our role as a responsible Opposition, as clearly our performance indicated in 1997, and the sentiments he is expressing, it is as if they are afraid of us as a viable opposition. That is why they are making the comments that we are wasting time, but we will not be side-tracked by the comments of the Member for St. Augustine.

Mr. Speaker, I am what those in other terms would refer to as a freshman Member of Parliament. This is my first term. I am a neophyte. I was not fortunate enough to have spent time with the former Member for Tobago East who occupied these Chambers for some time and, from my understanding, made valuable contributions in this Parliament, notwithstanding the fact that we may have disagreed in terms of our politics. The contribution he made to this honourable House will stand testimony, and it is most unfortunate that the person who has now replaced him, the manner in which he behaves in this Parliament leaves much to be desired.

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As a Parliamentarian, I feel cheapened by some of the comments I hear. As someone across there in his contribution said, when the whole tide rises, we all rise and, by extension, when the tide falls, we all fall. When the contribution of any Member in this Parliament deteriorates, I, as a Parliamentarian, feel very bad. This is why, perhaps, members of the national community are also concerned. The hon. Member for Tobago East has made it perfectly clear. He has now got a platform. He said he had a platform before, but for some reason, someone took that platform away from him. Now he has the highest platform in the land and he has decided to lecture to us and tell us how Parliament was supposed to have been. I hope that he will also take heed. It is a pity he is not here and cannot hear what I am saying.

I need to make some general comments before I get into my specific contribution. The first one comes from the statement made by the hon. Minister of Finance in his budget presentation at pages 6 and 7. He gives the impression that previous PNM administrations squandered the country's patrimony.

Sen. Kuei Tung: That was not impression, that is fact.

Mr. M. Joseph: That line has been taken up by speaker after speaker. I think I have made this point before in this honourable House, that we will be doing ourselves a serious disadvantage when we can say that previous PNM administrations did nothing for this country. It is being done deliberately. Then they talk about national unity. If we continue along this line, as long as Trinidad and Tobago exists, we will not have unity, because they give a particular set of people the impression that PNM did absolutely nothing for them in this country during 35 years, and that is not so.

The very gains they are now talking about having inherited, are as a result of previous administrations. I think I heard somebody on the other side comment that administrations before—*[interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have a choice as to whether we will proceed with anything that goes, or a choice to say whether we will proceed in accordance with the rules.

Mr. M. Joseph: Mr. Speaker, I was making the point that it does us no good as a nation when the facts clearly indicate that over the last 40 years PNM administrations, NAR administration, have contributed to the development of this country.

The fact that we are here poised to enter into the 21st Century with circumstances pretty good—at least they were very good when we demitted office

in 1995. What is happening since 1995 is something that we will talk about. We need to dispel that fact, and the hon. Member for San Fernando East, Leader of the Opposition, in his contribution yesterday, did so well in terms of dispelling the fact that the PNM squandered the country's patrimony during the years of the PNM administration.

There is another issue I need to raise. The question of business acumen. The Minister of Finance, in making his contribution, at page 8, boasted about the question of business acumen, and that for the first time, we have a Government that understands business. Let me quote specifically what he said at page 8:

“Over the years, Trinidad and Tobago has repeatedly squandered its chance to become the ‘Economic Tiger of Latin America and the Caribbean’.

However, Mr. Speaker, it has become abundantly clear that what this country urgently needed, was the new and aggressive business acumen which the Panday Administration has brought to the Government.”

There are two aspects to this on which I briefly wish to touch. No one can deny the current trend that is world-wide, which is fuelled by consumers, who, in terms of their private purchases of goods and services, are looking for high quality at low cost. They want high quality at low cost. For businesses to satisfy that, they must add value in the most efficient and effective manner so that they can remain highly competitive. That thinking has also entered in terms of citizens and their relationship with their administrations, so that they also want their administrations—their governments—to provide them with high quality services at low taxes.

In order for governments to satisfy that, governments are forced, in some instances, to privatize those goods and services which, for whatever reasons, the state enterprises cannot provide. It is a world-wide thing. As a result of that, it is being referred to as re-engineering. All governments, and most recently, the United States, under Vice-President Al Gore, was responsible for a whole re-engineering exercise in the United States government. The same thing is happening in the United Kingdom. It is happening all over the world. That is a trend with which we can have no problem. With that aspect, we do not have a problem. Some governments decide to privatize or enter into certain kinds of joint relationships with private enterprises. However, governments cannot run all of their aspects like a business, because they have entered into a social contract with the citizens for which there are some things governments have a responsibility to provide.

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As a result of that, Mr. Speaker, the Government cannot abdicate its responsibility. This is because it characterizes the thinking of those on that side, and it shows itself with respect to the John John towers. The Government of the day, at the time, realizing that it had a social responsibility because of the fire that devastated some 120 families in that area, was required to build housing at what was considered to be an extremely high cost because of the area. Those houses were designed for the fire victims. Those houses were ready for distribution since 1995. "The Houses are too good! They cost too much for the citizens!" Here is where we as a PNM government felt that we could not take that line.

I am hearing the Member for St. Augustine, the Minister of Housing and Settlements, saying that they wanted it free. They do not want it free. It has to be provided at subsidized cost. That is where a government cannot operate as a business because there are certain basic needs which are part of the social contract that exists between governments and their citizens. As a result, the government cannot afford to abdicate that responsibility.

The Minister of Finance boasted also about good business acumen. Mr. Speaker, good business acumen required that the Minister of Finance should have come to this House and provide us with information about the performance of the Government in 1997, so that we can determine whether or not the performance standards set by the Government in 1997 were realized. My colleague, the Member for Diego Martin East, clearly demonstrated in his contribution earlier, why this performance could not be brought, because the Government underperformed in 1997. The report of the World Bank clearly indicated that.

The Member for Oropouche, when we came earlier in the week to do some variation, boasted about the PSIP performance. He said that since the Government came into existence, there was some 80 per cent implementation rate of the Public Sector Investment Programme. When the Diego Martin Member looked at it agency by agency, ministry by ministry, he saw where that was not the case, and confirmed the findings of the International Monetary Fund when we talked about the underperformance of the PSIP.

Mr. Assam: This is December. That was since September.

Mr. M. Joseph: What happened between September and now? Business acumen did not show itself in that respect?

The other point I wish to make is that one commentator Pannell Kerr Forster, in reviewing the budget, characterized the budget as a "business as usual" budget.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance seemed not to have any problem with business as usual, because in concluding his presentation at page 36 he indicated:

“I have no intention of tinkering with success.”

5.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, business acumen says that in today's world one cannot afford to do business as usual. Business as usual means that one is marking time. One cannot even mark time because marking time means that one is regressing. One cannot mark time in today's rapidly changing environment. One cannot! Not only that, he says, “I have no intention of tinkering with success”. In other words he is saying, “If it does not break do not fix it”. That is long-time thing. One cannot use that again. Some of the giants that went before us: the IBMs, the PanAms and all the others, they felt that they should not tinker with success. Mr. Speaker, in today's environment that type of thinking, “if it does not break do not fix it” will get us nowhere, cannot get us anywhere.

As a result, we have seen—and this is the reason for us on this side being frightened with respect to this budget—that this budget does not show us what this administration intends to do over the next two or three years and as a result they cannot rely on the success that has been passed on to them from the previous PNM administration. We will see why it is so important that the whole issue about economic growth is important in terms of the future success of this country.

Mr. Speaker, I want to change gears and look at an area that is absolutely important and is of concern to all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago: that is poverty in the society. Mr. Speaker, I wish to start by quoting from a World Bank publication called *The Long March, a reform agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean in the next decade*. I am quoting from page 87, if I may. It says:

“The biggest challenge confronting development in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean is the persistence of poverty. Widespread poverty is a moral outrage, a profound obstacle to sustainable growth, a threat to the consolidation of democracy, and arguably the single greatest impediment to long-term political and social stability. In recent years, poverty has been a prime factor in the deterioration in the quality of life in many of the region's countries, a deterioration which is marked by the decline in the ability of families and schools to socialize children and adolescents, the increase in crime and violence, the rise in alcohol and drug addiction, and the erosion of social

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capital. For this reason, reducing poverty must be at the top of the regional development agenda, and the strategic priorities for reducing poverty require urgent and systematic attention.”

Mr. Speaker, there are all kinds of measures that are used in terms of determining poverty. The number of people living in poverty has been the subject of considerable debate in both the policy and scholarly literature. Estimates of the number of people in our country living in poverty or, what is referred to as the head count index of poverty, vary substantially depending on the methodology used, including the value assigned to the poverty line, below which people are considered to be poor, and the critical assumptions employed in formulating the estimates of poverty.

Before we examine the situation at home, a quick glance of the situation in the region is instructive. The World Bank's most recent publication on poverty estimates that about 24 per cent of the region's population was living in poverty in 1993, based on a poverty line of US \$1.00 in 1985 prices. Employing a somewhat different methodology and a higher poverty line, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLA), recently estimated poverty in the region in 1994 at 39 per cent and extreme poverty at 17 per cent. In comparison to other regions of the world, the Latin American and Caribbean countries occupy an intermediate position in the head count indices of poverty, as we do with respect to many other economic and social indicators.

Poverty, by any measure, is much higher, both in South Asia, where some 43 per cent of the population was poor in 1993, according to World Bank estimates, and in the sub-Sahara Africa where the figure was 39 per cent. On the other hand, the incidence of poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean is considerably higher than it is in East Asia—excluding China—where 14 per cent was considered poor. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 4 per cent; and in the Middle East and North Africa, 4 per cent. What is the situation here at home in Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Social Development, commissioned a study in September 1996 called "The Determination And Measurement Of Poverty In Trinidad And Tobago—Implications From The 1992 Survey Of Living Standards, September 1996", the most recent statistics in terms of poverty. What does it say? It says that some 35.9 per cent of the population was living below the poverty line in Trinidad and Tobago. The poverty line used by the Ministry was \$623.00 per month for a single person. For a household of 8, the poverty line was \$2,940.00. On the basis of that, the conclusion was that some 35.9 per cent of the population

was living below the poverty line of \$623.00. I think it is important that we talk about distribution, but let me just put it on the records.

Mr. Speaker, the distribution was as follows. The highest incidence of poverty occurred in the San Juan/Laventille area, where some 12.7 per cent of households were considered to be poor; 9.7 per cent in the Tunapuna/Piarco area; followed by 9.0 per cent for the Princes Town area; followed by 8.2 per cent in the Diego Martin area; some 7.9 per cent in the Chaguanas borough; and finally, 7.7 per cent in the Siparia area.

Miss Nicholson: What is Tobago's position? You left us out.

Mr. M. Joseph: I did not leave you out, those are the records I have here.

Mr. Hinds: Ask Morgan Job, the Minister for Tobago Affairs.

Mr. M. Joseph: Mr. Speaker, the reason I introduced the geographical areas is because in looking at measures to deal with poverty, the experts say that we need to look at location because poverty varies depending on locations and also in terms of housing sizes.

One of the major means of reducing poverty in any society is dependent on the question about the economic circumstances of the country, the growth that takes place within the economic circumstances. Interestingly enough, we have been able to identify what is referred to as a growth poverty reduction elasticity, which attempts to say what the relationship is between the reduction in poverty and the economic growth in the GDP of the society.

One Samuel Morely found that a two percentage point reduction in poverty occurs for every one per cent point increase in growth. Mr. Speaker, this is very important and instructive. Let me repeat it. It was found that for a two percentage point reduction in poverty to occur, there must be a one percentage point increase in growth. They said that the extent to which growth reduces poverty depends, among other things, on the extent of inequality that exists in the society and they said that generally speaking, the higher the inequality in a country, especially inequality in the distribution of assets, the greater the rate of growth that is required to reduce poverty by a given amount.

It went on to say that in Latin America and the Caribbean region that has experienced average growth rate at about 3.2 per cent since 1990, this resumption in growth has not resulted in a depreciable decrease in poverty. They went on to say that some observers have argued that the region needs to grow by almost twice

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that amount, that is, by almost 6 per cent a year, to reduce the number of people living in absolute poverty. It is unclear whether or not the region could rise to the task.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that the Manning administration did during the period 1991 to 1995 in the first instance was to focus on the economy. It is now history—and the hon. Member for Couva North is on record as praising the Manning administration for returning growth to the economy during the period 1991 to 1995—that we kept insisting that we knew that the way to treat with poverty in the society was, first of all, to fix the economy, to get the economy right. We did that. Mr. Speaker, you will see, as I just indicated, the relationship between economic growth and the reduction in poverty.

I will come to some specifics in terms of some activities undertaken by the Ministry of Social Development—not that I am going to be knocking it—but it is quite clear, all the evidence suggests, that the first thing one must do in order to reduce poverty is to make sure that the macro economic situation is good. It makes sense. Because, for one thing, if that happens, then you increase the amount of employment that would be taking place in the society. But you have to be concerned with increasing that employment within the context of what is happening. You are also having growth without the correspondent increases in employment that we used to see over the years because of the economic circumstances that are taking place. So that growth is critical, because we see that there is a direct relationship between economic growth and the attempt to reduce poverty in the society.

Mr. Speaker, the second thing had to do with equality in the society. Yesterday, when the hon. Member for San Fernando East was making his contribution and indicated his concern as to what is happening with URP, the shifts that are going to take place and what the URP was originally intended to do, he was scoffed at. We talked about urban poor and the hon. Member for Chaguanas wondered what happened to other poor, and the hon. Member for San Fernando East had to refer to the latest World Bank statistics which indicated that the Caroni area was one of the richest areas in the country. That is the reality!

5.50 p.m.

Unemployment relief was to deal with the question of poverty and it was most chronic in the urban areas. It is most unfortunate when those on that side say that we used—

Mr. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, the figures the hon. Member quoted show that poverty was almost evenly distributed throughout Trinidad and Tobago. He is confusing himself.

Mr. M. Joseph: When you look at the distribution of the projects, you would see that it was designed to deal with the question of unemployment in the various areas in which it exists. I want to make sure the link exists.

Mr. Speaker, when my hon. political leader attempted to indicate why this budget was not going to accomplish what it is supposed to, the Member for Tobago East accused—

Mr. Sudama: Is he honourable?

Mr. Williams: Is yours honourable?

Mr. M. Joseph: —he interpreted it as though we were trying to cause strife and social unrest in the society. What we are indicating is that, on the basis of fact and information, if certain things are not done, what are likely to be the consequences. That is our responsibility as an Opposition. We would be failing the society if we did not, because they would say that we never raised anything or indicated what were the shortcomings. That is our responsibility and we are going to continue to discharge it come hell or high water.

Miss Nicholson: Are you just going to keep the urban poor on URP? I cannot support that.

Mr. M. Joseph: I did not say that at all, Member for Tobago West.

Mr. Narine: An honest day's work for an honest day's pay. [*Interruption*]

Mr. M. Joseph: Mr. Speaker, let me turn to some of the measures that the Government has introduced. The Minister of Finance with a lot of fanfare and pomp—

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Mr. M. Joseph: —on Friday, talked about the increase in payments to old age pensioners from \$420 to \$520. We applaud it because only a week before, our political leader, the Member for San Fernando East was calling on the Government to keep its promise. I remind you of the promise. When you were on that side you promised that you were going to lower the age limit for old age pension from 65 to 60 years.

Mr. Sudama: We have not finished yet, we will be here for a few terms.

Miss Nicholson: We are not out yet.

Mr. M. Joseph: The second promise was to raise the income ceiling from \$5,000 to \$12,000 and we had called on them to do that; the third was to increase pension from \$356 to \$500, and they went a little further. I do not want to burst the bubble, but while this is nice, that, in and of itself, is not enough. Let me tell you why. There is a food component—*[Interruption]* Let me just say something. That increase—

Mr. Sudama: Instead of thinking about the poor he going to Hong Kong.

Mr. M. Joseph: —represented, as you know, a 24 per cent increase. I will tell you why it is not enough, because while that increase took place, here is where it is happening, on the other side of the economy. Sometimes I do not know whether or not the Members on that side—I do not mean to be hard—understand the interrelationship. The Minister of Finance boasted about the fact that somebody said he is a chartered accountant and the best. As a result, I am sure he is aware—I remember he told me one budget time, to stick to the things of which I know. I guess he might respond the same way.

Sen. Kuei Tung: Then you would not have anything to say.

Mr. M. Joseph: I will identify some items in the basic food basket and show this honourable House what has been happening to the prices of those items over the last three years.

Mr. Sudama: Do you go to the market?

Mr. M. Joseph: I am going to look at rice, flour, milk—the three kinds: condensed, evaporated and powdered milk; chicken, potatoes, sardines, salted fish—and in the event that you have a taste for the imported, local and imported; smoked herring, corned beef, cheese, Blueband margarine—not even butter—sugar and oil.

The hon. Minister of Social Development talked about the fact that they kept prices down. He said that duty was also removed from sardines, smoked herrings, butter, salted pork, beef, potatoes, onions, garlic, peas, beans and so forth. While duty was removed let us see what has happened to these prices during 1995, 1996 and 1997. One kilogram of rice in 1995 was \$1.60; in 1996 that went to \$2 per kilogram, an increase of 40 cents; in 1997 that went to \$2.50 per kilogram, an increase of 50 cents over 1996, thus an increase of 90 cents over 1995 to 1997. One kilogram of flour was 75 cents in 1995; in 1996 it did not move; that one kilogram now costs \$1.50, an increase of 75 cents. For the record, I am quoting from CSO statistics.

One tin of condensed milk in 1995 was \$3.75; in 1996 it went to \$4.00, an increase of 25 cents; in 1997 it went to \$5.75, an increase of \$1.75 over the 1996 price. One kilogram of chicken was \$1.58 in 1995; in 1996 it went to \$2 per kilogram, an increase of 42 cents; in 1997 it went to \$3.75 cents per kilogram, an increase of \$1.75 over the 1996 price. Potatoes were 75 cents per kilogram in 1995, and did not change in 1996; in 1997 it went to \$1.50 per kilogram, an increase of 75 cents over the 1996 price. One tin of sardines was \$4.35 in 1995; in 1996 it was \$4.78, a mere increase of 43 cents a tin; in 1997 it costs \$6.25, an increase of \$1.47; local salted fish—

Mr. Assam: That is madness you are talking.

Mr. M. Joseph: Give me a chance to talk. You are the Minister of Consumer Affairs, you can come after. One kilogram of local cod salted fish was \$5.50 in 1995; in 1996 it went to \$7.25, an increase of \$1.75; in 1997 it costs \$18.00.

Mr. Speaker, if you are like me and every now and again—[*Interruption*] this is Port of Spain prices.

Mr. Sudama: Where did you get those prices.

Mr. M. Joseph:—you have a palette for imported salted fish—I will tell you about imported salted fish—in 1995 a kilogram of imported salted cod was \$8.75; in 1996 it went to \$12.00, an increase of \$3.25; in 1997 it is \$24.00, an increase of \$12.00.

6.00 p.m.

We can go on and on. I have identified, some 11 basic items. In 1995 they would have cost the consumer some \$54.16; in 1996 that same basket would have cost the consumer \$62.33; in 1997 that same basket is costing the consumer \$96.48. Mr. Speaker, you talk to any consumer and he will tell you that the cost of—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, again I try to suggest to you that it cannot be done like this. At least one could do the hon. Member the honour of listening to him or allowing other people to listen to him or for the *Hansard* reporter to take down his contribution.

Mr. M. Joseph: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When you put that against the background that the poverty line, as used by the Ministry of Social Development, is \$600.00

Mr. Suduma: What is the source of your information?

Mr. M. Joseph: CSO. While they have prices for Port of Spain, San Fernando, San Juan, Sangre Grande, Arima, Chaguanas, Rio Claro, Siparia, Point Fortin and Tobago, I took Port of Spain prices.

Mr. Speaker, I was making the point in terms of poverty, \$630 per individual. While we welcome the increase in old age pension, we are seeing how that increase is going to be eroded. As we have indicated, that is related to what is happening with the foreign exchange and the relationship between the US dollar and the TT dollar. It is also related to the macro economics and confidence in the economy. That is the reason we on this side maintain that in order to seriously deal with poverty, it is so critical that there cannot be any quick fixes or some of the measures, that are being used. While we welcome the measures, the strategy ought to be a strategy that minimizes what some commentators are talking about as "new poor". Some of the measures that the Government is putting in place are bringing about a certain amount of new poor; a new dimension. New poor are those persons who are now finding themselves living below the poverty line because of the economic circumstance. For example, if we are talking about \$630 dollars for one person, what that \$630.00 could have bought in 1995 certainly you cannot get in 1997.

Miss Nicholson: What you cannot afford you do not use.

Mr. M. Joseph: What you cannot afford you do not use.

Mr. Speaker: May I suggest to the hon. Member that he continues to address me. It may help.

Mr. M. Joseph: Sorry. Okay, Mr. Speaker.

I cannot afford salted fish so I do not eat salted fish, I cannot afford rice so I do not buy rice, I cannot afford flour so I do not buy flour, I cannot afford milk so I do not buy milk, I cannot afford chicken so I do not buy chicken, I cannot afford potatoes so I do not buy potatoes, I cannot afford sardines so I do not buy sardines, I cannot afford anything so I do not eat. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for St. Ann's East has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Miss P. Nicholson*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. M. Joseph: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank Members on both sides for extending my speaking time.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to another measure which the Minister of Social Development talked about in his contribution, namely the public assistance grant. He said that there were no increases in public assistance since 1993. My understanding is that a single adult can only get a grant of public assistance if certified as being disabled by a government doctor. As a result that person receives a maximum grant of \$171.15. That is divided in terms of \$101 for public assistance and \$70.50 is the food subsidy. For a single mother, the child grant is \$158.15 which is broken up in terms of public assistance, \$88 and the food subsidy is \$70.15. Again, in light of some of those figures we have indicated, it is clear that has to be looked at in terms of making any meaningful contribution to the circumstances in which that person would find herself.

There is another aspect to it that needs to be addressed. My understanding is that in the case of the single mother, in order for her to access that grant, she has to prove that the father has absconded. As a result, a legal matter has to take place. The father has—to use local parlance—to be “brought up”; taken to court. She has to seek maintenance through the court because in order to access this, the board must be satisfied that some effort is being made to locate the father. That is laudable, we do not have a problem with that. What we are finding happening is that over 99 per cent of the time they do not locate the father; for whatever reasons the police or the marshal cannot find the father. But that mother must attend court every time that matter is called. If she does not, the matter can be dismissed because she is the complainant. This is an undue hardship, especially in light of the concerns the Government has expressed with respect to single mothers and the \$25 million for training and so forth. I am suggesting that this matter has to be looked at.

There is also another situation taking place. You have some mothers who are afraid of “bringing up” the father because of the threat of domestic violence. But the only way they can access that grant is through those means. I am suggesting that perhaps—I do not want the Member for Tobago East to say I am encouraging people to have children and then try to get the fathers to abscond. On that note, give me a little liberty, Mr. Speaker. Just thinking about it, the Member for Tobago East came and lectured to us on morality yesterday. Some newspapers are claiming that some Members on that side—if you are to believe anything appearing in some of the newspapers—should be the last people to be lecturing about family values

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and morality in light of what is happening. I understand some of them are wrecking families worse than hurricane Flora back in 1963. Be that as it may, Mr. Speaker, what I am suggesting is that we need to look again at that public assistance grant.

The Minister also talked about the initiatives he has taken in terms of the disability allowance. My understanding is that disability allowance used to be called a blind pension during the PNM's day and as a result it was confined to just a small group of persons. The disability allowance allows the same thing to be widened and we applaud them for that. However, in order to qualify for the disability allowance a single adult must be over 40. If you are under 40, irrespective of the nature of your disability, you do not qualify.

Mr. Ramsaran: Thank you very much for giving way. You do qualify for public assistance. We have things in place for every age. Over 40 you qualify for old age pension or disability grant.

Mr. M. Joseph: Thank you. Another initiative pursued by the Ministry of Social Development is the foster care programme. I understand that this programme was launched on two occasions but it is yet to get off the ground. It was launched in a fanfare in order to satisfy some conditionality but it seems to be stillborn. It needs to be looked at.

The Minister of Social Development, boasted in his contribution yesterday about the increase in allocations in 1998 over 1997. What we are seeing is the inability of the Ministry of Social Development to ensure that some of those developmental programmes are implemented. The Minister, in his presentation yesterday talked about putting in place some unit to increase the ability of the Ministry to ensure that PSIP for that Ministry is increased.

Let me say something about SHARE because he also talked about SHARE. He talked about some of these initiatives that are being used by the Ministry. He talked about SHARE as being non-political and so forth. My understanding is—and I asked that question in the Parliament—that the Minister did not renew the contracts of most of the persons who were executing the SHARE programme at all levels. My understanding is, and the Minister can correct me, that persons were concerned as to the reasons why there was that massive change in personnel. Was it because the Minister felt that the SHARE programme was not being administered in the way in which he wanted it? There were guidelines provided by the lending agencies as related to SHARE and because these people were adhering to the guidelines, ensuring that it was administered in a non-political and non-biased way but in an equitable way, they encountered certain problems with the hon. Minister.

6.15 p.m.

I think I saw some articles in the newspapers alluding to that and when I raised the question the Minister skilfully responded by—

Mr. Ramsaran: Thank you very much for giving way again. I listened to one sound piece of advice given by the Member for San Fernando East, and when these contracts ended, we readvertised and they were not appointed by the Minister; everybody was free to re-apply and four people who were there were chosen from the tender. When I say we, I mean the ministry. Thank you very much.

Mr. M. Joseph: I got conflicting information. I understand Price Waterhouse used to do the process; Price Waterhouse, as is becoming customary now, makes certain recommendations and other persons were selected. It is something that seems to be a pattern in all the ministries.

Mr. Manning: You used your business acumen.

Mr. M. Joseph: Mr. Speaker, the Minister also talked about the National Commission for Self-Help as an initiative that is also being used to assist in reducing poverty. We, in the constituency of St. Ann's East, use self-help in a big way and we have recognized that the whole focus of self-help is also undergoing radical change. While the mission of self-help is a non-profit, non-political organization engaged in mobilizing from within Trinidad and Tobago and elsewhere; physical, financial and human resources in pursuit of its role of financing self-help activities in the community, we are finding out now that the whole nature and scope of self-help is undergoing radical change and, as a result, difficulties are being encountered—well, I can only talk for my constituency—in terms of how long it takes and in terms of criteria now being used accessing self-help and I need to signal the concern as it relates to that.

Let me just make the comment. What I am attempting to prove here, Mr. Speaker, is that notwithstanding some of the individual initiatives, the budget fails to address in a very profound way the question of poverty in this society. And we are concerned on this side, because when we demitted office we left a sound economy; an economy that was performing well that only required certain tinkering to ensure that it continued on the growth path because that growth path would have ensured the reduction in poverty because of that poverty growth elasticity index to which I alluded earlier in my contribution. We are concerned because we started to see, during our administration, growth going up, now we are

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starting to see it coming down and the more it comes down is the greater the possibility of increase in the ranks of poverty in this country and the social consequences attendant with that.

Now, let me turn briefly to the constituency that I have the honour of representing, with some concerns that I need to bring to the attention of this national Parliament. One of the major issues with which we are confronted in the constituency of St. Ann's East has to do with roads in our constituency. We have three quarries—Coosal has a quarry in Acono; Seereram has a quarry in a place called Kangreal; and this new company Catalino has a quarry in Gasparee Road in Santa Cruz.

One of things that we are witnessing on the roads is some huge trucks. I understand some of them are 10-wheelers, 15—25 tonnes in loading capacity; mack trucks, 20 tonnes loading capacity. In the case of Coosal's in Acono, we have a bridge in Maracas, St. Joseph, commonly referred to as the Silver Bridge, that has a capacity of 15 tonnes, so when there are these 20 and 25 tonners crossing on that bridge, it is only a matter of time for that bridge to get into disrepair. We had the misfortune at one time that for a year that bridge was under repair and the residents of Maracas, St. Joseph were placed under serious constraint in that they had to go all the way around through Curepe. We appealed to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and it sent a couple of officers during the day to stop the trucks from using the bridge, but when they are not there, all hell breaks loose. The bridge is one thing, but you could imagine the damage because the road system was not built to accommodate these sizes of vehicles and while we do not want to stand in the way of progress, we have to be concerned with the damage that is going to be done to our roadway as it relates to this. It is something that needs to be addressed and I am bringing it to the attention of this Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, the second area—I note in terms of the Public Sector Investment Programme and the question of drainage, the lack of performance in that area. We have the Santa Cruz River which is a major waterway in the constituency. The previous representative for St. Ann's East had made efforts to make sure that there were certain parts of that river that were supposed to be dredged and paved, because in 1992, we had some serious flooding in the Sam Boucaud area, where residents lost valuable property. We have made representation with respect to the dredging of that particular river. I have noticed in this capital expenditure for 1998, nothing whatsoever. Let me, at the same time, indicate appreciation for ensuring

that the fire station was put back into the budget and we saw work being done. I had raised that in my contribution to the 1997 budget debate.

Mr. Speaker, the final area—water. I thank my colleague from La Brea in his contribution yesterday when he was complimenting the Minister of Public Utilities, the hon. Member for Caroni East, for alleviating the plight of the people of La Brea. For the first time in the history of the St. Ann's East constituency, we are experiencing the worst water problem that can be imagined.

Mr. Hinds: They just diverted it to the South.

Mr. M. Joseph: That is what is being said and you know what is amazing is that it has been to Valsayn. That is what is being said, that the water is being diverted and, again, there is reason to believe it. Because again it is all in keeping with the perception that they have, that while we were in government we distributed things in a particular way and they are now “correcting” to correct the imbalance. What imbalance? Only God in heaven knows.

What I am saying is that in the past people knew at least two or three days a week they could have counted on a water supply. Now they cannot even do that. Now there are some people saying, they have received no water for about the last 10 days. I am asking the hon. Member for Caroni East, the Minister of Public Utilities, to please address the plight of people—this does not just seem to be in St. Ann's East, it seems to be nationwide; to do something to alleviate the difficulties that we are encountering in terms of our water supply.

Mr. Speaker, I also would like to join Members who went before me in wishing you and your family all the best for the season and a most bright and prosperous 1998.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Dr. The Hon. Rupert Griffith): Mr. Speaker, I pause to let the usual irresponsible Opposition of Trinidad and Tobago take their leave. They are true to form—the height of irresponsibility—but the national community is looking at them. I congratulate those strong Members on that side because in every group, there are those who are professional, those who are focussed and those who take the best interest of this nation and you could see the few of them who have remained behind. I congratulate them for their fortitude.

It is indeed a privilege to enter this debate on the Appropriation Bill 1998, a bill which seeks to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ending December 31, 1998.

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Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance, for a very timely and excellent budget. There have been extensive commentaries and analyses of this budget by technocrats and members of the wider community. What I observe of these commentaries and analyses is that there is wide agreement that this budget:—

1. Will lay the foundation for the fundamental transformation for the social and economic balance of this society;
2. Is consumer friendly in its priorities and that it has a caring and humanitarian face;
3. Is indeed a blueprint for human resource development, savings modalities and asset building and will serve the greatest good for the fullest opportunity for the people of this country.

I must say that in my six years in this honourable House and as far back as I can remember, no other budget has raised such positive comments and warm reception by such a wide cross section of the society. The Panday Administration is to be highly complimented because this budget could only have been possible as a result of the astute leadership provided over the last two years.

My good friend from St. Ann's East spoke at length on a number of issues and he spent—

Mr. Hart: Your good friend and he walked out.

Dr. The Hon. R. Griffith: —most of his time dealing with matters of poverty. Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for St. Ann's East read statistics which he said were presented by the Central Statistical Office, which were compiled in 1992 and published in 1996. I wonder where the Member was yesterday when the hon. Minister of Social Development talked about the measures that his ministry was taking to combat poverty in Trinidad and Tobago. In addition to that, I wonder whether my learned friend, the Member for St. Ann's East, read the publication of 1997 put out by the United Nations Development Programme, which classified Trinidad and Tobago as the number one country putting measures in place to deal with poverty.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for St. Ann's East responded to the Member for St. Augustine by saying that he was out of place. Now we all know that the Member for St. Augustine is a humanitarian person and I think what he displayed here today is his sympathy for the Members on that side when he tried to give

them some good advice on what they should do. But here again, they are so confused, the hon. Member did not even pick up the cue of what the hon. Member for St. Augustine was trying to do for him and his colleagues and said that he was out of place.

Those Members are confused and all I can say is that they are suffering a bad case of "Manningitis", and, Mr. Speaker, in case you are interested in what that is, it is nothing but foot and brain disease. "Manningitis" cripples you and you are unable to walk; you are unable to think for yourself.

6.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for St. Ann's East also said that the Opposition sees its role as a responsible Opposition, but do you know what is funny? They are the only ones who see their role as a responsible one. Take a look at the other side! This is the responsible Opposition. Look at it. They talk about how the wider community see their role as positive in Opposition. It was only last Sunday that they boasted of putting 5,000 persons in the Convention Centre, they were unable to put 1800. Is that the wider community? Is that how the general public sees this Opposition? The Member also said that he felt cheapened and put back, based on some of the comments which were made in this honourable House by the Members on this side. I could well understand how he feels. Because of the negative comments made by his honourable political leader in response to the 1998 budget, I could well understand how he feels cheapened.

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has spent seven years in Opposition and I must say this year's budget response was indeed the worst I have heard in seven years. It lacked content and focus. It dealt with personalities and personal attacks on Members on this side and members of the wider community who are not here to defend themselves. It contained no constructive suggestion or recommendation. It was replete with trite and commonplace remarks not befitting someone in such high office and who carries such an important responsibility in this country of ours. I could understand how the hon. Member for St. Ann's felt taken back and cheated. I ask this question today: When will the Opposition raise its standard of performance? We are anxiously awaiting to see when this Opposition will raise its standard of performance.

Mr. Speaker, the irony of all this is that the Member for San Fernando East received an award from his party last Sunday. The award the hon. Member got was for the first PNM leader to serve in Opposition. When the Minister of Finance presents the 1999 budget in this honourable House, among his list of gratifications,

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may be, that as long as the Member for San Fernando East remains Leader of the Opposition, he will receive many more such awards for many more years to come.

There is not much more that I can respond to from the Member for St. Ann's East. The Member dealt with a number of food prices and my hon. colleague from St. Joseph will deal with those food prices. He has more up-to-date prices. Frankly, I do not know why my learned friend went so far back and took outdated food prices. Instead of looking at a national average of the price of food in Trinidad and Tobago, he limited himself to Port of Spain where, I am told, the prices may be slightly higher than in other places in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, there is one other thing that I feel I need to address and which has to do with the SHARE Programme. I thank my hon. friend from Tunapuna for reminding me—

Mr. Speaker: I ask the Member for Tunapuna to desist, please.

Dr. The Hon. R. Griffith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy that the Member for Tunapuna reminded me that I wanted to deal with an issue because it is the second time in this honourable House where certain statements were made by the Members for Arouca North and Tunapuna concerning the SHARE Programme.

I feel that since my brother, who is the Bishop of the Greater Malabar Christian Church is not here to defend himself or his organization, that I should correct what these Members have been putting on the records in the Parliament.

In 1994, the SHARE Programme was being administered in my brother's church. The church was on a growth path. The church has since developed where it is at any one time with about 1000 members attending. It has been able to put a social development programme in place, where it receives contributions and gifts to distribute to those in need in the community. It was in 1994 under the then PNM regime that my brother decided that since they are able to stand on their own that they would no longer participate in the SHARE Programme.

It has been said here by these two Members that because the SHARE Programme was removed that I am angry about it and that is why I took the decision to leave the PNM and join the UNC. There is no such thing. The fact is that the church now stands on its own with its social development department, it no longer requires the assistance of the SHARE Programme and therefore pulled out from the programme, and not the SHARE Programme pulling out from the church.

I shall make no more remarks on this issue. The matter is corrected on the records and I hope that is the last I will hear about that.

Mr. Speaker, let me draw my attention to the budget statement, *Opportunity for All* as presented by my hon. colleague, the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism.

The Minister must have more than the economic astuteness and the planning astuteness that he has. I believe he must have a crystal ball as well.

I listened to the presentation of the Members on the other side. The political leader, the Member for San Fernando East, as well as all the speakers on that side condemned the 1998 Budget Statement. They rejected and condemned it. As a matter of fact, the Leader of the Opposition in his rebuttal said that this budget is a crazy budget. He condemned it in this honourable House and in the general public and that is his right so to do. That is the kind of democracy we enjoy in this country and that is why we are here and we spend long hours to ensure that democracy prevails, as well as freedom of speech. All the hon. Members on that side have rejected this budget. In fact, what are they rejecting?

Before I get into that, let me deal with how my colleague, the Minister of Finance, has a crystal ball and I will point out to you what he said in his Budget Statement on page 5. The Member was talking about a lot of the gratifying things and I quote:

“It is also gratifying, Mr. Speaker, to be able to predict, with a great degree of accuracy, the many other gains which have come to Trinidad and Tobago within the last two years and to the Opposition’s response to all of this. It is either:

They started it.

They were about to start it.

They were thinking about it.

Or they were about to start thinking about it.”

He also went on to say and I quote:

“Even if we concede to any or all such claims from the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, the fact remains, everybody knows—even those in denial...”

Like so many of them on that side, particularly the ones who walked out—

“on the opposite side—that the Panday Administration has just done it.

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We just did it.

While the others deliver nothing but talk and threats, the Panday Administration is getting the job done for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.’

That is exactly what the Opposition is doing. They are true to form. The Minister of Finance’s prediction was correct. Mr. Speaker, I want to let you and Members of the national community know that I am proud to be a part of this team that is getting the job done for Trinidad and Tobago.

I have not heard anyone reject this budget other than those Members on the other side. When they reject this budget what are they really rejecting? Let me read some parts of the Budget Statement 1998. What the Leader of the Opposition and his team are rejecting is the upgrade of the social security system in Trinidad and Tobago as to ensure that every citizen is entitled to at least a guaranteed minimum pension. What they are rejecting, Mr. Speaker, is the introduction of a pension system for weekly, daily and hourly paid workers similar to those proposed investment-linked pension plans for the monthly paid central government employees. They are also rejecting where individuals would be entitled to claim annually the deduction of up to \$12,000 on those pension payments. By refuting the budget, they are denying the citizens this provision in the budget.

All the speakers, including their leader on that side, rejected the harmonization of old age pension and the national insurance pension scheme. They are rejecting the increase in old age pension which, even some of the senior citizens said they were expecting a \$50 increase and, they got \$100 increase from this caring administration and the national community must understand that. They are rejecting the proposed Employee Stock Ownership Plan that would be more transparent and an attractive investment to employees. That is what they are opposing. They are opposing the mortgage interest proposals claim to delink mortgage interest relief, including interest payment on bridging financing, from contributions to approved pension plans, annuities and national insurance. It is proposed that the current tax deduction of up to a maximum of \$18,000 per annum applies only to mortgage interest payments including interest payments on bridging financing. Mr. Speaker, do you know they rejected that? How could they reject such a provision in any budget?

6.40 p.m.

We are moving into an age of technology and information. This Government in its wisdom and foresight made a provision of a computer loan facility equivalent to 80 per cent of the purchase price of a computer up to the maximum of \$15,000.

This would be made available to public servants so they can develop their computer skills and literacy. It is interest free and must be paid back in three years. Those on that side rejected that!

When one looks at the measures for human resources, one would see the establishment of a national community college along the lines of the concept of the United States. We know that in Trinidad and Tobago access to the university is very limited. Only about 8 per cent of the national community enjoys access to higher education. This Government is proposing the construction of a national community college to widen the accessibility of education at that level. This Opposition rejected that!

When one looks at housing, a tax free housing bond valued at \$300 million would be floated by the Government, and the proceeds would be made available for the financing of low cost housing. I heard the Leader of the Opposition telling the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism, that it would not work. They rejected that too!

We know, and the statistics have shown, that most of the leaders in the households are single mothers. This caring Government made available an allocation of \$25 million to be used in programmes specifically designed for single mothers. They rejected that too!

Many of us who do not smoke have difficulty being in environments where there is much smoke. This Government would be putting measures in place to restrict smoking in government offices where many of us must go. They rejected that too!

With regard to tax collection, the Minister proposed the setting up of an internal revenue service to better monitor the tax collection and administration. They opposed that too! What do they want?

We know there are many jobs in this country such as in the security sector, where people are paid extremely and ridiculously low wages. This Government is trying to stabilize the wage system and provided a minimum of \$7.00 per hour. The Opposition rejected that too! I understand that some of them who hold high offices in the party also own security companies and they are seeking their interests. No doubt, they probably put them up to reject this measure, so that they would continue to pay ridiculously low wages to those security officers attached to their firms.

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A sum of \$28 million was allocated to FUNDAid; \$12 million in this first year so FUNDAid could provide assistance to small people in the society so they can share in piece of the pie. They would have an opportunity to invest and enter business as small entrepreneurs. What happened, Mr. Speaker? They rejected that too! What do they want? They do not want the loan guarantee to enable poor people to open small businesses so they can be removed from the dependency of URP, a dependency into which they held people to get their patronage. They rejected the provision of raising the maximum sum of \$150,000 to \$250,000.

There are so many other positive things that the national community spoke about in this budget, but the Leader of the Opposition in his rebuttal decided to be trite, banal or commonplace. He made no constructive comments on the budget more than nit-picking. He spoke about who has AIDS and he was looking over on this side and counting. When he did that I looked over on that side, and I also looked at this side at our Minister of Health. I asked him whether human beings could get Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in their brain. Anybody with a normal mind would not speak like that. I could go on and on, but I do not want to reduce the level of this debate to their level.

I have been assigned a number of responsibilities and among them are telecommunications, distance education, training and several other areas. For the time I have allotted to me I would focus basically on two areas. Those in the Opposition who walked out should, from now on, walk with their walking shoes to Parliament sittings because they would be hearing much more from this Minister in this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

6.50 p.m.

Firstly, I would address telecommunications. The mandate of the Telecommunications Division is to implement the International Telecommunications Union regulation in telecommunications; handle all telecommunications matters and national regulations. Among the activities, this division is responsible for the following:

- (a) Implementing the provisions of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), radio regulations and standards in the development of the local telecommunications industry and ensuring that all equipment and operations are in full compliance with the international regulations.
- (b) Representing the interest of Trinidad and Tobago at conferences and meetings at international and global fora which deal with the formulation of regulations, standards and the implementation of new telecommunications technologies.

- (c) Advising the Government and the industry on policy matters, regulations, standards and technology for the continued development of the telecommunications industry.
- (d) Instituting international coordination exercises for international networks including satellite systems, and to ensure that these networks do not impact negatively on existing and planned networks.
- (e) Facilitating applications seeking licences to establish local or foreign telecommunications services and to provide various telecommunications services with information pertaining to their interests.
- (f) Process applications for licence within Government's policy framework, and make recommendations to the Minister responsible for the grant of the licence or rejection of applications;
- (g) investigate reports of interference caused by the malfunction of equipment that is disruptive to other operations, and also to deal with illegal unlicensed operations;
- (h) maintain a frequency and company register for each licensed operator, giving full technical parameters, including the frequencies that are utilized.
- (i) ensure that all licensed companies in this country operating telecommunications equipment, at present estimated around 1,500, pay their fees on an annual basis to the Treasury;
- (j) inspect the licensed radio communication stations aboard ships and aircraft, in order to ensure that they are fully in compliance with the IMO Solar Conventions and the ICAO Regulations;
- (k) provide technical advice consultancy and evaluation of telecommunications equipment for all Government ministries, especially the Central Tenders Board, and assistance to the Customs and Excise Division;
- (l) update national regulations, ensuring that they are in keeping with international development and government policy;
- (m) serve on committees and task forces established to deal with matters pertaining to the telecommunications industry; and

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- (n) conduct examinations for radio operators and licensed operators in the amateur and maritime services.

Mr. Speaker, those are the responsibilities of the Telecommunications Division.

As we approach a new millennium, we do so in the midst of an individual revolution. Unlike the other industrial reforms, which feature combinations of technological innovations and physical resources, the current reform is predicated on state of the art collection, storage, analysis and dissemination of information.

Mr. Speaker, the information infrastructure, telecommunications and information technology, and broadcasting has evolved as one of the most critical, if not the most critical catalyst of the social, economic, political and cultural development in any country, in particular developing countries. Gone is the era when human welfare and factors that attend its changes were explained largely in terms of quantities of physical resources. Human progress is now coined in terms of reservoir of knowledge.

In this regard, the debate is conclusive as to the pivotal role telecommunications has played, and will continue to play, in facilitating the spread of knowledge within and across national frontiers. Recognizing this fact has impelled regimes to hasten engagements in multiple action to fashion gilt-edge telecommunications modalities to take advantage of the opportunities it offers within the industry. Such opportunities are many and present extremely viable options to the business community. It is estimated that by the end of the century, the world telecommunications market will top US \$3 trillion. Cable and Wireless Company, the major telecommunications carrier and holder in this region, has made a profit of US \$960 million so far in 1997.

The countries that have installed the most efficient telecommunications network, and thereby have developed the sharpest information advantage, are likely to become the new industrial giants and centres of the globe. In fact, this has already begun. Value in commerce is being redefined in terms of real-time universal delivery of information. Evidence of this is the significant growth in international telephony at the compounded onward rate of 18.3 per cent for the period 1985—1996.

The volume of international telephone calls peaked at 80 billion minutes in 1996, realizing returns of US \$28 billion and a gross profit margin of well over 60 per cent. The area of telecommunications has been the subject of breathtaking expansions. The earliest undersea cable, for example the TAT-1, installed in 1956,

carried less than 100 simultaneous calls. The current generation of TAT-12/13 has a capacity for 500,000 calls, simultaneously, and the four generation of cables, scheduled to come on stream over the next five years, will take this capacity to an impressive 3.5 million simultaneous calls. That is the growth and development in telecommunications.

The strong performance is expected to continue over the next five years as the information revolution matures. This, notwithstanding, telecommunications operators are forecasting stronger growth potential and higher financial returns from data and image traffic, consequent upon the popularity of internet and intranet technologies. Technological innovations in these areas are unprecedented, resulting in new challenges in the way business is conducted.

Today, the international marketplace is as close as a computer terminal and the internet to us. What is even more challenging, in the generation of new telecommunications technology on line for implementation by the turn of the century, the new broadband communications systems will allow data quantities of information to be moved around the world with increasing rapidity. These systems include teledesic, the skybridge satellite operations, global wide-band fibre optic systems, combined with broadband switching systems, such as asynchronous. Transfer mode, frame relay and linear modular personal communications services are also coming on stream.

Technology advances are restructuring the world telecommunications market for monopoly liberalization. In February, 1997, 69 member countries of the World Trade Organization, including the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, agreed to liberalize trade in basic telecommunications services over varying time schedules. These 69 countries, controlling 90 per cent of the world trade in telecommunications services, have agreed to market access and national treatment of most-favoured-nation principle under the World Trade Organization.

With effect from January 1, 1998, a group of European Union countries have agreed to hasten the liberalization process by forming a single market for telecommunications services. Within this single market, telecommunications operators from any European Union country will be able to build network, plant and conduct operations anywhere within the single market. They will be able to terminate international calls via the incumbent local network, paying the same interconnection charges that are paid for terminating domestic telephone—a local telephone call.

7.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the unrestricted competitive carriage of international traffic in a single market is very different from the environment in which the traditional arrangements were developed. Essentially, the latter relationships for cross border traffic where monopoly arrangements were doubled by individual country legislation, monopoly markets had to monopolize price structures.

However, rapid advances in telecommunications technology resulted in new modalities to beat high price via lower cost. Cost reduction methods include various forms of arbitrates such as international simple resale of circuits, a capacity which gave birth to call back operations which is illegal in this Republic, and many companies are seeking to have call back services in Trinidad and Tobago. The Government is taking steps to monitor that. Very early within the next year, legislation would be brought to this Parliament to deal with call back operations.

Other devices, such as refile, hubbing, international alliances of telecom operators, establishing foreign points of preserve, and internet telephony have all impacted decisively on the cost of cross international telephony. This notwithstanding, telecommunication operators in developed and developing countries are aware that the effects of expansion in demand for services, far outstrip the fall in prices, thus making the industry one of the most lucrative business enterprises.

This Government is aware that in an information based world economy, the country must develop a capability to access, analyze and use information quickly and effectively in order to posit this twin-island economy on a globally competitive footing. A competitive sector is a fundamental requisite for the sustained economic growth and enhancement of welfare in any small open economy.

Mr. Speaker, we live in an era where free trade is quickly becoming not only the prime mode of trade, but the only form of international trade. In the Americas, communication and information are pivotal in the North America Free Trade Agreement, the proposed Free Trade Agreement of the Americas and the Association of Caribbean States. The 1994 declaration plan of action of the summit of the Americas underlines the growing importance of telecommunications and information technology in their strategic mission which is to:

- i. satisfy the communication and information needs under equitable conditions at reasonable cost;
- ii. use appropriate technologies;

- iii. develop an environment of fair competition; and
- iv. encourage participation by a broad spectrum of groups in the decision-making process.

Mr. Speaker, how then is Trinidad and Tobago facing up to the revolution in the information industry, is an unavoidable question. When faced with the trend toward liberalization, this Government was confronted with a difficult choice. We were cognizant that the telecommunications industry lagged at a distance behind what obtains in developed and emerging economies. In this high growth industry output, Trinidad and Tobago has not yet exceeded TT \$1 billion and the level of employment remains below 3,000. In the area of voice telephony, our level of teledensity, example, how many telephone lines we have per 100 persons in the country, stands at 17.3 per cent. This pales against the levels of teledensity in the region that records 37.1 per cent in Antigua and Barbuda; 27 per cent in the Bahamas; 35.1 per cent in St. Kitts/Nevis; 27 per cent in Grenada; 25 per cent in Dominica; and 35 per cent in Barbados. In Trinidad and Tobago, we are at 17.3 per cent.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Why?

Dr. The Hon. R. Griffith: I ask myself, what have they on that side done to increase the teledensity in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago? Mr. Speaker, currently the telecom industry in Trinidad and Tobago is regulated by a Wireless Act of 1934—can you imagine—since the Telecommunications Act of 1990 has not yet been proclaimed, and those on that side who coulda, woulda, shoulda have not done it, the Act which was passed in 1990 is still not yet proclaimed.

Voice telephony is provided by a monopolist in Trinidad and Tobago, TSTT, which, pursuant to the shareholders agreement, has the right of first refusal for the provision of both local and international telecommunications services up to the year 2009. Against this background, this Government has embarked on a series of courageous initiatives to restructure the telecommunications sector.

In January 1997, the Government agreed under the World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations to phased introduction of competition in basic telephony services. After careful analysis, this Government decided that the industry should be weaned into competition rather than be subjected to an immediate open-door policy which may not augur well for national interest.

Studies have shown that most countries took advantage of phased introduction of competition in the telecommunications sector. The United States of America

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which is now the flag bearer of open competition in telecommunications took between 1956 and 1996, which is 40 years, to fully open its telecommunications market to competition. The United Kingdom was even more cautious. At first, the market was opened up to one other operator which was Mercury and for a number of years, British Telecommunications and Mercury had a duopoly in the United Kingdom. Today, the British telecommunications market is one of the most competitive among the OECD countries. Similarly, Japan beginning in 1985 preferred episodic liberalization of the telecommunications market. This process is expected to be completed by the year 2000.

In contrast, the liberalization of the telecommunications industry was sudden in New Zealand. It was so sudden that restrictions to market entry became policy without appropriate legislative amendments. This sharp transformation impacted negatively on the monopoly provider TCNZ to the extent that employment in the company fell from 23,900—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. The Hon. R. Griffith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and hon. Members for allowing me to speak for an extended time.

I was talking about the liberalization of the telephone industry and comparing it to several countries. I was referring to New Zealand and its sudden liberalization in the market which resulted in the loss of employment in the TCNZ company. It went from 23,900 in 1988 to 7,500 persons, a loss of 16,400 employees within that short period because of liberalization.

Mr. Speaker, there are success stories of quick liberalization in Chile, and to a lesser extent in South Korea and Malaysia. In the case of Singapore, the government had to pay the monopoly provider US \$1 billion to suspend monopoly rights and to agree to the competition. You would recall that TSTT has the first right of refusal up to the year 2009 with respect to liberalization in the telecommunications market.

To fill the void in policy, this Government has appointed a policy committee to draft a national telecommunications policy to make recommendations for

amendment to the existing legislation which it proposes to bring to this House early in 1998. So that the errors which were made by New Zealand, by seeking to liberalize its industry before appropriate legislation, would not happen in Trinidad and Tobago because this is a Government of wisdom and foresight and will avoid such occurrences.

The work of this policy committee is in an advanced stage of completion in undertaking this project. Technical assistance from the World Bank was accessed and negotiations are currently on-going with the Caribbean Telecommunications Union to secure technical assistance from the World Bank to advise on legislative amendments.

There is a call for strong regulatory mechanism to ensure that optimal delivery of telecommunications services is at affordable prices to all, and the international telecommunications union has been spearheading this concept. This Government recognizes the merit of strong regulation both as a stimulant for entrepreneurial exploits and protection of consumer interest. We have therefore subscribed to the WTO's reference paper as the signatory to implement measures to ensure the following:

- i. prevention of anti-competitive practices in telecommunications;
- ii. interconnection under non-discriminatory terms and conditions;
- iii. public availability of procedures for interconnection negotiations;
- iv. transparency in interconnection negotiations;
- v. an independent dispute settlement regime;
- vi. public availability of licensing criteria; and
- vii. pursuit of national universal service obligations.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is intent on putting these measures in place in the future. The National Telecommunications Policy which is in draft form embraces all of these issues. This document is expected to go before Cabinet within the first quarter of the next year.

While a comprehensive policy is being awaited, this Government is cognizant of the development in the industry and not standing still. It is putting in place interim measures to make certain that the country is not too far removed from the telecommunications super highway.

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As mentioned before, the bedrock of this highway is technology, and in 1998 personal communication would be expanded through the introduction of global digital communications service using low and medium orbit satellites.

7.15 p.m.

These systems would significantly alter the communications landscape by enabling people to people telephony, even in remote areas of low population density and with difficult topography. To access these new technologies, we have signed a Memorandum of Understanding which governs the use of Global Mobile Personal Communications by Satellite, the (GMPCS) system.

Mr. Speaker, like any forward thinking developing country, this Government is committed to detailed reviewing of the industry to ascertain, among other things, the extent to which telecommunications industry impacts on economic growth and development; whether substantial government investment already embodied in the industry will be recovered in a competitiveness environment; and how best to achieve the national universal service obligations, particularly, to rural areas.

In so doing, the Government intends to treat with issues such as transparency, non-discriminatory licensing practices throughout the sector; the promotion of market-driven allocation of scarce resources, using state of the art technologies; facilitating market access; optimal usage of broadband multimedia and internet services; assessing convergence of broadcasting and telecommunications technology, infrastructure and services; development of the wireless local loop telephony.

Towards this end, in 1996, the Federal Communications Commission, (FCC) of the United States of America, signalled to the world its intention to lower the accounting settlement rates for telephone operators. Carriers of the United States pay overseas carriers to transmit international telephone calls; the accounting rates in the wholesale price which is negotiated between two overseas carriers for a minute of voice telephony. This is what the settlement rates are about, what price would each carrier pay for settling a one minute call in any carrier's country.

If the Federal Communications Commission's proposal takes effect, it would mean a reduction—and this is very significant to us in this country—in the rate the Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago would receive from the United States service provider, to US 19¢ from US 65¢ per minute per call, a loss of US 46¢ per minute.

What would this mean for us and for the economy? In the telephone industry, there is very little correlation between accounting rates, wholesale price and

collection rates, and the retail price paid by the consumer. As such, accounting settlement rates determine the capability of a telephone company to earn hard currencies to facilitate network expansion and the purchase of capital goods.

The effect of the Federal Communications Commission's proposed reduction could be devastating on TSTT and, by extension, Trinidad and Tobago. As at September, 1997, Government's shareholding in TSTT was estimated at TT \$960 million. If the United States revised rates are used, TSTT is anticipated to lose an estimated TT \$794 million or US \$132 million annually over the next six years. Losses in Government's receipts from dividends before tax is forecast at TT \$36 million per year. Tax revenue will fall by approximately TT \$54 million per annum. Moreover, the effect on foreign exchange earnings will be of the order of US \$21 million per year. Ultimately, the negative impact could result in rationalization in terms of employment, coupled with higher domestic calling prices.

Many countries have opposed the FCC's proposal in setting benchmark accounting rates, citing, among other things, violation of sovereign rights to develop their telecom infrastructure. In the Americas, a working group was formed at the level of the OAS/CITEL to develop strategies to resist the FCC's proposal. This group is chaired by Trinidad and Tobago. The group, in conjunction with other regional working parties representing Europe, Asia, Australia and Africa, presented their findings to the International Telecommunications Union in Geneva, as recently as earlier this month. It was decided that the approach advocated by Trinidad and Tobago and supported by a number of delegations to replace the current accounting rates regime with a termination fee, merited further consideration and would be submitted to the World Telecom Policy Forum in February, 1998.

In the interim, Mr. Speaker, the International Telecommunications Union meeting recommended that any reductions in accounting rates should be phased in a manner that would not be burdensome on the telecom sector. This decision was taken as a result of the leadership and representation of the delegation of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Desk thumping]* In addition, the Trinidad and Tobago delegation was entrusted with the responsibility to table the amendments to the document, *Transitional Arrangements to Cost-Oriented Mechanisms for Accounting Resettlement Rates*. This Government is taking a decisive and proactive approach in rationalizing the telecommunications industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, in the remaining minutes I have, I want to touch, briefly, on another of my responsibilities, Distance Education in Trinidad and Tobago. How much more time do I have, please, Mr. Speaker? Do I have about 10 minutes?

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The largest slice of the national budget \$1.2 billion, or 16 per cent of the Appropriation Bill in 1998, has been awarded to education and training. This administration recognizes that it is the human resource which will have to ensure social cohesion and it is this human resource, properly trained, developed and motivated, which would effect the needed transformation in our society to create jobs, promote industry and elevate the cultural product needed for tomorrow's world.

This allocation reflects the profound belief of this Government that education, training and the development of the nation's human resources are absolutely central to our quest for the creation of a total quality nation. This is the only way we can develop our ability to compete and hence to pay and earn our way in today's reality and tomorrow's growing complexity. This Government recognizes there are no godfathers and we have to develop our human resources so that we can face the world of tomorrow.

The Ministry of Education is already moving ahead—my colleagues would talk more about the computerization of the curriculum by introducing information technology into some of the schools. At present, 152 schools in Trinidad and Tobago have at least one computer workstation available to students. Thirty-three of these have modems and are equipped to connect with the internet. Eleven schools have computer labs equipped to run classes of 10 to 12 students; to sophisticated programmes. The Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago has informed me that it has agreed to provide, free of charge, internet connection to the 33 pilot schools. [*Desk thumping*]

The Ministry of Education has plans to install 300 more computers in the school system in the new year and to increase the number in the ensuing years. To this end, TSTT has already agreed to provide for government secondary schools, 50 per cent reduction on the price of internet connection. Mr. Speaker, I compliment the Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago for this offer.

The Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago also intends to increase the teledensity by 10 per cent per annum up to the year 2005. Particular emphasis will be given in rural areas to ensure that our schools have the necessary competition.

7.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we stand at the crossroads where a number of developments meet; democratization in education, an infinite increase in information and ideas, and the emergence of new technology information have all expanded so fast in the

world that, at present, this expansion doubles its volume every two years or less. This phenomenon has an immediate effect on the school structure and particularly on the level of the teachers and their knowledge. There is a need to find new methods to improve the existing education and training system before we reach the 21st Century, using technological developments that can help us create this revolution.

The existing educational system was founded in all good faith, but in view of the vast changes that are taking place in our lives, it would appear that it cannot measure up to the challenges of our time. Hence, there is a need to find new methods to improve the education and training system, before we reach the 21st Century. Technological developments are now available to make this possible, and they can help us to create the quantum leap which we on this side propose.

Any educational system must observe three basic elements: people, that is teachers and students; new methods, which include information technology; and innovative curriculum programmes. The distance education approach will focus on all these basics, in close accordance with the new Educational Policy Plan of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Distance education approaches would enable a gradual changeover from the school method whereby a number of children are grouped together in a classroom and fed information frontally, at the same rate, for the whole class, to a method that allows the effort of learning to be individualized. When this development is implemented it will bring us into the 21st Century equipped with more suitable tools to prepare the young generation for the tasks that would be demanded of them.

Mr. Speaker, the Distance Education and Training Programme seeks to:

- i. identify and support the education needs of the population regardless of location;
- ii. support the traditional methods of delivery by incorporating the telecommunications infrastructure to address the problems of space and isolation experienced by some people;
- iii. identify and develop or modify programmes in those subject areas in which there is high demand;
- iv. identify and develop or modify programmes that speak to positive attitude change, promoting national unity, economic growth and personal development;

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- v. bring to every citizen information that leads to enrichment, well-roundedness, as well as physical and mental wellness; and
- vi. facilitate the introduction of open education methodologies and a greater use of distance education methodologies at all levels.

The distance education initiative would concentrate on creating an innovative environment for developing a curriculum characterized by its inter-disciplinary teaching, telecomputing and teleconferencing. Though the curriculum would not depart from the basics, it would emphasize science and technology. It would be remedial and upgrading, as well as rich in content while focussing on developing students' ability to learn and think creatively, solve problems and encourage their involvement in society.

Mr. Speaker, this Government would take the approach of:

- i working together in partnership with existing institutions and agencies currently engaging in distance education, for example, the University of the West Indies (UWI), the National Institute for Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (NIHERST), Royal Bank Institute of Business and Technology (ROYTEC), Metal Industries Company Limited (MIC), Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP);
- ii. utilizing the information Channel, TV4 and other networks for distance education and enrichment programmes;
- iii. the use of Government time-sharing on cable, television and radio stations and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, as one of the licensing requirements, the Government has time-sharing space on these media—

- iv. access to the internet for special projects and research. Internet connectivity will allow for setting computer work stations for training;
- v. the establishment of Distance Education Centres in existing schools. Emphasis would be given to rural and remote areas, particularly in community centres where there is adequate facilities and security;
- vi. utilization of the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre (RCLRC) which is a centralized facility with substantial capacity for the production of video, audio, print, instructional and learning materials. The Rudranath

Capildeo Learning Resource Centre will also be used for real time (live) transmission of instruction and programmes.

- vii. The establishment of a Distance Education Secretariat for the administration and implementation of distance education. The secretariat would be self-directed with its own appropriation.

The Government is committed to levelling the playing field for education and as we approach the 21st Century, I can give you the assurance that all measures would be put in place to ensure that no citizen is deprived of education.

Before I end, Mr. Speaker, may I join the rest of the Members of this honourable House to wish you and your family a Happy Christmas and also to wish all the Members of this honourable House and their families a very Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

I thank you. May God bless us all.

Mr. Barendra Sinanan (*San Fernando West*): Mr. Speaker, I must confess that I am unable to respond to the hon. Minister's discourse on density, telecommunications or otherwise, but I am sure that those on this side who are competent in this regard would do so in the course of time. However, I do wish to clarify one statement the hon. Member has made which has to do with the United Nations Development Programme Report on Human Development for 1997. I wish to advise him that the statement in that report on Trinidad and Tobago being the number one country in reducing poverty, was based on statistics in 1994. I hope that the present Government would continue in whatever it is doing to maintain the status that Trinidad and Tobago has achieved under the People's National Movement.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism, in presenting his 1998 Budget Statement has labelled it, Opportunity for All, A Blueprint for Human Development, Savings and Asset Building. To achieve its objective he proposes to employ three strategies; firstly, human development with opportunity for life-long learning for all in the society.

7.35 p.m.

The facility will provide access to those in our community who cannot afford to buy books or computers of such a quantity and quality and would encourage them to better their present circumstances. Well-stocked libraries with the encouragement for their use and benefit will certainly go a long way in improving

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the quality of the education of our young people. There seems every likelihood, based on the past promises and non-performance of the Government, that the site proposed for the National Library will continue, for the time being, to remain in its present state, the only benefit being that of a pumpkin patch, and every likelihood of being a place where the *aedes aegypti* mosquito will be able to breed.

What about the provision of technical schools? There are only two such recognized schools in Trinidad and Tobago. The John Donaldson Technical Institute and the San Fernando Technical Institute. Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if you are aware, but the entry requirements to these schools are extremely high. It is perhaps as high as, or even higher, than gaining entry into one of the recognized secondary schools, denominational or Government. Graduates of these schools are employable young people, and they are quickly absorbed into the construction, gas-based and petro-chemical industries, among other industries. Some open their own businesses and are very successful.

A graduate of one of these technical schools can gain entry into a foreign country as a permanent resident easier than a professional—be it a doctor, lawyer or businessman. I know of a situation in San Fernando where a businessman was refused entry into Canada, notwithstanding the fact that he was a wealthy person. That businessman went to a technical school in San Fernando, and based on a certificate in welding, he was admitted as a permanent resident in Canada. All I am saying is that technical schools are needed in this country at this time.

Mr. Speaker, in addition, with the expansion of gas-based industries in Trinidad there will be a greater opportunity for employment of technical and skilled craftsmen. The YTEP Programme does not sufficiently cater for training of technical and skilled craftsmen. Perhaps the Minister of Education may be inclined to consider the building, equipping and staffing of new technical schools, and put them in places as far as Sangre Grande, Couva, Siparia and Point Fortin. Couva being the area where Point Lisas is located, and Point Fortin being the area in which the LNG plant is being constructed. I am sure all of us at some point in time have had difficulty in accessing the services of a craftsman, be it a plumber, electrician, or even a carpenter. These skilled craftsmen are very difficult to locate and access when they are really needed.

I wish to welcome the Minister's allowance to our public servants when he granted them a loan facility of 80 per cent up to a maximum amount of \$15,000 to purchase a computer. Why limit this to public servants? Why not extend this facility to school children? School children attending schools which are recognized

by the Ministry of Education should be afforded this facility. This certainly will go a long way in building a competent and computer literate society that will serve this country well into the next millennium. I am sure if the Minister of Finance were to do this, he would gain the praise of his Prime Minister.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

One of the next objectives of the Minister of Finance is to broaden the culture of savings among our people, but he does not elaborate in any great detail exactly how he is going to achieve this objective, apart from proposing a national pension programme. Mr. Deputy Speaker, at the moment it is fair to say that our country is caught up in a foreign consumption frenzy. From foreign used cars to eating and drinking everything that is foreign. It reminds me of the days of the oil boom. This frenzy to consume everything foreign is definitely taking its toll on the available supply of foreign exchange. Members would note that when one reads the newspapers, daily or weekly, one would see the extent to which business houses are encouraging people to spend money mostly on foreign products in order to win a prize.

I wish to refer to a report entitled "Focus on Trinidad and Tobago Budget 1998" prepared by chartered accountants, Ernst and Young. When the Minister talked about savings, he proposes a national pension scheme. I would like to quote from this report:

"Over the last few years there has been much debate on the savings and investment ratio in Trinidad & Tobago and the ability of individuals to reach retirement age without the anguish that is created because of the insecurity of the social security system. Recently there has been a call for pension and legislative reform to encourage domestic savings and ensure workers are adequately provided for in their old age.

Current System

There are three main state pension schemes in operation at present: the National Insurance Scheme (NIS), Old Age Pensions, and non-contributory civil service pensions. Each system is fundamentally flawed.

The schemes are financially unsound, and it is estimated that by the year 2007 the NIS fund will be bankrupt. The issue of government liability is a main concern for these schemes and there is no reliable data source to confirm or predict the number of people collecting pensions or the cost of these pensions.

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In addition with changing demographics and lifestyles as the population ages, life expectancy increases and workers choose to retire earlier, this liability increases. Thus at any stage government expenditure on these pensions could dramatically increase, without warning.

The OAP system is non-contributory and 85% of persons over the age of sixty-five receive this benefit. In addition, the pensions are not indexed to inflation and have not been adjusted since the 1980's."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will find that the person who retired in 1980 will be receiving a pension which is less than a person who retires in 1997. In other words, what money could buy in 1980, it definitely cannot buy in 1998. It goes on:

"As a result, the systems which are meant to ensure that workers reaching retirement age have a secure future living above the poverty line, are in reality keeping them below it.

The private company pension fund rules in operation are also limited. Whilst these plans may be adequately funded and properly managed, the rules governing these plans may make them very restrictive and do not enable employees to provide for retirement as they see fit. One of the main limitations is that an individual's pension is limited to 66% of final salary, which is subject to inflation."

The point I earlier alluded to.

"The lack of unrestricted portability of these systems hinders labour mobility and development. This is a major concern in today's world where lifetime employment is no longer guaranteed and people tend to move from job to job and industry to industry. Self employed people are not usually registered as there is no legal requirement to do so. A large percentage of the population is therefore ignored. It is quite evident that the current pension systems in T&T are inefficient, ineffective and unsuccessful.

Government's Role

The need to reform is closely linked to government's role in developing the economy. There is an increasing global recognition that the role of Governments is not to provide services but to ensure that these services are provided. By trying to 'steer', i.e. make policy decisions and 'row', i.e. deliver services, Governments have been unsuccessful in trying to balance budgets and effectively provide adequate social services. There is need to define the difference between government and governance.

Government has a definite role in developing the economy and the growth of the nation, as well as a social role in protecting those who are unable to support themselves. The state must also encourage the population to reach their full potential.

Policies have been enunciated to encourage the further growth and development of the economy in our non-oil sector. This will be driven by encouraging domestic savings.”

One of the things the Minister is attempting to do in his national budget presentation.

“In addition the social aspect of this development is that there are workers with greater personal choice, freedom and knowledge. Pension reform is one step to realising these goals.

The other social role of the government is a welfare function. In every society there are groups of people who are unable to support themselves whether it be due to circumstances or health and physical inabilities. If there is no government intervention the free market state would forget these groups.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in essence, I urge the Minister to tread very carefully and to seek proper advice in his proposal to implement a national pension scheme.

In his desire to encourage savings, the hon. Minister may wish to look at removing the tax on savings accounts in both foreign and local currencies. In his last budget presentation, the Minister introduced a tax of 10 per cent on interest earned in foreign accounts, and I think the same applies to interest earned in a local currency account. In any event, persons who are 60 years and over do not pay tax on interest earned on savings accounts, and it is very possible that those members of the society with money to put in a bank would certainly put it in the name of a relative who is over 60 years so that the interest earned on the account is tax free.

If the Minister is not inclined to remove the tax on savings accounts, perhaps he may consider removing the tax on savings instruments with a three-year to five-year maturity. In other words, encourage people to save by not taxing them. So one can have a fixed deposit or any other savings instrument with a maturity period of three to five years that would not attract tax.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am happy that the Minister has seen it fit to reintroduce an allowance for contributions to the National Insurance investment-linked schemes and approved pensions. He has delinked the \$18,000 mortgage interest and pension allowance.

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7.50 p.m.

My only regret in this regard is that in order to encourage savings he has limited the amount to \$12,000. Pension policies are a good instrument of savings and it is a source that the Government can always rely on. Therefore, to limit it to \$12,000 is perhaps regrettable and if the Minister is bent on increasing savings I think he ought to, perhaps, reconsider increasing this amount of \$12,000. The former position with respect to approved pensions was one-sixth of assessable income. I am not sure whether the Minister would want to go that far, but perhaps, a little more than \$12,000 would suffice in the first instance.

Again, I am pleased that the hon. Minister has included the provision for tax-free death benefits through a pension plan. I am sure the hon. Minister's friends in the insurance industry will be pleased at the benefits that he has given them in this budget and, also, I am sure all persons who will benefit from this provision will be happy.

With respect to the cost of living, it is difficult for the average family of two to three to save. An average family with two to three children, having to pay for food, medicine, education and insurance, finds it very difficult to save.

Thirdly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister speaks of expanding the base of asset holders in the country. Again, without elaborating on how this is to be achieved, he speaks only of ESOPs (Employee Stock Ownership Programmes) and the listing of the Unit Trust on the stock market.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

I am not sure whether private companies will readily take advantage of this provision. I know certainly that public companies would do it and I am only aware of one or two private companies operating in Trinidad and Tobago which have ESOPs.

With respect to Unit Trust Corporation, when that goes on the stock exchange, it is my experience and that of the wider public that these shares are taken up by huge investors and unless there is a provision for the National Insurance Board to purchase shares on behalf of the small man, then this does not make sense.

In his budget highlights alluded to by the hon. Member for Arima, there are certain things on which I wish to comment. There is, in fact, an increase in old age pension from \$420 to \$520. Whilst we on this side welcome that provision, it must

be looked at from the background of the increasing cost of goods and services. So unless one can keep a lid on the price of goods in the groceries, whether it be sardines, rice, flour, whatever, you would find that the increase to \$520 will soon be eaten away by increased costs in foodstuff, transport and medicines.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to mortgage interest, the hon. Minister has given an increased provision this year in the sense that he has delinked the pension aspect from the \$18,000. Again, we must be thankful for small mercies, the Minister may very well have left it as it is. I am happy that he has thought it fit to, at least, increase that aspect of the saving and allowance for mortgage interest. Again, this really does not benefit the middle class in our society. The middle class in our society in Trinidad and Tobago has been demolished. The Minister would do well to look at provisions for recreating a good and steady middle class in the society. Not only will an increase in the allowance of \$18,000 help the middle class people, but it will also help workers in the construction industry. Construction in this country is not going to last forever and ever. Once construction in the energy and energy related industries has ceased, then the only thing that will pick up the slack is building construction. The Minister may do well to consider looking at ways and means to address that situation.

The hon. Minister of Housing and Settlements spoke of the \$300 million tax-free bond that will be floated, and this is a welcome provision. I certainly hope that it would be used to assist the poor and needy in our society to access loans at affordable rates. The one thing I would wish to alert the hon. Minister to is this; when contractors tender for these jobs, most of the time the jobs are not done satisfactorily. Recently, I have seen in the papers where residents of Valencia were complaining of poor construction and these are people who are accessing low cost housing through the National Housing Authority.

There must be some standard, there must be some method of determining whether the construction is up to a quality standard. In this regard, the Minister would do well to consider—if it is not there already—a defect liability period for at least 6 months after the developer has delivered his houses to the National Housing Authority. Also, there should be a retention of a certain percentage of the contract sum so as to remedy any defects that will occur in the defect liability period. It is all well and good to say that, “Yes, the Government is providing low cost housing to the citizens of the country” but what we need to do is provide them with quality low cost housing. I would urge the Minister to have his Ministry and his technical staff pay careful attention to the quality of housing being provided by contractors engaged under the National Housing Authority.

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The Minister also alluded to non-payment of land and building taxes in the year of income and stated that the allowance would be carried over to the following year. In other words, I understand him to be saying that if one does not pay land and building taxes, for example, in 1997, but pays the 1997 tax in 1998, then the mortgage interest allowable in 1997 can be claimed in 1998. I would want the Minister to clarify whether, in such circumstances, it is possible to claim mortgage interest for 1997 and 1998 if both payments for land and building taxes for 1997 and 1998 were paid in 1998. Mr. Speaker, I am not sure whether the Minister is right in his thinking in giving this allowance, because it could very well help taxpayers to adjust their financial situation so that if they ought rightly to pay tax in 1997, then they have the benefit of claiming \$36,000 in the following year.

Also, why not include water rates? Why land and building taxes only? I think the hon. Minister should include in this provision the payment of water rates. They are saying here that we can only claim mortgage interest if we pay land and building taxes. Why can we not claim mortgage interest if we pay land and building taxes and water rates? I am sure the hon. Minister of Public Utilities would be happy if that provision is included.

Sen. Kuei Tung: Some people are not getting any water.

Mr. B. Sinanan: And he is still charging people for water.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting is suspended for one hour.

8.00 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

9.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. B. Sinanan: Mr. Speaker, before the dinner break I was speaking about the provision for claiming of mortgage interest in the year the land tax was paid. You could claim it in the following year when the land tax was paid. The point is, this provision should extend also to the payment of water rates. I further made the point that by allowing the allowance to be carried forward, it could afford taxpayers the opportunity to so arrange their affairs that they would pay less tax in the following year than in the year in which the land and building taxes ought to have been paid. I do not have any statistics about the effects of that. Perhaps the Minister could get his people to examine that aspect of it.

There are two provisions in the budget statement for which I wish to commend the Minister of Finance and also the Minister of Health and these have to do with the excise duty on cigarettes and the Government's policies of restricting smoking in Government offices and public buildings.

Hon. Member: Is he selling cigarettes? No, that cannot be so.

Mr. B. Sinanan: I am now informed.

Dr. Rowley: There is a brothel in Woodbrook.

Hon. Member: Where are you from?

Mr. B. Sinanan: Mr. Speaker, I am from the South and I am not aware of the ways of Ministers in the North. However, I am glad that, at least, the Minister of Health has seen it fit to adopt a policy of non-smoking in Government and public buildings. Perhaps the Minister of Finance in charge of BWIA could enforce a non-smoking policy on all the airline's flights. [*Desk thumping*] I know on certain destinations there is, in fact, a non-smoking policy, perhaps this could be extended to all flights of the national carrier.

I turn now to the point in the Minister's budget presentation where he spoke of a minimum wage of \$7 per hour. While this is laudable in certain societies, I am not sure whether we have reached that stage in Trinidad and Tobago where small businesses can afford to pay a minimum wage of \$7. You have a host of small businesses, be they bakeries or any small business employing about 5 or 10 persons and in most of them the wage is definitely not \$7 per hour. The fact of introducing this minimum wage, as laudable as it is, will affect those small businesses which employ 6 or 12 persons on an average.

It is therefore likely that those persons employed in these businesses would lose their jobs. The effect of this would certainly be to put those persons on the breadline and to encourage them, if they cannot source employment at the minimum wage, in crime which will necessarily lead to overcrowding of the courts and prisons.

I read in the newspapers of a businessman who said he employed 50 persons or thereabouts, and he claims that the effect of \$7 per hour would certainly affect his business. I am sure that there are several other businesses that would be so affected. As I said, I am not against it but there will be an effect on small businesses. And perhaps—

Mr. Sharma: What is your suggestion?

Mr. B. Sinanan: The suggestion could be training those people to be employed in businesses where they can, in fact, earn \$7 and more per hour.

I now come to the provision in the budget that speaks of the URP and the road tax. You have heard much said before about the fact that the URP is being moved

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from the Ministry of Works and Transport to the Ministry of Local Government and that the Ministry of Local Government will now be responsible for administering 50 per cent of the road tax.

In my own constituency of San Fernando West there are several residential areas. To name a few, there is Vistabella where I live, Palmiste where the Minister of Works and Transport lives, Gulf View where the Minister of Foreign Affairs lives and the chairman of the UNC, and Bel Air. These are residential areas where, for example, in Gulf View there could be very well upwards of 500 households; Bel Air, about 250; Palmiste is a very huge development of close to 1,000 acres, where at the moment you have about 1500 houses; Vistabella is a very old residential area of about 1200 houses.

In these areas the average family has two cars and they pay road taxes. While I am sure residents in these areas are happy that others throughout the country are benefiting from the tax which they are paying; in their areas, I am sure, Mr. Speaker, that they would like some measure of the tax they are paying to be used in repairing roads within their areas as well.

Not too long ago the Minister spoke of four roads in Gulf View that would be resurfaced and it was alleged that residents living on these roads, are UNC and that is why the roads are being paved. Perhaps there are some residents there who belong to the UNC—*[Interruption]*—give me a chance, Mr. Minister—but it is because of my pleadings towards the former Minister and the present Minister of Works and Transport that I am happy to report that the Minister of Local Government has thought it fit to pave four roads in the constituency which I have the honour to represent. I want to assure him and others on that side, that most of the residents who live on those four roads have voted for me in the last elections and will do so on the next occasion. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Bereaux: Karma or no Karma.

Mr. B. Sinanan: There is a belief in the country—and certainly by the Members opposite, and to some extent it is true—that the work ethic of the URP, the former Labour Intensive Development Programme (LID) and Development and Environmental Works Division (DEWD) left much to be desired. There was a situation in these programmes where the intention was laudable: to provide employment for those people in our society who could not access jobs readily. It is today called URP.

9.10 p.m.

It is fair and true to say that the hours of work which the URP workers are being paid to perform, are not being performed. The question I wish to pose is this: by taking the URP and now spreading it across the entire country, would those in charge make sure that people who are working on these programmes give an honest day's work for an honest day's pay? In other words, if they are being paid to work eight hours, it is the duty of the Minister and his technical staff to make sure that they get eight hours' work for eight hours' pay. I hope that, in spreading URP across the country, whereby all will benefit, the people who live in rural areas who are traditionally the people who plant and feed this nation do not develop what we normally call a URP mentality. It is very easy for those who live in the rural areas, if not properly supervised, to develop what is called a URP mentality. I am appealing to the Minister of Local Government to make sure that those who work on projects give an honest day's work for an honest day's pay.

Much has been said about the ability of the hon. Minister of Local Government to cope with the URP. The Minister has said that he is, in fact, a super Minister and I am sure, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Minister Dhanraj Singh will be able to cope with whatever "bad john" elements may or may not exist in the URP. We have proof of his ability to cope. I am sure that, being a Singh—and a Singh is a fighter—he will cope.

Mr. Speaker, in presenting the budget the hon. Minister of Finance has made damning condemnation of the PSIP. It is evident that the anticipated performance of that programme did not materialize. In the words of, I presume, the Minister of Planning, because this text was prepared by the Ministry of Planning and Development, on page 35, Management of the PSIP. The condemnation is there and if I may read from page 35 of the Public Sector Investment Programme 1998 under the rubric: Management of the PSIP:

“188. In 1998, Government will intensify, once more, its efforts to improve the rate of implementation of the investment programme. An early review of the PSIP and reallocation of resources in 1997 did contribute to an improvement in overall performance, but the out-turn was still somewhat lower than expected, particularly with respect to certain major sectorial programmes.

189. It is evident that difficulties with implementation performance stem partly from human resource constraints and partly from the inappropriateness of existing management systems and institutional arrangements. Perhaps, a third factor relates to accountability.

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190. What is also clear is that delays in project and programme implementation imply postponement of the realisation of the benefits associated with any given investment. This in reality means delays in the delivery of school places, better health care, access to potable water, good roads, decent housing, etc. In addition, lagging implementation invariably leads to increased project costs, including the build-up of commitment fees. Having regard to these considerations, additional initiatives will be taken in 1998 to secure an increase in the rate of implementation beyond the 75% averaged in the last few years. In this regard, the IDB has been helpful in addressing this need and the assistance provided to the Ministry of Planning and Development through the C & D Action Plan is much valued.”

Here we have the Ministry of Planning and Development admitting failure to implement to a greater degree the PSIP in 1997.

Mr. Speaker, I now wish to address a situation alluded to by the hon. Minister of Housing and Settlements, with respect to Point Lisas.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. B. Sinanan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and hon. Members on both sides.

I was saying that the Minister of Housing and Settlements alluded to the fact that the Point Lisas Industrial Estate is, in fact, overcrowded. We now have industries going further up the coast and this is having an impact on the ecology of the area and, certainly, the environment. It is also having an impact on the cost of putting down a plant. I am informed that on one of these new projects the piling had reached up to about 200 ft. before there was solid ground.

Mr. Speaker, because of our gas reserves, the country as a whole has been able to attract gas related industries. A natural extension to the Point Lisas Industrial Estate would be eastwards towards the main highway. In going that way you would have to use lands belonging to Caroni (1975) Limited. There is the Brechin Castle factory, which could be relocated and by using that area east of the existing Point Lisas area one can access a fair amount of land for industry. There are roads and electricity; only the piping will have to be laid to get the product to the pier. I heard recently on the air, or read in the newspaper, that the National Gas Company has signed a loan to construct an additional pier at Point Lisas.

I am suggesting to the Minister of Energy that he looks towards the east to access more lands for the Point Lisas Industrial Estate. We do not want to overcrowd that estate, because one major accident there would not only affect the other plants on the estate, but also it could very well leave the hon. Member for Couva South without a constituency. Therefore, I am appealing to the Government to look at expanding that estate eastwards and not northwards. Mr. Speaker, why not Pointe-a-Pierre? The refinery at Pointe-a-Pierre appears to be in some difficulty; there is a natural deep water harbour and there is an abundance of land. I am not sure whether all the land that occupies that compound is at present in use for the purpose of the refinery.

Perhaps the Minister of Energy can undertake a study to see whether the Pointe-a-Pierre area, that is the area of the refinery and the adjoining areas, can in fact, be used to site some of these industrial plants. I am not a technical person and I am not sure whether, for example, an ammonia plant can be placed close to a refinery. But I venture to say I do not see why it cannot happen. In accommodating the inflow of industries to our country because of the abundance of natural gas, we really need to look for additional industrial sites and I am suggesting that eastwards of the existing Point Lisas and Pointe-a-Pierre refinery could be considered as useful additional areas.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at these gas-based industries they do not provide revenue to the Government in the initial stages. Revenue is being earned by the people employed in the construction process and, apart from the manual and technical workers, those who are engaged in the fabrication and erection of these plants. The majority of these plants come to this country prefabricated. The only work and benefit this country gets is at the construction stage, and when the plant is operational the country benefits from the sale of gas. These companies come here because of the location of the country, incentives, tax holidays and other considerations. If they do not come here they can easily go elsewhere. The benefit is not all that it is coughed up to be. They come here and earn their money in US dollars which do not stay here.

It is in this light that I want to look at the price of oil at \$19 a barrel on which the hon. Minister has predicated his budget. The hon. Member for Port of Spain South had indicated in his contribution that he thought that price of \$19 was, in the present circumstances, a bit optimistic. I am sure that the hon. Minister would have had technical advice, and based his projection of \$19 on such advice. The question I would like to ask the hon. Minister is this: Does he, or his Ministry or

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Government, have a plan to sustain the economy and country if the price of oil were to fall to \$15 a barrel for any sustained length of time? *[Interruption]*

It is not being negative. I would draw your attention to the year 1986 when the price of oil, coming down from 1985, was at a high of about \$30 and then went to \$9 for a period of about six to eight months.

Mr. Sharma: We survived that.

Mr. B. Sinanan: We did not. All I am asking the hon. Minister is—he does not control the price and many people who are supposed to control the price seem incapable of controlling it. There are all sorts of variables; there is the Iraq situation, the Mexicans, Russians and OPEC over-supplying. There are variables which can cause the price of oil to come down. I hope for the sake of this country it does not, but if it does, I am asking the Minister whether he or his Government has a plan in case that situation arises.

9.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, 1998, I think, could be a difficult year. I say “could be” because I do not know; I do not think even the Minister knows. This is why in my opinion, he has presented a budget that has given a little but it is, to me, a holding budget and it is rightfully so, perhaps, because he is unsure of the price of oil, he is unsure of the state of Petrotrin and he must certainly be unsure of what is going to happen at the other big revenue earner, Caroni (1975) Limited. This is why, I think, the Minister, in my opinion, has presented a budget which can very well be termed a holding operation and it is quite possible that in the middle of the year, next year, depending on how things play, he may come back to this House.

Before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, let me wish you and your family and Members on both sides of the House, a very holy Christmas and may the new year bring to all of us in Trinidad and Tobago, the best we would wish for our nation.

The Minister of Education (Dr. The Hon. Adesh Nanan): Mr. Speaker, I join this debate in total support of the Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ending December 31, 1998.

The Member of Parliament for La Brea spoke about the education system and its dynamism. He said that they were looking at it. Apparently, that is all they did.

Mr. Bereaux: How did you get your education?

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: This Government has taken the bold step to standardize textbooks for primary and secondary schools. *[Desk thumping]* The

Member for La Brea, in his contribution, deliberately misled this House by giving the impression that I picked the textbooks for primary schools when he is fully aware of the procedure for selection. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Bereaux: What is the procedure?

Mr. Speaker: No. Order, please.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: For the record, Mr. Speaker, I never selected any books.

The Member of Parliament for Diego Martin East took snippets from the Public Sector Investment Programme for the Ministry of Education to demonstrate non-performance. *[Crosstalk]* At this point, I would like to congratulate the staff of the Education Project Co-ordinating Unit for their commitment and devotion to duty. In my contribution, I would demonstrate the progress in the education sector and the role they have played.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Arouca North, once again, tried to impress with his decibel level. One would surmise that he has an auricular defect. Nevertheless, his contribution reminded me of a stuck record, the same thing over and over—1995, 1996 and now 1997.

Mr. Narine: What a poor Minister of Education. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, the observation of the Member of Parliament for San Fernando West is a very laudable one. *[Desk thumping]*

Miss Nicholson: Yes, he is a very nice man.

Hon. Member: Such charity.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: I can assure the Member that the matter is receiving urgent attention. I am sure he is aware of a technical/vocational education and training consultation held earlier this year and soon a report would be presented to Cabinet—early in 1998—for rationalization of the technical/vocational education and training sector.

Let me take the opportunity also to remind the Member that last week, on Wednesday, December 10, the hon. Member for Tobago West—

Miss Nicholson: He was present when I turned the sod.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan:—turned the sod with the Member for San Fernando West for the San Fernando Primary School. *[Crosstalk]*

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Mr. Speaker, as one of the Ministers on the ministerial council for social development—and this was already alluded to by my colleague, the Minister of Social Development—the Ministry of Education in its policy direction, is placing heavy emphasis on strategies to assist with the alleviation of poverty. Under the umbrella of taking education to the people, the following programmes were started in this year, 1997—Operation Read Me Now. I am sure they are all aware of it; a programme to promote functional literacy throughout Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] The results of this programme speak for themselves.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I am getting signals from the Hansard reporter that it is becoming difficult and I am sure that this is not your intention.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, let me repeat that. The results of this programme speak for themselves. Listening to some of the testimonies brought tears to the eyes of the audience. How could this be existing in today's society? Why were these people neglected by the previous administration?

As the country moves towards the 21st Century, there is a reservoir of people who need to be trained or re-trained. This Government, recognizing the importance of its human resource, embarked on a retraining programme for displaced workers for 1997. I am sure they are all aware because they had the benefits of that programme. This programme, although started under the previous administration, the People's National Movement, was scuttled by the PNM.

Mr. Valley: It was started in 1997, but it was scuttled under the PNM.

Hon. Member: Scuttled?

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, this Government took the programme from the depths of despair and, today, especially in this quarter of 1997, it is a tremendous success. [*Desk thumping*] Words cannot describe the sense of pride felt by the participants who completed the courses. I was invited to several graduation ceremonies. At all these functions, one could sense the bubbling enthusiasm. These people have been empowered—

Miss Nicholson: They can read the papers now.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan:—they utilized the opportunity afforded them to develop skills, human resource development, the underpinning of the 1998 budget. They had the opportunity to develop skills that would increase their capability to earn a livelihood; a striking example of human resource development. To date, 2,400 were trained; 45 courses were offered; taking education to the people.

Miss Nicholson: Nice. Very good! Very good!

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Something the previous administration neglected.

The expansion of adult education centres by 43 to accommodate persons 15 and upwards—these locations have already been identified and I would like, for the benefit of my colleagues on the other side, to say that it spans the length and breadth of the country. No nepotism.

Mr. Bereaux: No what?

Miss Nicholson: No nepotism. Everybody benefiting.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: These courses offered reflect the needs of the particular community. The people decide what they need within the confines of the Government's vision for a total quality nation.

In 1997, we also saw the Youth Training Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP) showing increased training and private sector initiatives. Just to cite an example, Kellogg's Pan-American joint venture with Youth Training Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP) with welding and training courses. This programme allowed many young people to be on the path of economic self-sufficiency and progress through self-employment.

Additionally, the school transport system is part of the programme for the alleviation of poverty; and the school nutrition programme. This year the school transport system has been expanded to include 141 routes with 12,671 seats for over 50 schools. Meals provided for pre-school, primary and secondary schools amounted to 24,255,000 from November 1996 to October 1997. This year, in the last quarter, a veggie-burger was introduced—

Hon. Member: A what?

Mr. Imbert: A veggie-burger.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan:—and the menu consisted of more locally produced fruits. *[Laughter]*

Hon. Member: Why are you all laughing?

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, as the artist takes his brush and produces a remarkable painting, I will now lay out, utilizing the geographic confines of the country as the canvas, a model for 1997, a result of the efficient use of the Public Sector Investment Programme allocation to the Ministry of Education.

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I start with early childhood care and education, providing increased access to children of socio-economically depressed families. The young mind is more impressionable and receptive to learning.

Miss Nicholson: That is a good programme.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: New and upgraded centres are scattered throughout the country. Each centre provides for 50 children and three teachers.

Miss Nicholson: Very good.

Mr. Bereaux: He needs the support. Give it to him.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: What are the areas targeted for construction of these centres? Charleville; Penal; La Romain; Aranguéz; Embacadere—

Miss Nicholson: Embacadere is their own.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: —Point Fortin—

Miss Nicholson: Point Fortin is their own.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: —Morvant; Diego Martin—

Hon. Member: Oh God!

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: —La Brea; East Dry River; Belmont; Cumana; La Pastora—

Hon. Member: Nothing in Pointe-a-Pierre?

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: —Chinapoo.

Miss Nicholson: You did not give me anything.

Hon. Member: Nothing in Arima? [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: To date, six new centres have been completed; four are to be completed by the end of the year. There was upgrading of 17 centres started in 1997; four have been completed which were started in 1996; six have been completed which were started this year.

I turn now to the Draft Estimates of the Development Programme. The Member for Diego Martin East took snippets out of this particular document, but he neglected the early childhood care and education section, a very important one.

Hon. Member: He is a short man; he cannot see that.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: I will now show him what is productivity and efficiency. Early childhood care and education—allocation, \$4 million; revised estimate \$3.5 million. Schools under the basic education project—Cedros Government, as mentioned by my hon. colleague from Point Fortin, is under construction.

9.40 p.m.

Schools under the basic education project. The Cedros Government School is under construction. Next week Monday at 10.00 o'clock my friend from St. Joseph will be turning the sod for the Bamboo Settlement Government School.

The Carapichaima R.C. and the Valencia Government Schools—my friend from Toco/Manzanilla—those contracts have been awarded and the sod-turning ceremony will take place early in the year, and I will explain why shortly.

Dr. Rowley: A whole year.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please, I honestly think that some of you are making it extremely difficult. Give the Member the courtesy by listening.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I will now offer an additional explanation. Under project constraints, designers did not fully grasp the operation methods which the unit and construction management firm wanted implemented. It was a learning process since the system in some cases was more demanding than in normal government run jobs. In some cases designs had to be redone in keeping with budget ceilings.

Tobago schools: A decision was made that the Tobago House of Assembly will handle the school construction programme there. Implementation of this decision caused a delay in the start of the school building programme on the sister island because there is no nexus between the bank, the EPCU, that is the unit, and the Tobago House of Assembly. The situation is currently being addressed.

I must point out that clarification in the relationship among the Education Project Coordinating Unit (EPCU), the Ministry of Education, the Tobago House of Assembly, the design consultant and the construction management firm will also be needed to be established in order for the Tobago projects to be properly implemented.

Coupled with this building and upgrading programme is the provision of furniture and equipment to these schools. At the primary school level for increased access and for quality schools, how can we forget the Carenage Boy's Government School under construction?

Dr. Rowley: No, sir!

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: And the Member turned the sod.

Dr. Rowley: Construction stopped a long time.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: The Arima Boys Government—completed; River Estate/Patna—new school. The Member for Diego Martin East smiled when he shook my hands.

The Guayaguayare R.C. Primary School—completed and is awaiting the formal opening ceremony. The South Oropouche Government Primary School is under construction.

The St. Mary's Children's Home—sod turning ceremony in early 1998.

Mr. Speaker, a burning issue that is really dear to my heart: the Reform Presbyterian Primary School. There was a decision to build the school in 1991, but it was taken off the Development Programme for 1993.

In 1997 the Reform Presbyterian Primary School was constructed and formally opened. For all those years total neglect! What about repairs?

A few of the requirements for a total quality nation: total quality people, total quality education, total quality schools, total quality teachers, total quality Opposition.

There were inherited problems of mismanagement from the previous administration. In 1997, under the repair programme 159 primary schools were repaired. The Pleasantville Government Primary School—completely repaired. The Member of Parliament for Arouca North was absolutely silent on the D'Abadie Government Primary School, and I wondered why.

Mr. Narine: We built that school.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: The Member asked questions in Parliament about that school. Arrangements were put in place for a shift system and repair of the sewerage system was done over the school vacation and not one word of thanks, and there is no problem for 1997.

Secondary schools repaired in 1997—68. Training colleges—2; Special education schools: Warthon Patrick and Pointe-a-Pierre Government Schools were completely refurbished.

The Point Fortin Vocational Centre. The new wing to be opened in 1998.

The great poet, Longfellow said:

The heights of great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they while their companions slept
Were toiling upwards in the night.

This poem reflects the true nature of this Government.

In 1997 the results of the 1997 Common Entrance Examination revealed that 20,883 successful candidates earned places at five-year and seven-year secondary schools; 1,333 candidates obtained places at post-primary secondary schools and junior life centres. Of the 6,645 unplaced candidates, approximately 2,800 are expected to repeat the examination. This is the first time since the introduction of the Common Entrance Examination in 1961 that all students taking the examination will have the benefit of continuing education.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, could the hon. Member give way? I just want to develop the point.

Statements expunged from the record.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I ask the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central to withdraw unreservedly what he just said.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I am withdrawing the statement but I will maintain I do not want that Member to say anything to me in this honourable House.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is on occasions like these that there are those who feel that in Parliament we are “kicksing”. I simply ask Members to reflect. The simple point is people lose their cool, people want others to say the things that they want them to say, and they do not. They are on opposite sides.

I was about to appeal to the Leader of the House and the Opposition Chief Whip to see how far they could rein their troops in and ask them to observe a certain standard of behaviour in the House. When a Speaker has difficulty in getting through to Members in the House, he has to be assisted by the Leader of the House and the Opposition Chief Whip, who are supposed to exercise some sort of discipline over their men.

I think we are sullyng this Parliament. I ask you kindly to reflect on your behaviour. The outburst of the Member for Diego Martin Central is withdrawn and in any case, it is expunged from the record. Please continue.

9.50 p.m.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The year 1997 saw the introduction of computers in 54 secondary schools.

I now turn to the 1998 projection. There would be continuing computerization of primary and secondary schools and the establishment of Internet training centres at schools identified in each of the regional education districts. The centre at Tranquillity Government Secondary School was formally launched in November 1997, and the remaining seven centres are projected to come on stream in 1998. The schools include St. Augustine Senior Secondary, North Eastern College, Chaguanas Senior Comprehensive, Rio Claro Senior Secondary, Iere High School, Pleasantville Senior Comprehensive and Bishop's High School, Tobago.

The Ministry of Education has submitted two project proposals for funding by UNICEF to the Technical Co-operation Unit. It is anticipated that in 1998, funding would be provided for addressing the education of students with special educational needs in the country, and the development of a Health and Family Life Education Programme for all levels of the education system from pre-school to tertiary level.

Early in 1998, the Ministry of Education will present to Cabinet a study on post-primary education in the country done by Dr. Ralph Romain, consultant for the Caribbean Development Bank. In 1998, methods would be developed and implemented for improving the delivery of post-primary education. For greater efficiency, accountability and more effective management of the human financial, material and technical resources, there would be restructuring and decentralization. Pending the review of the final report of the consultant on reform and decentralization of the management of the Ministry of Education, and subject to Cabinet's approval, the study would be adopted and implementation would commence. The areas of focus for 1998 would be the upgrading, refurbishment, furnishing and equipping of the regional education district offices. Training of staff to work in the regional offices would also commence.

With regard to school security, in 1998, priority would be given to implementing security measures at the 39 high risk schools in Trinidad. Emphasis would be placed on security of personnel, as well as plant and equipment, through fencing, installation of security lights, telephones, securing water tanks and a provision of a 16-hour or 24-hour security service at schools.

Cabinet's approval has been obtained for the provision in the draft estimates of \$6,149,158.00, comprising the sum of \$2,301,430.00 under capital expenditure,

and a sum of \$3,847,728.00 under recurrent expenditure. Let me put on record that this will be a partnership approach between all stakeholders. This Government would not throw money willy-nilly at any problem, like the previous administration.

With regard to increasing access to educational opportunities, the construction of new and replacement primary schools in 1998 would result in an increase in the number of available primary school places. The projected increase is 4,940 places. The proposed construction of three post-primary centres will result in the availability of 150 additional places.

Under the fourth basic education programme, by the first quarter of 1998, five new early childhood care and education centres on which construction began late this year will be completed. These centres are: St. Catherine's, Gran Couva, Cumana, Morvant, St. Dominic's, Moravia, East Dry River and St. Barnabas. Additionally, other centres on which upgrading work began in 1997 will be completed within the first quarter of 1998. These centres are Tabaquite, Chinapoo, La Pastora, South Diego Martin, Princes Town Baptist and Mafeking.

With regard to primary schools, Cedros Government, Carapichaima Roman Catholic School, Bamboo Settlement Government and Valencia Government Schools will be completed in 1998.

10.00 p.m.

Construction will commence on the following two schools in 1998:

- (1) the Beetham Government School; and
- (2) the Gran Couva R. C. School.

Construction will also commence on the Cunupia Secondary School during 1998. This school will cater for 800 students.

Under the FINCOR loan facility 1998, construction of the St. Mary's Children's Home Primary School will begin. This school will accommodate 240 pupils. Under the Supplementary Primary Schools Programme, construction of the Carenage Government Primary School—660 places—and continuation of the San Fernando Girls' Anglican Primary School will be completed.

Construction will continue on the South Oropouche Government Primary School, Erin R.C. Primary School, Princes Town Presbyterian No. 2, providing 840 places, and the Diego Martin Boys' R.C., also providing 840 places. The Debe Hindu Primary School will be constructed in 1998.

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Secondary schools construction. In 1998, priority will again be given to continuation projects, such as the Lakshmi Girls' Hindu College and the Tranquillity Government Secondary School. Construction on the third phase of the Lakshmi Girls' Hindu College will commence in 1998. Facilities to be provided will include administrative offices, a library, sixth form classrooms and a physics laboratory.

The rebuilding of the Tranquillity Government Secondary School is scheduled to enter its third phase, with the construction of a two-storey classroom block, a cafeteria and hard courts. In 1998, construction of a replacement school for the existing Rio Claro Junior Secondary School is also planned.

I turn now to training in 1998. Under the Fourth Basic Education project, there will be continuing pre-service training of prospective teachers and in-service training in the form of certification workshops for existing teachers without pre-service training.

Under classroom instruction and curriculum strengthening, regional workshops in mathematics are planned, in 1998, focusing on the training of trainers. Selected principals, vice-principals and teachers will be trained to deliver the new mathematics syllabus. There will be school-based coaching of teachers by trainers within their schools.

Mr. Speaker, as the country moves forward to the 21st Century, the student should be computer literate, multilingual, functionally numerate and literate. In 1998, there will be training of pilot teachers for Spanish. The introduction of Spanish in primary schools on a pilot basis is targeted for September, 1998. The Ministry of Education will prepare as follows:

- (1) a Spanish syllabus for primary schools;
- (2) a Spanish syllabus for teachers' colleges;
- (3) the training of pilot teachers for the subject.
- (4) the continuation of the Bachelor of Education programme for the second year for the first batch of 94 primary school principals and senior teachers;
- (5) the second batch of 100 principals and senior teachers will begin their two-year programme in September, 1998.

Mr. Speaker, computer literacy training will be intensified in 1998. This Government recognizes that computer literacy is a must as we approach the 21st

Century. The 21st Century is being called the learning century. In harmony with this, is an intensive structured computer literacy programme for teachers. This is also reflected in the loan for computers for public servants, which has been included in the 1998 budget.

Teaching information technology: the training of 68 secondary school teachers will begin in January 1998. Teaching with computers in secondary schools: the training of 1,000 secondary school teachers at 50 Ministry of Education equipped school laboratories to begin in January 1998. The Internet for teachers: training of secondary school teachers at schools with Ministry of Education equipped computer laboratories. Teaching with computers in primary schools: training of 1,000 primary school teachers at 15 Ministry of Education equipped school laboratories.

Mr. Speaker, in-service training will also continue. In order to achieve its objective of developing a well-articulated and fully co-ordinated system of teacher education, the ministry will continue its training programme for in-service teachers at the two teachers' colleges at Valsayn and Corinth. This will involve conflict resolution and mediation classes.

The Human Resource Division of the Ministry of Education will continue to mount in-service training programmes for teachers, senior administrators and general staff of the Ministry of Education.

I turn now to the *Medium-Term Policy Framework, 1998—2000*. I am reading from page 21:

“Further the Government is in the process of securing a loan for the building and expansion of secondary schools. The disastrous consequences of the shift system and lack of places for eligible students will be addressed in the medium term.”

Mr. Speaker, the shift system started under the PNM and it is one of the factors for the youth crime we are witnessing today, a direct correlation for unsupervised youths. The loan will facilitate the deshifting of junior secondary schools, converting junior and senior secondary schools to five-year schools and building new 600—800 five-year schools. This will constitute the major strategy for achieving the Government's target of providing places for 85 per cent of secondary school-age cohorts by the year 2005.

Mr. Speaker, at present, 30,000 students are eligible for secondary schools, but about 70 per cent of these cohorts are placed in secondary schools. Of the total

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placed in secondary schools, 11,200 are assigned to double shift junior secondary schools and 900 to single shift junior secondary schools.

10.10 p.m.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Thank you, hon. Member for Diego Martin West, the true leader of the People's National Movement.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for San Fernando West made reference to technical centres and the need for that facility, and the request was a laudable one. Let me inform the Member of the plans for 1998 to alleviate—

Mr. Bereaux: Hon. Minister, before you go to that would you please give way for a small question?

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: No, I am not giving way.

Mr. Bereaux: I wanted to ask who was responsible—

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: All right, go ahead.

Mr. Bereaux: I was going to ask the Minister—

Mr. Speaker: The Minister has given way now, but in future, if one asks a Member to give way and he says, “no”, it has to be accepted. It is not really the right thing to try to push the case or argue it, but at your insistence, he has given way. You have the floor.

Mr. Bereaux: Mr. Speaker—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Ask your question.

Mr. Bereaux: Sorry, I will not ask it again.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, the Member for San Fernando West was concerned about the need for technical centres. In 1998, the Government's recognition of the critical importance of skilled labour to the industrial development process is manifested in its commitment to the expansion of the Skills Development Programme for heavy industry and advanced technology.

In 1998, the Phase II expansion of this programme would involve the establishment of two skilled centres, one at Usine Ste. Madeleine and the other at Barrackpore.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member also made reference to the library and I would like to touch on the subject related to that. The Corinth and Valsayn Teacher's Colleges in the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme 1998*, on page 64, are allocated \$125,000 each for the development of library and library facilities.

In 1998 there would be the ongoing repair programme based on a priority list as part of its ongoing commitment to improving the physical surroundings in which education is delivered and learning takes place.

Mr. Speaker, I thank all the staff at the Ministry of Education for their preparation of this particular budget contribution. I would also like to take the opportunity, to say to the Member for La Brea that my colleague, the hon. Member for Arima, spoke at length on the Education Project Unit.

I also thank all Members here for their co-operation because as I laid out the 1998 projection for the Ministry of Education, one could see that it touches everyone in terms of how they are going to benefit in terms of school places, transportation and retraining programmes. As I am on retraining programmes, let me make mention of one particular area and that is the retraining programme for displaced workers which was a tremendous success in 1997 and it would continue in 1998 with over 3,000 persons being trained. As we forge towards a total quality nation, we must keep our eyes on the price of serving children and youths, building the reservoirs of inner strengths to allow us to face the negative in a positive manner.

I take this opportunity to wish you and all the Members of this honourable House a happy and holy Christmas and a productive 1998.

Thank you.

Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Mr. Speaker, I thank you and hon. Members for permitting me an opportunity to engage in this very important debate at this hour.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House began our contribution to this debate with a very factual analytical examination of the contents of what purported to be a budget, by the Member for San Fernando East.

Given the fact, as he made clear in his contribution, that what he sat and listened to could not be properly described as a budget, that in itself would have

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posed some difficulty for him, and all the Members on this side. Notwithstanding, I consider his contribution to have been one executed in its analysis of the emptiness and the silence which characterized that statement which has been bandied about as a budget.

Before I make my own observations about the measures in that budget, or in that document, I want to say that for the last 45 minutes to over an hour, we experienced sadly, but enjoyably, what we could call the entertainment hour in this Parliament.

10.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, it was, as I recall, punctuated with much laughter and light-heartedness. As I sat directly in front of the Member for Point Fortin, I remembered that he indicated some time past, that as head of the alumni of Howard University, an institution which he headed for many years, he learned that the Member for Tabaquite was supposed to have come from that institution, he searched desperately until Ash Wednesday of 1997, but to date he has not found the name of the Member for Tabaquite. I wish him well in his continued search. *[Laughter]*

I listened intently to the Member for “Taba quite,” sorry, Tabaquite, Mr. Speaker, and he told us that he had attended a number of literacy graduation programmes over the last few months and it brought tears to the eyes of the audience. I remember reading in the *Express* newspaper, one morning after such a graduation function which said that the Minister cried. Not the audience, he cried. *[Laughter]* I asked myself then—I am troubled—and I must ask myself now, why did he cry? Did it touch some position in him, Mr. Speaker? I will continue to wonder why he cried. I shall offer no suggestions, only time will tell. Perhaps the Member for Point Fortin would be able to tell us.

The budget, or what purports to be a budget, as I indicated a moment ago, could be characterized by its silence. It was silent on the issue of crime. It was silent on the issue of health—just like the Minister of Health—both in words and in deed, silent. It was silent on the issue of currency levels; the exchange rate. It was silent on the shortfall of oil revenues and VAT revenues. It was silent on the horrible shortfall on the expenditure programmes across all the ministries. However, I shall confine myself to the education function and I am fortunate that I am following, immediately, on the Minister of Education.

Any casual observer must concede that the education function needs some attention, one might even say urgent attention, Mr. Speaker. What frightens me is, that attention certainly could not be forthcoming at the hands of the Member for

Tabaquite, nor indeed, the UNC/NAR/single Member NAR/Independent and whatever else coalition; that mishmash.

I remember when the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism made his presentation in this House he said, almost at the end of his presentation—and I want to quote him accurately—“Yes, because of the wisdom of some of the voters and some of their leaders, we now have a Panday Administration.” How correct, Mr. Speaker. I think that comment got closest to a true reflection from that side as to what happened to cause them to be sitting as a government. It had nothing to do with voters. It had to do with—as he correctly pointed out—their leaders. It is a concoction with which we are now saddled and we would be so saddled until the hour comes for voters to really have their say in Trinidad and Tobago, hopefully, soon again.

The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism, very early in his budget statement at page 1 told us and I quote, yet again:

“The Budget will also be a telling reminder of how much the Panday administration has already accomplished since November, 1995.”

When he said that, he had not yet heard from the Member for Diego Martin East, the Member for San Fernando East and the Member for Arouca North. He had not heard the other side of the debate and anyone in the national community listening to him say that, could have been forgiven, briefly, for taking any comfort in that sentence. Having listened to the contributions from Members on this side, when it was subjected to thorough, analytical scrutiny, I am sure the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism could not use those words again. In fact, yes, it might be, a telling reminder of how much; it should rather be how little.

Mr. Speaker, I shall, as I have indicated, address some elements of the education function. In general, to improve the education system in this or any country, two broad approaches would be necessary. One has to look at improvement in equipment and infrastructure in general, and on the other hand, one has to look at the human element, the mental preparedness of the participants in the education system. That, of course, includes the administrators, teachers and the recipients of the learning which passes in the various institutions.

Mr. Speaker, there is so much to say on education, since 1997 was a most eventful year. I want to hark back, very briefly, to when that Minister of Education took the reins of the Ministry of Education at the end of 1995. You would recall, Mr. Speaker, that the first thing he did under the advice of his, perhaps, more

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senior colleagues, was to, in quick succession, get rid of three permanent secretaries of that ministry. By so doing, I have argued previously that he cut off from himself a line of information which would have guided him better through the management of that important ministry, had he done otherwise.

He approached the Ministry of Education as most of the Members on that side approach their functions, with malice aforethought, with prejudice in their minds and in their hearts. They were of the erroneous belief that for the years the former administration held power in this country, things and benefits were skewed in a certain way—they were hell bent on rectifying that. We have seen it in public utilities and we have seen it in education. Mr. Speaker, only two moments ago the Minister of Education told us—and I want to refer to the Draft Estimates for the Development Programme for the year ending 1998—that the so-called on-the-job training programme which was instituted quite wisely, by the PNM, recognizing that there were many young persons coming from secondary schools and out of colleges, fortified with GCE O' levels and A' level passes, but who could not immediately find work. With that as a backdrop—

Dr. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, I was not referring to the on-the-job training programme. I was referring to a re-training programme for displaced workers.

Mr. F. Hinds: I hope the Member has taken note of the ethic of the solid PNM parliamentarian. He wanted to have a say, I gave way and I urge him to practise that in future. While I am on the question of parliamentary “ek-quitette”—*[Interruption]* I was speaking to the Member for “Tabiquite” so I said, “ek-quitette”—*[Interruption]* Jah has always dealt with me favourably. Thank God for that.

While I am on the business of parliamentary etiquette and conduct, I want to remind one of our newer Members, the Member for Tobago East, that whenever we uphold the standards of this honourable Chamber we all benefit richly from it. By similar token, when we act and demonstrate conduct which demeans this honourable Chamber, it adversely affects us all. *[Interruption]*

Dr. Griffith: Then tell that to Mr. Valley.

Mr. F. Hinds: I am reminding the Member for Tobago East that the Minister of Education told us that in 1998 the on-the-job training programme would be reintroduced. What he did not tell us and what is on the record for all Trinidad and Tobago to know is that notwithstanding the beauty, the vision and the establishment of the programme, the Government put an end to it in 1997. To date

it is on hold, Mr. Speaker. The Minister said that in 1998 it would be reintroduced. He said that two main centres would be established—I am sure I heard him correctly—one in Barrackpore and one in Usine Ste. Madeleine. Mr. Speaker, if anything, that might yet again be an example of the Minister of Education, coloured by all that he has seen and heard around him, trying to fix a perceived problem. *[Interruption]* We have seen many examples of so-called national unity, UNC style. I understand full well what it is all about and we will continue to take note.

There is a very common saying that “teachers are born and not made”. In spite of this, it is suggested that ongoing care must be taken to ensure that there are adequate numbers of adequately trained teachers throughout the education system. That important element of the entire function must be treated in a certain manner. The PNM recognized this, so that it was not too long ago when—as we like to describe it—we democratized education. We had consultations on education throughout Trinidad and Tobago, engaging the attention of all interested parties, all players, all stakeholders in the education system, through democratization of the education system. Arising out of that, there was a major consultation finale—if I could call it that—at Chaguaramas and persons were allowed to involve themselves freely.

Under the former administration, a White Paper was developed and laid in Parliament. In that White Paper it was made clear that it was recognized that the principals and senior teachers in the system, being not only teachers but managers of various schools, needed a different type of training. A commitment was made to ensure that all principals of these schools, in short order, were buttressed with the learning of a Bachelor of Education or Bachelor of Science Degree. That programme was undertaken and I hope that the Minister keeps his promise to ensure that it continues apace.

Mr. Speaker, given this age of information technology described by the Minister in his contribution—the Member for Tobago East boasted as he spoke yesterday, that the night before he was able to pull some very valuable information off the internet. We agree, and this is why in this White Paper we committed ourselves to computerizing every school in this country.

10.35 p.m.

We agreed to, not only a computer for the use of administrative purposes, but we had committed ourselves, as soon as we were able, to provide adequate numbers of computers, particularly, in the schools where the science of computing was taught.

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This Government, as is well-known, came to dinner on a table that was properly well laid out; well-catered for three or, perhaps, even four-course meals. This Government was very fortunate to have come into office and met an economy that was strong and growing; an economy with inflation that was declining; an economy with foreign reserves that were growing. This Government was lucky, no end. We would have thought that given the two years that it has spent in power—if I can call it that in the colloquial way—it would have accomplished significantly more than it comes to boast of today.

Perhaps, that is the reason the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism, in his wisdom, was so short on words in this budget. He did not give very many details. He said he would leave it to the individual Ministers to put some flesh on the bones, but even at this late stage in the debate we have gotten very little flesh. At any rate, we recognized the importance of availing computers. This Government is better able than any other government since 1988, to undergo and to take Trinidad and Tobago through a process of social development.

Hon. Member: Why?

Mr. F. Hinds: Because we have just come out of years of structural adjustment. The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism in his presentation said that in 1993, the debt service ratio was 33 per cent and they project 10 per cent ratio in 1998. He did not tell us that when he came to office the debt service ratio was 20 per cent. So that coming out of the structural adjustment years—*[Interruption]* We could deal with that. The Government has been spreading a myth, trying to mislead people in this country with the folly that for 34 years and more the PNM has contributed precious little. That is the pet line of the Member for Tobago East. He goes up and down the place and he came to this Parliament with his typical Woodford Square behaviour yesterday, trying to tell the national community from this platform, which he boasts of now having, that the PNM has done nothing in 34 years. I have a simple suggestion of which to remind the hon. Member.

While the PNM is 42 years old—well, the PNM was born in 1956—between 1956 and 1962, though the PNM had the majority in the then Legislative Council, this country was still a colony of the so-called Great Britain. Within those six or seven years—*[Interruption]* Between the years 1962 and 1974, while the country had a flag, an anthem, a national motto, emblems, a national flower and so forth, all the trappings of a state—because we became a state in the context of international law—the country was without money. All the commanding heights of

the economy were controlled by persons in insurance, in sugar, in banking, in oil and in every sector. When you consider the six or seven years between 1956 and 1962 and you deduct another 10 or 12 years, from 1962 to 1974, you realize yet again, that you were a man, you were unemployed, you had no money.

Then came a rise in oil prices in the mid-70s. *[Interruption]* Wait! Take your time. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member is talking about \$60 million but when we got oil revenues we sought to purchase the majority shareholdings in all the elements of the economy that I have just described, for the people of Trinidad and Tobago

The Minister of Education in his—I do not want to say ignorance, because it may be considered unparliamentary in the context, but I must say ignorance because he simply does not know. The hon. Member spoke about deshifting the system. We went on at a pace, building schools in every community around Trinidad and Tobago. There are about 351 schools. *[Interruption]* There was much effort exerted. We established schools in every community in this country. The idea was to give every child a chance to enjoy education at the secondary level free of charge, which did not exist before. By virtue of the number of children who were outside of the system before and the pace of the development that had to take place in education, as well as in the other facets of governmental activity, we built schools. And a junior secondary double shift school was effectively two schools in one. We created thousands and thousands of places. If we did not do that—Member for St. Joseph—as a matter of logic, about 50 per cent of those children would not have had an opportunity, in the first place, to go to school.

Mr. Speaker: Could the hon. Member address his comments to me, please.

Mr. F. Hinds: Indeed, I am obliged, Mr. Speaker. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, have you heard the comments from the Member for Fyzabad when he said that there is no school in Caroni? That is the malice and prejudice that the hon. Member has come with and it is interesting that you would have had the hon. Member for Tobago East mouthing off that sort of thing, much to your benefit.

As I was indicating, Mr. Speaker, when the PNM found itself in Government with money then serious activities could have taken place, and indeed took place. *[Interruption]* So that this Government is in a better position than any other government in Trinidad and Tobago—the country having just come out of structural adjustment—to facilitate the schools of this nation and to provide them

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with most of the resources they would need to properly educate the nation's children.

One school in my community—Malick Secondary School—was a senior comprehensive school. In that school there are about 800 to 900 students, who are undergoing courses in computer studies, but there are nine computers in the school. It simply cannot fit. As a result, during periods allocated for that subject, many of the students are wandering about the school compound doing absolutely nothing. This has a demoralizing effect on the students and staff. When the Minister of Education talks about computerizing—I am told that in developing countries they try to achieve 40 or 50 computers in a class of 40 or 50 students. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for St. Joseph does not understand. We were busy repaying the nation's debt. *[Interruption]* I am being informed by my hon. friend from Port of Spain South that many of the computers about which the Minister boasted, were not supplied by the Government but by an oil operator in this country. Nothing is wrong with that. *[Interruption]* Nobody is criticizing it. I am simply saying that you are in a better position. *[Interruption]*

10.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Order please. Order. I have suggested to the hon. Member that he speak, according to the Standing Orders, to me. I want to suggest that you will continue to get yourself into these brawls with the other side if you continue to do it like that. Please.

Mr. F. Hinds: Indeed, Mr. Speaker. I am obliged.

So Mr. Speaker, if we are talking about a world class nation or total quality nation which really means, as the Member for San Fernando East pointed out, total quality chaos, we have to seriously ask ourselves what vision, what goal do we have for Trinidad and Tobago? If we are attempting to deal with education in this country, merely for the purpose of protecting ourselves, that is to say, that we are concerned that there are so many young citizens coming out of school and who are, by virtue of their indiscipline and perhaps even miseducation, turning up at our doors with aggression and misconducting themselves up and down the society, then we will take a certain approach.

If we really and truly have a vision of making Trinidad and Tobago world class as we should, and see ourselves as competing head and head, shoulder and shoulder, with the best at our level of development, and challenging those that are developed beyond us, then we take a different approach. I agree with the Minister

that in an age of information technology, the computer will play an important part and I, like the Member for San Fernando West, congratulate the one element in this budget that is deserving of that: making accessible to public servants the facility of a computer.

Mr. Speaker, at the Ministry of Education—I was about to speak about the Minister but the Minister is not exactly in charge there—earlier this year, Trinidad and Tobago had to bear the brunt of what came to be known as the “textbook fiasco”. By nature, we dwell on issues and a few days later the issue is gone off the headlines, but it is still affecting children adversely up and down this nation. Up to about two weeks ago we were hearing about errata, corrected documents being sent to have six and seven year-olds deal with a separate document to find the error and to correct, and all kinds of madness.

Mr. Speaker, I want to remind you and Members of this Chamber that that fiasco began because of the attitude of the Minister of Education. I merely want to remind Members, at this juncture, that he refused to take the good advice of the technocrats of the Ministry of Education and officers of TTUTA who warned him that to attempt to standardize books in the manner that he sought could only have led to total quality chaos. But he believed that he could and he ventured—this was about three to four weeks before the end of the term, running into the August holidays, the vacation period—and it did not work. Consequently, Mr. Speaker, children across the nation found themselves possessed of textbooks that were of no assistance to them.

The Prime Minister, in his usual public relations way, came and described it as chaos, as a national disgrace and stated he would set up a task force to investigate this national disgrace and let the chips fall where they may. Well, the task force engaged itself and it conducted the exercise. What happened at the end? It wanted a little more time. It was given some more time and it finally reported. What did the Prime Minister do? He gave them an additional mandate, he widened and deepened the purview of the task force which is still in operation today. It is led by a former Minister of Education. That former Minister of Education is reported in a newspaper as summoning the Minister of Education to give an account for what happened in that fiasco.

So Mr. Speaker, you will not blame me for thinking that perhaps we have two Ministers of Education; the one who sits at Alexandra street and the *de facto* Minister who sits elsewhere. It is clear to me that the Prime Minister has little confidence in the Minister of Education but because of the numbers, the leanness

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of the figures and the balances that exist in this Chamber, there is precious little he could do without him. Because of that situation, Trinidad and Tobago is saddled with a Minister of Education who could only be described as incapable, not equal to the task of delivering quality education to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The same could be said about health, public administration, finance, trade and industry, up and down the elements of Government in this country.

As was correctly pointed out by the Member for Diego Martin West, for two years this Government has been running along a stream that it met when it went to office and now that it has exhausted the programmes it has met in place, one can understand why the Minister of Finance had to be so short on words in this budget and gave little explanation for anything, achieved very little over the year, and this budget is characterized by sheer silence. They believe that they will do that and the PNM or the Members on this side of the House will sit around quietly and say nothing. They believe that they will throw a few extra dollars to a few persons' pockets in the society and that will be good enough to win their hearts and minds, but they must have another thought coming. As long as we have strength, vitality, the gift of life, we will tell the people of this country that you all are up to no good and you all could deliver no good to them and they must move hastily to seeing the back of you come the next outing at the polls.

Mr. Speaker, I want to remind Members of this honourable House of some of the lines that I found written on page 20 of the *Medium Term Policy Framework* that was laid in this Parliament by the Minister of Finance. Under the rubric "Poverty" it says, and we have heard it before:

"Government is committed to eradicating poverty. Several new initiatives will be implemented to complement ongoing programmes."

We all have documents, I do not want to bore us. It speaks about:

"A Social Displacement Unit will also be established...by providing counselling, rehabilitation, medical attention, housing, training and employment opportunities to the socially displaced.

In addition, Government will continue to provide access to credit to individuals to help them start or expand small businesses..."

And I suspect that the Minister of Finance was telling us there about his big contribution to the Fund Aid Scheme.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for Laventille East/ Morvant has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. F. Hinds: Thank you very kindly, hon. Members.

Mr. Speaker, I am dealing briefly with this question of poverty because I want the Minister of Education to understand that if children are to come to school and imbibe the information that is being put to them in the environment of a school, they have to be comfortable. When they are coming from uncomfortable backgrounds where poverty is rife, it is very difficult to expect them to be able to—some come without breakfast or lunch. As a fact, there are many children who do not go to school many days because of the experience of poverty. Well, Mr. Speaker, all I am saying is if we have a vision for making Trinidad and Tobago better, we must all apply our minds to these problems. Not only the unemployed experience these, but as the Member for St. Ann's East said, there are also the working poor.

I remember speaking to a teacher some time ago who indicated to me, in the presence of my friend from Port of Spain South, that he could hardly go to school and if he does, he cannot put his foot up, across the other, as we do, because—there was one occasion when he had a hole in his shoe and he could not afford to buy a proper pair of shoes. Poverty is a serious issue.

So the Government came with this so-called budget and tried to convince us and the national community that it has done so much about poverty. I do not have to give any further details, the Members for St. Ann's East, San Fernando East and Diego Martin East pointed out that this budget does not go anywhere near to eradicating any poverty, it is all a trick and a trap. As a matter of fact, what they give in one hand they take with two hands. Some people call it the 20/80 trick, they give you 20 per cent, they take 80 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, let me give you a quick example. There is a flyover by the Central Market area at the foot of John John Hill, which was built with some of the oil revenues that we spoke about earlier. I have never seen that kind of construction painted anywhere else in the world. That was built of prefabricated material to withstand snow, dust, sun; any weather. This Government decides to enhance the ambience of the area and to paint it. I do not know if they spent \$350 for a gallon of paint as they did with those flying, running birds on the tanks in Laventille. You know, they create a little more pleasantry to eyes and that is the 20

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per cent. What they did not tell you—and this is the 80 per cent trick—is that they have given a contract to some one of their friends or relatives who will now have the job of maintaining that paint job for the next three years at a minimum. So they give you with one hand and they take with the other.

Mr. Speaker, we took time out in this budget debate to point out that we have not scratched the surface of poverty and the Government is behaving—*[Interruption]* I do not want to say this, do not force me. The Government is laughing itself to death. It behaves as though it has done so much. We want to tell them they have not done anything.

11.00 p.m.

Returning to the question of education, the Government boasts on page 20:

"We will reform the entire education system."

Mr. Speaker, I learned recently—we travelled to the Far East together—that in Japan, which is a developed country—and one may argue that we cannot compare ourselves with that country, but look at the ethic, and we are talking about radical reform—unlike Trinidad and Tobago where on the first day of school for toddlers there is much crying, they are excited to go to big school but when the time comes they do not want to leave mummy and daddy. It is a traumatic day for them—you know what they have managed over the years? On that day the entire country is up in a big fanfare. There are garlands all over. The children are made, not to dress in the ordinary school uniform, but in their best clothing. It is a happy day. It is the first day of school and that sort of ethic launches them into their education programme for life. It is extremely competitive, I am told.

Further to that, if a child is ill and cannot go to school on a given day, the mother, grandmother or nanny of that child goes to the classroom and gets the information that the teacher would convey, and communicates it to the sick child later on at home. That is the kind of competitive spirit, the yearning for education, that we have to create in this country if we have to be world class. *[Desk thumping]*.

When we are speaking about—*[Interruption]* I will not be distracted. If we are contemplating radical reform we are also contemplating a situation where schools and such institutions remain open for 24 hours per day. There are seven hours of class, a cleaning crew comes in and cleans for an hour, another seven hours of class, then another cleaning crew passes through again and so forth. Those institutions are never shut! That is the way the competitive and vibrant society proceeds.

We have the information and we are awaiting our opportunity.

Mr. Assam: You had the opportunity!

Mr. F. Hinds: Yes, we had it, but too—there we go—anyway let me not be distracted. My time is short.

I have already indicated on the business of information technology, we need not see computers in a laboratory. One is not going in to experiment. A computer has to be, not in a place like a laboratory to conduct experiments; the concept has to be different. A computer must be like your pen or your car. It must be a functional instrument and become part of your domesticity and occupational engagement. It must be second to you at all stages.

Miss Nicholson: So take all the money and buy computers?

Mr. F. Hinds: Thus, the question of computer laboratories is an antiquated and outdated approach. It will be off to a bad start. I hope the Minister of Education takes a quick note.

Mr. Assam: You would blight anything. "Yuh have bad mouth."

Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I thoroughly enjoyed the contribution of the Member for Diego Martin East who went through a litany of failings on the part of the Minister of Education which he drew from the development programme for 1997. He demonstrated that in many cases his projects were never even started; zero, zero, zero. Time is short so I would not detain us, but it did clearly demonstrate—and he did my job for me—that precious little happened in the Ministry of Education, other than total confusion and chaos, over the last year.

We are also quite clear that he is incompetent and the Prime Minister of this Government recognizes that but we are understanding that in this democracy, given the numbers, the Prime Minister could at this stage do nothing about it, especially since he was ably assisted by two—shall we say—froghoppers. No, we will not say that, but by two individuals.

Mr. Sharma: Make a sensible suggestion.

Mr. F. Hinds: I am not sure whether the Minister of Education appreciates the fact that the teaching service is demoralized. We must intensify and accelerate training and retraining of our nation's teachers. There are thousands of young persons who are adequately qualified to find jobs in the teaching service. We saw it again in the hospitality industry in the Far East and it is well known in other parts

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of the world. They train many young persons in the hospitality industry and have a pool of those persons. When it becomes necessary in high tourist season they draw on this pool to facilitate serving the tourists visiting these countries.

In similar fashion, there should be relief teachers. A programme should be put in place to train many of the young people who are otherwise unemployed but not qualified to be teachers. When you have done that, principals should be given the authority on any given day, if a mathematics teacher could not come for a day or two for any, hopefully, good reason, to draw on that pool to deal with the problem immediately. If principals are to be managers of schools that is the kind of thing we would like to see if we are contemplating world class Trinidad and Tobago.

Teachers need not be castigated and criticized, as they have grown accustomed over the last two years, but praised and honoured for the commitment, dedication and the contribution that they have been making to the development of society. When you criticize them, do not feel that they would be fooled by some half-baked apology. They are made of sterner stuff.

The Minister alluded to the question of school security. We saw for the last few weeks around this Parliament, one Mr. Trevor Oliver, the former Public Relations Officer for the teachers. He decided to impress upon this Government, with a one-man protest, the need for security. It is something we all know. In Success Roman Catholic School in my constituency there has been a series of break-ins.

Mr. Assam: When did it start?

Mr. F. Hinds: Well, it is a problem.

Miss Nicholson: This is a backward argument.

Mr. Bereaux: Forget how late it is and fix it.

Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, we expect that the Government is the government of the day and will do all it can to ensure lives and property are secured in these institutions and the contrary would not interfere with the development of the nation's children.

We opened up and forged links with the School of Education and the University of the West Indies on the question of training for teachers. We ask that this programme be intensified as well so as to make them better equipped.

There are a number of problems in the education system and I am sure that the Minister is aware of them but had nothing to say about these issues. There is a

significant shortage of guidance officers and there are cases of one guidance officer for five and six schools; including primary and secondary schools. Given the challenges of today's youth, it is sheer impossible to deal with that. *[Interruption]*

The Member for Fyzabad is saying in two years but as I have explained, time and time again, this Government is better able, financially, to deal with these issues than any other government since 1988. Between the years 1991 and 1995 we set the foundation like a master builder. True PNM tradition.

Miss Nicholson: You carried on.

Mr. F. Hinds: We rebuilt this country after the social upheaval of 1990 and the devastation of the economy in the years preceding that.

The Minister must also take note of the significant shortage of curriculum officers, the people who would visit from time to time, to review the curriculum. I know that there is some curriculum review being undertaken now, I think by the same task force, but the Minister is outside of that. He will never know of it until they summon him to answer a few questions, but it is critical.

I speak now of school supervisors. The errant behaviour of some teachers just goes undetected and unattended. Schools supervisors are a scarce resource. This is an area the Government needs to look at as well. There are large pools of teachers in schools. For example, in the comprehensive schools there are upwards of 110 or 115 teachers. It is difficult for the principals to manage, especially when they are called upon to teach; 50 per cent of the time they are teaching, 50 per cent of the time they are operating as actual managers in these institutions. This is another matter that needs to be given some attention if we are to take this nation forward into the new millennium so that it can properly compete.

11.10 p.m.

There is one other matter, Mr. Speaker, that I will like to deal with very briefly. There are cases where you have burnt-out teachers, just like the Minister of Works and Transport, burnt out; just like the Minister of Health, burnt out; just like the Minister of Education, burnt out; just like the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, worn out, beaten and burnt out. There are teachers who are burnt and disoriented as a result of the traumas that they suffered at the hands of this Government. There are dysfunctional teachers for one reason or another. There are teachers who are ill but have not yet attained the retirement age. The time has come, and TTUTA has been asking for it, when serious consideration must be given to creating, what I call an escape route for these

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teachers maybe at the age of 45 and their pensions would not be too adversely affected. The Minister needs, if he can get the ear of the *de facto* Minister of Education, to indicate to him that that is a programme he may wish to consider because the alternative is to have people who are on the job but not performing effectively and efficiently in the system to the detriment of their charges and of the entire society.

Mr. Assam: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. F. Hinds: I am hearing rumblings from the Member for St. Joseph as usual.

I want to say in closing, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Education had the temerity to tell this honourable House that the shift system is responsible for crime in this country; very “Jobian” kind of nonsense. It is the kind of thing that he must have heard from the Member for Tobago East. I cannot quote him because I do not have *Hansard* but, in essence, what he said was the shift system created criminals in this country. I want to tell the Minister of Education that I can point him to at least 5 or 10 persons who have come out of that shift system who will never say “para-dig-im” when they see the word “paradigm”. I can point out to him at least a dozen persons who have come out of the shift system and who are now holders of PhDs. I can take him to the University of the West Indies and show him two lecturers who have come out of the very shift system. I can show him dozens, scores and hundreds of people in this country who have come out of the system and who can only be considered noble, productive and upright human beings. For the Minister of Education to come to this Parliament and castigate and relegate all the thousands of children who are still in the shift system and to suggest that it creates criminals, is nonsense, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. F. Hinds: Check the record. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I am hearing protestations that he did not say that. Indeed, maybe he did not, but he seems to get his tongue twisted around his eye tooth and probably cannot see what he is saying. Mr. Speaker, he has the habit of not making himself clear.

Mr. Speaker, as I come to the end of my contribution—[*Interruption*] I need your protection.

Mr. Speaker: Please continue.

Mr. F. Hinds: Thank you kindly for your protection, Mr. Speaker, and for creating an atmosphere of parliamentary demeanour yet again. As I come to the

end of my contribution, what is clear is that when the Minister of Education came into office he met a ministry that was up and running; a ministry that was running on the energy and the fuel of the White Paper which came out of thorough and democratic consultation with the people of Trinidad and Tobago. All that was left for that bumbling Minister to do was to carry on as he met it. But he did not do that, he interfered with the programme and Trinidad and Tobago's growth and development in education and we are where we are today. Confusion and demoralization is rife, more and more children are becoming frustrated. That, buttressed by the conditions of poverty that exists in the society and which this Government pretended in this so-called budget to address, is a combination for retardation of progress and growth.

I pray that for the sake of this country, some semblance of good sense will come into the mind and heart of the Minister of Education and also the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister, and the Member for Couva South who has failed palpably to deal with crime in this country, notwithstanding his boasts. For the sake of Trinidad and Tobago, I pray that the day is short in coming when a budget presentation will find us in our rightful place in the other corner of this House so that Trinidad and Tobago can really move towards becoming the world class society that we had set the course for. We would pick up the mantle and carry it again.

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

Motion made and question proposed, That the House do now adjourn to Friday, December 19, 1997 at 10.00 a.m. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 11.17 p.m.