

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, December 19, 1997*

The House met at 10.03 a.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**PAPERS LAID**

1. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts and financial statements of the Southern Roads Development Project for the year ended December 31, 1996 as required by Loan Agreement No. 8/OR-TT between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean Development Bank. [*The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Strategic Services Agency for the period July 01, 1996 to December 31, 1996. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]

*Papers 1 and 2 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.***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 after the conclusion of Bill No. 1, the Appropriation Bill, 1998.

*Agreed to.***APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

[FOURTH 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 of Health (Dr. The Hon. Hamza Rafeeq): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to make a contribution to this debate in support of the measures outlined by the Minister of Finance.

I intend in my contribution to address three specific issues. Firstly, I will give a response to some of the issues and concerns raised by Members of the Opposition

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so far. Secondly, I will highlight some of the activities and some of the achievements of the Ministry of Health during 1997 and, finally, I will outline some of the plans and programmes that are in place for 1998. These will be done in the context of the Health Sector Reform Programme and against the budgetary allocations for the health sector in 1998.

Before I begin, however, I would just like to emphasize the policy thrust of the Ministry of Health and that is, over the last few years—in fact many years—much emphasis and resources have gone to the hospital sector and over the last two years since we have been in office, we have also used much resources and paid much attention to the hospital sector, for good reason. But in the coming years, that emphasis has to change and we have to put a lot more emphasis and focus into primary health care and health promotion activities.

To borrow a phrase from the hon. Minister of Finance when he delivered his budget presentation, “that is not an option, but it is a must.” This approach has been adopted by countries all over the world and it is this approach that will give us the greatest health gains from the resources that we have available in the health sector. It is against this background, therefore, that developments will take place in the health sector in 1998 and, indeed, in the coming years.

Mr. Speaker, I now respond to some of the issues that were raised by Members opposite. Firstly, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition mentioned, and it was mentioned by others as well, the subject of dengue. I would like to spend a few minutes on this subject. I would like to say at the outset that there is a little misunderstanding on some of the information that I have been giving to the press as far as the dengue situation is concerned and which I intend to correct this morning.

Firstly, I have never said, whether inside or outside of Parliament, that there is no dengue epidemic. Secondly, I have said on many occasions, as information becomes available to us, that there were two confirmed cases of death from Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever and there have been about 16 or 17 reported cases, but we cannot confirm these cases unless there are laboratory results, and we have had laboratory results which confirmed two deaths—which is what I have said; that we have had two confirmed deaths from Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever. I just thought that I should clarify that matter.

Mr. Speaker, when the Leader of the Opposition was speaking, he said that dengue was easy to control. There is no country in the world that has been able to

get rid of the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito. In the Western Hemisphere, there are epidemics of dengue in many countries and a few years ago, a study was commissioned by the Pan-American Health Organization to find out what would be the costing to getting rid of the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito in this part of the world. That study has now been completed and the estimated cost is US \$1.6 billion to get rid of the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito in this part of the world.

A few years ago, the President of Cuba, after an epidemic of Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever, led his army and his people in an effort to eradicate the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito in Cuba and he had some measure of success, but shortly after that *Aedes Aegypti* mosquitoes reappeared in large concentrations in Cuba and there are also incidents of Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever in Cuba. I am saying this just to put this issue of dengue fever in proper context.

When I assumed office at the Ministry of Health in 1995, the Insect Vector Division had very little resources and very little support and because of our experience during the dengue epidemic in 1996, as early as February of this year, I put a team together at the Ministry of Health to formulate a plan to deal with dengue in 1997. As early as May of this year, it began giving public advisories on the question of dengue and what people's involvement should be. In September of this year I made a statement in Parliament as regards the dengue epidemic and our measures worked reasonably well until September, because the incidents of dengue fever up to September 1997 were far less than we had for the corresponding period in 1996.

However, for the first time, in September of this year, we were seeing in Trinidad and Tobago Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever and that is what caused the problem. Today, even though we have reported less than half the cases of dengue fever in Trinidad and Tobago as compared with the corresponding period of last year, the problem, as I said, is the epidemic outbreak of Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever that we have had in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, we activated the inter-sectoral committee to deal with the dengue situation and we addressed it in the following way. We had our public education campaign and I must say in that campaign, we got a lot of support from members of all sections of the media. They gave us a lot of support in this effort; they were putting out advisories on a daily basis insofar as what people and the communities should do.

We increased our spraying capabilities; we bought 30 new dyna-foggers which we brought down here in a very short period of time. We were spraying with the

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ultra low volume machines and, of course, the ordinary spray cans. We improved our surveillance mechanisms; we improved the sensitization of medical and other health professionals as regards Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever, because as I said it was a new experience of Trinidad and Tobago and many of our doctors had not seen a case of this nature before, so we had to do some sensitization to the medical personnel. We increased the capability of the major hospitals to deal with Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever cases; we increased the capacity of the Blood Bank to make blood products available, and in conjunction with the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Works and Transport, we engaged in a certain number of clean-up campaigns.

10.15 a.m.

In addition to this, we engaged a consultant with the Pan American Health Organization in Cuba to give us some advice on this matter. A few days ago, however, there was a question on the "People Meter" on TV6 as to whether the Government had done enough, or whether the ministry had done enough, to deal with the dengue situation. That, really, is one of the problems. The Government does not have the sole responsibility for the management of this situation. This is what we have been trying to say to the population all along.

Two days ago, I think it was the Member for La Brea who made reference to the fact that attention was brought to the Prime Minister, when he visited the Member's constituency, about the case of a patient in Orange Valley who died from Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever. The Prime Minister was right on target when he said that if every household should take care of its immediate environment, then there would be a dramatic decrease in the incidence of dengue, and, of course, Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever.

Reference was also made to the fact that a school in the Prime Minister's constituency was closed because of the *Aedes Egypti* mosquito. That is true. I do not think there is any individual living in this country at present who has not been informed that we do have a dengue epidemic in Trinidad and Tobago; that it is caused by the *Aedes Egypti* mosquito and that they should have some kind of input in getting rid of the mosquito.

In that particular school, the public health inspectors went to check on it and they found the *Aedes Egypti* mosquito breeding in a tyre outside the building. There are close to 500 children in that school, about 40 members of staff and also supporting staff, and there is a tyre in that school yard breeding mosquitoes. That

is an attitude problem among members of our population and I warn the population today—it is true that there were, I think 16 or 17 reported cases of death from Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever; two deaths were confirmed—that this is a situation which is likely to increase in the coming years. I said so when I made my statement in Parliament earlier this year, because Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever comes as a result of a second infection of dengue. If there are so many people in this country who have had a first infection, with the second infection there is a likelihood that the incidence of Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever could be increased.

It is therefore the responsibility of the Government to do what it is supposed to do, but it is also the responsibility of the community, the members of the public, to do what they are supposed to do to curb this epidemic.

This brings me to the second point, and that is the question of AIDS. It was raised by the Member for San Fernando East, the Leader of the Opposition. Before I get into that, I want to clarify one thing, and that is, the incidence of AIDS in Trinidad and Tobago is not one in 25. It is important that we get the record straight, because these things are reported in the newspapers; the newspapers are put on the Internet and people all over the world have access to that information. The incidence of AIDS in Trinidad and Tobago is closer to one in 100. The Leader of the Opposition is not here, but I would like to say to him that the incidence could be one in 25 in high-risk groups. He made reference to this side of the House and I am not aware that there is increased promiscuity on the part of any Member of this side of the House, so I cannot say that this is a high-risk group.

Mr. Speaker, 93 per cent of the cases of HIV AIDS in Trinidad and Tobago are contracted or spread by sexual activity. The other 7 per cent is transmitted from mother to child. We have not had a case of HIV AIDS being transmitted in this country through blood transfusion and I do not think we had any cases so far of transmission by needles from persons who have used drugs, and so forth. This means that for any programme to be successful, we have to be able to influence the sexual behaviour of persons. I confess that is not an easy thing to do at all.

Studies in other parts of the world have shown that scaring young people by giving them the information as to what the ravages of AIDS can do to their bodies, has not helped to curb the epidemic. The approach, therefore, has to be different. We have taken the approach, first of all, of education. May I mention to Members of this honourable House today that the Ministry of Health has had discussions with the curriculum committee of the Ministry of Education with a view to getting some aspects on the subject of AIDS included in the school curriculum and they are

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giving consideration to that at this point in time, while they are developing the curriculum for the next school year.

We have had features on all the media: on the television, the print media, the radio as well, particularly targeting young people. We have a drop-in rapport centre at the Health Education Department; we have a drop-in centre where persons can be tested, free of charge, at Curepe junction; we have the Queen's Park Counselling Centre and testing centre as well and we have other clinics around Trinidad and Tobago. We have also had discussions with the inter-religious organization and the Family Planning Association and we review our programme from time to time.

One significant development is that I have had discussions with the Pharmacy Board in order to deregulate the sale of condoms. As it obtains at present, condoms can only be sold in pharmacies. We would like to deregulate the sale of condoms and make them more available, for example, in supermarkets, shops, and so forth, so that people can have easier access. I know that one of the charges may be that we want to increase promiscuity. That is not necessarily so. As Minister of Health at this point in time, if I have a choice as to promiscuity with condoms or promiscuity without condoms, I think our choice is clear. So we would like to make condoms more easily available to members of the public.

There was another comment made by the Member for San Fernando East and I am sorry that he is not here. He scoffed at the idea of the Minister of Finance and Tourism when he spoke about the "no smoking" policy being developed by the Ministry of Health and when he spoke about the increase in the duty for cigarettes. In Trinidad and Tobago, at this point in time, there are, on an annual basis, 100 new cases of lung cancer. To diagnose one of these cases and to treat the patient up to the point of radiotherapy, costs about \$60,000. That means that every year we spend \$6 million on new cases: diagnosing and treating patients who have cancer of the lung.

It has been shown that 95 per cent of these cases have a close relationship to smoking. That is only the direct cost and that is only one disease. There are diseases like bronchitis, emphysema, heart disease and so forth, but for cancer alone, it means that in 10 years we have spent \$60 million treating new cases of patients with cancer.

We are certainly intensifying our efforts with regard to our no-smoking policy. We have already developed a no-smoking policy for property owned by the Ministry of Health facilities, including our vehicles and during the year we will be

developing our national no-smoking policy, addressing smoking in public areas and the advertising of cigarettes.

10.25 a.m.

Finally, in relation to a comment that was made on the other side that there has been no resolution to the dispute with regard to the doctors. Mr. Speaker, when we came into office we met a situation in which the doctors in the public health sector had not had a review of their overtime arrangements for the last 15 or 16 years. Last year they went on a work-to-rule to press their demands for a review of this situation.

I am happy to report that this issue has been settled, and an agreement was signed between the Chief Personnel Officer and the Public Services Association on behalf of the doctors on November 14, 1997, in addition to general salary adjustments that were made for public servants. I just want to report to this honourable House that this issue has been settled.

I now turn to some of the activities in which we were involved in 1997. Firstly, I want to inform Members of this honourable House, if they do not already know, that the Children's Hospital at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex is now open to members of the public.

As one would know, there is a well-equipped children's hospital at the Eric Williams Sciences Complex with all the back-up services. There were attempts in the past by various administrations to open that hospital and to transfer the services from the Port of Spain General Hospital without much success. On December 1, 1997 the doors of that institution were opened to members of the public and on December 8, 1997 the transfer of the patients from the Port of Spain General Hospital to the Children's Hospital was completed.

I also want to state, for the benefit of the Members of this honourable House, that children who require care and who live in the north west peninsula, on an emergency basis, can still seek care at the Accident and Emergency Department of the Port of Spain General Hospital. For those patients who require hospitalization there are two dedicated ambulances stationed at the Port of Spain General Hospital to transfer patients from Port of Spain to Mount Hope.

There is the whole range of medical and surgical services that are available at the Mount Hope Medical Sciences Complex and all those services that were offered at the Port of Spain General Hospital which are now offered at Mount

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Hope, are offered free of charge to the patients. Also, in that hospital there are some rooms for parents who may wish to stay with their children during their hospitalization period. Now that this department has been transferred, there is an immediate freeing up of space for 150 beds at the Port of Spain General Hospital for use as the authority sees fit.

Secondly, early in the year, there again was protest from doctors at the Port of Spain General Hospital as regards equipment. We addressed this situation and it is something we will have to do on an ongoing basis because equipment always needs to be upgraded and replaced. We addressed the situation in the following ways.

Some equipment from the Mount Hope Hospital which was not in use was transferred to the Port of Spain General Hospital. Secondly, we bought \$1.2 million in equipment for the Port of Spain General Hospital, and most of it has already been received. Thirdly, the X-ray Department at the Port of Spain General Hospital is also being upgraded and a contract has already been awarded for the purchase of four new X-ray units for that department. Two of these will be stationary units and two will be mobile units. One of these units will be stationed in the Casualty Department of the Port of Spain General Hospital. These pieces of equipment are expected to be received early in the new year.

At the San Fernando General Hospital, \$1 million of equipment has been ordered and most of it has also been received; \$1.2 million in instruments for the operating theatres. In addition, the Central Sterile Services Department at the San Fernando General Hospital, the department that gives support services to the operating theatres has been upgraded to the tune of \$4 million and that was opened recently. The new theatres of the new wing at the San Fernando General Hospital are expected to be opened sometime early in the new year. In addition to this, there has been the addition of space for 90 beds at the San Fernando General Hospital and this has somewhat eased the overcrowding. The problems at the San Fernando General Hospital, as far as overcrowding is concerned, are still not fully addressed but we have eased it somewhat and plans are in place to decrease it as we go along.

In the area of infrastructural development, several health centres were refurbished. The Mayaro Health facility has been commissioned and the new Matelot and Ste. Madeleine Health centres have been opened. The Sangre Grande Hospital has been refurbished where there has been expansion and renovation of the maternity ward, expansion and renovation of the laboratory and expansion and

renovation of the library, air-conditioning units put in at the Accident and Emergency and the Pharmacy departments at the Sangre Grande Hospital.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of health promotion, there were 12 health fairs and three youth health expositions during the year. There were workshops and seminars on the subjects of dengue, cholera and AIDS throughout the country. There have been seminars to sensitize teachers of their role in reducing the incidence of HIV (AIDS) and other diseases. There were lectures to schools and communities on subjects such as: breast feeding, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, mental health, dental health and the role of the community in preventing and controlling diseases, and I mentioned already, our no-smoking campaign.

In the area of human resource development, there were several training programmes for all levels of staff in the health sector. We have continued our training of nurses, dental nurses, midwives, district health visitors, public health inspectors and district nurses and the Government continues to pay 50 per cent of the economic cost for the training of doctors, dentists and pharmacists. We have awarded scholarships for radiographers to be trained in preparation for the new treatment centre for cancer patients at the Mount Hope Medical Sciences Complex. I have already mentioned the negotiations that have been completed between the public servants and the Government.

Mr. Speaker, those are some of the activities in which we have been engaged in 1997 and, of course, I cannot mention all. I would briefly like to mention some of the activities in which we will be involved in 1998.

There has been an area of irritation among members of our population as far as the ambulance service is concerned. As you may be aware, in the Health Sector Reform Programme the development of a National Ambulance Service is one of the components. This ambulance service will cater for properly equipped ambulances, paramedics and, of course, radio communication.

I will like to inform Members of this honourable House and the national community that a contract has been awarded for the purchase and delivery of 13 new ambulances and this is expected to be delivered by March, 1998.

Mr. Speaker, in the 1998 Development Programme \$5 million has been allocated towards the national ambulance service for purchasing new ambulances, in addition to the 13 new ambulances which have already been requested to train paramedics to begin to operate this new system. This upgrading will continue in the coming years.

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I also want to inform Members that the Fire Service has also acquired new ambulances which they received just a few days ago. They are now offering the service whereby if a person who is injured in an accident, or is found lying at the side of the road, one can dial 998 and they will come and pick up the person. I know that this has been an area of irritation but I mention the number. If they do not have an ambulance available they have already had discussions with private companies and the St. John's Brigade to pick up these patients from the side of the road, or in the case of an accident.

Mr. Speaker, maybe, I should just interject a little light note and, that is, that we may also consider the establishment of an undertaking service where one will dial 624-PNM. Thank you.

10.35 a.m.

I now turn to the area of health promotion in 1998 and beyond. In this country, health care has become synonymous with hospital care. This attitude must change if we are to improve the health status of the population. As we know, the highest causes of mortality and morbidity in this country are related to the lifestyle diseases such as high blood pressure, cancer, heart disease, stroke and others. We must target individuals and communities to assist in influencing behaviour.

For the new year we have put things in place to establish a Health Promotion Council. This will be comprised of members from the various ministries and agencies that impact on health, the non-governmental organizations related to health such as the Diabetes Association, the Cancer Society, the Heart and Lung Society and others. Many documents are available with regard to health promotion. This committee will review the documents and develop an action plan. As I said, the emphasis would be getting people to take responsibility for their health.

Another area of irritation in our population has been the unavailability of pharmaceuticals at the health institutions. This has been a perennial problem. In 1994, the sum of \$43 million was allocated for the purchase of pharmaceuticals; in 1995 it was increased to \$48 million; in 1996, in our first budget this was increased to \$60 million; in 1997 it was \$60 million and in the 1998 Budget, this has been increased by 20 per cent to \$72 million. Even this amount would not be enough to satisfy the demands for pharmaceuticals for the population. We have to keep our policy in place for the chronic diseases. For the common illnesses we would be able to supply the pharmaceuticals and for some diseases we would be unable to supply the pharmaceuticals. We have gone further than that. We are shifting the

emphasis away from the brand name drugs to cheaper but effective generic drugs. We hope this would stretch the dollar that is available for the purchase of drugs.

We are in the process of improving our system including computerization for monitoring the distribution of pharmaceuticals. We are also discussing and seriously giving consideration to using governmental infrastructure and procurement mechanisms, to involve certain private pharmacies in the provision of drugs for certain conditions, particularly chronic conditions as glaucoma.

In the area of surgical operations, when I assumed office in the health sector in 1995, I met long waiting lists at all the major institutions. I confess that to this day we have been unable to make a serious dent in those waiting lists. One of the areas with a long waiting list was that of cataract operations. We were involved in a semi-private arrangement where during that year, 300 additional cataract operations were performed. I am pleased because sight was given to 300 persons who were previously unable to see. [*Desk thumping*] One particular lady had not seen her grandchild because she went blind before the child was born. Two days after the operation tears came from her eyes when she was able to see her grandchild for the first time. That has not made a dent because the waiting list is still very long.

We have put certain things in place such as same day surgery at Point Fortin, Mount Hope Hospital and San Fernando General Hospital. All the back-up services are now in place at the new operating theatres at the new wing of the San Fernando General Hospital. We are having difficulty in recruiting some of the staff such as anaesthetists, but we hope to open the new theatres early next year. There will also be the upgrading of the central sterilizing services at the Port of Spain General Hospital. They have placed an order on an operating table, which they hope to receive early next year and a new theatre will be opened.

In the area of human resource development, training programmes for all categories of staff such as nurses, midwives and district health visitors will be continued. At present, there is a problem with two parallel structures in place with public servants and employees of the Regional Health Authorities working together. A sum of \$50 million has been allocated in the 1998 development programme to establish a pension fund for the employees of the Regional Health Authorities. More money would be needed in that fund for the coming years, but we hope that as soon as it is established, we would begin to offer options for transfer to members of the public service to the Regional Health Authorities.

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A total of \$6 million has been allocated for information systems and information technology development. This is also a major component of the Health Sector Reform Programme which includes the purchase of equipment, software, training and materials.

Next, I turn to the area of primary health care. This has to be our shift from this year onwards. The aim is to strengthen the delivery of the primary health care services to reduce health risks and the need for hospitalization. A total of \$1.8 million has been allocated for the development of primary care and chronic diseases programme. It means that clinics and health centres would become more active and would be engaged in more screening and preventative measures during 1998 and beyond.

The immunization programmes would continue. We would continue to establish specialist clinics in the districts. The adolescents programmes which have been started in some districts would continue. In 1998, we will begin new training programmes for doctors in primary health care. This would be done at the University of the West Indies.

In keeping with the primary health care thrust, infrastructural development would take place where we will begin and continue the refurbishment and building of the health centre stock.

Finally, having said all this, in spite of the achievements we have had in the health sector for 1997 and our plans for 1998, there are many complaints by members of the public as to the quality of care and the attitude of staff at the different institutions.

One of the Members on the other side scoffed at the idea of the Quality Council we have established at the Ministry of Health. This council has been established to deal with issues like these. It is chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health and comprises the chief executive officers of the Regional Health Authorities, senior officials from the Ministry of Health and the quality management person in each of the Regional Health Authorities. They will determine quality targets against established benchmarks. At the major hospitals we have established a customer relations/complaint system. We are now in the process of expanding these to some of the major health centres.

In the new year, we would take two other initiatives. We would establish a complaints review panel in each of the Regional Health Authorities which will review complaints. Secondly, Cabinet has already approved the establishment of a complaints authority at the national level. This means that members of the public

who feel aggrieved in any way as to the quality of care received, will have different levels at which they can lodge their complaints and have them addressed. The Quality Council has already drafted a patients' charter, which is being considered by the regional health authorities, and which will be finalized during the year and circulated to members of the public to inform them of their rights and responsibilities as patients.

10.45 a.m.

We will also begin to establish next year, on a pilot basis, clinical audit systems. In 1998, we plan to establish, for the first time, an incentive scheme for employee of the year in each region and an employee of the year in the health sector at the national level.

Mr. Speaker, we have had many complaints from members of the public, but there have not only been complaints. I would like to relate two incidents before I close. One is that a couple weeks ago, at a school in Sangre Grande, there was a problem where the school was sprayed late in the evening. Rain fell, the school was closed, and the next day, quite a number of the children fell ill. During that day 200 children were seen at the Sangre Grande District Hospital, where they were able to mobilize all the doctors, nurses, ambulances and all members of staff to deal with them, in a very short space of time.

I visited the institution and would like to place on record that I was very impressed with the way they dealt with this emergency. They hospitalized three or four of the children, and there was an ambulance on standby in case any of the children needed to be transported to Port of Spain or any other major hospital. It has not all been bad news with the hospitals.

Secondly, in this time of the dengue outbreak, we have had many more admissions at the major hospitals, both at San Fernando and Port of Spain, and other hospitals, and some of the wards have been very overcrowded. Again, I would like to place on record my thanks, appreciation and gratitude to the members of staff who are trying their best to cope with this situation.

This, in summary, is a bird's eye view of the operations of the Ministry of Health and its agencies. Our Health Sector Reform Programme is now in full stream: we have our plans and programmes in place. We have our policies and programmes in a structured manner and we are on our way, so that by the end of 1998, the health sector will be in a better position to respond to the health needs of the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a short intervention in the 1998 Budget debate with respect to the allocations for 1998. I am very sorry that the Minister of Finance is not here. I had hoped that I would have been able to speak to him directly. However, I hope that he is in the country and would somehow pay attention to what we on this side have to say.

I think it is quite discourteous to this House that we should be discussing the national budget and in typical, cavalier, bacchanial style the Minister of Finance is absent from the Chamber. However, if I had presented a budget which was as pretentious as it is disjointed, as confusing as it is deceptive, I, too, might have been absent from this House.

Mr. Speaker, I will spend some time dealing with the facts as presented to the House and to the country by the Government. When one listens to what was said as against what was written and presented, one can only come to one conclusion. The only conclusion that one can come to is that the Minister of Finance and the Panday Administration are playing smart with foolishness, according to a local editor. Playing smart with foolishness and a loss or lack of credibility is epitomized by the behaviour of the Minister of Finance himself when he seeks to deny his ancestry in the PNM. Mr. Speaker, let me give you an example of what I am speaking about. This puts the whole budget and the whole behaviour of the Government in context.

The Minister of Finance records in the *Hansard* in the presentation of a national budget—and he was speaking to you, too, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure that you, too, had you been allowed to intervene, because you had a long history in the PNM, would have done so. Listen to what he had to say to you and others:

“...this sort of data provide compelling evidence that for more than three decades, this country was atrociously managed, and badly short-changed by the Party which is now in Opposition.”

That is the party, Mr. Speaker, that you served as Minister of Works for quite some time.

But that is the lack of credibility of the Minister of Finance and the Government. If the Minister can come to Parliament and record that in *Hansard*, I would have to ask him a question to his face this morning: If that is so, when he was seeking to join a political party, in 1991, to get into government, to put his hands in the Treasury, he did not join the DAC, he did not join the Alliance, he did not join Tapia, he did not join ONR, he did not join the UNC, he joined the PNM,

after the 30 years of atrocious management that badly short-changed the country. So, what manner of man is this? He knew that the PNM had short-changed this country for 30 years, yet when he entered the political arena, he climbed on the PNM's back to get into government.

Mr. Speaker, I would not be too long, but I would like to put this in perspective for Members because you all do not understand. *[Interruption]* I welcome the Minister into the Chamber.

In 1992, when we were in government, the Salaries Review Commission submitted a report very much like it did recently, and we had a discussion among ourselves as to what was the minimum requirement that individuals in the group would need to meet their personal commitments. We had to determine how to respond to the Salaries Review Commission report, because we were thinking of reducing the allocation of the Salaries Review Commission, and join in the sacrifice that the rest of the country was making. As we went around the circle, members said that they required from \$5,000—\$7,000 to meet their basic commitments. I can never forget what the Minister of Finance said. He said that he needed a minimum of \$20,000 a month to live, and my mouth fell open. I said to myself: “What have we gotten ourselves into?” A man who requires \$20,000 per month minimum to live has voluntarily taken a job for \$8,800.

After I heard that, I said to the Prime Minister: “Do you know something? This PNM has just come out of a very difficult period and we were accused very vociferously of corruption. I said that the one thing that the PNM would not be able to survive in this country again is corruption on the part of any individual in government. My colleagues can bear me out on that. I went to Rome to a FAO meeting and when I came back he was out of the government. To this day, I have no idea why he left the government. I do know that he told the country publicly that he could not manage in the political arena. I was surprised, he was back in so soon after, and this time he has a new song—that the PNM has short-changed this country for 30 years and as a result of that, the PNM had atrociously managed this country.

10.55 a.m.

Why did he not join the UNC, the ULF, the DAC or Tapia? Why did he not form his own party? He joined the same PNM which he knew atrociously managed the affairs of the country. That is the level of hypocrisy.

Mr. Speaker: I know that you are anxious to talk directly to the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism, but in keeping with the Standing Orders, do it through me.

Dr. K. Rowley: There are some things which I want to tell him that I do not want passed through you, Sir.

Mr. Kuei Tung: They do not want him and he would not leave.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, if as I suspect, that politicians of this country are held in very low esteem, it is because of this kind of behaviour. It is people like us, and statements like that which contribute to the way in which politicians are viewed in the wider national community as persons who are untrustworthy, would say anything, and do anything for anything.

I wish to advise the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism that he was not the first to have come to this Parliament and attempt to "grandstand" at the PNM's expense. They could say what they want, we on this side have no problem being in the Government or being in the Opposition. Neither do we have a problem being with the PNM as we have been for the last 41 years. [*Desk thumping*]

What we have a problem with is when intelligent persons with governmental responsibility talk foolishness to our children. I want through you, to take the Minister of Finance to the 1987 Budget. When he was busy doing other things before he rallied into the same PNM, which he is seeking to denigrate now, a budget was already in existence. I will quote for him from the manifesto of the party which won that election. A fundamental statement was made seeking to attack the PNM's approach to monetizing the hydrocarbon resources saying it was the wrong way to go and casting all kinds of aspersions about what we were doing at the heavy industrial sector at Point Lisas. For the benefit of the neophytes on the other side, listen to this. It says on page 1 of the 1987 Budget describing Point Lisas and what it represents in this country:

"The skirmishes of the past government into large-scale industries notably at Point Lisas have for the most part been spectacular failures..."

That was on page 1 of the budget of a government which had just come into office in a matter of weeks, and there was much thumping and cheering because they had won 33-3 and there were those who felt that was a correct statement. Today, 10 years later it is the same spectacular failure. A part had to be sold to get \$600 million to fool the country saying it is a surplus. If the methanol plant could not be sold to inject \$700 million into the 1997 budget it would have been shown for all to see as a spectacular failure. But, of course, corruption was taking place.

Page 9 of the same budget on state enterprises says:

“Given the new policy direction I have outlined, it is appropriate to reflect in the 1987 budget a break with the practice of financing state enterprises and public utilities, under the recurrent expenditure of the central government.”

They were having a break with financing state enterprises from current account. What is this Minister offering the country today? In 1997 the Minister got approval for providing Caroni (1975) Limited with \$14.4 million. This year, he is coming for approval to provide Caroni (1975) Limited with \$153 million and that is in the context of a situation where the Minister of Finance and Tourism has made a big "grand charge" about financing the state enterprises from the current account. He is going in a completely opposite direction, but of course, the Minister has no allegiance to that. Mr. Speaker, in 1988, the following year the Minister returned to the Parliament and he was poo pooing Point Lisas and the so-called thrust in the Caroni industry.

He speaks about our incautious approach to economic diversification. That is how Point Lisas is being described. Today, Point Lisas is the jewel in the crown of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. And insofar as the manifesto position is juxtaposed against the PNM trying to cry it down saying it is developing something else, it had said there would be no more excursions, as it is called, into heavy industry in this country, and no more mega projects. That was the position of those who opposed the PNM. Now, there are two alumina plants, and not two, but four methanol plants. When they are attacking the PNM, it is because they do not respect their elders, but they must learn to respect their betters.

Mr. Sudama: Let me make a clarification. The government's position in those days was that it ought not to get into heavy industry with public finances, but it was not against private investment, in fact, it attracted a lot of private investment and that is what is being done now.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Planning and Development cannot fool me with that. They were talking about the country entering into the particular sector of economic activity which was called, "sunset industries". Is he now saying that they were going to encourage the private sector into "sunset industries"? Is that what he is saying? He cannot fool me with that.

I want to take my friend the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism back to the budget of 1988 where again, he is trying to do something different from the PNM.

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Page 30 of the 1988 Budget states:

“Whereas in the past there has been noticeable concentration on expenditure relating to community and social services, general administration, public order and safety...”

They were going to do it differently. The PNM was spending on public order and safety, community services and so forth, and they were saying that they would do the opposite. It is right here on page 30. I do not have the time to quote the whole paragraph for you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a new government coming into office meeting a situation of crime and the government would be saying that there would be a shift away from the expenditure in public order and safety. Clearly, the crime situation could not have been anywhere as it is now because that government would have had to be either mad, or it did not know what it was doing; and if there is anyone over there who can speak for the government, tell us which one it was. Because it is written on page 30 of the 1988 Budget that there was going to be a shift away from the expenditure pattern on public order and safety and community and social services. The country's record is available to any objective researcher.

Now, we are hearing of record-breaking expenditure towards public order and safety so in one breath it is “Do not spend too much on that as a matter of policy.” In the next breath, “we are going to break records by spending on that.” I am only saying these things to tell you that whenever the UNC Government is trying to criticize the PNM, try and understand exactly what they are saying because it cannot stand scrutiny. Public order says expenditure is too high in the scheme of things, now we have reached the point where this Minister in the 1996 Budget on page 3 says the third of the many priorities that the Government would attack after infrastructure and poverty is especially "the area of crime reduction".

I want to say something on that. The Government has a way of saying that it did not create it. Neither I, nor my colleagues are saying that anyone on that side or the Government in general has created or committed crime. What we do say, however, is that insofar as this Cabinet or any other in the national community is concerned, the fact that you are the Government you are the officers of the state who have the responsibility to treat the problem. That is all. And we would love to see your stewardship in treating the problem. Let us not be childish and talk about who created this and who did not create it. No one is accusing anyone of creating anything. We are measuring you by the yardstick of performance where you

yourselves have said that your priority is crime reduction. The Minister in his budget speech said that his administration would address these deficiencies as a matter of priority. He also said that to successfully launch an offensive on crime, the Government would establish a task force assisted by the support unit in the Office of the Prime Minister to prepare and implement a crime reduction master plan as a matter of urgency.

This is the yardstick which the Parliament was given in 1996 and I am asking if the agency has been successful. Is there a fast-tracking support unit in the Office of the Prime Minister? Where is the crime-reduction master plan? If, in fact, there is such a plan, is it working? Is that what 624-LEAP is? That is what I am asking because this has come after 24 months of this commitment from the Minister, and crime is now worse than when he was making this commitment.

Mr. Speaker, for his benefit, I am giving one aspect of statistics. I am saying that crime is now worse than when he was making this commitment in 1996. In today's *Newsday* it says:

“7 Men Gang-Rape 2 Women—One Woman Raped Twice”

That is total quality raping and that is what we are talking about, and in 1996 when he was talking about that commitment to reduce crime as a matter of urgency, there were 149 reported cases of rape then.

11.10 a.m.

With respect to rape, there were 149 reported cases in 1996. In 1997, the figure was 202, so the master plan is not working. In terms of sexual offences, in 1996, the figure was 250; in 1997—and we have not finished yet; in the last 48 hours four sets of women have been gang raped—472, up from 250, so the master plan is not working.

All I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is that the Government is responsible for managing the situation and whatever has been put in place is not impacting and turning around the negative of that situation. If I had the time, Mr. Speaker, I could have gone into all the other aspects of major crime to show that there is no significant reduction at all, in crime in this country, as against the commitment of the budget of 1996 and the Government. Of course they could say that they do not believe the figures. *[Interruption]* It is not only on the crime scene. Mr. Speaker, granted that the reason he has made no impact on the crime situation is because the PNM has done that.

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Mr. Speaker, the Minister said that in 1996 the National Petroleum Company would have been reviewed:

“Demonopolization of the company will take place in 1996.”

Has that come and gone? What has happened with that? That was a specific comment of action and time-frame. We are now entering 1998 and all we know about National Petroleum Company is that a strange gentleman is there, nobody knows what he is doing, but we are being told that he is doing something specially for the Minister and the Chairman. That is how Government policies are being conducted. The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism gave a specific commitment to demonopolize National Petroleum Company in 1996, he says nothing about it after but somebody is there doing something that nobody knows about, except the Minister and a few of his friends. Tell me who did that!

In the same 1996 Budget Statement he said that he was formulating a social mitigation programme which would involve the disbursement of \$60 million to farmers who suffered adverse effects of the structural adjustment programme. I ask him and his Government: Has he disbursed 06¢, 60¢, 6,000¢ or \$6 million to farmers under this programme? That is all we are asking them to do: report on the stewardship against the yardsticks that have been set in the budget.

Mr. Speaker, remember when they made these commitments in the House, they pounded the desks and the press reported as though the country was going somewhere fantastic fast, because the Government is doing X, Y, Z. All public relations and no delivery. My friend from Caroni Central would understand what I mean.

It is the same thing with the 1997 Budget Statement. In the Minister’s budget presentation last year he came with all kinds of figures. We said to him that that budget would not perform. At the end of the day he had to sell the methanol plant to put money in the current account to make the budget look good. If one looks at the performance of the various revenue sectors, one would see that government revenue is down in a disastrous way.

Last year, when the Minister said he was going to receive \$209 million from National Lotteries, we said, “that is not going to be realized, you are over-estimating the receipts so as to pad the budget”, the estimate \$180 million. He was budgeting \$209 million in a case where it was clear to everyone that lottery receipts were on the decline, VAT was on the decline and whatever else. Mr. Speaker, we have to ask ourselves: What will be the condition of this country if

there is a slight drop in the oil price, as is likely to happen given the international scenario? What is the Minister of Finance going to do? Where there are serious problems to be addressed they end up gerrymandering the figures and they come into the Parliament and misrepresent the facts. Again, I regret I have to return to my friend from Princes Town, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, because that demonstrates it more than ever.

In one document, the *Review of the Economy* provided by the Minister of Finance, it says one thing and the Minister comes here and paints a rosier picture of fantastic growth and expansion in agriculture. Let me walk you through what the *Review of the Economy* says, Mr. Speaker. Cocoa production fell and price continues to slide. Sugar production: the ratio of cane to sugar fell from 12.1 to 12.3; foreign exchange earnings, 15 per cent below for sugar sales; copra fell; grapefruit production fell; orange production fell. However, in that kind of scenario one gets this description: There is growth in broilers, chickens and that is attributed to the production in hatching eggs. Mr. Speaker, where else does one get chicken except from eggs? Then, there is expansion in pork as a result of an increase in pig production. That is in the document. Where does one get pork except from pigs? He goes on: Output of milk—and I dare not say where the milk is coming from. That is what they are using to pad the document to give the impression that something is happening. We had eggs so we got chickens, we had pigs so we got pork.

The bottom line is, however, if one goes to the back of the document where the real numbers are—forget what he said—look at the performance of the agricultural sector, percentage change in constant prices—the same yardstick is used to measure from year to year and what does one see? One sees that in 1996, it was 7.6 in terms of growth, in 1997 it is going to be 3.7. Is that going up or is that going down? The Minister is telling us that it is going up.

When one looks at the subsets in agriculture one would see where, in terms of actual dollar value, in 1992 under Head XI, Agriculture, in terms of growth, if there is any significant growth in agriculture in this country we are really going to have to export those things because one is not going to eat 10 more bananas because one is growing more. As I said, one would have to look for export agriculture.

In 1992, we exported \$21 million, in 1997, \$39 million, in 1994 and 1995, \$40-odd million, in 1996, \$43 million, in 1997, \$29 million. Is that going up or is it going down? Between the years 1992 and 1996 it was going up, from \$21 to \$43

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million. It has now gone down to \$29 million, but they would not say that and explain what happened. They come to the Parliament and try to present a different picture.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources presented some figures about the performance of the Public Sector Investment Programme. I want to spend a few minutes on this because when they were not in government they gave the impression that something dreadful was happening to agriculture because those in government had something against the agricultural sector, and if they had the opportunity in government, they would have made waves in expanding agriculture in this country.

What do you see, Mr. Speaker? If one looks at the Public Sector Investment Programme which is where money is allocated to provide infrastructure and other support for the sector, and in 1997, this Parliament—under this agriculture-loving group—approved, under the productive sector heading, \$64 million for agriculture and spent \$50 million. They were underspending by \$14 million—in an area where they claimed they were going to make this magic—from an approved budget of \$64 million.

11.20 a.m.

Under economic infrastructure, this Parliament approved \$109 million and they spent \$79 million, not because they did not have the money—they told us in the Parliament that they had a surplus of money and they are claiming that they have the acumen on whatever and they performed so well. He said on record here that they did a 90 per cent performance in the development programme but the Public Sector Investment Programme said that you got \$109 million under economic infrastructure, you spent \$79 million, how could that be 90 per cent? Do you know what he has done? New maths according to my friend from Tabaquite.

Having underspent what the Parliament approved, the revised estimate is now used as the original target, and then he compares that figure and gets a figure of 90 per cent. He gave us the documents. We know what we approved in this document, it is recorded here. You had \$173 million to be spent on agricultural development, you spent \$129.89 million. That is the level of the performance. If that is so they must say so, they must not come to the Parliament and try to bramble people by way of the media and saying what is not true. The media do not have time to go in here and look at the numbers row by row, line by line; they take them at their word. I am cautioning the media in this country, do not repeat any

figure any Government Minister gives you, you would get in trouble because they do not speak the truth.

If one goes to page 37 one would see what was approved in the Parliament in the last budget, one would see what they have spent and come to one's own conclusion. They do not speak the truth. When one looks at this group of people having said everything about agriculture, one has to ask oneself: Now that they are in Government, should we not be treated with dramatic changes in agricultural policy, innovative programmes, new crops, new patterns of expenditure and so forth? That is what I was looking for. But what do I get? Underspensing in the development programme. The Minister mumbled his way through a document called *Agriculture Incentive Programme*. He tried to give the impression that his Government had embarked on some new, innovative scheme for incentives for agriculture. Nothing is further from the truth. The origin of this document was a study that was done in 1995 to review the same incentive they used to criticize and cry down when they were in Opposition. Technical officers of the ministry were detailed to review those things in 1995, it took him until 1997 to bring it here for the 1998 *Budget Statement* to be presented as something new.

I have no problem with that. What shocked me is that after he went through it, line by line, he could not find a single area of any significant consequence to change gear in the agricultural sector. The only new area in which anything is mentioned here, other than existing programmes, is water for agriculture. Even that they did not get right, because we were working towards finding out the needs of farmers for water and our approach was to go to the Water and Sewerage Authority and seek to negotiate some kind of arrangement which would specifically apply to the supply of water for farms. That would have brought a special rate for farmers who access water. Instead, the Minister comes and says he is giving subsidies to a few water projects.

The entire thrust of incentives for agriculture is back to the same subsidy programme that has been criticized and, in many cases, justifiably so, found to be inefficient, prone to corruption and ineffective. That is the sole thrust of this agricultural ministry, after looking at the programme for two years.

It does not end there. Even after they have finished the review, we come to a situation where there is provision for the same subsidy programme—\$55 million, and gives the impression that it is something new. I want to draw the Minister's attention to the last page in his own document that in 1991, the subsidy in the agricultural sector was \$56 million, so we can forget this as anything new or

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innovative. It is something that does not even mesh with the budget. They are not even honest.

While making his contribution, he made reference to our fishermen having to pay the road improvement tax and that he had taken their concern on board and his document in the ministry has informed the Minister's budget. One would expect that since he has taken the fishermen's concern on board something would have been done with respect to the gas subsidy. Yes, something was done but the way it was put across, it was as if something positive has been done. It is something negative.

If one looks at the provision for gas rebates, one would see the provision for support with gasoline and diesel for fishermen has been reduced. Last year, it was \$500,000 and this year it is \$475,000. How is it he reduced it and the Government is telling us that it has taken this concern on board and has addressed it? That document is replete with that.

When one looks at the *Medium Term Policy Framework 1998—2000* and all one sees there are the same two old *clichés* about linking agriculture to tourism, linking it to the School Feeding Programme and things like that. It is the same thing that has been going on that they found inadequate, and now they are in government in their third year—if I know you have not put your innovation forward you have nothing to offer. Therefore, one has to look back and ask: What was all this criticism about? Because they could find nothing; when they could find nothing, do you know what they did? They gerrymandered.

When one looks at the *Review of the Economy*, under Employment Creation—and my colleague from Diego Martin East made the point—all this unemployment is falling, but you cannot see it. One of the areas where unemployment is supposed to be falling is in the agricultural sector. We were told by the Minister yesterday that almost 6,000 persons entered the sector and half of them entered the sector in the sugar division; 3,000 new workers came into the sugar division. This country has a sugar industry of a fixed size, of a target of 140,000 tonnes. In fact, the target for this year was in the order of about 118,000 tonnes or thereabout. So what is going to happen to require you to take into that industry, of a fixed size and target, 3,000 new people?

If one looks at the document one would see that the largest growth of 19.9 per cent in employment was recorded in sugar. What are these 3,000 people doing this year in the sugar industry that they were not doing last year and the year before?

They are fooling no one. If they tell me this came from the Central Statistical Office, all I would say is that if the CSO is producing documents like that, then the integrity of that unit has to be called into question. I do not think that is what it is all about. *[Interruption]* I am not attacking anybody; I am just saying logically, tell me where 3,000 new people entered the sugar industry. What did they come in to do this year that was not done last year, and the year before? What is worse, at the same time we are being told that 3,000 new persons came into the industry, we are seeing a decline in the production of the industry. As I mentioned to you earlier, there is decline in production in the agricultural sector, but we are being told that 6,000 additional persons came into the industry. Something has to be wrong!

11.30 a.m.

Of course, as I say that, I come to the point that the Member for Princes Town made. He wanted to find out why I told the press that 5,000 Caroni workers must go. I did not tell the press that. I discussed the matter with the press and they came to their own conclusion, which is reasonable. It is reasonable because the Minister himself told us yesterday that Caroni has 7,200 workers. He said that. Price Waterhouse has said that they were hired by the Government to do a job. Let me read for you what Price Waterhouse said on the question of labour:

“Labour is the largest element of cost, yet significant and largely inexplicable discrepancies exist between payroll, organization charts and physical head count reported by managers. Payroll records as at April 8, 1997 included over 12,000 employees.”

So, if the press and I are talking, and Price Waterhouse is saying that the managers are reporting payroll records of 12,000 people, the Minister is telling the Parliament that he knows about 7,200, how much plus 7,000 adds up to 12,000? So 5,000 workers who should not be there are there. In fact, if that is so, what is the problem in saying that 5,000 have the go?

The Minister is saying that he only knows about 7,000 but he pays Price Waterhouse and they cannot find the number of people in Caroni (1975) Limited. Do you know what they said?

“Despite the people's request, no reconciliation or clarification of payroll figures was performed.”

They should have asked the Minister how many persons are working at Caroni, because he seems to know. But when they were asking the company, they could

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not tell them, because Price Waterhouse said it varied between 12,000 and 9,100. This is a report of June 1997 paid for by Caroni. So, they hire a firm like Price Waterhouse, they are talking about 9,000 and 12,000 workers, but the Minister is telling the Parliament about 7,000 workers. I simply ask the Minister of Finance: "Who is footing the bill?" He has provided \$153 million for Caroni. How many workers are there at Caroni? It is a reasonable question, I think, and I hope they can answer.

I bring that back to the bogus figures about employment creation because, at the same time, there seems to be a discrepancy of 3,000 appearing in the employment creation figure, so it may very well be that the CSO is not wrong, but the Government will not admit that the real number is with the company. All I am asking is for somebody in authority in Government to tell us, because, Mr. Speaker, it is logic.

The Minister told us that in 1992 Caroni (1975) Limited had 8,500 workers. In 1997, they have 7,200 workers, so they have cut the workforce by almost one-eighth. What kind of company is this that cuts its workforce by approximately one-eighth, but yet has a serious financial crisis that is getting worse? At the same time they are cutting the workforce by 1,000 but still cannot make ends meet, even though in the interim, as they sell and get foreign exchange, it is being converted into more Trinidad and Tobago dollars because the dollar has been depreciating against their earnings. What is going on? They cut the workforce by 1,000 but need \$153 million next year, as against the \$40 million dollars budgeted last year. What is going on? I want the Government to explain that to me, because, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has not addressed the Caroni situation.

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. [*Miss P. Nicholson*]

Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I wish to thank my colleagues on both sides for the extension.

I do not want to get into a long debate about Caroni. That debate is going to continue outside of this Chamber, and outside of the budget debate, because the Caroni situation has to be addressed. We cannot hide from it. It is not a question of who created it, because if we had to debate that it would take us even longer.

It is being bandied about now about exactly what did the PNM do. The PNM made a mistake with Caroni. A big mistake! Had the PNM done what ought to have

been done with Caroni in the very beginning, we would not have been in this position. There is no reason not to follow the solution we have agreed upon in recent years to correct the situation. I say that with no fear because the PNM is not in Parliament.

When the sugar industry was bought as a failed industry in the private sector, it should never have been taken on board and tied to the Treasury of Trinidad and Tobago. There is a future and a place for the sugar industry in Trinidad and Tobago, and until we get back to that position where the sugar industry employs only what it needs, it will always be a problem for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The sugar industry can, must and will survive in Trinidad and Tobago. The problem is that we are trying to finance and support excesses at the company.

Trinidad and Tobago can have a decent, strong and viable sugar industry without substantial state support if we do not try to employ more people than the industry requires. We do not have to go to Mars to see that. We go to Barbados and the industry is surviving outside of its treasury, and the managers know that if they do not perform the bank closes them down. We go to Jamaica and see a sugar industry surviving outside of its treasury. We go to St. Kitts and we see the same thing.

We made a mistake in Trinidad and Tobago believing that we had to fund our sugar industry out of the Treasury. We have to abolish that. We tried in 1992 to address it. We started with a clean slate. We must not recreate that situation. Had we gone through with what we embarked upon in 1992, we may not have been in the current position which we have to address, and the point is made that initially, we sought to reduce the Caroni labour force by attrition. One has to give attrition time to work. If attrition does not take one to the target that is required, then one has to intervene. That is simple.

Mr. Speaker, there were excess workers in other enterprises in the country: PTSC, WASA, the Port, and so forth, and I think the total number was far more than the excess at Caroni. In the national interest, we pruned those excesses. As a result of that, the Port, PTSC and other areas which were treated in that way are no problem now for the Treasury. It is in that context we have to see the Caroni situation. If we do not address the Caroni situation, and try to fund it in the way the Minister of Finance embarked on funding it in 1998—\$153 million which will not be enough—I can tell him that the next year will be \$200 million and after that \$300 million.

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What we are doing, as he himself has acknowledged, is that by not treating with the excesses of Caroni, we run the risk of derailing the entire national economic programme and everybody in the country will suffer by trying to maintain 3,000 excess workers. Instead of providing 6,000 workers with a secure future in a secure job in a secure industry, by trying to maintain the current status quo, one could put all those jobs and the entire industry at risk, because the day the Minister of Finance does not have the \$200 million to pay them and pay day comes, what are they going to do?

That day may very well come, because he has been lucky so far. In one year there was the Saddam Hussein threat on Kuwait and we got money. The next year, the methanol plant was sold and we got money. We cannot plan on that kind of arrangement in the long term. What he is heading for is to take the country back to deficit spending, because when the workers at Caroni cannot be paid at pay day and they have to be bailed out from the Ministry of Finance, he tells Caroni to go to the bank to get the money, and when they get the money at the bank, the Government guarantees it. At the end of the day, the Government spending runs into a deficit, and that deficit will have serious consequences for the currency which is now a floating currency. Once the currency begins to move, I need not talk about the effect it is going to have on the pensioners, the middle class and the small business. He knows it. All of us know it. What are we trying to do, put the whole country at risk to preserve something that cannot stand scrutiny?

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to waste time with my friend from Princes Town. He is a lost cause. I am speaking to the Minister of Finance and telling him, having been the Minister who brought the consensus on the Tripartite Agreement in the PNM Government. If you look in the Medium Term Policy document, you will see the current Minister of Finance speaking about enhancing the viability prospects of Caroni and his action in the medium term will be to continue to implement the recommendations of the Tripartite Agreement.

Mr. Speaker, by that not being given substance in the last two years, we are now into a more difficult position than we were in 1994 and 1995 with that company. I can tell you that had we not got the kind of response from the tripartite committee which was required for the viability of the company, the options that would have been taken to Cabinet, which are options open to this Government, would have been to restructure the company in a very fundamental way.

Mr. Speaker, there is no reason now for us to want to preserve Caroni the way it is. We have to be bold, forward looking, humane and effective. The Government

has to consider taking the company almost entirely out of cane production, that is one recommendation, that is where the bulk of the costs and losses are—and put that cane production in the hands of cane farmers. Expand the cane farming community to as large as they can absorb, and reduce the company's cane production. Take the Treasury out of cane production.

We can also look at the company as a milling kind of arrangement with a small amount of in-house mechanized cane production. If that is done, with both initiatives, one can then—as someone has suggested from the cane-farming community—give them stake in the industry. Let them get involved in the industry. If they do that and take the industry out of the Treasury, the entire country will benefit. We have to do something about that particular company. One would expect that a Government that talks so much about agriculture would know what to do, especially since the leader of the Cabinet was a part of the original solution of 1992. I leave that for now and ask the Government to take action on that.

11.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, talking about the performance of the Public Sector Investment Programme, my colleague from Diego Martin read out yesterday for you the series of zeroes on the school building programme, the allocational expenditure. One that he did not read out was Carenage Boys' Government School, because a contract was awarded for that school. Mr. Speaker, you will think, having heard that a contract was awarded, that the school was being built. No such thing. I want to inform this Parliament, through which the fight was taken for the Carenage Boys' Government School, that construction of the school has come to a halt. Do you know why? The contractor has walked off the job.

Miss Nicholson: Why?

Dr. K. Rowley: Good question, my friend from Tobago West. This Government came into office, met tenders being invited for that job. My friend from Oropouche and I had many tiffs over it. He told this House that one of the reasons for the delay in awarding that contract is that new tenders had to be invited, as you may recall. A tender was awarded to a particular contractor. The contractor is now claiming that the Government made a mistake and awarded him the contract as the lowest bidder, \$800,000—not dollars—below what the real price of the contract was. So, the contract was awarded for a certain figure, he is given the job, the job has started, he is now saying, "in the documents, you will see the real figure is almost \$1 million more and if you do not pay me one million more

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I am going to walk off the job". As a result of which, the contractor has stopped working. The Carenage school is not being constructed.

I ask anybody in this Government: Under what circumstances does a contractor get a contract where, if you add what he is now claiming is the real figure—the error in his document—to the award size, he becomes the highest bidder? If they pay him that money he is the highest bidder, but he got the contract by being the lowest bidder and is now blackmailing Government saying, “You have to pay me that, or I stop the school.” I ask this Government of performance: How did that happen? What is happening at the Carenage school? And what does the Government intend to do about it? The children of Carenage want to find out.

Mr. Kuei Tung: Mr. Speaker, through you, I thank the Member very much for giving way. Is the Member aware that that tender was awarded by the Central Tenders Board which comprised the same public officials whom they left, plus two people who were appointed by his administration?

Dr. K. Rowley: I am not asking about anybody. I am asking you. I am not casting aspersions on anybody. I am simply asking what has happened under your watch. A contract was awarded to a contractor for a certain figure, and he is now claiming that there is an error in the figure. The end result is that construction has stopped. That is all I am saying. I am also asking you: How did that happen? You must tell me; do not tell me who appointed whom. How did that happen and what do you intend to do about it? That is what I am asking you, you are the Government. [*Desk thumping*]

That is the story of the Carenage school and that symbolizes the behaviour of this Government. Whether it is interviews for jobs, if you come sixth you get the job, if you come nineteenth you get the work, if you bid the highest bid you get the contract. That has symbolized the behaviour of the UNC Government. You mark my words, the people of this country will have to pay more for a school in Carenage because, at the end of the day, it is going to result in increased costs one way or the other. I spent the whole of last year in this Parliament; motion after motion, question after question about that school, and being given the run around by this Government. When a contract is awarded, it is awarded to the highest bidder through some kind of nebulous and strange arrangement, where the bottom line figure made him the lowest bidder and he takes the contract and now he says, “If you do not pay me \$1 million more I will stop the project”. And this impotent Government comes to Parliament, sits there beating its chest while that is taking

place in Carenage. Mr. Speaker, in Carenage, every class has 50 per cent more children than it should have. Do you understand? That is what is happening.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to ask the Government—while they are grumbling—somebody on the Government side in this debate got up and told this country categorically, what is the story with the Guyana debt. Firstly, tell the country if you have been receiving the payments on schedule for the last shenanigan. Tell the country if Trinidad and Tobago has agreed or intends to agree to any further write-offs of the Guyanese debt. Tell the country that. These are the things we want to know. We do not want to know about the private details of your private lives. We read that in the *Mirror*. We want to know how you are managing the country's finances. The question of the Guyana debt must be addressed because information in our possession is that the Government has indicated its intention to further reduce its debt relief to Guyana. If we are wrong, get up in this Parliament and tell us so. That is what the Parliament is for.

After the last hoorah in this country over Guyana's behaviour towards our debt, after we wrote off \$2 billion, Guyana went to Parliament and gave substantial portions of their forestry to other people. Even after we had to write off \$2,000 million of debt, we told them, "Give us some of that money in wood." This country is short of timber and forests, we are now importing substantial amounts of timber from Guyana. We said, "You can pay your debt in kind, we are prepared to accept that." They refused and this Government agreed. I am saying that nobody outside of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago but the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has the authority to give away Trinidad and Tobago's money. Nobody has the authority to do that. So with these Paris and Japan clubs, the responsibility requires an agreement by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Does the Government intend to agree, or has the Government agreed to further write off the Guyana debt? You must tell us that.

Mr. Speaker, I hear a strange voice over there telling me, "Speak to the Paris Club." [*Laughter*] If his voice did not break at 14, it is going to break now under the URP. If he believes that the allocation of URP to his Ministry is a dark night, his worse nightmare is about to begin.

Mr. Speaker, I have my own views. My colleagues will tell you I have always had a view on how local government should be organized, how it should be run. My colleague over there was in the Government with me: he knows what my views are with respect to local government. I have no fundamental problem with decentralization or with unemployment relief being decentralized in some way. The

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problem I have is with "vaps". Mr. Speaker, you see "vaps", you "ketch a vaps" and you do something. This Government "ketch a vaps" in response to a difficulty they created in the URP, where they went out there and sought to use the programme in the same way the PNM was using it. They say the PNM was using it to buy and win support. They are now in Government so they are saying that they will do the same thing too. Then they went out there with a vengeance and ended up handing a multimillion dollar programme into the control of criminals and ne'er-do-wells across the country. When it got too hot to handle, they "ketch a vaps" and decided to put it in local government.

I simply want to caution the Government to think it through very carefully, they are committed to doing that. As they move towards operationalizing it, they should think through very carefully what they are doing. Local government already has a large body of workers on the Government payroll with whom the country has a problem with respect to their level of productivity. If they just go and throw into that ministry \$150 million of temporary part-time workers, they are creating a recipe for chaos! If this thing is not thought through properly, what they are going to have is a series of workers in one arm of the ministry—which already is notorious for its inefficiency—being highly paid and, in many instances, going home at 9.30 in the morning, and if they put URP in there, then they have problems.

The Government, having given the criminals sway in the URP, how does it intend for councillors and local government public officials to now manage that situation? If it is a question of just dumping tens of millions of dollars in the various corporations, they are laying the groundwork for massive corruption, massive social disorder, and they will not end up addressing the unemployment problem in any fundamental way. One may very well find that as the budget is being eaten up in that ministry, the unemployment problem is not, in fact, addressing itself.

Mr. Speaker: Order please.

Dr. K. Rowley: I want to make one further point on URP with respect to allocation. For my friend from Tobago East I want to make it clear, I am not arguing for any entitlement in the URP relief. I am simply saying that we have a situation existing—my fault, your fault, the swine's fault, the "jagabat's" fault—where there has to be Government intervention for unemployment relief in Trinidad and Tobago.

12.00 noon

That need is across the country but greater in some areas. In the South where we have agricultural lands and some of our colleagues and citizens engage in enterprises the state provides additional support for them. In this budget you will see \$40 million in support for our fellow citizens in the farming areas, largely in the South and wherever there is farming. To access any of that money you have to be engaged in farming.

There is an increase of 50 per cent on the rice subsidy. I am not querying that because that is state support for people engaged in rice growing. If you do not grow rice you cannot access that money. There is an increase to \$13.5 million—a slight increase—for dairy farmers. If you do not have cows, you do not get milk, if you do not get and sell milk, you cannot access that. There is an increase for sugar subsidies. Therefore, there are subsidies for sugar, cocoa, milk, coffee and dairy. All of that is state support. I am not querying that. I am simply saying, there is state support over and above what the market pays because the market pays for those products. The state pays \$40 million.

There are areas in the country where people cannot grow any rice, raise any cattle, grow any cocoa but they live there. If the rest of us are to live in this country in peace, comfort and harmony, we have to take into account their plight and give them some assistance as well. It cannot be that because you are now putting URP in the Ministry of Local Government, you take it that we have 14 corporations, 14 equal sections, and you get yours, you get yours and so forth.

I am saying to the Government—I am casting no aspersions and making no accusations—in allocating the URP support programme look at the areas of Trinidad and Tobago where the greatest needs are and let the greatest amount of support go to the greatest amount of need. That is all we are asking. [*Desk thumping*] I take no pleasure in saying, that if you mismanage that programme and do not replace it with something else to provide some social stability in this country, then all of us have to live here and all of us will have to face the outcome of that disaster. The Government is warned to take care, because you have to provide support where the support is needed.

Mr. Sudama: That is where your thinking ends, not to empower people.

Dr. K. Rowley: The thoughts are not mutually exclusive, nobody is arguing that people should be kept on URP. I am all for supporting programmes that will get people out of those situations. We will be much better off if there were no need

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for URP. I would be the happiest person if there was no need for that programme; but the bottom line is, there is a need. That is what it is. As you supply the need, you have other programmes, whatever they may be, insofar as they exist there would be nobody on this side who will oppose any of the state's programmes to assist people away from dependence and welfare and into productive contributors to the national development.

Mr. Sudama: That is our philosophy.

Dr. K. Rowley: We do not argue exclusively but we ask the Government to look at that and give it careful thought.

There is one other point I want to raise. My friend from Tobago East spent a lot of time giving us lectures on Chaucer and telling us about pus dripping from the lips and so on. What he did not address was the real concerns of his constituency. I want to spend a couple minutes pointing out a potential problem in the year ahead. If you do not believe me—I know you are going to be there in that chair. I will be here too and we will see it.

I am talking about two things, allocation and accountability in Tobago. As I raise these points I am not opposing any quantum of allocation for Tobago. I am asking for proper accountability and I am questioning the Minister of Finance's arithmetic.

In a recent debate I had to point out that because of the peculiarity of last year, something happened in Tobago which we should pay attention to. In the budget for 1997, we had an approval package for Tobago of \$119 million. According to the list of projects embarked upon in Tobago, with or without the support of the Minister of Finance's sanction, as of September of this year the Tobago officials had spent or committed \$53 million more than the approval that the Minister gave.

The information I have is, that by the end of this month, December, that figure of commitment and requirement would be \$220 million. You will look at all the projects and you add up what they all require as at December. Therefore, you had \$119 million approved in January, by December the requirement is \$220 million as per commitment and expenditure. We had a variation recently in Parliament, I think it was last week or thereabouts, where the Minister of Finance provided a further \$85 million. Thus, over and above the \$119 million he provided a further \$85 million. One hundred and nineteen plus eighty-five is how much? That is \$204. In December the Assembly would have committed or expended \$220 million so

there is a shortfall—I mean committed or whatever—even on work already done. There is a shortfall of approximately \$16 million.

When I said earlier in this House that, as regards Tobago, we had already spent a portion of 1998 budget even before it was debated, that is what I was talking about. I expected to see the Minister of Finance make adequate provision for that, to cover what took place in 1997 and to take care of what is to come.

You look at the expenditure programme and you see a provision of \$80 million. That means you have to subtract from that \$80 million, \$16 million, to get the real figure of what has been allocated to Tobago. But that brings us to a question, is the Tobago administrative system going to spend again in 1998 the same way it spent in 1997? If they do they would be recreating this problem and if they do not, during the year you are going to hear problems coming out of Tobago with respect to how we have managed our affairs there.

The year 1997 was a very strange year. Many things were happening. If you look at the expenditure pattern you will see that 1997 was a very special year; I do not know what caused that. There was a lot of jumping around taking place. We see in 1996 Tobago got \$51.3 million for its development programme; in 1997 \$81 million, but at the end of the day it was revised to \$100 million more, and now it is like arrearage into \$80 million. I am asking this Government, is it that something special took place in 1997?

Mr. Panday: The law changed.

Dr. K. Rowley: But the law came into effect in 1998. The law did not create the projects. The law only created an executive council. The law caused a \$100 million increase in 1997, why then is there a \$100 million reduction in 1998? The same law would be in place.

Mr. Speaker, I am leaving that there and winding up. I am ending here. If the Minister of Finance does not explain this to us and tell us what to expect in Tobago in terms of adequate allocation, we are going to hear a lot of grumbling and unpleasant talk coming out of Tobago in the midst of what appears to be a lack of proper management arrangement between the central government and the House of Assembly.

At the end of the programme, what do we say about the national budget? We say that it is a budget that cannot stand scrutiny. I will be charitable. It is impossible for the Minister of Finance to spend \$14 million and not spread some good or not bring good to some part of the country or some persons. There are

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some aspects of it that will impact on some citizens positively, but by and large, the budget does not create the kinds of euphoria that we thought we would have in the middle of the term of a Government that has all the answers. We are being raped and pillaged. We are watching the currency move and everything fall in terms of the indices and at the end of the day what has saved us are the unusual injections.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this budget and I ask the Government in debating it and in talking to the country talk about the facts of the numbers in these documents and stop giving us PR nonsense. At the end, a day of reckoning shall come and we will see that these emperors really have no clothes.

Thank you.

12.10 p.m.

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Hon. Mervyn Assam): Mr. Speaker, I thought that I had come to this Parliament since Wednesday to listen to a budget debate. This is the third budget debate in which I have had the opportunity to participate—and this one was more anticlimactic than the previous two, in that the speakers on the other side dwelt on all sorts of matters which they have been accustomed to dwell upon during the normal course of parliamentary business. Not one of them attempted to address the contents, the intent and the philosophical underpinnings of the budget, 1998. As a matter of fact, when I listened to the Member for San Fernando East as he opened the debate for his side, he made a number of statements in which he said that the budget failed to deal with crime, domestic violence, kidnapping, AIDS, wanton murder, rape of women, robberies, epidemics and I wondered whether, in fact, the Member for San Fernando East expected the Minister of Finance to give a state of the nation address. It is my simple understanding that a budget is an estimate of revenue and expenditure that a government expects in the ensuing year. A budget indicates how the government expects to raise the estimated revenue and how it intends to disburse or spend the revenue in terms of expenditure, either at a recurrent level or at a developmental level.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. M. Assam: You are not an economist, so keep quiet. You know nothing about finance either. Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, a budget sets the objectives and strategies, gives the guideposts, and presents the philosophical underpinnings of how one intends to achieve these goals. That is precisely what this budget sets out

to do. It is very instructive that this 1998 Budget indicated very clearly and unequivocally—although Members opposite said we were not giving the national community facts—facts, which are documented in all the publications that have been, so far, made available by all the accounting and auditing firms, newspapers, trade organizations, the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association and the Chamber of Commerce over the last week or so. They are all unanimous in their conclusion. Inescapable conclusions, Mr. Speaker, as to what is the performance of this economy and Government during the year 1997.

It is said that unemployment declined from 15.1 per cent to 14.5 per cent. The Member for Diego Martin West talks about agriculture and all sorts of things where he feels employment was not created. But in the non-oil sector we created some employment during the year 1997 and we are going to create further employment in 1998. We have had cumulative growth of 6.7 per cent over the last two years of which the estimated or projected growth for 1997 would be about 3.3 per cent. We have had a balance of payments surplus. I am trying to show the fiscal prudence and proper economic management of this society and economy by this Government.

We have had a balance of payments surplus of US \$224 million. Our debt service ratio has plummeted from 1993 at 33 per cent and it will be going in 1998 to 17 per cent. We have had relative stability in our currency and we have had only a one per cent decline in 1997. By any standards, in terms of a floating currency, a small society and economy with a lot of exogenous influences, a one per cent decline in the rate of exchange is admirable. We have held inflation to a consistent low rate of 3.8 per cent. That is where I am going to deal with the Member for St. Ann's East with respect to the ludicrous prices and the misleading and erroneous information he gave to this Parliament yesterday afternoon that sardines are \$6.85 per tin. I will deal with it because inflation has been kept at 3.8 per cent. We have had falling interest rates and when combined with low inflation, I wonder if the economist on that side knows what that means to prices? I want to know if they understand the meaning of the combination of low inflation and falling interest rates—what it does to prices. The prime rate has dropped from 17.5 per cent to 15 per cent in 1997.

Mr. Speaker, we should be absolutely proud of this country, that we have a net foreign exchange reserve of US \$855 million. As the Minister of Finance indicated in his budget speech, this translates into four and a half months of import cover. By any standard, world, regional or otherwise, Trinidad and Tobago is exemplary.

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And more than that, Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the influenza or the virus—and I am not in any way attempting to gloat over these things that have hit some of the Southeast Asian countries recently—their stock markets were in trouble, their currencies were affected, and some of them have had to go into International Monetary Fund programmes as many businesses collapsed.

Investors on the Stock Exchange of Trinidad and Tobago are now even more confident with the establishment of the Security Exchange Commission. Our booming Stock Exchange has had average gains of 107 per cent in the composite index for 1997. What a testimony of the confidence of investors in this country when they go to the stock market three times per week! Small, medium and large investors have shown and demonstrated confidence in the businesses of this country; all the publicly listed companies.

Mr. Manning: Explain the development of the black market.

Hon. M. Assam: What is your hurry? Take your time.

I want to go further, Mr. Speaker, and indicate to you some figures with respect to how this country has performed over a period of time, and I will give a comparison from 1991 to show the performance of previous administrations and this one. These are considered to be key economic indicators. They are saying that this Government has piggybacked on them; this government has not performed, has not delivered and is putting this economy and the country, by extension, in jeopardy.

Let me read some figures to you, Mr. Speaker, to demonstrate to this honourable House and to the national community the kind of misleading information and assertions the Members opposite are wont to engage in, in order to create panic, destroy confidence, and indicate to foreign investors that the country is not suitable for investments. That is the kind of thing they do, in addition to the numerous veiled threats they utter from time to time in order to cause social destabilization in this country. As I said before, the Member for San Fernando East reminds me of Catiline, always going around the country creating all kinds of social threats and disturbances.

The GDP 1991, \$22.5 million; 1992, \$23 million; 1993, \$24 million; 1994, \$29 million; 1995, \$30.5 million; 1996, \$33.99 million; 1997 projected, \$36.4 million. Per capita GDP 1991, \$18,799; 1992, \$19,265; 1993, \$20,409; 1994, \$24,174; 1995 it went down under their watch to \$23,494; in 1996 it went back to \$26,152 and in 1997 projected \$28,000.

The unemployment rate, Mr. Speaker, 1991 was 18.5 per cent; 1992 it went up under their charge 19.6 per cent; 1993 it went up further, 19.8 per cent; it started to come down in 1994 to 18.4 per cent; 1995, 17.2 per cent; 1996, 16.1 per cent and now 15.5. Mr. Speaker, in 1991 when they assumed the governance of this country inflation was 3.8 per cent. You know what happened in 1992 under their watch? It went to 6.5; in 1993 it went to 10.8. It started to soften in 1994 to 8.8 then to 5.3. Under our watch 3.3 and 3.5. They have been fooling the people of this country by saying when they demitted office the exchange rate was 5.92 or so, but when they demitted office it was 5.99. It is now 6.299.

I read these figures into the record, Mr. Speaker, merely to demonstrate to you and the national community that this Government has performed admirably and that the economy is on a growth path. In fact, Mr. Speaker, there is a developmental economist called W. W. Rosstow and he said in his treatise on the stages of economic growth that Trinidad has moved away from the stage of traditional society. Then there are the preconditions for take off and then the take off; we are in the take off. You know why, Mr. Speaker? Because we have had consistent growth and all the indicators suggest that we will have growth into the 21st Century on a sustained basis.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the hon. Member could simply inform us, who set the preconditions for that take off?

12.25 p.m.

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Speaker, a fundamental plank of this budget is poverty alleviation. We did not come to this Parliament and say that we would eradicate poverty. In fact, all of the persons, economists, sociologists, social workers, anthropologists who have researched poverty, have come to one conclusion, that even in the most developed societies, even in the most opulent and affluent societies, poverty is ineradicable in certain areas of different countries.

We talk about poverty glibly, but we have never studied the aetiology of poverty, *[Interruption]* the causative factors. That is what it means. The aetiology of poverty means the causative factors and I will show you now. *[Interruption]* You know, the conclusions of very serious research have suggested that there may be three reasons for this. It may be structural, systemic and cultural, but all the researchers agree that the methods employed by that previous administration were all wrong.

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I was very happy that the Member for Diego Martin West, in his rare moments of magnanimity and truth—and I do not know if he had a drink of wine this morning, because it is said, *in vino veritas*—he said that his government or the PNM had made a mistake with respect to Caroni (1975) Limited. I know, in time, he will admit to many more mistakes that the PNM has made in many more areas of this society and economy. One of the areas is how they dealt with poverty; how they dealt with a number of economic matters in this country.

The PNM believed that by giving subsidies, by negative list, by price control, by handouts, by DEWD, by special works, by bribing, by cajoling, they would be able to address poverty. They never ever realized that in order to deal with poverty in a very fundamental way, they had to deal with the development of people, training, human resource development, motivation, counselling, lifting people out of where they are and putting them into where they ought to be. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. M. Assam: Instead, they continued to perpetuate the dependency syndrome in order to win votes of the unsuspecting population in Trinidad and Tobago. That is the fundamental error that they made in addressing poverty and social matters in this country.

They talk about schools, and how many schools they built. They did not build schools. They built plants; they built structures, but not schools. That is not a school. In doing so, what they did was to destroy Queen's Royal College which their late leader attended, and all the other good schools, in order to give the impression that they were democratizing and liberalizing education in the society. That is the impression they were giving.

Hon. Member: We will deal with you on the outside!

Hon. M. Assam: You know, Mr. Speaker, in so doing, they further pauperized this population. It almost reminds me of a book that was written by Walter Rodney, *How Europe Under-developed Africa*. I would write a book one day, "How the PNM Under-developed Trinidad and Tobago."

This reminds me of that great literary work of Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables*, and also that great book by Frantz Fanon, in analyzing the plight of the Caribbean man, *Les Damnes de la terre; the wretched of the earth*; supported by that great sociological work of Orlando Patterson, *The Children of Sisyphus*.

That is what the PNM has done, created the *Children of Sisyphus*, *Les damnes de la terre* and *Les Miserables*. *[Desk thumping]* That is what they have done.

That is the wretchedness they have brought to people in this country. And they talk about Caroni (1975) Limited, with their usual racial overtones. I could afford to talk about it because I am a Trinidadian. You could never say that I am racial. I do not even know what I am. I am a callaloo, fully representative of the rainbow that is called Trinidad and Tobago.

They are the ones who pilfered Caroni (1975) Limited, you know. They are talking about Indian people and corruption. The Member for Diego Martin West spoke about corruption. It is people like him who look like PNM, according to the Member for Arouca North, who pilfered, pillaged and raped Caroni (1975) Limited. I would not use parliamentary privilege to call names. I would not do like some people, but it is people looking like PNM who pillaged and raped. They are social, economic and political predators, all of them! That is what they are, and now they want to blame people in Caroni.

This administration has been in office for two years and when we entered into office, we realized the social and economic situation which we had inherited—for over 30-odd years. They talk about a party of 41 years, well, maybe it is 41 years I should be saying. You know, when you have a headache, you take, maybe, phensic or advil; when you have cancer, you need radical surgery, so having looked at the situation, we had to do some very important soul searching with respect to the kinds of programmes and policies that we had to embark upon. It reminded me of Brutus on his way to the plains of Philippi to defend his honour. We said, we are not going to wait and tinker with this population for 35 years in office like they did; we will take the bull by the horns, because:

“There is a tide in the affairs of men

Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;

Omitted,...

Which is what they did:

“ all the voyage of their life

Is bound in shallows and in miseries...”

In which they put the people of Trinidad and Tobago:

“On such a full sea are we now afloat;

And we must take the current when it serves,

Or lose our ventures.”

Hon. Member: Talk about the budget nuh!

Hon. M. Assam: That is what this Government has done.

I want to say another thing about the budget, because they claim that this budget is going to bring all kinds of ills and would bring no benefit. There is an income tax computation done by Price Waterhouse, in terms of low, middle and upper income families. No income group was left out in the analysis. Because of the measures that the Minister of Finance and Tourism has included in his budget, if you were to look at the mortgage interest and the retirement plans and all these things that could be utilized by a low income family, interestingly, their effective tax rate drops from 12.44 to 9.33. For a middle income family, it drops from 9.92 to 7 per cent. For an upper income family, it goes from 18.96 per cent, effective tax rate, to 14.58 per cent. I did not say it; it is Price Waterhouse who did the analysis, so they can question them.

12.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to read some of the things that the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association, one of the premier manufacturing organizations in this country had to say. As I say, Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association, I am reminded that the Member for San Fernando East called me a "Johnny-comes-lately." Mr. Speaker, do you know—and I do not want to sound immodest—when I was managing director of a company and president of the TTMA he was a mere parliamentary secretary. When I was an ambassador to several European countries and High Commissioner to the Court of St. James he was leader of the Opposition. Now that I am a Minister he is still Leader of the Opposition but he calls me a "Johnny-comes-lately." What impertinence!

This is what the TTMA has to say on the 1998 Budget. Unsolicitedly they wrote about it and every comment that they made, they said the following in glowing terms:

"The TTMA supports the measures regarding fiscal surplus, capital expenditure on infrastructure, debt reduction, containing inflation, maintaining stability of the exchange rate. It agrees with the tax compliance proposal to establish the IRS, it agrees with the deferment of the final reduction of the CET."

And it has nothing to do with the nefarious suggestion by the Member for San Fernando East who told the Minister of Finance that the Government is not implementing the CET from January 1, 1998 because of a revenue consideration. It has to do with getting and accepting the proper advice from people who are important to the economy. But more than this, it has to do with the implementation

schedule of all the other Caricom members who have been delinquent—and the Member knows that because I have a document when he was chairman. I do not have time to read it.

When the Member was chairman of Caricom he lamented the fact of the slow rate of implementation of the CET of all the other member states and Trinidad and Tobago was the only state that jumped to the fore on January 1, every year to reduce the CET by 5 per cent. It had nothing to do with revenue—strategic!

“The TTMA agrees entirely with the statement that no one should be left behind and agrees with the budget intent, Opportunity for All.

Measures in this regard such as grant for the disabled, support for sports, community college programmes, carnival institute and centre for the performing arts, fund for single mothers, support of the reduction on dependency syndrome, provision of housing, 300 million housing bonds to provide funding for low income housing, increase in old age pension from \$420.00 to \$520.00 are commendable.

We support the no smoking policy, the computer loan, increase funding to the Small Business Development Company, savings and investments and so forth.”

I can go on and on in order to indicate to Members opposite that they are the only people who do not celebrate in this country, the only non-thinking people. And do you know why? It is because of their callousness; it is because of their envy of the performance of this Government; it is because they are not in Government and they are in opposition, and they have this attitude, this mental block, this mindset, that this Government must not perform, will not perform, has not performed and whatever they can do to stop it from performing, whether it is through threats, bad reports they will do. I see that they go to the newspapers, and sometimes hold all kind of press releases, press reviews, and conferences three times a week. And when the Leader of the Opposition has one, the substantive leader of the Opposition, the Member for Diego Martin West has another one and there is confusion and contradiction. That is the reason they have treated this budget as they have treated the two previous ones.

I would like to make some remarks with respect to the ministry for which I have a responsibility, to indicate how vicious one gets when one comes to this honourable House and makes statements that are inaccurate and unsupported by fact and claim to have got it from a certain source, trying to impugn the integrity of Government institutions. We, in the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, through my initiative, have established sector committees. We meet quarterly with some of the

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most important sectors in this society in order to control, restrain, cajole, persuade them in terms of quality of products, of services, safety, price of products and services, and we have been extremely successful.

As one would recall, last year I laid a National Consumer Policy in this Parliament and the business community has been sensitized to that policy. Let me read some figures: Macaroni: during 1997 the price went down by 3.57 per cent; fresh butter—6.58 per cent; corned beef—2.35 per cent; peanut butter—1.52 per cent; sardines—the hon. Member for St. Ann's East said that sardines are being sold at \$6.85 per tin. Sardines are \$2.83 per tin, either sardine in spring water or sardine in soya bean oil. Brunswick sardine imported from Canada. The Member stood in this Parliament and misled the whole country saying sardines cost \$6.85 and they are \$2.83 per tin. I challenge the Member to go to Hilo, Tru Valu, Budget Foods, including his own Narace, and he will find it cheaper at Narace.

Pigeon peas—1.97 per cent; yeast—1.33 per cent; tuna in vegetable oil—1.93 per cent; parboiled rice—5.6 per cent; all these are decreases. Pre-packed flour—1.72 per cent; Ibis flour—6 per cent; red beans—2.04 per cent; eggs—0.53 per cent; garlic went down by 14.34 per cent; Milo—3.5 per cent; oil—0.3 per cent; cornmeal went down by 22.43 per cent but pigtail went up by 21 per cent, I admit that.

Chicken fluctuates and I will tell you why. It is simply because we import most of our hatching eggs and because of either too much cold or too much heat; sometimes we have to import from Holland and it costs more. When one imports eggs from far distances, the hatchability which is normally 87.2 per cent goes down to about 65 per cent as a consequence of which the price rises.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs has ensured that the consumer of this country has more power, and that power lies in the ability to make informed choices through consumer education and our consumer outreach programme which has been highly successful throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. More than that, there is legislation before the Parliament in the form of an amendment to the Consumer Protection and Safety Act, and this will create a revolution in the whole perspective of how people view consumers in this country, both in terms of goods and services, both in the public and private sector domains and that has been the outstanding work of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs.

12.45 p.m.

I turn to the Ministry of Trade and Industry for which I also have a responsibility. Sometime earlier this year, I had the honour to lay in this honourable House a Trade Policy for 1997—2001. I know that the Member for

Diego Martin Central has congratulated me fulsomely on this very important comprehensive document. I had laid an Industrial Policy for 1996—2000 which sets out the parameters for integrated and balanced growth and development in the society, with a vision to establish enterprise zones, so that no part of this country would be left out of the developmental process. At this point in time, we are formulating investment legislation called the Investment Promotion Act which would replace the Foreign Investment Act and create an environment in this country, as one of the best destinations for investment in this western hemisphere, especially in the non oil sector.

They spoke about competition policy. Last year, it was announced in the budget. They said we have done nothing about it, but we have. It is a fact that a green paper has been approved by Cabinet and is now out for public comment. Every Member should have a copy of that green paper on competition policy. When it comes they would see the kind of work that has been done by this Government in the Ministry of Trade and Industry to ensure that everyone in this country, whether consumer or manufacturer is protected in some form or the other, from monopolistic and cartel activities of certain people, either foreign or local.

The other document is this beautiful document of which I am so proud. It is called *Creating A Nation of Entrepreneurs, 1997—2001*. It shows the intellectual capability residing in the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Consumer Affairs. I put on public record my gratitude to all the officers of these two ministries with whom I have the honour to work, for the kind of work they have produced and the results they have been able to achieve during the last two years, particularly, 1997.

I have explained why competition policy is not in Parliament, but there is a green paper. I hope the Member for San Fernando East has read it. He is always asking me about the IPA. It would be before him very shortly. He raised the question about market space and the free trade agreements which should have been pursued. I give credit where it is due. The Member for Diego Martin Central had a draft of the Caricom Bilateral Trade Agreement before he demitted office, but this Minister got that draft into a proper policy document which was accepted by the Heads of Governments, under the distinguished leadership of the Member for Couva North. That document was enhanced in a number of ways in terms of tourism, services, transport and the currency fluctuation, which was not in the original draft which was left by my distinguished friend, the Member for Diego

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Martin Central. He started it and I give him credit for that. Of course, it was enormously enhanced by this Minister.

I will give the status of these negotiations. As you know, trade negotiations take a long time and are very expensive. Mexico has told us that it took years and over \$500 million to negotiate NAFTA with the United States. This also included the enormous number of personnel travelling backward and forward. We have been attempting to negotiate a free trade agreement with the Dominican Republic and we have run into some difficulties, simply because the structure of the economy and the production platform of the country are different from the rest. I am not gloating here. It is a fact and an economic reality. It is very different from the other members of Caricom, particularly the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States. They have been putting all kinds of exemptions and exclusions which have been irritating the people in the Dominican Republic. The sessions are continuing, but in an atmosphere of difficulty. We had some serious discussions among ourselves and we are putting together a team of high powered negotiators who have specialties in different areas of negotiations. We are now attempting to see if we can go along as a group with the rest of Caricom, or whether it would be in our interest to delink to get a variation, as it says, and have a clause whereby they can come into the process when they are able.

It is part of the agreement. Having started it together one must ask for variation. It is common courtesy and protocol. I know that the Member for San Fernando East does not understand protocol because he attempted to run the Ministry of Foreign Affairs when he was Prime Minister. I forgive him for all these things. We are on the way to negotiating free trade agreements with the Dominican Republic, the Central American Common Market and the Andean Group. At this point in time the meeting has just concluded and we are dealing with Caribbean/Colombian trade matters.

Mr. Manning: What time-frame are you looking at?

Hon. M. Assam: Hopefully by June.

We are also involved in negotiations by the establishment of a regional negotiating team to deal with LOMÉ V. We are very much part of the free trade agreement process. It has absorbed much of our manpower and financial resources, time, effort and energy because there are 14 working groups moving towards the free trade agreements which are supposed to come on stream in the year 2005.

As a country which is interested in market space and which believes that international trade is the bloodline and one cannot do without it if one has to expand, grow and create jobs and social equity in the society, we are moving speedily ahead. In April 1998, when we meet in Santiago de Chile, we would decide the date to start negotiations for the free trade agreement.

I hope I have brought Members opposite up to date with the efforts, achievements and future schedule and plans with respect to free trade agreements and market space. The Member for Naparima, the distinguished Minister of Foreign Affairs has been in conversation with the foreign ministers of Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil with respect to getting a window in Mercosur, and hopefully before long, we would have an association with them.

In terms of a free trade agreement, we are also looking at Mexico and Chile which is a very progressive country and has done exceptionally well economically. This country also had the same kind of privatization of pensions very successfully, that has been alluded to in the 1998 budget by the hon. Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism.

The Member for San Fernando East also spoke about the Orinoco/Apure project. I am disappointed that as someone from San Fernando, he has demonstrated such ignorance of the position of that particular initiative. Everyone knows that the Orinoco/Apure project is an excellent idea because it would open transport, tourism and trade in that southern part of Venezuela, with the people in the centre and south of this country and beyond. The Member for St. Augustine would be opening the entire coastline from Chaguaramas to Cedros.

12.55 p.m.

The Member for Diego Martin Central will recall that when I was in the private sector, he led a trade delegation to Venezuela and Colombia and I went with him. We were pushing full speed ahead with the Orinoco/Apure Project. He knows that, but it appears that they are not on speaking terms. I thought the Member for Diego Martin Central would have brought the Member for San Fernando East up to date. The economy of Venezuela went into a tailspin. There was a crash of their banks and their financial institutions. There was tight rein on foreign exchange control and the economy started to perform badly.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member's speaking time has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, by agreement with the Opposition Chief Whip, and with your consent, the Prime Minister will make a statement at this time and then we will break for lunch.

Agreed to.

**PRINCES TOWN REGIONAL CORPORATION
(BY-ELECTION)**

The Prime Minister (Hon. Basdeo Panday): Mr. Speaker, I hope Members opposite do not misinterpret this as my contribution to the budget.

I am grateful to you, Sir, for permitting me to make this statement, which is required by law.

The Local Government representative for the electoral district of New Grant/Tableland, in the Princes Town Regional Corporation, Councillor Mohammed Mustakim, died on October 11, 1997. As a consequence of his death, the Princes Town Regional Corporation at its 16th statutory meeting dated October 20, 1997, and in accordance with section 27(1) of the Municipal Corporation Act, No. 21 of 1990, declared that a vacancy had occurred in the electoral district of New Grant/Tableland.

Section 27 states:

“(1) Where a person elected to a corporate office—

- (e) dies or, by writing under his hand, addressed to the Mayor of the Council of which he is a member, resigns his seat on the Council;...

his office is thereby rendered vacant.”

It is pertinent to note that it is required that an election be held within three months from the date on which this seat was declared vacant. The Elections and Boundaries Commission, the competent authority to oversee the by-election, has already undertaken an electoral registration, with effect from November 26—December 4, 1997 in accordance with the Representation of the People Act, Chap. 2:01.

In accordance with the necessary legal requirement, I have advised His Excellency The President that the holding of the by-election for the vacancy in the electoral district of New Grant/Tableland, in the region of Princes Town, due to the death of Councillor Mohammed Mustakim on October 11, 1997, will take

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place on January 26, 1998. May I also announce that the Nomination Day for such election will be January 9, 1998.

I thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting is now suspended until 2.00 p.m.

1.00 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.02 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

APPROPRIATION BILL (BUDGET)

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Speaker, when we took the luncheon adjournment, I was informing the Member for San Fernando East on certain matters which he had raised during his budget contribution on Wednesday. I had reached the point where I was advising him about the Orinoco/Apure Project, about which he had expressed concern with respect to its progress in terms of implementation.

I was telling him that I was on a mission with his colleague, the Member for Diego Martin Central, when I was in the private sector, and it was moving ahead, but then the economy of Venezuela got into a tailspin and there was a financial crash and banks collapsed. A tight fiscal and foreign exchange regime was introduced by the president. All the initiatives pertaining to the Orinoco/Apure project had to come to a halt, notwithstanding the best efforts of the Government, Plipdeco and the South Chamber of Industry and Commerce. As you know, the former president, Diane Seukeran, has been quite a mover with respect to that project.

I would like to advise the Member for San Fernando East that we are recommencing the initiative. Very recently the new Mayor of San Fernando, Plipdeco and the South Chamber of Industry and Commerce began to renegotiate some of the initiatives started some time ago. Hopefully, now that the economy of Venezuela is showing a little more promise, it would come on stream before long. I hope that the Member is much happier with that situation.

I turn now to some of the areas under my responsibility. I would do so quickly because I do not have much time. As you know, as Minister of Trade and Industry, there are a number of institutions, agencies and companies which report to me. The Member for San Fernando East lamented the fact that we were not taking advantage of the export centres that his government had established. This is not true because we have continued to utilize the export centres in many ways and have, in fact, increased activities there.

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There is a company called the Export Trading Company, which was not doing so well simply because it was understaffed and did not have the working capital to undertake the kind of inventories and production needed to fill all their orders abroad. They have established a line called the Buccaneer line. You may have seen it in the supermarkets here, but it is mainly an export line. I took representatives from the Small Business Development Company Limited, the Free Zone Company, the Tourism Investment and Development Company and placed them on the board of the Export Trading Company, in order to create synergies within these companies that report to the Minister of Trade and Industry.

2.05 p.m.

What is happening now is that the Export Trading Company is emerging as a very strong company with a strong export bias and it is assisting the Small Business Development Company, as well as the export zones, to export these goods with certain quality and standards. *[Interruption]* I have no difficulty with that, you know that competition is an important element in our economic strategy because with competition, one has better quality and affordable prices, and service has to be given and these are the three elements in competition.

If one reads the book *Competing for the Future*—which I am sure you must have read, and if not you should do so—it tells of all the fundamentals which are necessary in order to survive in the 21st Century. In order to do so, one has to keep ahead, and in order to keep ahead one must do the things which I have just enumerated.

The Export Trading Company is very much involved in the export of all these areas pertaining to small businesses. More than that, hitherto, it used to have a biennial trade fair/international exposition which was located at the Jean Pierre Complex/National Stadium and every two years, millions of dollars were spent in running lines for electricity, telephone, putting up chemical toilets and all kinds of things. *[Interruption]*

I have no difficulty with the south, I love the south land, but the point is, those millions would no longer be frittered away every two years in unnecessary overheads. A permanent exhibition hall is being built with an export centre in order to be close to Piarco Airport and there would be a permanence there in Trincity.

Mr. Valley: The PNM again.

Hon. M. Assam: It is okay if it is the PNM. I have no difficulty if you want to take the credit. Take all the credit, but why do you not take the credit for destroying the country too?

Mr. Speaker, I have great pleasure in announcing also—and they would take the credit again—that the Export Credit Insurance Company (EXCICO) is now a full-fledged exim bank, is now a reality. You may take the credit again, but it is okay. Since I was the President of the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association, 20 years ago, I was one of the persons who pushed for the transformation and elevation of EXCICO into a full-fledged exim bank. One could imagine how delighted I feel, now that I am the Minister, that this transformation has, at last, taken place with expanded financial services both to the services sector and the manufacturing sector.

Mr. Speaker, the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards is one of the flagships of this country and, indeed of Caricom, through which I had the great honour to pilot the Standards Bill in this honourable House not too long ago, which is now the Standards Act because it has been assented to by His Excellency the President and promulgated. The guardian of the Standards Act is the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards, protecting the standard of goods and services both local and foreign in Trinidad and Tobago, so that no unsuspecting consumer could be trapped by any goods of poor quality, low standard, or which are unsafe, which is an important consideration. When that is added to what I said earlier—the amendment to the Consumer Safety and Protection Act—consumers in this country would, at last, have consumer power, what the economists call consumer sovereignty. Of course, the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards would be involved in many other activities.

I intend to bring to this House in the new year the Metrology Bill to supersede a bill which is called the Weights and Measures Standards Act of 1923, an Act which for well over 50—60 years has been on the statute books. I shall be modernizing and updating that Act and bringing it to the Parliament to be called the Metrology Act in order to bring Trinidad and Tobago into the 21st Century of metrology. The institution which would be responsible for administering that Act, like the Standards Act, would be the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards, which is an organization that has an international reputation—not only in Trinidad and Tobago and Caricom.

I also want to tell you about the Metal Industries Company (MIC) which is something that links to poverty in this country because it is felt that trading, education and the uplifting and upgrading of skills, reskilling, retooling and retraining persons are some of the most essential things. It is the *sine qua non* for transforming Trinidad and Tobago into a quality nation with quality persons and,

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attempting at the same time, to reduce poverty and alleviate some of the hardships which we suffer in this country perennially. It is by empowering persons—in fact there is a new word now, self-potential, that is the new language which is being used now, not empowerment anymore and that is exactly what MIC is going to be doing.

In 1997, 1,200 persons were trained with skills, and the targeted trainee population in 1998 is 2,200 because right now there are three skills development centres. If one travels to Macoya, there is one; there is also one by PowerGen on Wrightson Road, one would be in Usine Ste. Madeleine, and one in Tobago. Almost double are to be trained in 1998, from 1,200 in 1997, 2,200 would be trained in 1998 in addition to 35 master craftsmen and instructors. They would in turn train persons so there would be a self-perpetuation of the training system within MIC, through the skills development centre.

We are very pleased that the private sector, Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission, Hydro Agri, Cliffs Reduced Iron Corporation, Trinidad and Tobago Methanol Company, PowerGen Limited, and the National Gas Company in collaboration with a German company called Fitz Werner have, in fact, been a very important part of this project. This is one of the most important thrusts, in terms of social policy and poverty alleviation in our society where persons are being removed from a state of dependence and preparing them—particularly the young ones—for the world of work and also the new thrust into the industrial era of the 21st Century of the new millennium.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to speak about the Tourism Industrial Development Company (TIDCO), which is the organization responsible for attracting inward investment in tourism and industrial development. It is also responsible for promoting exports in this country and I have had the good fortune in 1997 to have led, successfully, state trade missions into a number of countries both in and outside of Caricom with outstanding results, to the point where, before long, we would be recording exports to the non-oil sector of over US \$1 billion. I have asked TIDCO to reorganize the Prime Minister's Export Award, and not only take into account exports *per se*, but to take quality, productivity and innovativeness in different categories with respect to the Prime Minister's Export Award. This is how we are moving in order to give life to the whole concept of total quality.

In terms of tourism development, before long one would see the sod of two important hotels being turned in Tobago and, hopefully, by the year 2001 there should be two major tourist developments in Tobago and we are hoping to have,

at least, two business hotels in Trinidad which would cater to the business community. We are also looking at a number of areas in terms of manufacturing and I have been looking at many potential investors and hopefully in 1998, important investment decisions would be taken to construct manufacturing plants which would increase the number of jobs in the non-oil sector of Trinidad and Tobago.

In terms of the Small Business Development Company, only yesterday I had to leave Parliament to deliver a speech in order to initiate the venture capital programme where they have started to get persons to invest in this particular programme. As one knows, there is a generous tax benefit of 35 per cent or so.

Mr. Valley: Just a small correction. The Small Business Venture Capital fund is really from a grant, and one does not get 35 per cent. An individual cannot invest in the Small Business Venture Capital fund, that is from a grant from the European Union, it is a share fund.

Hon. M. Assam: Thank you. Nevertheless, it is one of the instruments which is being used to ensure that small businesses do not depend on loans and overdrafts, and that they would be able to use these injections of capital, whether it is from the European Commission or from any other source, in order to ensure that they have success, and the probability of success is increased.

We are also going to be launching in 1998, a leasing company which would reduce the amount of outlay which small companies have to put out in terms of purchasing machinery and equipment and the Small Business Development Company would be actually buying the equipment and leasing it to the small companies so it would ease the financial burden on these small companies. In fact, in 1997 we have been able to assist well over 1,500 small businesses and we have created well over 700 new jobs.

In terms of the Trinidad and Tobago Free Zones Company, which had a very slow start, in 1988 the then Minister of Trade and Industry piloted a bill to give effect to the creation of the Free Zones Company. It was not until 1992 that some kind of activity started to take place with the attraction of some free zone companies. By 1994, the speed had increased and I am happy to report that in 1997 there had been tremendous success in the Free Zones Company. In fact, in 1997 it was responsible for the creation of 528 direct jobs and 1,056 indirect jobs, and in 1998, the creation of over 700 direct jobs and about 2,200 indirect jobs are expected in the free zone area.

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These are some of the important areas of my ministry, and the last one, and certainly not the least, is the Point Lisas Industrial Port Development Corporation. This company has been responsible for the development of the Point Lisas estates and for preparing the industrial sites for companies particularly in the energy area and they have been also doing the development of the port in order to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago not only becomes a port for exporting, but for transshipment, which is a big part of the free zone companies' activities.

2.20 p.m.

They have been responsible in the last year or so, for developing about seven different industrial spaces, including methanol, ammonia and steel, and hopefully before long, it would be for a smelter plant.

These are some of the achievements and activities of the Ministry of Trade and Industry. We like to think that the Ministry of Trade and Industry is responsible for creating the opportunities for sustained growth and development. To this extent, let me read, very quickly, some statistics to give an indication of the kinds of exports which have been taking place. In terms of food and live animals, we have had an increase of 22 per cent in 1997; beverages and tobacco, 25 per cent increase; crude materials, 24 per cent; minerals and fuels, 3 per cent; animal and vegetable oil fat, 45 per cent; chemicals, 25 per cent; manufactured goods, 18 per cent, machinery and transport; 2 per cent, and miscellaneous manufactured articles, 15 per cent. This is reflected in dollars in terms of \$1,588, million in manufactured goods, an increase of \$244 million over 1996; that is the 18 per cent. In terms of chemicals \$3 billion, an increase of 25 per cent or \$600 million over 1996. In terms of minerals, fuels and lubricants, \$5,626 million, an increase of 48 per cent over 1996.

These are the areas to which we have exported, including our good Caricom neighbours, which is a very important market for Trinidad and Tobago: the United States of America, \$4.7 billion; Venezuela, \$217 million; Germany, \$71 million; Colombia, \$155 million; United Kingdom, \$322 million; Japan \$4 million; Caricom, \$2.8 billion; Canada, \$77 million; Brazil, \$36 million; Puerto Rico, \$592 million; Mexico, \$240 million; France, \$356 million; and the Dominican Republic, \$206 million.

It merely goes to show, Mr. Speaker, the quality of the manufacturing community in Trinidad and Tobago where they have been able to penetrate international markets, and to retain and increase their market share. It shows what we are doing is working and will continue to work. Therefore, it is my view,

notwithstanding the prophets of doom and gloom; notwithstanding the critics who say that the economy is in jeopardy; notwithstanding all that has been said, the figures demonstrate, unequivocally, that this Government, in its two years in office has an unenviable record of economic management and prudent fiscal policy, which have brought wealth generation and an improved quality of life to all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Therefore, before I sit, I would like to think that not only will the words of our motto: "That every creed and race find an equal place," but one day we will stand with one chorus and we will all sing "This land is my land; this land is your land; this land is our land; this land was made for you and me." [*Desk thumping*]

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gordon Draper (*Port of Spain North/St. Anns West*): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that people can start from, sometimes the same place and end with fundamentally different conclusions. [*Laughter*] In a sense, I start where my good friend the Member for St. Joseph started in trying to determine what ought to be in a budget. Interestingly, I agree with much of what he says but I end at a fundamentally different place when I look at this budget.

Like him, I agree that the budget needs to identify how Government intends to raise and spend money, that it ought to have some philosophical underpinnings—his words—and it ought to have some sense of strategy. I would add, too, that it ought to give some review of the performance of the economy and the country, and over a period, it ought to establish some priorities, it ought to establish a vision and a cohesive set of strategies to achieve that vision. [*Desk thumping*]

When I put that criteria against this 1998 Budget, it is an absolute and a dismal failure. [*Desk thumping*] The budget statement really did not give us any sense of the performance of the economy over the last year. It failed on that score. As I look at the budget, there is no philosophical underpinning coming through in the pages of that budget. In a while I would demonstrate, in detail, what I mean by that.

What is the vision and what were the strategies to achieve that vision in the budget? Again, Mr. Speaker, I am not sure. One would hope and, of course, I think the hon. Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism suggested, that his colleagues would provide some of that for us. However, again, as I listened I am still left wondering about the vision, the philosophy and strategies to achieve that vision.

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While I agree with the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism that one may occasionally need to look at a budget and attempt to do things a little differently, I think there are some things that must remain. We may change some things but there are some fundamentals, values and approaches, which, notwithstanding the changes in approach, need to be there and, Mr. Speaker, they were not there. [*Desk thumping*]

I also have a concern with the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism's approach to the issue of not tinkering or tampering with success. One wonders as one looks at the plight of some of the Asian tigers, even today, whether some of their own problems may have come from not recognizing when fundamental changes need to have been made. In short, Mr. Speaker, they assume that the things which brought them success in the past will continue to bring them success in the future.

The hon. Member for St. Joseph, who has just left, suggested some reading for us. I figure it may be useful for the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism to read some of the futurists as well, people like Joel Barker, who would argue, for instance, that when paradigm shifts we all go back to zero. What that means, Mr. Speaker, is that if we are living in a world which is changing rapidly, we ourselves need to continue examining the things that we do, so that we change. We cannot sit on our laurels, we cannot assume that because whatever we did a year ago was successful, it will be successful in the future, not if the world is changing that radically. The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism, therefore, cannot come to us and say because some things work well we do not need to examine them and we do not need to change. If that is his notion of a philosophical underpinning for success I have serious difficulties. [*Desk thumping*]

I am also concerned that as we talk about a total quality nation it demands total quality leadership. When I talk about total quality leadership, what are some of the things I talk about? I am concerned about things like integrity, magnanimity, the recognition of the contribution of others, fairness and even-handedness. With the exception of the Member for St. Joseph, one would assume that a government which was in power between the years 1991 and 1995, did absolutely nothing. One would assume that a government which was able to bring this country through varying kinds of crises and governed well, did nothing, that would be the assumption. Clearly, we need to understand that we have to be prepared to acknowledge the contributions of others even while we may identify our differences with them. As I said, with the exception of that Minister, nobody else

was magnanimous enough to recognize that. We cannot be talking about total quality when our behaviour is not manifested. *[Desk thumping]* Mr. Speaker, the old people have a saying that when you spit in the air some could fall on your face.

He also spit in the face of his colleagues that he has now joined, because many of them were part of the NAR administration who also served this country and also contributed. We need to be careful. *[Interruption]*

2.30 p.m.

Dr. Rowley: The Speaker, too.

Mr. G. Draper: We need to be careful, Mr. Speaker. *[Laughter]*

Dr. Rowley: Tell the Speaker, too.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member is trying to encourage me to get into the debate but I notice that you are studiously avoiding that. *[Laughter]*

Mr. G. Draper: Mr. Speaker, you can be assured that I would not carry you into the debate. My concern, however, is that when you listen to much of what is being said, the point is that we need to reflect on the quality of the leadership that we have. We all make contributions. We can be critical of contributions but we need to recognize them and we cannot come here and say that a government which has, in fact, contributed, which has, in fact, brought this country forward, has done nothing.

When the Minister of Trade and Industry, in making his similar kind of comment about the impact of human resource development on poverty, could say that education and training are critical and that the PNM did nothing in that regard, he spoilt what in other parts of the contribution was, in fact, a magnanimous gesture to the PNM. It was this PNM administration, over the years, that developed an education system which provided access to education to thousands of our young people. *[Desk thumping]*

Much as they would like to rewrite the history of this country, they cannot, and they must not be allowed to do that. It was the PNM administration during 1991—1995, recognizing some of the weaknesses of the system that the PNM government put in, who went and had widespread consultation, developed a new education reform plan which this Government is busy implementing. In other words, a clear appreciation and recognition on our part of the role that education must play in the human resource development in relegation of poverty.

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The Member for St. Joseph spoke about the apprenticeship programme towards the end of his contribution; about the involvement of German organizations in that programme. Who brought them here, Mr. Speaker? It was this PNM administration between 1991 and 1995 which did that. The On-the-Job Training Programme; the programme for young people treating with geriatrics; all programmes providing skills in technical and specialized areas, a recognition on our part, therefore, of the importance of human resource development. So that we cannot allow statements to be made in this honourable House which seem to attempt to rewrite the history of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me turn to some of the elements which came out partly in the budget and other contributions and point to the distinction I make between pure statement about what it is you want to do, and the issue of a philosophical underpinning. I start with the issue of computers. I think that the gesture by the hon. Minister in providing a facility for public servants to acquire computers is, in fact, a just one; is in fact one for which the Member is to be complimented. I wonder whether he would wish to extend that facility to parliamentarians. We too, need to keep pace with change in technology. I think that merely making the point about computers and talking about putting computers in schools and in homes, that, by itself, is insufficient. We need to put that within another kind of context.

Some other words came out from that side. The Minister of Education, in fact, talked about the next century as being a learning century—I think that is the terminology he used—a lot of the literature talking about development, and management, talks about learning organizations, talks about the knowledge area. One of the things that is pointing to us, therefore, is that we need to begin going beyond the hardware; we need to begin going beyond the machine; we need to start talking about how we access and use information. In other words, we need to locate a policy of putting computers into homes and schools in the wider context of our vision of an information society for Trinidad and Tobago.

I thought that when my good friend, the Member of Parliament for Arima, talked to us about his telecommunications mandate, he might have carried us there. He gave us a statement about the status of the telecommunications industry and then said to us that there is a Cabinet committee looking at the issue of policy. I would have hoped that we would have gotten some inkling about this Government's thinking, relating to a vision for information technology and information in Trinidad and Tobago.

I want, therefore—since there is a love-affair party going on with this Government and Singapore—to go to Singapore to show what I mean by a vision and philosophy which would underpin a statement which says we want computers in all homes.

In 1992, the National Computer Board of Singapore put out a paper called *A Vision of an Intelligent Island*. It gives very instructive reading for us. I want to read parts of this report into *Hansard*. In setting up the backdrop of this report is:

The vision of the Intelligent Island is based on the far-reaching use of it. It sees Singaporeans tapping into a vast well and electronically-stored information and services which they can best use for best ends—to improve their business, to make their work easier and to enhance their personal and social lives.”

Then it carries us through a number of visionary statements about how Singapore, at that time, saw themselves engrossing information, information technology and the development in this industry to facilitate their own enhancement and development. I am going to read chunks of this. It may well be that it could help my friend as he looks at his committee and the policy that it is preparing. Section 3.2 of this paper says:

“In our vision, some 15 years from now, Singapore, the Intelligent Island, will be among the first countries in the world with an advanced nation-wide information infrastructure. It will interconnect computers in virtually every home, office, school, and factory. The computer will evolve into an information appliance, combining the functions of the telephone, computer, TV and more...The information infrastructure will also permeate our physical infrastructure making mobile telecomputing possible, and our homes, workplaces, airport, seaport and surface transportation systems “smarter”. A wide range of new infrastructural services, linking government, business and the people, will be created to take advantage of the new broadband and tetherless network technology.”

It goes on to talk about how this vision would impact on nearly every aspect of life in Singapore. It talks about the manufacturing, of converting raw materials to finished products, involving many steps and the way in which this new technology would facilitate the pulling together of these, facilitating among other things, subcontracting and electronic payments. It talks, therefore, about Singapore moving forward towards high-value manufacturing and co-ordinating links to a lower-cost manufacturing across the region.

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It talks about commerce. It talks about the way in which the commercial sector is going to be able to use this and tapping into for trade networks and for all kinds of relationships. It talks about construction and, very interestingly, it talks about what they call Community Telecomputing Network. I want to read this in some detail. It says:

“The Community Telecomputing Network. The community telecomputing network will provide low cost, 24-hour access to a wide range of electronic services. It will allow users to send and receive electronic mail from others in the community and seek the advice of volunteer experts such as doctors and lawyers. It will provide access to all types of public information on subjects like education, cultural activities and special events. It will support communication with elected representatives, town council officials and community leaders and access to information about government services.”

The point about all this is that when we read this we get a sense of vision, we get a sense of philosophy, so that when they talk to you about the box, the computer going into a home, it fits in with this vision where they see information technology facilitating improvement in every aspect of life. That is what I mean. When I listened to the Minister of Finance; when I listened to my friend from Arima; when I listened to the Minister of Education, I got none of these visions. I got none of the philosophical underpinning and from the perspective of providing us with a philosophical and visionary backdrop to that statement of putting computers, they have failed us. [*Desk thumping*]

2.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, as I went back and reread this report from Singapore, I developed another vision as well. I developed a vision even for us here as parliamentarians, that one day some parliamentarians would send their contributions on a diskette and we come here and just plug it in. Consider that. That means we will not necessarily have to come here and listen to the Member for Tobago East. [*Laughter*] Is that not going to be a significant advance in terms of parliamentary life? That is how, therefore, I lock in the computer for parliamentarians into my vision.

Mr. Speaker, the second area I want to turn to is to recognize some things which were done very positively and some other issues I think we need to address. The proposal to develop and introduce the community college, I think, is also an admirable one for which the Minister of Education should be complimented. I think it will add to the store of institutions providing training for us here in

Trinidad and Tobago. However, there is one issue I want to put on the table, which I think will need to be addressed as a matter of some urgency, particularly as we go in that direction. It is the issue of accreditation.

One of the things that has been happening in this country over the last decade is that a number of organizations and individuals have begun to develop and run a range of academic, professional and technical programmes. Some of them are programmes run on behalf of foreign institutions and, therefore, in that sense, the accreditation issue may not arise. However, we have also seen within that period of time places like the Caribbean Union College and Roytec developing their own home-grown programmes of tertiary education. Roytec, in fact, has degree programmes developed by that institution.

Both CUC and Roytec have, over the years, been attempting to treat with the issue of accreditation using the NIHERST approach. It has been a torturous approach. Very torturous. I am saying that as we begin now to talk about dealing with the community colleges, which will expand the range of institutions, it is the time for us to address the question of the mechanics that are going to be used to allow accreditation to take place. One of the concerns I have is that so far, NIHERST has been a central actor in this process, but if NIHERST is also going to be a central point for the development of the community college, one wonders if we are not running into a conflict of interest situation—whether we are asking them to accredit themselves. We are going to have to address this field of advancing education: tertiary education in particular. I urge the Members opposite to deal with that as a matter of urgency as they go forward with the community college. It is critical.

Mr. Speaker, the other issue—as we think about the community college, as we think about that level of education and human resource development in our society—has to do with the role of our university. The University of the West Indies (UWI) has, over the past years, been attempting to go through its own process of transformation. It is changing, attempting to become more relevant and proactive, but it seems to me that as a major stakeholder in our university, the Trinidad and Tobago Government may need to signal in one form or another what kind of UWI it wishes to see in the future.

One would have hoped that in the budget, and not only the budget itself, but the statements emanating from various Ministers talking about the importance of human resource development, we would have also got some sense of the Government's thinking, direction and vision for the University of the West Indies,

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because that, too, will continue to play a critical role in developing our young people. We may have our community colleges and the private sector putting in various institutions, but UWI will continue, and one would hope that we would get some sense of where the Government is going, as far as the University of the West Indies is concerned.

While I will come back to some other issues relating to the Ministry of Education, I want to say that while I commend the Minister for his statement relating to his repair programme and his building programme, some of the training he is doing for teachers, particularly the computer literacy programme, there are some other areas of life in that Ministry which I think need to be addressed.

The education reform programme to which we alluded earlier talked, for instance, about the establishment of an education services commission, because it recognizes that the duality, in terms of oversight for public officers in that Ministry, between a public service commission and a teaching service commission, creates bottle necks, administrative delays, and hiccups. That is why that task force recommended that all persons working within the Ministry be placed under one umbrella. The Minister seems to be studiously avoiding that recommendation, but I will say to him that unless he also deals with the administrative and management arrangements for the Ministry, a lot of the other programming he will put in place will not be optimized, and it is critical, therefore, that he places that on his agenda. I listened to the Minister of Education and I did not get that sense about where he is going where that is concerned.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to the issue of the contributory pension scheme. Again, it is not a new issue for us. Those of us on this side raised that issue when the Pensions Bill came. However, the way in which the Minister of Finance posited that for us raises some concerns. I think the Member for Tobago East talked about the Chilean model, there is that arrangement, but let us recognize that the settlement of public service collective agreements was completed this year—and I think the Government has to be complimented for that—with the assumption of non-contributory pension arrangements.

If the Government is moving in that direction, it is critical that it understands the implications of that for the agreements at which they just arrived. It is critical, therefore, that they treat with those issues at the same time they seek to treat with introducing any new pension arrangements. Here again, I contend that we are not

placing these things within a broader philosophical framework, because really, what we are doing is addressing some issues about compensation and benefit management of our public servants.

Over the last few months, we have seen some piecemeal efforts at parts of that. The last being the addition of housing allowance for Ministers, an increase coming out of the Salaries Review Commission of some \$4,000 per month to Ministers in emoluments. I am not against ministers or parliamentarians getting increases. What we do, however, when we treat with these things in this ad hoc way is create more and more separation between parts of our public service. In other words, the relativities which were built in years ago through an old classification system are being eroded, and what concerns me is that we began an exercise to reclassify public officers through our evaluation programme.

Funds for it were put into the 1997 estimates. My sense is that nothing happened. Funds for it have been put back into the 1998 estimates, and I am saying that unless the Government treats with this issue of the classification of public officers, which would allow us to take a clinical and objective look at where jobs ought to fall within the public service, we run a risk—they have heard it already and will hear it again until they do something about it—because it is a critical part of the reform of our administration in our public service of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, when we left office in 1995, in the teaching service that programme was 95 per cent completed; in the protective services, it was 60 per cent completed; in the wider public service, it was 20 per cent completed. Clearly, it was at a point where we could have hastened completion. It was also at a point where, if the Government so wished, it could have completed it within the teaching service, moved on to the protective services, and moved on to the public service. Do you know how that links back into some philosophical issues? If we are saying that human resource development is so important, then clearly, the way in which we manage the people who carry that process forward, the teachers must become a priority for us, and that is where things like priority become important in budget statements.

I think my friend from Laventille East alluded to it yesterday where we continue to have situations where excellent teachers can only find routes for promotion by moving out of that field. We need in our system now, our excellent teachers to continue working in that field, and so there are provisions for master teachers, there are provisions to reward our good teachers without causing them to come out of the teaching stream. At a time when we are talking about training

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and human resource development, it is absolutely essential for us to do something about that. Two years later that classification system has gone no further.

I am saying, therefore, that as we come now to talk about pensions, we are talking about elements of the benefit system, and I am saying that we cannot, and ought not to do it in isolation from these other elements. It is a plea to my friends opposite to recognize the importance of that, and to treat with it.

I turn to some comments which were made by the Member for Tobago East. I think he read into *Hansard* something that was very critical, and which I think we need to address. In doing that, he was very inaccurate in one of his statements. I refer to his contribution relating to the study on employment practices in the public and private sectors in Trinidad and Tobago, which came out of the Centre for Ethnic Studies. He said:

“Mr. Speaker, this is not a document produced by the UNC Government. This was produced in 1992 by the Centre For Ethnic Studies and suppressed. Except for myself and a few other people who collected these things, nobody knows about it.”

2.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I was part of the Cabinet that dealt with this and I am going to go back into some of the background to it. The one point I want to make here is that this document was not suppressed. In fact, I double-checked it again this morning, just in case something had gone wrong with my memory. It was in the media, it was laid publicly by the Centre for Ethnic Studies, it was sold to the public and, in fact, I am told that there are still copies and they are willing to give them away freely. For this Member to come here, therefore, and talk about this document being suppressed, and that there are just a few who have access to it—this is what I mean about total quality leadership. This is not the kind of thing that we expect in this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*].

Carrying us into this document, I think it is important for us, particularly in this country at this time, as we view current events in Guyana, to understand the difficulty we have as we try to talk here about ethnic relationships. Yet it is one that we need to face, but we need to face it on the basis of objectivity. It is for that reason that the PNM government opted to go to an institution which, in our view, had the integrity and credibility to do the kind of objective analysis and present facts and data to the national population on which we can make policy and decisions. It is for that reason that the government went to the university and funded the Centre for Ethnic Studies. It is out of that this document came.

Mr. Speaker, having had access to the document, it is passing strange that the Member for Tobago East only opted to quote some small snippets of the document. He quoted a section which dealt with the public service and what he quoted was some elements of the findings of the investigation. I am going to quote some of what he quoted in the document. He said, from (vii):

“It was also found that where merit and technical criteria must prevail, as in the Judicial and Professional Sectors, Indians were more than adequately represented. Indians have achieved parity at the clerical level but as one ascended the ladder of promotion, their proportions declined considerably. This was more true of the Central Services than of the Public Enterprises Sector.”

Mr. Speaker, this relates to issues relating to human resource management in the public service. It speaks about the operation of the Public Service Commission, and the operation of the human resource management function in the public service. Indeed, as I will quote in a while, the recommendations—which were just two pages down from what the Member quoted—pointed to those things. Having done this, we were then in a position to reinforce in our minds some of the reforms which we were prosecuting at that time within our public service. Listen to the recommendations, because we cannot allow the Member to dangle this in front of our eyes, to make it appear as though the PNM government was somehow trying to ferment racial disharmony in this country through producing this report and then suppressing it. We cannot allow that kind of thing to go on in this country anymore. Here are some of the recommendations which came out of that. Recommendation (3) listed in the summary, page (x):

“3. A positive attempt should be made to ensure a measure of racial balance on all interview panels in the Public Service, Municipal Corporations and in the Public Enterprises Sector.”

It is interesting that some years after, these recommendations continue to be valid—and I dare say, the Member for Tobago East should do things which ought to guide his Government. The recommendations go on to say:

“5. The Human Resource Management function should be integrated at the national level, but a section should be set up in each Ministry with exclusive responsibility for the human resource function.”

Mr. Speaker, that process began as part of the PNM government’s administrative reform programme. The current Government is seeking to continue

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it, but has slowed down. This recommendation points very squarely to the absolute necessity of restructuring and reformatting the human resource management in our public services. It goes on to say:

- “8. The current system of staff reporting should be re-examined with a view to finding a mechanism to protect both the reporting officer and the person on whom the report is being made.”

Again, one of the things which we had been moving towards, which has also slowed over these last two years, has been the issue of the performance appraisal system in the public service. In the 1997—1999 *Medium Term Policy Framework* under “Public Administration”, page 15. I quote:

“Government recognizes that there is a critical need for the ‘fast-tracking’ of bright, achieving public officers, and a practical career and succession planning programme for the senior ranks of the Service.”

Mr. Speaker, when one reads this year’s *Medium Term Policy Framework*, this same concern surfaces because not much has happened in that direction.

One of the things which could have facilitated some of that fast-tracking and some other assurance that people of talent got to the top, which again, we introduced, they stopped and then tried to reintroduce, was a Deputy Permanent Secretary. In looking at issues relating to succession planning which their document raises, and to which this report also alludes, we recognize that we needed to put different systems in place; a new performance appraisal system and a Deputy Permanent Secretary system. They stopped the Deputy Permanent Secretary system and then tried to restart it. I really thought, and occasionally I choose to believe some of what the Minister of Finance says, because he said to me—and it is one of the things I started to believe—that the Government has some management skill and business acumen. Mr. Speaker, if the Member is asking me what that will achieve, it says to me that he does not appreciate management issues within the public service. They still have to deal—which is why they tried to reintroduce it—with issues of ensuring that they put in place succession plans for top management in the public service.

I know that one of the things that happened as they went back out and re-advertized and so forth, is that certain persons whom they felt should have been shortlisted were not shortlisted. I understand that certain persons who were acting permanent secretaries were not shortlisted. I am not going to go into that, it is a consulting relationship with the Government that led to that. What I am going to

say, however, is that was one mechanism—not the mechanism, not the only mechanism, but one mechanism—which was absolutely critical to deal with issues here in their *Medium Term Policy Framework* and in this document.

Mr. Speaker, you see, as we look at the Government over the last two years, we recognize that—in fact, the Minister of Trade and Industry alluded to it—so much of what they are doing really is a continuation of what we put in place. In a sense, at times it reminds me of when fellows fudge in school. Very often, what they are able to fudge is the answer and when the teacher asks them for the workings they are totally at sea. This Government is like that; they fudge the answers, but when they have to go back inside and fiddle, they do not understand the workings, hence I will get that kind of question from the hon. Minister. They need to be able to understand the answer and how to get it.

Let me return to the Centre for Ethnic Studies. Among the other recommendations, and I quote”

- “13. The Chairmanship of the Public Service Commission and The Police Service Commission should be separated.
14. In order to facilitate monitoring the overall development of the Public Services in relation to ethnicity, it is recommended that the records of individual agencies should include data on gender and race, insofar as they relate to appointments, promotions and other awards.”

What I am saying is that here was a study done by a credible institution, providing for us data on which we can build policy and strategy. For the Member for Tobago East to come and pull a piece of it out, and dangle it to suggest that there were some other overtones, I think was very unfortunate.

Mr. Speaker, *The Companion Study to the Public Sector Study* was a piece that looked at the employment practices in the private sector. It also provided us with data—I would not bother to go into all of it here—and with some recommendations. Among other things, it talked about the importance of firms taking immediate steps to draw up clearly written equal opportunity programmes relating to recruitment, training and promotion. It talks, for instance, about personnel departments looking at, and talking to managers about disparities among applicants based on ethnic differences. In other words, we have a blueprint here on which we can seriously talk about how we manage our diverse population. We cannot play footloose with this. We cannot do it. As my colleague is pointing out to me, this Government closed the centre down which may suggest that issues

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relating to fact, thorough analysis and these matters are not the concern of this Government.

One of the things that was also indicated in the *Medium Term Policy Framework 1997—1999* was the importance of the Government establishing and developing a White Paper on Public Administration, which has been done, and again, it is one of the things which was completed and on which they need to be complimented. This document is called *Towards a New Public Administration, White Paper, May, 1997*. What is, of course, interesting is that when one looks at the summary of issues on pages 42 and 43, they really are a restatement of our policy and directions.

One of the things I want to raise which has been very silent, in a sense, in this document and many other statements is what is going to be the continuing role of public service commissions. Here is where, once again, I return to this issue of the philosophical underpinning. While this document, on page 43, talks about devolution management or delegation of authority, which should be vigorously pursued so that managers at all levels of the service can manage critical human, financial and other resources, it remains silent on whether this Government's philosophy is about delegating functions from the public service commission.

About two weeks ago I was very fortunate to be in St. Lucia where there was a Caribbean workshop dealing with human resource management and public service commissions. The hon. Minister of Public Administration and Information was also there, as indeed, some other senior public officers from this Government. What was emerging as consensus from that round table was a view of a new role for public service commissions. A role which saw those commissions, not carrying out the day-to-day, mundane, nitty-gritty functions of appointment and recruitment as the commissions now do, but a role which sees the commission in the future, as audit, establishing rules and regulations and ensuring that they are enforced and as establishing an ethos for the public service as possibly serving as a tribunal. That is the vision emerging from this region about where our public service commissions ought to go.

This document, published in May, 1997, is astoundingly silent on this Government's position on that. But yet, it talks about devolution and delegation, about setting up human resource management units within ministries. My concern is that unless, at the same time, we understand the need to delegate functions from the public service commissions into those units, we may end up with units within ministries without the necessary authority to really allow them to function

effectively. It would seem to me that an institution as critically important as the public service commissions ought to feature into the philosophical underpinnings—to use the term of my friend from St. Joseph—which will guide some parts of this new public administration. It is not here and I ask that the Government reflect on this and say to the national community whether they believe that our current model and operation of service commissions continues to be relevant given the other changes that they anticipate and are saying that they wish to make in our public service.

3.10 p.m.

The document also raises some other interesting issues. It talks, for instance, about the need to establish management and executive development for ministers, permanent secretaries and other senior managers.

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. [*Dr. K. Rowley*]

Mr. G. Draper: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Members for this extension.

I was on to the point of building from recommendations made in this White Paper, *Toward a New Public Administration*. On page 43 it states:

"A Management/Executive Development Programme for Ministers, Permanent Secretaries and other Senior Managers should be developed and implemented."

I tie that to an interesting comment made in a report which went to this year's Commonwealth Heads Meeting in Edinburgh in the United Kingdom in October 1997. It was made by the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management. It talked about some of the new directions and paradigms in public administration. Among other things it said the following:

"The changing nature of the political/administrative interface in the Westminster system of governance is now highlighted in many of the discussions concerning the new public administration and has been examined in many CAPAM discussions."

What they raised is whether we now need in a very formal way to establish some mechanics for looking at the relationship between ministers and permanent secretaries. I know that the Minister of Public Utilities has spoken about benchmarking. Here is a benchmark that he may want to look at.

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In New Zealand they describe that as a zone of strategic conversation but really it is a recognition that effective governance necessitates effective relationships between ministers and permanent secretaries. While it does not hold for all on that side, there has been enough happening in those relationships in the last two years to suggest that ought to be a priority item in this Government's reform agenda.

We cannot continue systems where our senior public service managers operate in fear and uncertainty and where ministers operate in a manner which seems to threaten rather than work collaboratively with their senior managers. Their recommendation endorsed by some other benchmark work suggests that ought to be a priority; some work which helps both these people work together.

I want to go a step further. It seems to me that one of the things we have not addressed here as yet, and we may need to, is a mechanism in which we can really, effectively, evaluate permanent secretaries and persons who become permanent secretaries. Here, some of the training that they spoke about could fit into it. Again, it comes back to my concern about philosophical underpinnings and the programmes and strategies that are put in place.

When this Government took office in November, 1995 there was, in fact, an ongoing management development programme for senior public officers, principals and teachers in schools, which the Government stopped and returned in May, 1997 to say that is what it wants to do. The modules are there. I have them listed. If they wish and if my friend wants a copy they can get that too. They were there, but it recognized that we needed to put those systems in place if we were to be effective.

While the Minister of Public Administration and Information in particular, or the Government, in fact, developed for us the framework, it seems to my mind to be lacking in a couple of very critical areas: Public Service Commission issues; issues relating to the very senior levels in our public service; how do we prepare them for that level and deal with succession planning to get them to that level; how we monitor their performance; and, I guess, ultimately, how we reward them.

Mr. Speaker, I want—still on the issue relating to public service and public administration—to recognize some of the comments made this morning by the Minister of Health. If I understand him correctly, it seems to be that he is moving toward putting in a "citizen charter". He may have used a slightly different term, "patient charter" but it really comes out of the UK model of a citizens' charter, which I think is an admirable way to go.

I suggest that this notion of a charter which establishes standards of performance for ministries and departments, perhaps, could also be put in the Minister of Finance's new IRS. The Inland Revenue Department and now the IRS will have some critical levels of interface with the business community and members of the public. I think it would be useful to establish a quality charter for the IRS early in the day so that we know up front how long it ought to take VAT returns to be processed and returned to the private sector. Therefore, we will know up front how long it ought to take to process our individual tax claims, but more than this, that there would be some kind of penalty attached for non-compliance to those standards. If they do not meet the standards of the business community or individuals there may be some kind of interest added to it.

The direction touted by the Minister of Health is, in fact, an appropriate way to go. It is one which needs to build on the Government's notion of customer service because it sets some very clear targets and some specifics within which we can measure performance.

I want to go a step further because in these documents also, the *Medium Term Framework* as well as the *White Paper on Public Administration*, there is the notion of putting in place strategic reviews and plans for ministries and departments. That too was started when we were there and it needs to continue.

Where I would like to see us go—and I would like the Minister of Finance, in particular, to take this on board—is move to a point where, when we present budgets here, they are presented alongside some clear statements of strategic intent and plan for each ministry. If we do that we will no longer get into all the semantics about performance. It would be clear, absolutely straightforward and we will have no quibble about it. It, however, requires a vision to move from merely talking about doing these strategic reviews to one in which we recognize how they can be locked into the business of governance and government. I would also like to put that on board for this Government.

Mr. Speaker, one of the very interesting elements of this budget as well is the fact that this budget served to do a Cabinet reshuffle. The reshuffle pointed to up to now, very largely, has been that relating to URP and the road programme moving from the Minister of Works and Transport to the Minister of Local Government. We recognize that while the rug was being pulled from under the feet of the Minister of Works, the Minister of Local Government was being anointed.

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On page 24 there is another reshuffle and the Minister, in fact, seemed to—

Mr. Valley: That is an appropriation, not a reshuffle.

Mr. G. Draper: It is a reshuffle because, in fact, he made a statement to the media. The Minister of Finance said:

"Mr. Speaker, Government is also proposing to institute a properly structured, Maintenance Programme targeted at maintaining all public buildings, government offices and properties.

This new Programme will require a more efficient Property Registry which will fall under the aegis of the Ministry of Finance."

The Minister is reported, in the media, the day after the budget as saying that the Property Management Unit will move into the Ministry of Finance. I have not seen anything to refute that, so I am assuming from this statement that this is the Minister's intent.

Let me say from our side, quite categorically, that the Government's real estate portfolio needs to be rationalized, in fact, we started doing it. We sold vacant government houses in a very transparent way. I trust that when you do that, it would be as transparent. The Member for San Fernando East has on more than one occasion made a point in this House while talking about other issues, that prime ministers need to be very careful about allocation of portfolios.

In one of the divestments of the last Government's holdings in the property sector, when we were dealing with Salvatori Building, there were a number of people who expressed interest coming forward to develop real estate assets in the heart of the city. One of these persons was the hon. Minister of Finance and, therefore, it raises in my mind some questions when he now says that he wants to take the Government's real estate portfolio and put it under the Ministry of Finance. I am not accusing, but it does raise questions. It is not that anyone here is opposing this notion of rationalizing the state's real estate portfolio. It has to be done, we have to have a proper registry, we have to do some selling out, there is no quarrel about that. But it can be done where it is.

3.20 p.m.

There are mechanisms which can be put in place, there are staffing arrangements, using information systems, the works which can allow that property management unit to become efficient and effective. But when we see Cabinet reshuffles taking place in this manner, you understand why cynicism and skepticism abound in this country.

In a sense, I want to return to the point where I began. When we look at the statement which has come, as I have indicated, there are so many things which have been said but so many things which have not been said. So many things which have been said without really providing us with a vision and philosophical framework within which we can understand and meaningfully comment. But it has been said in a way which raises serious questions. The statement has not, in my view, provided us with a clear enough documentary on performance. It has not provided us with a clear enough statement of strategies to a vision and to philosophy. For all these reasons, I will continue to have problems with this budget as it has been presented for us in 1998. Notwithstanding that, in the spirit of the season, I would wish the Minister of Finance a very prosperous and blessed Christmas. Indeed, I would wish all the Members opposite and their families a very blessed Christmas. We know there will be difficulties in 1998 but I trust that we all have a very productive year. You and your family as well, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Hon. Ralph Maraj): Mr. Speaker, I rise to participate in this debate at a time when I had long given up any expectation to be standing on my feet, so that I feel somewhat like a nightwatchman, as it were, coming to the wicket at this point in time. I therefore want to ask my colleague, the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West to forgive me if I do not respond in detail to the hints that he was making. I did not have enough time to focus and it is not out of any disrespect for the substance in the content of his contribution. I have no doubt that he will be responded to in due course especially when he talked about public service reform and so forth. He was making a point over and over, Mr. Speaker, about the philosophical underpinnings of the budget or the lack of it in his view, and the need for that. Maybe I can focus on that a little because, coming as late as I am in this budget debate, I do not intend to go over the ground that has already been covered by so many eloquent speakers to and fro. In any case I think at this point in time the debate is already won by this side. I intend to try to put a different kind of spin on the ball, something which I hope will be of benefit to us all.

I think it can be categorized under the whole question of philosophy of budget and governance, direction, vision, understanding where we are and what we are doing. One cannot really talk about underpinnings if one really does not understand the context within which we are operating, the world realities, the present situation. If we are deprived of that understanding, we could formulate and come up with a policy that is either irrelevant, obsolete or counterproductive. I think it is important for us to understand that the economy of Trinidad and Tobago at this

point in time is the result of a process of reform which has been underway for some time. In fact, it has been underway for over a decade now. I think any objective analysis of the situation would reveal that no single government or individual has been responsible for this process of reform. All have contributed to it. There is no doubt about that. In fact, the paternity of the reform really lies outside of Trinidad and Tobago because if we look at what has been happening, the truth is that for the last decade or so we have been following economic prescriptions in this country which have been fashioned for us by global forces, the twin global forces in particular of globalization and liberalization. These forces have been pushing economies throughout the world, whether they are developed, developing or underdeveloped towards macro-economic convergence. What we are seeing in the world today is uniformity of economic policy which we have been following. In other words what Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Jamaica and Latin America have done, India and China have also done to a certain degree and even Viet Nam and Africa are being pushed to adopt these reforms. We have got to understand where we are. I think this is where we must locate this budget and the nine or ten other budgets that we have had in Trinidad and Tobago.

As a country we have long accepted the fact that the period of introversion and stateism that we thought was beneficial to us in the past were counterproductive and that we have moved the economy of Trinidad and Tobago—the way we have been doing business—to a process of de-regulation and liberalization, the purpose of which has been to unleash the inner energy of the society. This is a clear result of a national consensus which has developed with respect to this new direction. That consensus is evident in the fact that different administrations, born out of different political parties have accepted that in order for Trinidad and Tobago to be viable, we had to take those macro-economic decisions which would insert this economy into the global economy.

Having said that, we also cannot help but characterize the last two years of this administration as a time of prudent and creative management. The facts speak for themselves. We have had non-inflationary growth, very important, a fall in unemployment levels, the country's reserves are up and budget surpluses are now a norm. There is a constantly favourable balance of payment position, economic diversification and industrial expansion moving apace. The flow of investment has turned into a flood and we have witnessed great strides, I think, in the development of the physical, economic and social infrastructure of Trinidad and Tobago. I think to deny all this, no matter what side we are on and what perspective we may bring on it, is to practice a kind of deliberate ostracism—

Mr. Manning: *[Inaudible]*

Hon. R. Maraj: I heard that. *[Laughter]* —which I think is most unbecoming of Members of this honourable assembly.

If we look at the presentation of the budget of the Minister of Finance it speaks volumes about the state of affairs in Trinidad and Tobago and we will see that the economy of this country has been moving from a trot into a measured gallop. We do not want to gallop away, we have got to control it all the time in order to maintain this non-inflationary growth so we may continue to have sustained economic growth. I have no doubt that the 1998 budget will increase the momentum, but, Mr. Speaker—this is very important to me—there are pitfalls in the way we are going and we have got to be aware of them. It is my view that the pitfalls are inherent in the very direction in which we are moving and the very reforms that we have embraced. Therefore, we could be carrying the germ of our own chaos if we are not careful. That is the point I want to make. That is why I am saying that philosophical underpinning can only come about if there is clinical understanding of the situation. I am saying, inherent in the reform are also some very great dangers and that the budget hints at these dangers, the very budget which I talked about, which was born out of a process of reform, born out of globalization.

I come now, to one of the main questions I want to ask today. What is this globalization that we have embraced, which is upon us and has been knocking at our doors for sometime, pushing to get in and which we have accepted willingly and inevitably? Is it the old greed born anew which may never be satiated and through which the earth has been conquered, millions lost their lives, ancient civilizations destroyed, empires built and dependencies established, some forever? That is the question I want to ask. This is the question we must ask: Is globalization that old greed? I hope I do not need to go into any further explanation. Anybody with a sense of history will understand what I am talking about. Or, is globalization the inevitable consequence of the global village, technological advancement, the development of efficiencies, the growth of markets and the collapse of central planning?

These are the things we have to ask ourselves because if we do not know what this beast of globalization is, we will never be able to fashion the philosophy and the policy to move the country forward and avoid the very pitfalls that I am talking about. Let me make it very clear, I am not talking about closing down the shutters and going back into a state of introversion. I am saying there is a force afoot in the

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world which we have embraced, which we must negotiate with and through which there are so many advantages to be had for Trinidad and Tobago. I am saying also, if we do not understand the beast, if we do not make ourselves capable of negotiating with it, this country will be sucked dry and our children will be left with baubles, crumbs and valueless coins jangling in their pockets. I make that point very, very clear.

In this administration we are convinced that we have to be able to understand this beast, negotiate with this beast. We can only benefit from the globalization if we are not reduced to being the mere playthings of forces which, apparently, are more powerful than us. Our administration realizes that in order to have long term and real benefits from globalization, certain adjustments have to be made. The time has come for a review of the incentive package for investments in certain key sectors. We must deepen the industrial base by going downstream of steel and natural gas. We must encourage investments towards these objectives. We must encourage the local private sector to participate in certain key and strategic industries. This has not been happening enough. We are moving in Trinidad and Tobago to a position where the commanding heights of the economy, to use an old term, will be controlled by the local private sector. We are constantly looking for ways and means by which we can encourage this. This is one of the reasons the Minister of Finance is talking about increasing savings in the country so that we can finance our development through the capital that is in Trinidad and Tobago. That is the point; we have to increase our level of savings to further our development.

3.35 p.m.

We must develop our human resource, not just to alleviate poverty and if we are talking about the philosophical underpinning, we must understand what we are talking about. If we are to develop our human resource, it is not just for alleviation of poverty, to make the country competitive and so forth, we must understand that we in the country also need local hands at the levers of the Trinidad and Tobago economic engine.

Agriculture, tourism, small business, high-tech industries, these are areas which must be given opportunity to grow and flourish, because it is in these areas that we will be able to deepen our industrial base and sustain our economic democracy which can be threatened by a globalization which runs untrammelled through your economy and through your society.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

So that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to know the beast of globalization and we have to know how to tame it to our advantage. We must, therefore, be able to use it for our enrichment rather than allow it to displace us in our own homes. I am saying that these are matters that this budget of the hon. Minister of Finance throws into question, throws into light, throws into the debate and I think as a national community we need to consider these matters if we are to take full charge of the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

There is another aspect of the economic reform that we have undertaken in Trinidad and Tobago and which is, in a way, a very direct aspect of the globalization that we have embraced and I think it is important that we also consider that in this honourable House. We are looking here in particular at the role of private-sector-led growth in the integrated development of Trinidad and Tobago. We have been talking about private-sector-led growth. For years now, we have been shouting from the roof tops about the virtues of private-sector-led growth and in this administration, we believe that private-sector-led growth is the way to go because, of course, governments by and large all over the world have proven to be inefficient in the delivery of certain goods and services.

We have made the enabling environment and the budget reveals this even more propitiously. The Minister of Finance, in his last budget presentation, reduced corporation tax. That has been maintained and the figures will show that in 1997, the Minister of Finance experienced a contraction of about 23.6 per cent in revenues from corporations, which resulted in a deduction in tax revenues of about 4 per cent. In other words, revenue foregone by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to encourage the private sector to expand.

When we look at the other side of the balance sheet, we are seeing private sector expansion; we are seeing industrial expansion; we are looking, for example, at the contribution of the non-oil sector to the gross domestic product. It is increasing more and more over the oil sector and so we see that the policies are working.

It is important for us at this point to congratulate the private sector of Trinidad and Tobago for taking up the gauntlet, but the Government must also be congratulated for providing the environment and the conditions for mounting a successful challenge. In other words, what we are seeing in Trinidad and Tobago is a very creative, dynamic and productive partnership between Government and the private sector. I am focussing on this private-sector-led growth and I know I could be treading on dangerous ground, because I do not want anybody to accuse me of

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being anti-private sector led growth. I am saying that is important. Let me, for example, just repeat what I said to a private sector delegation that I led to Curacao some time ago. I told them then, “Go forth and multiply in your millions. The Government is behind you. The Government has no problem with people becoming millionaires through legitimate means.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker—and this is the point I want to come to—private-sector-led growth is one thing, but private-sector-led politics is quite another and I think in Trinidad and Tobago we ought to differentiate between the two. Private-sector-led government is not what we are practising in this administration; private-sector-led politics is not what we are practising in this administration; we want private-sector-led growth and we feel that it is the political directorate, the politicians, who must set the agenda and that is seen in this budget.

We are talking about an agenda for poverty alleviation; we are talking about an agenda for the development of our human resource, so that we are using in a way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this administration, private sector entrepreneurial talent and energy for achieving the social objectives for Trinidad and Tobago and that I think is important for us to remember always.

Some people say that is obvious. I am stating the obvious but I think it is important for it to be stated and restated. You see, in this new environment where we are talking about the virtues of private-sector-led growth and so forth, we can find ourselves worshipping at the altar of business and market policies to such an extent that we may not understand. We may become entrapped in a blurred understanding of the difference between private-sector-led growth and private-sector-led policies.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank the hon. Minister for giving way. After we have pursued this economic approach for a decade, does the Minister believe that we have now learnt enough to begin to make some kind of modifications to the approach and, if so, what are the modifications he sees relevant for Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. R. Maraj: Modifications might be the wrong term to use. I think what we have got to understand is that we are in a process that could be evolutionary; we are in a process that is evolving incrementally. We talk all the time about the role of government and how the role of government has changed from the interventionist role and so forth, to the one that is the enabler and creator of the environment and the debate is on. That is why I think it is important; we have to understand it. And your question is really relevant to the debate.

What is the role of government and what is the level of intervention in an economy that is market-oriented and market-driven? The debate is going on. To what extent must we be interventionists? I am making the point in answer to the question that if we understand the difference between private-sector-led growth and private-sector-led government and business, we will retain the right and the responsibility of a government to set the social and political agenda of Trinidad and Tobago. I am saying that is where we need to look.

The point I want to make is, if we do not understand the distinction, if Government in a way abdicates its responsibility to set the agenda, neither wealth nor power will be able to deal with the displeasure of the disaffected masses of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Manning: Do you think Adesh understands that?

Hon. R. Maraj: I am sure he does.

In other words, all our reforms will come to nought and these are the dangers that are inherent in the very policies that we are following. The germ of chaos lies in the policies that are bringing us the prosperity, but we have got to understand and we cannot talk about philosophical underpinnings if we do not understand the beast with which we are dealing. I am saying that these are matters we have to consider, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You would see in this budget, the Government is angling to deal with deprivation.

Mr. Valley: Where?

Hon. R. Maraj: As I said, we need to move in a measured way on it and you are going to see a revealed—

Mr. Valley: I wonder whether the hon. Minister can just point us to the section of the budget statement in which the Government plans to deal with deprivation?

Hon. R. Maraj: I think if you look at the housing loan; I think if you look at the upgrading of—

Mr. Valley: Which housing loan?

Hon. R. Maraj: The loan for low cost housing. I think if you look at the single mothers loan; I think if you look at the computers in every home; I think if you look—

Mr. Manning: Poverty?

Hon. R. Maraj: That has to deal with poverty.

Mr. Manning: But you are not looking convinced.

Hon. R. Maraj: I am very convinced. I think if you look at the policies which are going to generate employment, because in our view, poverty in the country is structural and you can only deal with it by generating long-term sustainable employment—the Small Business Development Company, tourism, agriculture and so forth. All those things are being pointed to in the budget.

The point I want to make is that the Government cannot do it alone.

Mr. Valley: You better come back home!

Hon. R. Maraj: We are in a partnership—

Mr. Valley: You better come back home! “I went away, I leave and I come back home.”

Mr. Assam: After you all threw him out.

Hon. R. Maraj: We are in a partnership, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with private enterprise, so we must not become ecstatic and rhapsodized about private-sector-led growth and not understand our role as leaders and as politicians, and I am saying that this budget statement speaks volumes. Any intelligent reading of this budget statement will give a very clear idea of the role that the Government has to play in the new paradigm that we are following.

Mr. Manning: Tell me about the equidistance principle.

Mr. Assam: Look, it is there between Valley and Rowley.

Hon. R. Maraj: So that, we want to make it very clear that in this partnership whilst we, as a government, are convinced of the role of the private sector to create the environment and so forth, the private sector must understand as well that it has new obligations in this relationship.

I would not go into too many details about what are the obligations of the private sector in this new relationship, but we are talking as well about the development of a social conscience. We would like to see the social conscience developed in the private sector. We would like the private sector to understand, for example, that a nation can never be a mere market-place; that as human beings we are consumers, not just buyers and sellers. Anybody who sees human beings as

mere buyers and sellers is debasing this grand being called the human being. We are much more than that.

We are people with soul and spirit and so we are talking about culture, the arts and the private sector must begin to see a role for itself, not just for Government to do it. The private sector must develop that social conscience and begin to see a role for itself in the development of the arts, and the development of culture, in putting down the artistic and entertainment infrastructure in Trinidad and Tobago. The private sector must also see the role that it must play in education, in the provision of libraries in the country and things like that. The private sector must also sense the direction into which the Government is leading the country and be willing to take risks in new areas.

3.50 p.m.

Look at agriculture, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have been talking in this country about the woeful state of the agricultural sector for some time. I have no doubt that my honourable colleague from Princes Town is going to move the agricultural sector, as has already been demonstrated in the budget. There is employment in the agricultural sector. I want to make a point—and I would come back to the private sector and the new obligations which the private sector must have in this new partnership, if, indeed, it is going to be maintained as a partnership. It ought to be obvious to everybody that what is needed in Trinidad and Tobago in the agricultural sector at this point in time is private capital. We are still at the stage where we are producing the primary products for small wayside markets and so forth. If we do not have private capital investing in agriculture, in the agri-business sector, to add value and so forth, for exports abroad, where are we going?

Dr. Rowley: Am I to understand that the Member is agreeing with the fact that we should not be rearing cows; and planting tomatoes, plantains, cassava and coffee with treasury money at Caroni (1975) Limited? Does he agree with that?

Hon. R. Maraj: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am saying that there is a role for private capital in agriculture and that is the missing link in our agricultural development. My friend from Princes Town is going to provide the inducements for the local private sector to take part in agricultural development, and similarly tourism.

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I would not go into all the details about tourism, and so forth. We have been talking about tourism for decades in Trinidad and Tobago: the sun, sea and sand model, the events tourism, the cultural tourism, and so forth, but we really have not focussed on domestic tourism. This country exists for us in the first instance.

Hon. Member: Because we do not have a Minister of Tourism.

Hon. R. Maraj: Well, if the Member read the Minister's budget statement, there is going to be domestic tourism. If we develop the infrastructure in Trinidad and Tobago for ourselves, in the first instance, it will also be attractive to others. Look at Mayaro beach. When I was a young man—not too long ago, of course—we used to go to Mayaro beach and spend weekends. There were many beach houses there; many businesses were generated and so forth. I think that industry has died. So we need to develop a domestic tourism sector and we are saying that the private sector, if it understands the role that it must play in this new partnership—the local private sector—must be willing to take the risks in these areas. It must be willing to be creative in these areas. The private sector cannot ask for a reduction in corporation tax and just go on like that. It is a partnership. It has an obligation to expand, to be creative, to be dynamic, if this partnership is to mean anything for the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago.

Those are two major points of philosophical importance which I thought I would introduce into the discussion today; the whole question of globalization and we, as a people, trying to understand what globalization means and trying to set within a context, this whole question of private-sector-led growth and trying to understand that there is a very important difference between private-sector-led growth and private-sector-led government or private-sector-led politics.

It is customary and traditional around this time, as a minister, to take the opportunity, as well, to bring the population up to date on what has been happening in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I do not intend to go into too much detail, because if I were to do so, I would need another hour or so. I think people are fully aware of what is happening in one of the most dynamic ministries in the country. Much is happening, and I would just seek to give some highlights.

This year, for example, we used the resources in our allocation to open a consulate in Miami; we opened for the first time a Trinidad and Tobago consulate. This brings to four the number of foreign service offices in the United States. That Miami consulate has been given the mandate to emphasize trade, investment and tourism and already a report has come in about the very good work that we are doing there.

One of the things about which I am very pleased, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, is the way our missions abroad have been responding to the challenge to encourage trade and investment into Trinidad and Tobago. Our New York consulate, for example, headed by a very dynamic New York consulate general—I do not mind putting his name into the records; I am very proud of the work he is doing, Mr. George Mc Kenzie—through the efforts of that consulate general, Trinidad and Tobago will see US \$250 million worth of investment in this country next year. We are talking about a glass manufacturing plant, a paper plant and an energy plant. All these are going to come into Trinidad and Tobago, mainly as a result of the work of the New York consulate, assisted, of course, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Trade and Industry and Consumer Affairs, and the Ministry of Planning and Development, and so forth. Most of our missions are engaged in these exercises. Look at the reports coming out, which I presented to the Cabinet. Indeed I am very pleased with that.

This year, as well, we started a brand new initiative with the northern states of Brazil. We have had diplomatic relations with Brazil for some time. We are looking at Caricom, Mercosur, and so forth, but it struck me that because of distance, the economic ties with Brazil have been militated. Again, I take credit for it. I conceived of this idea of Trinidad and Tobago for more direct ties with the northern states of Brazil. The Governors of Sierra and Para have now accepted invitations to visit here. Preliminary teams have already visited and a steel plant is in the making, as a result of this brand new initiative between Trinidad and Tobago and the northern states of Brazil, generated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

One of the things that I was very pleased about this year, as well, in the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was the very prominent role that we played in that historic US/Caricom summit, the first ever, between the Caribbean and the United States. *[Interruption]* Sometimes if you do not sing your own praises, nobody else will. So let me say, that idea for that US/Caricom Summit was one that I put forward at a Foreign Minister's *[Interruption]* Do you want to take all my ideas? I put that on the agenda of the Foreign Minister's meeting in Barbados. The fact is, Trinidad and Tobago, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in particular, played a leading role in the preparation and execution of that summit. What emerged out of that summit was a blueprint for co-operation between the United States of America and the Caribbean countries, a plan of action, entitled Partnership for Prosperity and Security in the Caribbean.

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May I also say, I have been appointed the chairman of the monitoring process of the agenda item, that plan of action, under that summit. My colleague, the Minister of Trade and Industry and Consumer Affairs, would have spoken to you about the trade agreements we have been pushing forward with the Dominican Republic, and Andean Community and the Central American integration process.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I say that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs played a particular role in that. We reactivated that Caricom Central American integration process and, as well, through our efforts, the Mercosur countries have also agreed to go in the direction of a trade agreement between Caricom and Mercosur. I know the Member would say every time I stand up I talk about Mercosur but it is very true. I have been pushing that idea since 1992, but it is now coming to fruition and one has to understand that.

Mr. Manning: You were ahead of your time.

Hon. R. Maraj: I was always ahead of my time and the Member knows that. When, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I was talking about Argentina, Chile, Haiti, and Central America my friends used to call me Aristide in the Cabinet. I do not boast except on rare occasions like this just to put it in the record.

Dr. Rowley: How did you react to be called Aristide?

Hon. R. Maraj: I reacted rather violently at one time.

One of the things that is happening, as well, as a result of the emergence of Trinidad and Tobago as a major economy in the region, as the major diplomatic centre, is the location of new embassies in this country. Argentina recently opened an embassy here. Surinam has also opened an embassy and that will be done officially soon. May I say as well, one of the things we have focussed on this year was pushing the trade agreement between Trinidad and Tobago and Mexico. A whole new bilateral agenda has been worked out including this trade agreement about which we have been talking. The hon. Prime Minister will be visiting Mexico next year. The date has already been set and we are looking at a number of agreements that will be signed. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is pushing and co-ordinating the entire matter forward. May I say I see No. 12 in my list of 46. I do not want to go through all of this. I do not like to boast. I repeat with satisfaction that only yesterday a new fishing agreement has been signed between Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela.

Mr. Manning: I congratulate the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs on the signing of a new fishing agreement with Venezuela. But does it allow for our fishermen in Cedros, Moruga and so forth, to fish for shrimp in Venezuelan waters?

Hon. R. Maraj: I made it clear today at a press conference—and the hon. Leader of the Opposition is very well aware I have spoken voluminously on this matter—that it is a new fishing agreement, it is not the old fishing agreement. I say very plainly the old additional shrimping grounds to which—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Manning: Is the answer yes or no?

Hon. R. Maraj: I am explaining. If I say yes or no the answer will be incomplete and then you might be able to use my yes or no in a very mischievous way as you are wont to do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the old agreement the shrimping ground to which our fishermen from Cedros and Icacos had access is no longer part of the agreement, neither are the North and East coast of Trinidad and Tobago part of the agreement. This agreement has been negotiated over a two-year period. These were tough negotiations because no side wanted to give what they had given before.

Our experts in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources—and my colleague would tell you—were telling us in no uncertain terms that one cannot give access to the North and East coast. Our fishing stocks there are disastrously depleted through the rapaciousness of predatory vessels coming from all over the world, and we are not in a position to police our coastline, so we could not give that.

The Venezuelans were telling us on the other hand they do not want to put on the table the shrimping ground with special facilities and so forth. We had to negotiate a new agreement based on new fundamentals so we have come up with a common fishing area south of Trinidad and Tobago, north of Venezuela; a modern fishing agreement into which for two years, unlimited fishing vessels from both countries can exploit those waters without the need for fishing permits. The agreement makes for arrangement for joint venture, joint management of the stocks and is based on the recognition of the new realities and fishing all year round.

Let me say as well that Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago signed a cultural agreement. There is what we call the double taxation agreement which will come into force before the year ends and a number of other things as well.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, at the bilateral level a number of things have been happening with Trinidad and Tobago and countries in the hemisphere and outside of it. With the People's Republic of China we signed an interest free loan of \$20 million for development in the small business sector. We have visits to Trinidad and Tobago to further the relations from a number of important people: the foreign minister of the Dominican Republic paid a visit, there were leaders from Africa coming to Trinidad and Tobago to deepen the ties between the two countries. Importantly, with respect to our relations on the other side of the Atlantic, Trinidad and Tobago had been playing a very lead role with our Ambassador in Brussels as the chairman of the subcommittee on the future of the ACP and European Union relations. We played an important role in laying the foundation for an ACP position for these very important negotiations. We also played a very lead role as the Caribbean spokesman in the summit in Gabon where we made the position very clear as to what we would like to see, and the solidarity we would like to have between the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries on this old important matter of the arrangements for the post in Lomé.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. R. Maraj: I thank hon. Members. This year, as well, an agreement was signed with the Cuban Ambassador, visa waiver agreements to facilitate high level contact, and we are looking at signing similar agreements with all the Association of Caribbean States countries. With respect to the Association of Caribbean States, may I say that we continue to fulfill our obligations under the headquarters agreement. We have signed the headquarters agreement and legislation will be coming to Parliament with respect to that. Trinidad and Tobago continues to receive glowing praise in the hemisphere for the fulfillment of its obligations. We had in Trinidad and Tobago, for the first time ever in a Caribbean country, the hosting of the ministerial council of the Latin American Economic System and we made significant inputs into the discussion on that particular matter of economic growth and social justice, and I suppose what I said today, is in tandem with some of those discussions that took place at that meeting.

My colleague from the Ministry of Trade, and Industry has been talking about participation in the free trade of the Americas process. We are also looking at

signing Headquarters agreement with the CAIC. We have taken that decision. The Prime Minister, as part of his responsibility for leading foreign affairs abroad, went to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference. A number of honorary consuls were appointed this year, as far as Italy and also in Japan. There were high level visits from our Caricom partners—Antigua, Barbuda, St. Lucia, Dominica—all in an attempt to forge Caribbean solidarity and to take advantage of the bilateral ties between Trinidad and Tobago and its Caribbean partners.

We often take for granted those ties within the multilateral framework of Caricom. One honorary consul has also been appointed in Norway. I think that for the first time we are developing very close ties with the Netherlands Antilles.

4.10 p.m.

Mr. Valley: “Oh gosh boy, yuh working!”

Hon. R. Maraj: There is too much for me to say. I am getting hoarse.

A businessman from Curacao has been appointed honorary consul. He has been coming to Trinidad and Tobago on a regular basis to interact with the business community. I would talk about one very important initiative we took this year.

Mr. Manning: Page what of the budget?

Hon. R. Maraj: I am talking about foreign affairs. I think at this point in time I have to give an idea of how the people’s money was spent. This is what I am seeking to do. There is so much. I do not want to talk about all of it.

This year we mounted a very important initiative with the craft entrepreneurs of this country. I held a display at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs last year and we promised to make our mission of art and craft available for display. This year our embassy at Washington mounted a very successful display of art and craft from the Association of Craft Entrepreneurs. To a certain extent, this was replicated with the Youth Training Employment Partnership Programme in our mission at Miami. Other missions are seeking to find markets for these small businessmen of Trinidad and Tobago.

I will talk about an initiative of which I am particularly proud as Minister of Foreign Affairs. The captain of our national football team, Mr. David Nakid, had many problems in Lebanon this year. We took unprecedented action in the diplomatic history of Trinidad and Tobago, when we sent a special envoy in the person of Mr. Patrick Edwards to Lebanon to negotiate with the authorities there for the release of Mr. David Nakid. I have no doubt that the excruciating

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experience which we gained from that exercise would serve as a basis for any future action if that becomes necessary. I place on record my congratulations to the Acting High Commissioner in London, Mr. Patrick Edwards, who was our special envoy and negotiated very successfully there.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was involved in our visit to India which took place this year. Very important discussions were held and a number of agreements were signed. The private sector was there with us and initiatives were taken. We are seeing the fructification of those initiatives in impending investments in the country.

As Minister of Foreign Affairs, I headed a lobbying mission organized by the American Chamber of Commerce to drum up support for NAFTA. That has not come about, but we would continue to pound the pavement in that regard. In a little haphazard or chaotic way, those are some of the highlights of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

As I said, I am speaking as a night watchman, though my inning seems to be going rather long. May I say that as Minister of Foreign Affairs, I am very happy with the work that we have done. Unlike what my friend from San Fernando East says, that the Latin American agenda has gone low; that is not so. The hemispheric agenda of Trinidad and Tobago is multifaceted, dynamic and strong at the bilateral and multilateral levels. Everywhere one goes Trinidad and Tobago is there. Our voice is heard and respected. We help to shape and take a leading role in shaping the hemispheric agenda, especially with respect to the smaller economies in the region. I am very pleased with that.

I take the opportunity as well to pay tribute to my staff at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We do not have all the resources and technology as yet, but they did very well. I place on record my gratitude to them. Congratulations to them for working very hard. May I finally say that I have made it clear to the staff at the ministry—and I have spoken to the staff at our missions; yesterday, I spoke with the staff at the mission in Venezuela—that the foreign policy of Trinidad and Tobago is set for the next 20 years. We do not have to worry about foreign policy. We need to sharpen the machine called the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and make it a mean machine. That includes all our missions.

We have undergone restructuring at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We have done away with the Political Department, International Economic Relations Division. We have regionalized the mandate into the Americas, Europe, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the Pacific so that these departments

would look at all aspects of it. Technologically, we are seeking to update the ministry. We are going to move it to a paperless ministry. I have very good support from the Ministry of Finance. We are spending about \$800,000 on computer equipment. That includes the missions abroad.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

All augurs well for the future, Mr. Speaker The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continues to be vibrant, dynamic, creative and imaginative under this Government. I am glad for the opportunity to speak with some modesty about the achievements of the ministry. I thank hon. Members for their attention. I wish everyone a happy Christmas and a bright and prosperous new year.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Is that it? What normally happens is that there is balance on both sides. Let me explain what I have been trying to do. Gentlemen, before the commencement of the debate, through the Clerk of the House, I asked that one indicates the order in which one would want to speak, because although one was not bound by this, one wanted to get some sort of indication. I got nothing.

From the commencement of this debate I have tried to have balance, where one person from one side would speak and then another from the other side. I do not have to do that. I am trying to maintain balance. If Members do not want to get up and the Minister of Finance gets up, you would appreciate that would be the end of the debate. [*Interruption*] You know that you do not control the way in which I recognize people.

Mr. Valley: May I say something, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Yes. Please come.

Hon. Members, the sitting is suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.20 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.02 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I also thank Members on both sides for what I considered at times a very lively debate.

The budget document which I introduced to this honourable House last Friday seems to have generated quite a bit of criticism from the other side. The thing I

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find odd about it is that they said there was nothing in the budget, but every one of the individuals who spoke spent 75 minutes arguing about nothing.

I would like, with your permission, Mr. Speaker, quickly to talk about some of the comments which came out of this debate. The hon. Member for San Fernando East started by saying “that hodgepodge of vacuous rhetoric designed to mislead and seduce the nation”. If I have one ambition in life, Mr. Speaker, it is not to seduce anyone, far more a whole nation. [*Laughter*] However, I would die a happy man having seduced a whole nation. We heard the same Member for San Fernando East talk about “female women”, so I want to ensure that if I have to seduce anyone, they will all be women of the female type.

A little later in the debate, the Member for Diego Martin East talked about a blue fly, and words like “blue fly” found their way into the *Hansard* record.

I think I may want to recommend a particular contribution which was made, perhaps a little late at night, that we need to get friendly societies back on track.

Last week Monday, in preparation for coming to this debate, I decided to take a little time off. Some friends and I went to Paramin. When we were going in, we had to count the number of people, because we had to pay \$5.00 each at the door. There were 15 of us. [*Interrupted*] I was invited with a guest. I remember meeting the Member for Diego Martin East and, poor fellow, he had one friend with him—a male man. The reason I say a male man was that his friend was called Joel and there was a woman in my party also called Joel. I want to make sure we are talking about the same person. The poor guy, the minute he lost his friend in that throng, hung around us. Somewhere along the line, he got it into his head that our group of 15 were hanging around him like blue flies when he, poor guy, was looking for his good friend from Diego Martin West and was totally lost.

What amazed me, Mr. Speaker, is that the Member for Diego Martin East has the capacity to fool himself. He does not only try to fool the whole nation, but he fools himself. He believed that I was following him like a blue fly while, poor fellow, we welcomed him in our crowd because we felt sorry for him. I walked with 14 friends; he had one, which he lost. I believe that my colleague, the hon. Minister of Housing and Settlements has dealt with that.

Then there was the word “fraud”. I know, Mr. Speaker, that you have ruled on it and I am glad that you did. It seemed to have legitimized the words that go in and out of the *Hansard* based on a ruling. It was not much later than that, that we heard about faecal matter from the hon. Minister of Housing and Settlements, and before the day was finished, we saw the word “vomit” expunged from the records.

Has it not been a lively debate, Mr. Speaker? It has been a debate that has reached new heights, or new depths, depending on the way you look at it. I really think that the debates over the last few years have reached the point where it is time, hopefully, to end this year in good cheer so that we can start the year 1998 with a new standard of debate: when we will not argue about nothing for 75 minutes, and we will not use words that really are unparliamentary. I hope that at the end of the day we would be able to rise above all this and carry on the affairs of the nation for which we have been selected.

There is one word on which I feel I would like to expound a little. That word is “tabanca”, for which, obviously, I have a special qualification. I recall when my grandmother used to warn me. She said, of all the maladies in the world, the one to avoid is tabanca. That was the only time I have ever heard her quote Shakespeare: “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned”.

5.10 p.m.

I do not think that my grandmother ever expected that I would enter the political arena, but I believe that political tabanca is even worse than a woman who is scorned. After two years we are still hearing; “That was ours, we planned that, we wanted to start that, we were thinking about it.” I would have thought that after two years they would have accepted the way the affairs are being run.

I am very disappointed that a party like the PNM, to which I once belonged, would have been able—on the day the Leader of the People’s National Movement is addressing this Parliament there are at least 20 per cent empty chairs. I am really sorry for that. As we reach the end of this century I am wondering whether this party would survive the year 2000.

Mr. Manning: Let not your heart be troubled.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: My heart is not troubled, on the contrary, my heart is good. My heart rejoices because I really would like you to remain there. Do you know when the hat was being passed for money to help you pay your legal bill I was the first one who came forward, because I did not want you to feel—

Hon. Member: How much did you put?

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: I put a \$1/2 million. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Valley: He could afford it.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: Mr. Speaker, on a more serious note, in 1996 when I presented the budget, one of the first ideas that was expounded at the time

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was that were we not only interested in removing a number of taxes from the tax system. One would recall that a number of licences, permits and Value Added Tax were also removed and a number of foodstuffs were zero rated. At the time it was felt that the system needed to be cleaned up in order to have a more efficient system. Further, in 1997 the tax system was simplified by removing a number of allowances and deductions which also clogged up the system. At the time, I indicated that the restructured tax system would have been much more simplified and persons would be able to understand the system rather than having to use experienced accountants because of the complication.

Mr. Speaker, having simplified the system in 1996 and furthermore in 1997, when I spoke about the need not to tinker I did not mean that as a long-term or even short-term measure we should not tinker. The folks on that side really think that when I said it was working well, and not to interfere with it they thought that is what I had planned to do on a permanent basis, because that is precisely the way they think.

What I said is that for the year 1998 there was need to make a shift in focus and emphasis away from the traditional, and the only way to ensure that any change in shift is brought about was to leave the rest alone. In essence, in trying to bring the nation on board so they can be assisted in developing savings and asset building rather than confuse the population, I preferred to continue with that simplified tax system and to use one added reduction to influence people's behaviour so that they could start thinking in a serious way for savings, pensions and annuities.

More than that, even though there is a \$20,000 allowance for all taxpayers, in addition to a mortgage interest of \$18,000 there is now a deduction of \$12,000 per individual for pensions and annuities and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, not only have we simplified the tax system, we have a tax system which allows the nation to submit tax returns on a regular basis because it is easily understood and more than that, the taxes which are paid by the average Trinidadian and Tobagonian would be lower than they used to be, without any tinkering with the rest of the economic system. I am not talking about tinkering of the tax system only but of the entire economic system, so that if the macro-economic fundamentals are sound, I see no need in the year 1998 to interfere or tinker with it.

Much hullabaloo has been raised about the fact that oil revenues had been down. We knew that this was going to be so and there is an easy explanation for that. It was because of the investments which had been made by Amoco in

anticipation of the Atlantic LNG, and knowing full well that these investments were going to be allowed as a deduction against future taxes, we expected the oil revenues to be down. *[Interruption]* They are not recognizing that this Government is prepared to live within its means and it is something they do not understand because for years there had been deficit spending on that side and therefore, to understand that there is need to cut our expenditure to suit our revenues is a hallmark of sound prudential management.

Hon. Member: I beg to move.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: Mr. Speaker, I have been pleased at the reports which we have received especially by someone like Prof. La Guerre who complimented the move of the URP from the Ministry of Local Government.

Mr. Imbert: I beg to move.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: Mr. Speaker, because this Government is concerned about the level of technology, we ensure that we try measures that would bring Trinidad and Tobago in line with the rest of the technological world. It is for this reason that we have agreed to allow, in the first instance, interest-free loans for computers to public servants and that we have, hopefully, inveigled the private sector to follow suit so that ultimately, there would be computers being made available initially to public servants, teachers, members of the judiciary and to school children. There would be a computer for every home. So concerned are we that this Cabinet is considering to also extend it to Parliamentarians in the hope that Members on the opposite side could also come of age and reach the technological advancement that we need.

Hon. Member: I beg to move.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: Mr. Speaker, I am glad that this budget has received so many compliments so far and wide. It is with the greatest pleasure that I commend this budget to this House.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move. *[Desk thumping]*

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill and Estimates committed to Finance Committee.

Mr. Speaker: The gallery has to be cleared because the Standing Orders do not permit persons other than Members of the House and necessary personnel to

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be present when this is done. I therefore have to ask the House to be cleared for the short while that the House is in Finance Committee.

House resolved into Finance Committee.

5.30 p.m. *House resumed after Finance Committee.*

Bill reported without amendment.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the third time.

The House divided: Ayes: 21 Noes: 13

Maharaj, Hon. R. L.

Panday, Hon. B.

Persad-Bissessar, Hon. K.

Lasse, Dr. The Hon. V.

Griffith, Dr. The Hon. R.

Humphrey, Hon. J.

Sudama, Hon. T.

Maraj, Hon. R.

Nicholson, Hon. P.

Khan, Dr. F.

Assam, Hon. M.

Rafeeq, Dr. The Hon. H.

Job, Dr. The Hon. M.

Singh, Hon. G.

Nanan, Dr. The Hon. A.

Partap, Hon. H.

Mohammed, Dr. The Hon. R.

Singh, Hon. G.

Ramsaran, Hon. M.

Sharma, C.

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Ali, R.

NOES:

Valley, K.

Manning, P.

Rowley, Dr. K.

Draper, G.

Imbert, C.

Narine, J.

Hart, E.

James, Mrs. E.

Bereaux, H.

Sinanan, B.

Boynes, R.

Hinds, F.

Williams, E.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

CANE FARMERS INCORPORATION AND CESS (AMDT.) BILL
Senate Amendments

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

That the Senate amendments to the Cane Farmers Incorporation (Amdt.) Bill listed in the appendix be now considered.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 4:

Senate amendment read as follows:

“Delete ‘section 11 A(1)’ and substitute ‘section 13A’”.

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

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 5(c):

Senate amendment read as follows:

“Insert between the words ‘necessary’ and ‘copies’, the word ‘certified’.

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

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 8:

Senate amendment read as follows:

“Delete and renumber clauses 9, 10, and 11 as clauses 8, 9, and 10.”

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

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Renumbered 9:

Senate amendment read as follows:

“Delete and substitute as follows:

‘9. The Ordinance is amended by inserting after section 11, the following section:

‘Eligibility
to vote

11A (1) All cane farmers who are eligible to be members of the Association under section 4(1)(b) and who are in good financial standing are eligible to vote at Annual General Meetings, Special General Meetings and meetings called by the Independent Supervisor under section 13B.

(2) A cane farmer referred to in subsection (1) shall be deemed to be in

good financial standing where all annual membership fees or dues payable to the Association have been duly paid.”

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

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Renumbered 10:

Senate amendment read as follows:

“A. Delete paragraph (a) and substitute as follows:

(a) delete subsection (1) and substitute as follows:

‘(1) The quorum at any annual general meeting, special general meeting or meeting called by the independent Supervisor under section 13B(1) shall be ten per cent.’

B. Delete paragraph (c) and substitute as follows:

‘(c) by inserting after subsection (3), the following subsections:

(4) Notice of every meeting called by the Association or Independent Supervisor for the purpose of holding general elections shall include a request for nominations.

(5) Where two consecutive Annual General meetings, Special General Meetings or meetings called by the Independent Supervisor are held after Notices have been duly served, but the number of voting members present is insufficient to constitute the required quorum, a third meeting may be convened and all decisions may be taken at that meeting by a majority vote of all voting members present.”

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

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

New clause 11:

Senate amendment read as follows:

“After renumbered clause 10 insert a new clause 11 to read as follows:

New Part 11 (A)

Inserted

‘PART 11A

THE INDEPENDENT SUPERVISOR

Appointment of

Independent Supervisor

Powers of the

Independent Supervisor

11. The Ordinance is amended by inserting after section 13 a new part as follows:

13A(1) The President shall appoint an Independent Supervisor for a period of three years.

(2) The President may renew the appointment of the independent Supervisor for consecutive periods of three years as he considers necessary.

13B (1) The Independent Supervisor shall be responsible for -

(a) monitoring the conduct of annual and special general meetings of the Association;

(b) convening special general meetings in the circumstances set out in section 8(3); and

(c) calling meetings for the purpose of elections where there is an impasse pertaining to the management of the Association.

(2) Notwithstanding section 11A (1), the Independent Supervisor may waive the requirement for good financial standing in respect of the first meeting convened by him under subsection (1)(c).”

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

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

5.40 p.m.

Clause 13:

Senate amendment read as follows:

Delete and substitute as follows:

“New section
27 inserted

13. The Ordinance is amended by inserting after section 26, a new section as follows:

Minister may
make regulations

27. The Minister may make such regulations as may be necessary for the purpose of giving effect to the provisions of this Ordinance.”.

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

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

FELICITATIONS

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, before I move the adjournment of the House, may I take this opportunity, through you, to return the greetings and best wishes to His Excellency the President for a very Happy Christmas and a Bright and Prosperous New Year. We extend those greetings also to his wife and family. May I also take this opportunity to wish all our friends on the other side a very Merry Christmas and a Bright and Prosperous New Year.

Christmas, as we all know, is a time of togetherness, a time, regardless of the differences we may have, during which we exchange best wishes because we

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recognize, in the life of Jesus Christ, that we must forgive and forget. I ask: What would it profit a man to gain the whole world but to lose his soul? [*Desk thumping*] I think at this time that might be a more appropriate statement to make so that hon. Members on both sides would also recognize that there are more important things in the world today apart from worldly things—spiritual enrichment.

May I take this opportunity to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Bright and Prosperous New Year.

Mr. Kenneth Valley (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Speaker, I join with my colleague on the other side in returning the compliments extended so graciously by the President of our Republic. We wish him, his wife and their children all the best for the season.

We are coming to the end of another year, about to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, it is a time of reflection; it is also a time that is very nostalgic. To you, Mr. Speaker, and your family, I wish all the best for the season [*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: Special felicitations!

Mr. K. Valley: That is right, “special”, because I know at times it is not easy dealing with this unruly crowd that we have here [*Laughter*] I am sure you know that in the cut-and-thrust there are only, at times, some real genuine ill-feeling and most often we disagree without being disagreeable and, of course, the honourable House maintains a camaraderie that was really absent in an earlier period.

We also wish our colleagues on the other side all the best for the season and a Bright and Prosperous 1998. We want to assure them that we would be back in the New Year to give them hell! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to thank you on both sides of the honourable House for the sentiments expressed to me and my family on the occasion of the Christmas season. The sentiments you have expressed, through me, to His Excellency and his family, will be passed on. I, for my part, want to reciprocate. I wish to join with you in the greetings of peace, plenty love and happiness to their Excellencies and, indeed, to every Member of this honourable House.

I wish to associate the entire staff of Parliament with these greetings and I do wish to extend similar greetings to those who have the duty of working in the

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precincts of this building. Although many people may be surprised that I am expressing these feelings to the press, they are as fervent and sincere as those which are given to the Members of the House and to the security services and to all that—I am almost tempted to say—dwell herein.

I do hope that the new calendar year would see Members reinvigorated, determined even more to do their duty to the state and I hope that the New Year would see many more fruitful deliberations in this august Chamber.

Thank you.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, we have left our best wishes to you for last. Very expressly, we wish you and your family a Merry Christmas and a Bright and Prosperous New Year. May we also join you in wishing the members of the media, members of the staff and the members of the security forces a Merry Christmas and a Bright and Prosperous New Year.

ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, January 16, 1998 at 1.30 p.m. Mr. Speaker, as you know, there is a Commonwealth Presiding Officers Conference in Trinidad and Tobago and the staff of the Parliament would be, obviously, engaged.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.50 p.m.