

Leave of Absence

Friday, January 2, 1998

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, January 02, 1998

The House met at 1.32 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to advise that I have received communication from the Member for San Juan/Barataria (Dr. Fuad Khan), the Member for Point Fortin (Dr. Vincent Lasse), and the Member for Tobago West (Miss Pamela Nicholson) who have asked to be excused from today's sitting. Leave has been granted to them.

PAPER LAID

The Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 1997. [*The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung)*]

PROVISIONAL COLLECTION OF TAXES ORDER, 1997

The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. Speaker, I rise to move a Motion that is standing in my name. Before doing so, on behalf of Members on this side, I offer to you and your family, as well as to Members on that side and their families, a very happy and holy 1998 and peace and tranquillity.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved:

Whereas it is provided by subsection (1) of section 3 of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, Chap. 74:01 (hereinafter called "the Act") that where proposals for general or supplementary appropriation of public funds are made to the House of Representatives and are embodied in an Appropriation or a Supplementary Appropriation Bill, the President may, for the purpose of raising revenue to meet the expenditure specified in any such Bill, by Order, provide for the imposition of a tax or the variation of an existing tax and from the date of the publication of the Order in the *Gazette*, the tax as imposed or varied shall be payable:

And Whereas it is provided by subsection (5) of section 3 of the Act that an Order varying an existing tax shall cease to have effect if the Order is not

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confirmed with or without modifications, by a resolution agreed to by the House of Representatives within the next twenty-one days after the commencement of the Order:

And Whereas the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 1997 was made under section 3 of the Act, whereby provision was made for the imposition or variation of taxes in the written laws mentioned in the said Order to the extent and in the manner set out therein for the purpose of raising revenue to meet the expenditure specified in the Bill entitled “An Act to provide for the Service of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ending on the 31st day of December, 1998”:

And Whereas it is expedient to confirm the said Order:

Be it Resolved that the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 1997 be confirmed subject to the following modifications:

By deleting clause 8 and substituting the following clause:

“8. The Excise Duty (Tobacco Products) Order 1992 is amended in relation to cigarettes under tariff heading number 2402.20, by deleting the words ‘\$2.10 per pack’ and substituting the words ‘\$2.50 per pack’.”

Mr. Speaker, the Motion now being considered by this honourable House is for confirmation—as I said, a very minor modification—of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 1997 which was published in the *Gazette* of December 12, 1997. Measures which are contained in the Order have already been explained in the delivery of the budget presentation on Friday, December 12, 1997 and, therefore, I will not dwell on them in detail. I will, however, point to the relevant provisions of the Order which seek to give effect to these measures. I will also explain the modifications which are now being proposed for the approval of this honourable House.

Paragraph 2 of the Order increases the old age pension payable to pensioners from \$420 to \$520. Paragraph 3 deals with amendments to the Income Tax Act. Subparagraph (a) of this paragraph will allow the lumpsum death in service benefits paid to a pension fund plan to be exempt from tax. By paragraph 3(b), the Income Tax Act is amended to allow a taxpayer to claim in a particular year of income the mortgage and bridging interest paid on an owner-occupied property where the relevant taxes payable under the Lands and Building Taxes Act and the Municipal Corporations Act have been paid by the taxpayer. This claim would be allowed whether or not the relevant taxes have been paid in the year of income to which those taxes relate.

Paragraph 3(c) and (d) revises the provisions relating to balancing allowances and charges by permitting the proceeds on disposal of an asset under the pooling system to be deducted from the residual value of the pool in that particular class of assets. The amendments to paragraph 3(e) and (f) seek to delete the mortgage interest relief from contributions to the national insurance scheme and approved pension plans and deferred annuities so that a person may claim up to \$18,000 with respect to mortgage interest payments including payments on bridging finance. Furthermore, paragraph 3(f)(ii) allows a person to claim a deduction of up to \$12,000 in respect of contributions to the national insurance scheme, approved pension fund plans and approved deferred annuity plans.

Paragraph 3(g) of the Order also amends the Income Tax Act so as to allow computers to be removed from class B of schedule 7 where the applicable wear and tear rate is 25 per cent and to include that item under class C where the wear and tear rate is 33 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, the Corporation Tax Act is amended in paragraph 4 so that the wear and tear claims of a company would now be allowed where the company satisfies the Board of Inland Revenue that it has paid the relevant taxes under the Land and Building Taxes Act and the Municipal Corporations Act. As with residential mortgage claims, no wear and tear deduction was previously allowed unless the company actually paid the relevant taxes in the particular year of income. With this amendment, the wear and tear claims of a company will now be entertained by the Board of Inland Revenue whether or not the relevant taxes were paid in the year of income to which those taxes relate.

Mr. Speaker, under paragraph 5(a) of the Order, the Miscellaneous Taxes Act is amended to ensure that 50 per cent of the road improvement tax would be allocated to the Ministry of Local Government for the sole purpose of repair and maintenance of roads under that ministry's purview.

Paragraph 6 amends the Customs Act to permit disabled nationals to import left-hand vehicles which are specially equipped for use by disabled persons, for their own use, and which have been acquired by these disabled persons through purchase or gifts.

As I indicated in the budget presentation, this administration is committed to developing a national "No Smoking" policy. To complement this initiative, the excise duty on locally manufactured cigarettes was increased from \$2.10 to \$2.50 per pack. To avoid any discriminatory treatment between locally manufactured and foreign cigarettes, there were corresponding increases in the import duty on

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cigarettes of Caricom origin as well as a tobacco tax on extra-regional cigarettes from \$2.10 to \$2.50 per pack. This measure came into effect on December 13, 1997 and is contained in paragraphs 5(b),(7) and (8) of the Order. The increase in excise and other duties on cigarettes should also impact positively on the collection of value added tax on these items.

Mr. Speaker, I therefore, respectfully ask that the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 1997 be confirmed with the modifications specified in the resolution. As one would observe, the modifications contained in the resolution seek to correct the very minor typographical error in the citation of the Excise Duty Tobacco Products Order, the date of which should have been 1992 and not 1997 as stated at paragraph 8 of the Order, in addition to which the drafting style has been tidied up to achieve clarity as to what item in the Tobacco Order is being amended.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

1.45 p.m.

Mr. Kenneth Valley: (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Speaker, the calling of this special sitting today is yet further testimony that this Government does not have a clue as to what it is doing. Or, perhaps, it has a bit too much confidence in the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Tourism. I can tell them that it is unfounded confidence, and that they should know because in the Winsure matter, they saw where the Minister failed to provide certain critical information to the Cabinet. Unlike that situation, however, I think on this occasion, it is a sheer case of incompetence.

Let us look at what is before us today. The preamble to this Order left out a very critical part. If we go to the Chap. 74:01 and look at the provisions of the Act, I think I will just concentrate on the critical part of the preamble.

In the last line of section 3 it says:

“...from the date of the publication of the Order in the *Gazette*...”

the portion that is left out and one can see it in the Act where it says:

“or such later date as may be specified in the Order (hereinafter referred to as ‘the commencement of the Order’)... the tax as imposed or varied by the Order shall be payable.”

That critical phrase was left out of the preamble. What it means, and one sees it in the Order, most of the items in this Order did not take effect as of the date of the Order. If we were to look at clause 9(2) it says that clauses 2, 3, 4, and 5(a) come into effect from January 1, 1998 with respect to those items. Let us look at what the Order contains. The first one simply says that this is the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order 1997. The second talks about the old age pension which, of course, has no place in the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order because it is not—*[Interruption]* They do not know what they are doing. My job is simply to try to help them.

Mr. Sudama: The Member for San Fernando East needs help.

Mr. K. Valley: You need more help. Mr. Speaker, had they gone to the 1992 Order they would have seen that when one increases old age pension the appropriate order is under that Act. For example, if they had gone to the precedent of 1992, when this Government increased old age pension, they would have seen that the resolution is under the Old Age Pension Act. The Provisional Collection of Taxes Order talks about raising of revenue or variation of a tax. It does not fit in the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. As was noted before, items 3, 4, and 5(a) will take effect as of January 1, 1998. Section 3(5) of the Act says quite clearly:

“An Order varying an existing tax shall cease to have effect if the Order is not confirmed, with or without modifications, by a resolution agreed to by the House within the next twenty-one days after the commencement of the Order...”

With respect to items 3, 4, and 5(a), if the commencement of the Order is January 1, as stated in this, therefore, one had up to January 21, to confirm that, *[Interruption]* You are not within the 21 days. It has come into effect *[Interruption]* Which is the holiday—21 days—and there is the rule also that it is within four days or within 21 days. But the important point is, on the last day the Parliament was adjourned to January 16 within the 21-day period.

Mr. Speaker, they attempted to build a case and convinced you that there was need for this special sitting. They thought there was need for a special sitting simply because they do not know what they are doing. The commencement date of the Order is January, 1 so we could have dealt with this matter on January 16, 1998.

Let us look at paragraphs 7 and 8. Paragraph 7 talks about the Customs Import Duty (Caribbean Common Market) Order 1992 amended by deleting in relation to cigarette the words, “\$2.10 per pack” and substituting the word, “\$2.50 per pack.”

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Paragraph 8, as amended, talks about the Excise Duty to the Tobacco Products Order, 1992, is amended by deleting the words—Mr. Speaker, these two items; one should have been a Caribbean Common Market Order and the other an Excise Duty Order. Again, the precedent is there from 1992. If only they would do their work, they would realize that is so. In 1992, Legal Notices Nos. 6 and 7, one would see those two orders. One is under the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01 and the other is under the Excise Duty Act, Chap. 78:50.

When one looks, for example, at Chap 78:01 one would see that what is required there is that the Order be submitted to the Parliament within 21 days, just as in Chap. 78:50. You would recall last year, when this goodly Government failed to bring the Excise Duty Order in time—which was supposed to take effect from January 1—they then brought it on February 2 and it was not confirmed until we were at the Finance Bill stage some time in May. When we argued at that time that for that order to be valid it had to be confirmed within 21 days, it was the Member for Siparia, an Attorney-at-Law, then Minister of Legal Affairs who said “no, what the section says is that it must be submitted to Parliament within 21 days, it does not say that it has to be confirmed within 21 days.”

1.55 p.m.

If we are using that precedent, one sees quite clearly that two Orders had to be submitted to Parliament. There was no requirement that it be confirmed within 21 days, even though it took effect on December 13. Once more we could have dealt with that on January 16. We see that with respect to this thing called the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order—because it is not—clauses 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8 are now revised. We are not required to be here to confirm these today. Clause 9 is procedural and it states:

- “(1) Subject to subclause (2) and unless the contrary intention appears, this Order comes into effect on the 13th day of December, 1997.”
- (2) Clauses 2, 3, 4 and 5(a) come into effect on the 1st day of January, 1998.”

The only conclusion that one can come to is that we were brought here because of paragraph 6 of this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. Paragraph 6 states:

“The Customs Act is amended in section 45(1) by deleting paragraph (ba) and substituting the following paragraph:

- (ba) vehicles specially constructed for use by disabled persons and acquired for such use through purchase or gift;”.

Mr. Speaker, for the life of me, I could not make out what the hell that was. I do not know if that is a parliamentary word. I searched the Minister's budget presentation to see where this came from, but I could not find it. I do not know what it is. Then, I went to the Customs Act, section 45, but I do not know whether there is an amendment to it. It was not helpful. I hope that the Minister can help me in his winding up. The Customs Act, Chap. 78:01, section 45(1) states:

“Until revoked by Order under section 44 the following goods are prohibited to be imported:”

This section talks about goods which cannot be imported into Trinidad and Tobago. I do not know how this is a revenue-raising matter. Are they now stopping the importation of vehicles specially constructed for use by disabled persons, and acquired for such use through purchase or gift? I do not know what that is. I cannot see why this Government brought us here. *[Interruption]* I know what a wheelchair is, but I do not know why he would want to stop the importation of wheelchairs. I do not know what he is doing. It cannot fit into the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. I am making the basic point that once more, this Government has just goofed. There is absolutely no reason for our being here today. It cannot be to deal with those matters. That is the procedural matter for which we are here today, when we could have been here on January 16, 1998.

Let us say we are on January 16, 1998 and look at some of these measures. Let us look at the provision which attempts to reinstate the deduction for pension and annuities. In the last budget debate, we counselled this Minister that he was making a fundamental error when he combined the deduction for mortgage interests, pension and annuities and carried it to \$18,000. We also told him when we debated the Finance Bill that we expected him to come with further flip-flop with respect to annuities and pension.

At that point, I was making reference to the matter of returning nationals. In 1996, when we came for the budget presentation after he was thrown out of the PNM—*[Interruption]*. That is our problem. If we had told the public why he had to leave the PNM, he could not be “gallerying” up and down the country today. I have a political leader and sometimes he gets some licks that are not called for. If he says clearly what is happening all the noise would cease. He must start talking and tell people what is happening. The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism came here in 1996 and “galleried” with respect to returning nationals.

He sat in a PNM Cabinet and knew the thinking behind the provision for returning nationals. He agreed with it! He came in 1996 and made a big hullabaloo

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that we did not understand why that Government wanted to create two classes: people who went away and then, suddenly, they decided that they wanted to attract them back and all sorts of tomfoolery. He attempted to remove the benefit which we had in the legislation with respect to returning nationals. By the time we got to the Finance Bill of that year, it was as though there was some sense. There was some flip-flop again with respect to that, but he still left a 10 per cent tax.

I said that lo and behold, by the time we were on to the Finance Bill good sense started to get to the Minister. In the Finance Bill he put in place a system under which returning nationals would get some exemption from customs duties. He did not plug all the loopholes because he left the main loophole where persons were buying vehicles for other persons. That is the loophole the PNM government had already taken steps to plug. At that time, I said that it was good to see the Minister had accepted the position of the People's National Movement and that all his criticisms of last year had now gone to nought. He criticized the returning nationals and then he had a whole flip-flop last year when he went right back to the PNM's position.

Similarly, on the pension and annuities, I do not know why it took him one year. Mr. Speaker, at one time I thought he was bright. He fooled me also! He flip-flopped on the pension and annuities. Here he brings it in the context of reform and tells us that he would reform the pension system. He said that having reformed the pension system he would now give a deduction of \$12,000 for pension and annuities. However, the pension reform still has to be debated, but this is coming in from January 1.

2.05 p.m.

We would all agree that there is need to encourage savings particularly if this savings vehicle is important to our society, but do not try to fool the public by putting it in the context of pension reform because it has nothing to do with it. A mistake was made last year, and the Minister could have said that, there is nothing wrong with that. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: He is not bright.

Mr. K. Valley: I ask, Mr. Speaker, how come he realizes the errors of his ways with respect to the deduction for pension and annuities, but not with respect to credit unions?

Hon. Member: That is for next year.

Mr. K. Valley: Not so much the unit trust, but the credit union, because the pension and annuities deduction is a deduction and not a tax credit and it appeals more to the middle and higher income taxpayer, because as a deduction it means one saves at the marginal tax rate. As a lower income taxpayer, given our two-tiered system which is 28 per cent and 35 per cent, the higher income taxpayer, in effect, gets a benefit of 35 per cent of the amount he pays, while the lower income taxpayer would get a 28 per cent savings. The tax credit with respect to credit unions, however, has a standard 25 per cent tax credit so that this benefit is skewed towards the higher income or high middle income and above.

The credit union, on the other hand, is for the little people and if savings are to be encouraged in the society, the same way that we understand that the jobs come from the small firms, the same way we have to know that savings must come from the mass of the population and that we have to encourage savings amongst the widest possible sectors. So that while we agree that this savings vehicle ought to be reinstated, there is also need to encourage savings among the lower income taxpayer, the people who would save via the credit union. One cannot understand how the Minister can see the wisdom, unless he is thinking merely of his friends at Maritime, or unless there is a strong lobby saying, "How you could do me that, after putting so much money in the party?" Unless that is the rationale, Mr. Speaker, one cannot see the wisdom of having the deduction with respect to pension and annuities and not having it for the credit union.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say a few words on this whole issue of pension reform, because the Minister in his budget presentation on page 28 dares not talk about his pension reform and I hope that we would have the benefit of the widest possible discussion with respect to this. He talks about a two-tiered system where everyone would qualify. There is no problem with respect to that. He talks about the second tier of the system which "will provide an Investment Linked Benefit for individuals earning over a particular level of income". I have a few questions with respect to that.

Are we then talking in terms of having persons take risks with their retirement income when we refer to investment link? We say that we want security but when I see the concept of investment link—and it appears that the Minister is forcing individuals to get involved in this—I am concerned. I have a further concern because I believe that in Trinidad and Tobago we live in a democracy and my income is my property, and while one would agree that in the public interest there might be need for a National Insurance Scheme and so forth, I think that when one is talking about sizeable percentages of one's income and having a Government to

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use that percentage of income in a particular way, I have difficulty with that. I am a lover of freedom, and if I want to blow my money that is my business. There is the basic threshold of the NIS and so forth, but over and above that, I do not want a Government telling me that I must save “X” per cent of my income; not in a democracy. We have a problem with that.

There are other very critical issues, because unless one understands that if trading is forced to this quality there must be outlets for it and the environment for that has to be provided, or we would be in difficulties. We may have a heaping set of funds which users of those funds would then be able to use at very low interest rates. In other words, the savers may then be subsidizing the investors and given that abundance, the supply then exceeds the demand. Before we get involved in this, we need to think carefully and ensure that there is an environment. I agree that there is need for increase in the savings rate, but at the same time, we have to know that we need to have the environment for investment.

That brings me to the issue of the new Investment Act. We have been talking about this for too long. If one looks at the Medium Term Plan for a minute, since 1996 one would see that this Government is saying that because it was almost complete it was going to be left, but since 1996 they were saying that this legislation was going to be brought into Parliament. In 1997 they are bringing it to Parliament, in 1998 they are bringing it to Parliament and unless they can provide the environment for investment, my fear is that, yes, we would have a lot of savings, but then we would have savers subsidizing the investors and that needs to be looked at.

The other issue is the movement from a defined benefit plan—as is the norm in pensions in Trinidad and Tobago at present—to a defined contribution plan. I will explain the two. The defined benefit plan tells the employee to pay “X” per cent of his salary towards this pension plan and when that employee retires, we will ensure that two-thirds of his or her income and that might be the final income, or final average.

The defined contribution plan on the other hand, says simply, you put five per cent, the employee may put five or six per cent, or what have you, and at retirement with the investment it accumulates, or whatever is there, we are going to buy a pension for you. So clearly, the risk is being removed from the employer to the employee, while under the defined benefit plan, the employer takes the risk saying, I have to give this individual a pension of “X” amount when he gets to retirement. Under the defined contribution plan, it is the pensioner who takes the

risk, he does not know what he is going to get. Again, I ask whether we want to gamble with one's retirement, or whether we want a fair degree of certainty with respect to the income which the taxpayer will get when he reaches retirement age.

At present public servants are in a non-contributory pension plan and there is a basic concept that pension is the fundamental part of the compensation package of an individual to the extent that if one is in a non-contributory plan, then one assumes that the trade-off is with respect to salary, cash income. In a contributory plan, again, one would expect that one's salary would be adjusted, otherwise it would make a mockery of the claim that it has just settled the public servants' pay issue and has given them 5 per cent over five years. Can you imagine the public servants who just received 5 per cent over five years, in other words, an average of 1 per cent per year, are now being asked to contribute to a pension plan to the equivalent of let us say 5 per cent of salary? The effect of that would be, on average, at least 4 per cent behind the "eighth ball". So that public servants would understand when this pension reform is talked about, that it is moving from a non-contributory to a contributory plan and, therefore, an adjustment ought to be made in terms of cash compensation, that is salary. Otherwise, the 5 per cent which was received from the Government means that they would be giving 1 per cent per annum on average and taking 5 per cent. A word to the wise.

Mr. Speaker, just continuing in the vein where we say that this Minister does not know at times what he is talking about. He is talking about moving to a money purchase plan, a defined contribution plan, but then talks about proposing to introduce legislation which would lay down clear ground rules for the distribution of pension fund surpluses. Those of us who understand pension plans know that when one talks about a defined contribution plan, there can be no pension plan surplus. There is a surplus when one talks about the defined benefit plan, but if one is talking about a defined contribution plan, whatever is there at retirement, all of that is used to purchase a pension. There is no concept of surplus. If one talks about a defined benefit plan, there could be a surplus in the plan from time to time, because when the actuaries calculate the liabilities under the plan, which is the amount required with future contribution to provide the benefit to employees, then there could be a surplus, but there can be no surplus in a defined contribution plan. The Minister does not know what he is talking about.

The critical issue with respect to all of this is that the Minister has attempted to combine this annuity pension deduction with pension reform and if that is the connection, how come this deduction is coming on January 1 when we have not even started discussing the pension reform and which, given the current

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formulation, may not see the light of day for about two or three years.
[*Interruption*]

The record would show that it was I who took money from you last year. Do you remember when you bet that you would win the Local Government election and you would get more seats? Do you remember I took \$1,000 from you? Do you remember? [*Laughter*] That is what the record would show.

Hon. Member: Was that a legal bet?

Mr. K. Valley: It went to my constituency. Do you remember there was another bet? I still have a dollar with your signature in my drawer. So the records would show that whenever we bet the winners are on this side. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, I should talk to you. The third point is that we have had no reporting by the Minister last year. Last year, he instituted six measures in the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order and he comes with a presentation which was even shorter than his winding up in the budget debate which, of course, I am sure has gone down in the *Guinness Book of Records* for winding up in the budget debate and one which I thought could not have been bettered. But he has bettered it today in the presentation of this legislation. He has given us no insight concerning the outcome of the measures which were instituted last year.

Lastly, the Minister exempted the interest on Government bonds from taxes to persons over the age of 60. They were already not subject to tax on interest income on savings in the bank, therefore, it made sense simply to exempt them also from tax on interest income on Government bonds.

2.20 p.m.

We made the point last year that the person 60 years who can invest in a government bond, is quite a different person to the one over 60 who may have a savings account in the bank. While we can see the logic in exempting that interest income on savings in the bank from tax, we have a difficulty with the concept that income must be taxable to exempt interest on government bonds for persons over 60 years of age. What the Minister does not understand, is that the well-to-do will, therefore, then skew their investment towards bond investment rather than equity investment and, firstly, that is going to have certain ripples with respect to the financial market, and then to the economy. Unless one understands the relationship between things, then one would have that difficulty. Therefore, we would like to hear from the Minister what were some of the outcomes from that measure.

We have already spoken about the combination of mortgage interest deduction, annuities and pension and though the Minister has not reported, what we can think of his flip-flop, is that he has now admitted to making an error. Mr. Speaker, again, we want to counsel him and say that he needs to go a bit further and include an incentive for savings via credit unions. *[Desk thumping]*

There was also the employment allowance. Mr. Speaker, you remember last year when he said that he was going to allow a 200 per cent deduction with respect to incremental employment in trade, up to \$4,000 per month. We would like to know what effect that has had and how many new jobs were created because of this measure? Or, is it a fact, that given what has happened at the airport, his friend for whom this benefit was placed, that nothing has happened with respect to it. We would like to know, Mr. Speaker.

Last year the Minister went ahead with the—*[Interruption]* Yesterday? I am speaking on the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. Mr. Speaker, with respect to the CET, last year we moved from the 30 per cent rate to 25 per cent rate and this year, of course, we were supposed to make the final movement to 20 per cent. This has now been deferred for a review in July. I find it rather interesting, on December 29, 1997, there was this article in the *Trinidad Guardian* headlined:

“St Vincent phases out CET reductions.”

Mr. Speaker, St Vincent and the Grenadines with a population of 141,000 persons. I quote:

“ST VINCENT and the Grenadines will implement the final phase of the tariff reductions of the Common External Tariff (CET) on January 1, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Sir James Mitchell has announced.”

While we are pussyfooting with Caricom, there is a country—a little country—abiding with Caricom’s decision.

I counsel this Government, that they may have to, from time to time, provide leadership. Sometimes manufacturers may say: “It is hurting me and you cannot move down.” One must understand that today competition is the name of the game, that we are now in a global economy and when one sends these signals, it is not simply the 5 per cent reduction. What is more important, is the signal that one is sending both to the domestic and the external business community. The message received by the domestic business economy is that if we put pressure on the Government it would budge. Therefore, before long, if one is not careful, we

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would then have all the protection that we once had, which we have concluded now, is not proper and right given the current world paradigm.

Mr. Speaker, I counsel, again: Yes, there are manufacturers out there who would be making all types of noise but one must understand they have to be forced to be competitive in the world environment. The Minister ought to know because he was there and when we started with the trade liberalization, they were talking about 40,000 to 45,000 jobs would be lost. Poor fella, he was not there to implement the programme. However, when we started taking them out there—as the current Minister of Trade and Industry mentioned on the last day—at that time we had to say, come with us to Colombia and Venezuela and so forth. Now that is not so. Now they have grown up and they are arranging their trade missions and they are saying come with us and they are in a good frame. Do not allow them to get back in the frame where they feel they can run to the Government looking for protection. It is to the country's benefit to move to that 20 per cent level come January 1, 1998. *[Desk thumping][Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, do you understand the level of their discussions?

One cannot understand why they would want to do that, while at the same time they are talking about removing the export allowance. Under the World Trade Organization's rule they have up to the year 2003, with respect to the—

Mr. Assam: Until 1999.

Mr. K. Valley: I would stand corrected, you know I would, but my understanding is that it is until the year 2003. However, as I said, if that is so I stand corrected. I will take it under “advisement”.

The other issue I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, is with respect to old age pension. As I said, it does not belong to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, but it is here and, therefore, I think it requires a comment. While we think this is a step in the right direction, we believe that it really does not go far enough. It is quite a compromise from the UNC's position with respect to old age pension, where they have claimed, from time to time, that the qualifying income level should be raised to \$12,000 per annum. That has not been done. We would have liked to see some movement with respect to that. We say that, because given that the economy has now responded to the growth initiative which we have taken over the period since 1992, that the Government must now return to their core functions—I nearly said core competencies, but they have not shown competencies in those areas, so I think we have to leave it to their core functions—namely, poverty alleviation,

health, education, management of the economy, social services, security and so forth, that there ought to be a greater emphasis on social services.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that we are not amazed that there has been a growth in this economy. We regret the fact that there seems to be some compromise on the growth momentum. Again, if one were to look at the statistics, one would see that this economy returned to growth—and it is shown in the *Review of the Economy*—in 1994, by 3.4 per cent. Growth went up to 3.8 per cent, indicating the momentum, but lo and behold the Government was changed and the growth momentum seem to have been compromised, as though brakes are being applied to that momentum. As I said, it was 3.5 per cent in 1996 and in 1997 it is projected at 3.2 per cent. We regret that.

2.30 p.m.

We are saying that the Government needs to look at two important areas: the place of implementation and credibility. As we said before, they need to realize that in a country such as ours, there must always be new initiatives on which a government is working to take the society to the next level of growth. We need to look at that. However, given that there has been this response to the growth's initiative, we would expect that the Government would now turn its attention and focus on the social services. In our first year in government, when one looks at the income levels in 1992, the current income was \$6.1 billion; in 1997, the revised estimates indicated that the current income was some \$9.2 billion. We are talking about an increase of \$3.1 billion in that period. That did not happen by chance. If one wants to go back to 1992 when we took control of this government, one would see that in every budget speech we were saying clearly where we wanted to take the economy. We were clear on the point.

If one looks in the 1992 Budget Speech one would see where we outlined the medium term plan. The Minister of Finance said and I quote:

“We shall seek to achieve three broad objectives in the medium term. These are:

- sustainable growth of the economy;
- a significant and durable reduction of unemployment; and
- restoration of an adequate level of foreign exchange reserves.”

That was in 1992.

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. [*Dr. K. Rowley*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I was making the point—it is simple to reply to the hon. Member for Siparia—that we did not arrive at 1997 or 1998 by chance, it was simply a response to policy action taken over the period 1992 and beyond. Again, I am saying that when we look at the 1993 medium term objectives of the Minister, he said, and I quote:

“Three basic objectives underpin the Medium-Term Policy Framework; these are:

- (a) improved fiscal and monetary management;
- (b) increased reliance on the private sector for investment and growth; and
- (c) an export-led approach to growth and employment creation.”

More interestingly, when you compare—I have here the *Medium Term Policy Framework 1998—2000* and the *Medium Term Policy Framework 1995—1997*. I want to simply compare the medium term objectives to see whether there has been any new initiatives. I have here the *Medium Term Policy Framework 1995 to 1997* which says:

“Medium Term Goals and objectives...

- (i) sustainable economic growth through the expansion of export-oriented economic activity, increases in productivity and further diversification of the productive base;”

Mr. Speaker, whereas in the *Medium Term Policy Framework 1998—2000*:

“Medium Term Goals and Objectives...

- promote strong economic growth;

One talks about sustainable economic growth and is going ahead and saying how we are going to do it, and the other one simply says, “promote strong economic growth.”

The Medium Term Policy Framework 1995—1997:

- “(ii) a substantial increase in the level of employment;”

1998—“reduce unemployment”. So one talks about substantial increase in employment, the next one talks about reducing unemployment.

- “3. Appropriate balances and the overall fiscal and external accounts and an adequate level of foreign reserves.”

They do not even have anything concerning the fiscal outturns and I think that is as a result of the fact that that objective, to all intents and purposes, has been achieved; there are now fiscal surpluses and the balance of payment, overall, is in a healthy position. I continue: *The Medium Term Policy Framework 1995—1997* says:

- “iv. The containment of inflation level;”

1998—2000 “contain inflation rate”

- “ v. An effective and efficient social safety net programme;”

In 1998—2000 it says here, “ensure equity within the society”.

- “vi. Environmental protection;”

the other one says: “Protect and preserve the environment.”

Mr. Speaker, do you understand? So when they are telling me it is 1998, what is new? We deal with a bunch of jokers! We simply make the point that the growth momentum on the fiscal outturns did not happen by chance, they are really, in effect, the direct result of policy actions which included the rationalization of the state enterprise sector. The important one—rationalization of the state enterprise sector. Again, this Government is so jokey. We look at the *Medium Term Policy Framework—[Interruption]*

Mr. Panday: Mr. Speaker, people are laughing their way to the bank.

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I know. His hon. Member’s friends like Ish Galabaransingh, Steve and the others while the others are suffering. We now have to be actually fighting on Christmas Eve for pittance in the Unemployment Relief Programme. That is what is happening. You are right! People are crying! The Prime Minister gave a Christmas message without one word of hope for those people and you talk about caring! *[Desk thumping]* The Prime Minister would be there for the shortest possible time. I gave the Prime Minister that! After 30 years, I must tell him that Brian Lara would make duck every now and then but he is still the greatest of batsmen. That is like the PNM. After 30 years we can lose an election but we are still the greatest of parties. We are the only political party in

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Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, let the hon. Member for Couva North put that in his pipe and smoke it! This political leader—Mr. Patrick Manning—would be the next Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Panday: In the year 2015.

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I would not give the hon. Member an answer to that.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Panday should not talk so soon. He should just wait and see. I would not argue with him.

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, you know when they were in Opposition they and their friends had all types of things to say about the state enterprises policy followed by the government. Lo and behold in their *Medium Term Policy Framework* at page 10, they have outlined state-owned enterprise public sector investment, a policy programme with respect to divestment. When you read it you would find that it is extremely similar to ours. We could find another occasion in which to read it. You would find that the outline is a mere copy from the document called *Public Participation in Industrial and Commercial Activities Revisited*, which was laid in this honourable House in 1994. So that what they criticized in Opposition is now gospel for them. What I found rather interesting is that my colleague's friend, Ramesh's friend at the *TnT Mirror*, Mr. Ali—

Mr. Manning: Is it the one in jail.

Mr. K. Valley: Yes, it could not happen to a nicer fellow. I am going to make a point in a while.

2.40 p.m.

On today's *TnT Mirror*, the guy is trying to make a flip-flop. He has been against divestment all the while. They have been selling out patrimony. He wants investigation in National Fisheries, BWIA, all of them, and he claims that the people have been critical—not the people. He was. Based on articles given by his friend Ramesh. He has a newspaper. He can attack me any time and he has attacked me all the while, but today is my day for him. I want to tell him that I know that would have happened to him.

When people feel that they can do other than go straight down the middle to be fair and square, to try to do all types of things with the truth, it will come to pass. So, when his friend jailed him, he was so upset, but I said it could not happen to a nicer fellow, and up to now he would not learn. He is trying to flip flop now on divestment. But, as I tell them, any of the divestment done within the period 1992

to 1995, they can have it. [*Desk thumping*] I maintain that the BWIA divestment will stand the test of time.

Do you know what they are trying to do now, Mr. Speaker? The union has come running back to me, because in dealing with the pension plan issue, while this Government agreed to use one-third of the surplus to allow their employees to have 15.5 per cent of the airline, and that there would be an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) under which they would get another 10 per cent of the airline, so that they would end up with about a 25.5 per cent stake in the airline, this Government is trying to cheat them out of it and they have to come to me. I wrote them a letter stating my understanding concerning this deal. This labour Government! I have to be a mad man to walk away with files, but just go and take a look at the Cabinet Note. There is a Cabinet Secretariat. They must have the decisions. What nonsense!

Mr. Speaker, simply because the pension plan has now accumulated some extra money, they are looking at that and telling the union that it has extra money, pay it out of that; in breach of the arrangement. That is what that labour Government which loves labour wants to do. The basic thing is that we must always stand by the truth, what is right and just in every situation. [*Desk thumping*]

Also, we are getting to the point in Trinidad and Tobago where the head at the newspapers will have to start telling journalists and persons who write in the newspapers to have a disclaimer or certification that they are not being paid by anyone to advance their point of view.

Mr. Maharaj: He is attacking the media now.

Mr. K. Valley: I am not attacking the media. I am saying that the media, in their attempt to uphold that freedom of the press and responsibility of the press, must ensure that the journalists have a disclaimer, because a number of them are public relations people walking up and down this town fighting claims for certain people, and playing they are just writing for the newspapers.

There is one writing with respect to the Betting and Levy Board. That same one now wants to play that he loves the PNM and wants to advise the PNM on what to do. I want him to tell us who is paying him. He must sign a disclaimer saying that he is not paid by anyone to write the nonsense. I want to make an unequivocal statement today that the PNM stands behind its political leader. Only the PNM is to say when he is to go! Nobody else! No special correspondent!

Mr. Panday: Mr. Rowley has never said that.

Dr. Rowley: What you calling my name for?

Mr. K. Valley: The PNM said that last year, loudly. We need the Government to return to core functions. I say that in the context of something I saw in the newspapers coming out of the debates in the other place. A Minister was making the point that he wants to set up a company and force foreign investors to allocate 10 per cent of the equity in investments in the energy sector to this company. This is what I saw in the newspapers.

I am making the simple point that one has to be consistent. They have now outlined the policy decision with respect to state enterprises and it mirrors the PNM's policy. It is a policy to which we are in agreement, that the state ought to get involved only in strategic areas. We need to provide the environment for business. We need to concentrate on our core function: health, poverty alleviation, and so forth. We ought not to go back and get deeply involved in the commercial sector. We need to deal with that. The proof of the pudding will always be in the eating. We do not have to worry.

Mr. Speaker, I conclude as I started. This Government has shown by bringing this Motion here today that it does not know what it is doing. Really, we could have been debating this on January 16, 1998. Even if it were January 16, 1998, we see clearly that the Government's focus is in the wrong direction.

I thank you.

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I feel very sorry for the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central. On the first day of the Parliament for the year, he came here and has been perspiring, was very emotional, has lost his balance and was shouting and, at the side of him, his leader—or one of his leaders—was sleeping.

I can understand how he feels, because here it is that he has been frustrated in his budget debate. He wanted to speak, he said he could not speak, then he said he was not prepared to speak, and here it is that he came today with the same notes he had for the budget debate and tried to use that speech in this debate. It was shown when he talked about “come January 1, 1998”. But, you know, for him to liken the PNM to Lara is an insult to Lara. [*Desk thumping*] Lara may make a duck here and there, but the PNM and its political leader has made six ducks consecutively over the last year.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I wondered whether he would tell us how many ducks his leader made since 1966!

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, in a short while the PNM will have a duck farm. Here it is he says that the PNM supports its leader. Is he insulting the population of Trinidad and Tobago when they read everyday about the rift and confusion existing in the PNM? The General Council is against the Member for San Fernando East having a fund that he is calling a democracy fund. The Member for Diego Martin West is against that. There is a rift in the PNM. They are putting up people to fight each other, yet he is saying that the PNM supports its political leader.

What has happened is that the PNM should not talk about truth at all, and for the Member for Diego Martin Central to talk about truth here really is an insult to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin Central gave the impression to this House that there is no basis for this meeting in the Parliament here today, and I want to spend some time showing how it is necessary to have this Order confirmed, if the law has to be complied with in order to continue raising the revenues that have been provided for in the Order.

Mr. Speaker, there can be no doubt that the Provisional Collection Of Taxes Order was published on December 12, 1997. The commencement provision is stated in paragraph 9 of the Order, and it says it comes into effect on December 13, 1997. The Provisional Collection of Taxes Act enables the President to vary an existing tax for the purpose of raising revenue to meet the expenditure specified in the Appropriation Bill. This the President did by varying the excise duty, import duty, and to back the tax on cigarettes, increasing those taxes from \$2.10 per pack to \$2.50 per pack.

Where the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order varies a tax, the Order must be confirmed, with or without modification, by a resolution agreed to by the House within the next 21 days after the commencement of the Order. As I mentioned before, the Order commenced on December 13, 1997 and, therefore, the 21 days would have expired on January 3, 1998.

2.55 p.m.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, would the Member kindly inform the House, that with respect to paragraphs 2 to 5(a), whether the commencement of the Order is December 12, 1997 or is it, in fact, January 1, 1998 according to section 74:01? Will he also inform the House about the matter relating to the excise duty on cigarettes, whether it is rightly on the Provisional Collection of Taxes, or should it be on the Excise Duty (Caricom) Order, which requires only that it be submitted to the House within 21 days, as was stated by the Minister of Legal Affairs last year.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, I wish to give the Member the assurance that I will respond to his contribution. I was explaining there could be no doubt that some aspects of this matter came into effect on January 1, 1998 and some came into effect on December 13, 1997. There is no doubt about that. I do not know whether he wants us to come one day to see about excise duty on cigarettes and another day to come and see about pensions. He wants us to see about pensions when he and his party voted against pensioners! And they voted against the budget! They voted against the provisions for increase in pension, they voted against pensioners! But he is talking about pension. We will come to that.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please!

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, it should be pointed out that the increase in the excise duty is not being done pursuant to the Excise (General Provisions) Act, but is being done pursuant to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act. Under the Excise Act, the Minister of Finance is required to submit his resolution to Parliament after four days, but no later than 21 days of the publication of the Excise Duty Order. The resolution before this House is submitted pursuant to the Provisional Collection Of Taxes Act which requires the confirmation of the Order by the House of Representatives within 21 days of the commencement of the Order.

Mr. Speaker, for the record, may I refer to section 3(5) of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, Chap, 74:01. It states:

“An Order varying an existing tax shall cease to have effect if the Order is not confirmed, with or without modifications, by a resolution agreed to by the House within the next twenty-one days after the commencement of the Order, and where any provision of the Order is deleted by that resolution that provision shall cease to have effect.”

Mr. Speaker, why should the Opposition Chief Whip, the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central, on behalf of his party, come to this House to try to mislead the population of Trinidad and Tobago and give the impression that we do not have to pass this measure? Is it that the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central wants this provision to lapse so that the Government would not be able to raise revenues which will be necessary to assist in paying old age pensioners? Does he want us to be unable to ensure that the roads in Trinidad and Tobago are repaired? Are they voting against the URP programme? These are measures for the Government to function. They voted against the budget: social development, the

alleviation of poverty, pensioners, single mothers, for the Government not to pay them, public servants, computers, the country, the public interest. That demonstrates that there is so much venom and antagonism by the other side that it colours their role and functions to recognize that there is a public interest.

Mr. Speaker, the failure to confirm the Order varying the taxes on cigarettes would mean that the increased tax paid pursuant to the Order would have to be refunded. This is provided for in section 4(1) of the Provisional Collection Of Taxes Act. In confirming the Order in relation to the excise duty on cigarettes, the House would, in effect, be giving effect to what was proposed in the budget debate in the Appropriation Bill and, in effect, would be complying with the requirements of law.

With respect to the other matters mentioned in the Order, there is the argument that it is not necessary because according to them it came into effect on January 1, 1998. If it falls within the Order and within the law, the requirements, and it comes into effect on January 1, it still has to be passed within 21 days and we are all within the time.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be very candid, I think I have to be very candid with any matter like this. There has been two schools of thought with respect to some of the matters which we mentioned as to whether they should or should not be in the Order. What has happened is that the Government has taken the cautious approach, because we would not want anyone to have to file a case in court and then be ordered to pay costs and then that person has to go around the country begging for money to pay the costs. So the Government decided to be cautious, because if we are not cautious with respect to these matters, it means that poor people would probably have to fight cases, there will be litigation, and it may be that one side is right and the other side is wrong.

So what has happened is that, as one knows, in Government—and they should know the operation of Government—there is, in matters like these, apart from having the staff, the Ministry of Finance, in respect of the Government's Parliamentary Counsel's Department, there are different views taken from time to time. Therefore, in the public interest where no damage is being done, it was decided to have all encompassed in the Order. Take it at its highest, if we delete them or leave them out of the Order, and for some reason they should be included, then the public interest would be affected, but if they are included in the Order, no damage and no injury to the public interest would be caused.

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Mr. Speaker, I do not understand why it was necessary today to say, well, we should have come one day with this and another day with something else. I do not understand why it is necessary to say, well you know, strictly speaking, these are not tax raising measures. A measure may not be directly a variation of a tax or a tax raising measure, but indirectly it can be that and it can be construed as such. Therefore, in those circumstances, prudence demands that action is taken in the public interest to ensure that there is no question of having unnecessary litigation in matters like these.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know why the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central got up today—and he knows that it is not true to say that any Member of Parliament has the jurisdiction to send anybody to jail. He knows that is not true! He knows that only a judge of the High Court or a magistrate has jurisdiction to send anyone to jail. Here it is that he comes to the Parliament and he knows that it is untrue, he knows that it is mischievous and he makes an accusation stating that a Member of Parliament jailed someone; a minister of Government jailed someone. Is that how the PNM operated? Is it that the PNM operated in the interference of justice? Is it a confession by the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central that while he was in Government he interfered with the administration of justice and influenced people to be jailed and some to be charged?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Gentlemen, please. We cannot continue like this. We cannot set the pace like this at the beginning of the year. The hon. Member is on his feet. Other Members will have an opportunity to speak. Both sides are guilty of it.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to what the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central said, I regard that as a serious attack on the independence of the Judiciary. Here it is he referred to a case in which a High Court judge made an order in which the matter is under appeal, and yet he comes to the Parliament and makes an allegation that a Member of Parliament jailed this individual. One knows that is not true, it merely has to be stated, but it shows how irresponsible the PNM has become.

As a matter of fact, I could understand his frustrations because he has a leader who comes there and sleeps in the Parliament all the time. As a matter of fact, any time the Member for San Fernando East sits, he starts to sleep. So I could understand his frustration. If he has a frustration in the PNM do not take it out in the Parliament.

When the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central says that the Government should tell us what it is doing about poverty, social security and unemployment, they do not have the moral authority to talk about that. The PNM, in a budget debate, voted against, not only the pensioners, the people in the country to get their roads fixed, the people in the country to get URP work and voted against the people in Laventille, Couva and Cedros to get URP work, but they also voted against children who depend upon money from the state to promote education. They voted against school feeding the pupils, farmers, doctors and health in the country. They talk about crime, but if the Government does not raise money to pay the police officers, to pay for the programmes in the Ministry of Social Development, to repair the boats in order to interdict some of the drug vessels, how could the Government deal with crime and drugs?

3.10 p.m.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: They voted against this Government fighting the drug trade.

Mr. Panday: Are you surprised?

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: What I would like the hon. Member for Diego Martin West to do after I have finished speaking, is to give an explanation to this House why, when he was the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, he allowed Mr. Dole Chadee to squat on state lands for so many years and did nothing about it.

Mr. Panday: One hundred and seventy-five acres.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Tell this House why he and his Government allowed that to happen, while poor people's homes were being broken down and they were being put out of business?

Mr. Sudama: Dole Chadee used to drink with his political leader.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, the Member says these things, when he knows—I know that he knows—what he is saying has no truth in it. He knew that this Order had to be confirmed within 21 days. He was a Minister of Trade and a Minister of Finance—

Mr. Assam: Junior minister, always junior.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: —junior Minister of Finance; he knows that. Every Member sitting on that side who was a minister of government knows that this thing has to be passed within 21 days. Why is it that they came this afternoon in

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order to give the impression that we do not have to do it, having voted against the budget?

Mr. Bereaux: We will vote against you every time.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, it is quite clear that the PNM does not have the public's interest at heart.

Thank you.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that as I was about to make a brief intervention, the Attorney General invited me to respond to a particular matter with respect to Dole Chadee, and state lands, in the prosecution of Dole Chadee. I simply remind the Attorney General and his colleagues that contrary to their attempt to rewrite the country's history, Dole Chadee, a convicted drug dealer, was arrested by the security services under a PNM administration. Let us not debate that today.

I rise to make a brief intervention, firstly, to support the point made by my colleague from Diego Martin Central which was really that the Attorney General is right, these things have to be done. He did not say that they did not have to be done. What he said was that we left here expecting to come back on January 16, 1998. If we had come back on that date we could have met the legal requirements. I do not know to what the Attorney General was responding. Mr. Speaker, they saw it fit to convince you that we should come today. I have no problem, personally, with coming today. As a Member of Parliament I stand prepared to come to this House at any time and any day to do the people's business, unlike the Government who seems to be all over the world from one place to the other.

Mr. Speaker, I take the opportunity today in our first session of 1998, to raise a matter with you. I hope that in talking to you, the Government, especially the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance, would listen to what I have to say. The first session in the third year of this Government is an opportune time for this Government to listen to what is going on in this country.

Mr. Maharaj: I know.

Dr. K. Rowley: I know that you know and that is why I am raising it. It is because you know that I am concerned. The Minister of Finance was my colleague in a previous administration. I am sure in his moments of sober thought he will agree that we all—I hope that we all—did make some contribution to national administration. He served in the Cabinet with me until he went across to another

government. I bear no malice against him. In fact, for the benefit of all of us, our children and our children's children, we hope that as Minister of Finance managing our affairs he would be successful in doing a job that is hard to do.

My friend from Diego Martin Central pointed out certain inconsistencies in the performance of the Minister of Finance. Today, I want to raise a matter with him, insofar as this measure before us is concerned, insofar as the Attorney General has been at pains to point out that it is really about revenue raising, and insofar as the Opposition could not see it fit to support the budget provisions in their entirety, especially in the Government's lack of candour on the matter and lack of details as to what the measures would mean. The Attorney General pointed out that what we were talking about was raising revenues and who voted against revenue to pay pensioners and so forth. All that is just so much rubbish.

If you look at the matter before us, there is only one real revenue-raising matter here, the cigarette matter, where the Minister of Finance ended his presentation on the note, "no new taxes". He has one revenue-raising matter and that is item 8—"Excise Duty, Tobacco Products" to attach a tax of 40 cents a pack on cigarettes. As the Attorney General said this major revenue-raising measure is to do all things, to pave roads and pay pensioners. How much hooaha do we have to listen to from the Member for Couva South?

Initially, the tone in which the Minister of Finance presented his measure, he sought to give the impression that it had to do with attacking lifestyles, cigarette smoking. The Government led by the Prime Minister—and I commend him—is leading a charge against us turning away from the use of tobacco; purely from a point of view of health preservation. That was the idea. If, in fact, what the Minister of Finance is doing is saying that this simple and single measure is a significant revenue measure, it would have the effect of someone urinating in the wind in an attempt to put out the Red House fire. *[Laughter]* That is the only effect it is going to have because there is no serious revenue-raising measure here.

Insofar as the Attorney General is trying to tell us that this is a serious revenue measure, it would take the tax on 600,000 packs of cigarette to pay one year's salary for the nebulous character that the Minister of Finance and his colleagues have put in National Petroleum at a salary of \$26,000 per month. *[Desk thumping]* Do you know who is paying that? Little old men who are still smoking cigarettes. As history has shown us—I recall, my father was a smoker and he used to pay 30 cents for a pack of cigarettes and over the years, tax after tax has been added on and it has now gone to \$2.50. There are more people smoking today than in my

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father's time. Clearly, the record will show that adding the tax is not going to turn people away from cigarettes. What is required is a proper health education programme with a national effort as the Prime Minister is trying to do. That might help. Point out to people and those who are involved that it is a serious detriment to their health and, therefore, they should stay away from that. Mr. Speaker, clearly we are not raising revenue here.

The Attorney General spoke about moral authority and the PNM has no moral authority to do whatever. Sometimes I wonder how many Jekylls and Hydes there are in the Government. In one breath as they foster, fuel and fertilize corruption in the country, they reach out and grab the worse of the PNM, those with no principles who would sell their parliamentary seat for a mess of pottage. [*Desk thumping*]. They will reach out for them and pay them large sums of money to betray the voters who made the mistake to put them in Parliament and in the Cabinet, then all of a sudden they are washed whiter than snow. Could you imagine that! [*Desk thumping*].

Mr. Speaker, you have served this country with distinction and continue so to do. When they speak about PNM and no moral authority, they cast aspersion on you too.

Mr. Assam: You know he served with distinction and you voted against him. That is Jekyll and Hyde!

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Dr. K. Rowley: Do you have something to say? As I mentioned a while ago, 600,000 packs of cigarettes to raise the equivalent of the basic emolument of a particular gentleman of questionable character ensconced at National Petroleum with the say so and support of this Minister of Finance, Prime Minister and Government. How did he get there? He was appointed by the Government as a member of the board of National Petroleum, a wholly owned state enterprise from which we can look for revenue. Thus, at the same time we are squeezing 50 cents a pack out of smokers in a futile attempt to raise revenue, according to the Attorney General and 600,000 packs of cigarettes will give us the equivalent of \$26,000 per month.

3.20 p.m.

This gentleman is a member of the board appointed by them, he is also a CEO in another state enterprise and he was fired from there for improper conduct in financial dealings in another state enterprise. All the details are known to the

Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister and I dare say, the Cabinet. What do they do? Instead of asking him, since he is fired from that state enterprise, to step down at NP, they promote him from the board to an executive position at twice the salary of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and they are coming here talking about the “moral authority”. The Minister of Finance cannot pretend not to know the details because my friend from Princes Town has pointed out how easy it is to get information.

It is all well and good to go into ADB and find out the details about who owe and did not owe and come to the Parliament and lie about who write-off and who did not write-off. But a character is fired for serious financial impropriety in a state enterprise and he is now chief in another state enterprise!

Mr. Panday: What has the Prime Minister’s job got to do with that?

Dr. K. Rowley: This irresponsible and ridiculous Prime Minister is asking me what has the Prime Minister’s job got to do with that.

Mr. Panday: Fire the board?

Dr. K. Rowley: No, do not fire the board. Continue to encourage corruption.

Mr. Panday: That is not corruption.

Dr. K. Rowley: It is corruption of the worst kind. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister should shut up and listen. The people of this country looked to this Government for maintenance of the standards that we tried to set in this country and insofar as this Government believes that—[*Interruption*] Do you have something to say? Well, after I am finished you can talk.

Mr. Speaker, this Government believes that it is unassailable, it can do whatever it wants, it can encourage all kinds of misconduct in this country. But in that belief and insofar as that belief governs the Government’s conduct, it will simply add to the discomfort, hardships and deterioration of the quality of life in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It will be right there with those who cut off heads and put them in whisky boxes; those who rape behind altars and those who openly and nakedly take the Treasury’s money and fuel their corrupt friends in high places. Simple as that.

When the Government comes here and talks about moral authority it should take note that its actions are causing disquiet to the population with respect to how it is conducting public business. No national who has been dismissed from a state

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enterprise for impropriety should find himself or herself in a position of authority in the way that is being carried on at NP and be paid \$26,000 per month.

But then the Minister of Finance comes here, interrupting people's Christmas season and having the Attorney General coming here and talking foolishness about 40 cents a pack to raise revenue to pay pensioners and so forth. Absolute nonsense, Mr. Speaker! They are talking about looking in the canals to pick up a penny while he is allowing his friend to burn mountains of dollar bills. That is what he is doing. The Government is not only corrupt. My friend from Diego Martin was accused of being incompetent and negligent. If that were all then one could say they can learn as they go along; as they make mistakes they correct those mistakes. But if they are inherently corrupt and encourage corruption as they are doing as I mentioned a while ago, then this Government sets about to damage Trinidad and Tobago. *[Interruption]* The Prime Minister could grumble and shout as much as he likes, he is leading a corrupt and destructive regime. The facts are there to see.

Mr. Panday: That is why the people want us.

Dr. K. Rowley: I am not against the people wanting you. What I am asking you to do is, as Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, take cognizance of the standards that we expect of a proper administration. The Prime Minister is leading and encouraging arrogance and corruption.

Mr. Speaker, he wants to come out here to raise revenue. I wonder how much money we are going to raise from paragraph 8, cigarette taxes. This is the same Minister of Finance who presented us in his budget with a charge of \$100 million on the Piarco Airport and everybody who is paid, like myself, the Leader of the Opposition, Members for Diego Martin West and Central and the media, we have asked the Minister of Finance and his Government to tell the country on what in God's name he spent \$100 million. Up to now we have no answer but he comes to tell us he is concerned about revenues so he comes to raise 40 cents taxes on tobacco.

We are losing sight of what is important and playing with trivia. I am asking the Minister of Finance this afternoon, since this arises out of the same budget speech which he entitled "A Blueprint for Human Development, Savings and Asset Building", to tell us, when he gets up to respond this evening, why he requires the revenue from tobacco and as he tells us that, he must also take the opportunity to tell us what he spent \$100 million on in Piarco Airport last year. It is a question of revenue and expenditure. He cannot just talk about raising revenue and make it

sound very important and critical, but at the same time arrogantly refusing to say what he spent the revenue on; \$100 million. This is the people's Parliament and people are asking in this Parliament, tell us what you spent \$100 million on.

We have an irresponsible Prime Minister who supports liars in the Parliament, corruption at NP and also supports the Minister of Finance to stay silent on large sums of money like \$100 million and wants to give me the impression that I put on my suit to come here today to raise revenue on cigarettes. Absolute nonsense, waste of time! The Government is not concerned about important things. The Government is concerned about sham and image.

Mr. Speaker, at the same time that we are concerned about the raising of a few cents from the tobacco taxes and about the Government for not telling us a word about the \$100 million expenditure at the airport, we are also hearing—we have raised it here in the Parliament—that the Government is preparing, again, to accede to the giving away of substantial sums of money with respect to the Guyana debt. I am asking the Minister of Finance again this afternoon, as he is trying to raise revenue from tobacco, to tell us what is the position with respect to the moneys owed to us by Guyana. Firstly, I am asking him, is Guyana on schedule with paying the instalments of the last arrangement? Have we been receiving those moneys? Are the payments on schedule? Secondly, is it the intention of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to accede to requests for further debt reduction for Guyana?

Mr. Speaker, we are talking about debt relief for Guyana, but we are talking about revenues. Peppercorn revenue being raised from tobacco but substantial tens or hundreds of millions of dollars not being accounted for, not being reported upon, even when Members of Parliament ask specific questions of the Government. What arrogance! That is what the Prime Minister is fostering as the new standard in Trinidad and Tobago. I tell you, Mr. Speaker, if this Government continues with this public display of disdain for all that is right and decent in this country, where the standard is that you can be placed sixth in an interview and you get the job, you cannot be on the shortlist but you get the job; you can be fired for grand theft but you get a doubling of salary—all of those things. If that is what the Government is fostering as the new standards, then I tell you, Mr. Speaker—they say they will remain in office until 2015—they might very well do that but half of us in this country will not recognize Trinidad and Tobago when the Panday Administration finishes with it.

We are talking about raising revenues. To spend how? To throw good money after bad? We raise a few cents on the tobacco matter but what has the

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Government said about its major expenditure, Caroni (1975) Limited? Not a word. All we have seen is \$153 million to be transferred from the Treasury to Caroni (1975) Limited. We are saying over and over and over that the Government must tell us how it intends to treat with the Caroni (1975) Limited situation. What has the Government told us to date? Nothing.

Today, I will take the opportunity to make a few suggestions to the Government. One is that it cannot take the position that whatever Caroni (1975) Limited requires would be funded out of the Treasury, because those funds are not available even if that is the intention. The other, Mr. Speaker, is that there are a number of suggestions being made to the Government, none of which is being given yea or nay. The Government has before it a crisis with respect to expenditure at Caroni (1975) Limited. I suggest to this Government that it does three things. One is to ensure that cane-farming is done largely by independent private cane farmers. By that I mean that Caroni (1975) Limited, a state owned enterprise, should be removed as far as possible from the production of cane.

Secondly, may I say to the Government that we can have a sound and efficient sugar industry in Trinidad and Tobago and we must have it. But that company must only have available to it the resource required so to do. By that I mean that the sugar producing company—in light of the fact that we have a fixed sugar quota of 140,000 tonnes of sugar—should only be given the required land and resource commensurate with production of 140,000 tonnes. That is the size of the industry. And then, Mr. Speaker, it should only employ the human resources required to efficiently produce that 140,000 tonnes on the acreage required. We can look around the region and see what the ratio of workers per tonne of cane is to know what is a proper and reasonable arrangement for Caroni (1975) Limited. You do not have to go to Mars for that.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, the lands at Caroni (1975) Limited which are not required for cane-growing and other associated arrangements—and by cane-growing I mean what minimal amount of cane the company might grow in a mechanized way and the cane that will be grown by private farmers across the south and central area—should be taken out of the sugar-producing Caroni (1975) Limited and a separate arrangement should be made to market them by way of leases for agricultural and other purposes.

I keep hearing the Government talk about divestment and diversification. The diversification at Caroni (1975) Limited under the sugar-producing arrangement is a colossal failure and a waste of time. If the core operation of sugar and rum

production is not profitable and viable, those same people cannot be expected to get involved in other alien operations and make those operations a success.

The history is there to show us that they are colossal failures, which, if we support them indefinitely, are going to require further raising of revenues. So I am saying to the Government that those operations can be put under separate arrangements allowing the sugar-producing part of the company to continue with its core business of sugar and rum. Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that all that company is doing with respect to diversification under the arrangement of the sugar-producing management and structure is a failure.

3.35 p.m.

What has been happening with Caroni (1975) Limited is, because the company is in control of the state assets of lands which are not required for sugar production, the company is marketing those lands and using the proceeds of those sales in its current account. In other words, it is converting land into cash and using that cash to support the sugar operations, largely in paying wages and salaries. That has to be bad business. The sugar industry must be able to support itself from its own efficient operations and its sales. It must not be a case where you sell off the sugar lands and use those moneys to pay wages and salaries to keep an inefficient and uncertain arrangement in place, because sooner or later you will run out of lands to sell and you will be right back to square one with an industry which cannot stand on its own two feet and requires state support to the tune of \$153 million this year; and, of course, projections are that next year, it will be \$250 million and the following year, \$300 million.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying that as the Minister of Finance concerns himself with revenue in the trivial and pettifogging way that he is talking about revenue here with respect to cigarette taxes, we have to be concerned about the significant drain in expenditure, and the Minister of Finance and his colleagues must tell the country, very clearly, how they propose to deal with the expenditure side of the matter, specific to the airport, specific to Caroni (1975) Limited and specific to the National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited.

Coming back to the National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited, the Minister of Finance told us in his 1996 budget presentation, that the National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited was going to be demonopolized. Nothing has happened with that.

Hon. Member: Thank God.

Dr. K. Rowley: What we do know now is that for one day of last year, the entire country was inconvenienced because the workers at the National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited and the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union saw it fit to raise a voice of query asking the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister and the Government, to tell the country what this particular hand-picked gentleman was doing at the National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited. Is he an employee? Is he a consultant? Is he a member of the board? The reason the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union asked those questions was because, as a serious labour leader in the country, one of the country's leading institutions is seeing irregularity at the National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited and is asking the Government to tell us what this gentleman is doing. Because all we have heard in the grapevine is that he is involved somehow in making preparations for the demonopolization of the National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited. The Government has nothing to say on the matter.

We know two things about this mysterious gentleman who has caused the Oilfield Workers Trade Union and the workers of the National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited to bring the country to a standstill with respect to fuel supplies. All we know is that he happens to be the son-in-law of a major gas station proprietor in the country and, secondly, he happens to have been fired for funny fingers at the First Citizens' Bank. But he is the person who, ostensibly, is in charge of preparing a package for demonopolization of National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited. Mr. Speaker, what is going on?

This is a Government that talks about transparency, an open Government when it suits them, but here we are dealing with a hundred million-dollar patrimony and this kind of secrecy is taking place and the next thing we hear is some *fait accompli*, equal to or greater than the corruption that took place with the airport, with the buildings and with the Maritime moneys. That was not good; at that time it would have been done and only then would the Minister speak, because by then his policy would be, "You could fire me now; I have already fixed myself."

Today, I am calling on the Government to tell this country what is going on with respect to the Government's stated objectives of demonopolizing the National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited; how the Government proposes to go; who is involved and to tell us specifically what that character from the First Citizens Bank is doing at the National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited. What is he being paid to do? To whom does he report? And, what does the Government expect out of it?

The Minister of Finance cannot let Trinidad and Tobago be a silent partner to all that corruption. The Minister of Finance does not have the option of silence, because it is that silence that prepares the basis for the corruption that is running rife in this Government in Trinidad and Tobago at this time. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, this Government has a lot of goodwill and I do not begrudge it that goodwill. As the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, they have a job to do and if they are successful then we all benefit; if they are not successful, then we all suffer and that is why it is important that as citizens, all citizens must demand of this Government to know how the Government is conducting the state's business. I am putting this Government on notice that many of its actions are detrimental to the comfort and improvement of the quality of life of all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

When the budget says “A Blueprint for Human Development, Savings and Asset Building”, clearly that is not for all of us; it has to be for them and their friends at the National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited, because, I mean, at \$26,000 a month, a lot of assets can be built down here; and as for human development, when someone gets fired from a bank, nobody else in the private sector will touch that person with a 10-foot pole, only your partner could put you in a state company and pay you more than the President. Understand that.

Mr. Hinds: Shameful!

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I want to believe that the day will come when I could look back at my life and speak without rancour about the times I spent in the Parliament and the Cabinet with my friend, the Minister of Finance. We served in the Cabinet together and while we were not very close friends, we got along very well; we had good times; we had difficult times and I am sure that at the end of the day, as of now I am leaning toward thinking that it was good to have known him. But, Mr. Speaker, if he continues along the line of facilitating the blatant and naked misconduct on behalf of people whom he puts in office, facilitating the massive corruption that this Government is now becoming legendary over, flying in the face of reason and treating the population with contempt with respect to the moneys of which he is supposed to be in charge, refusing to answer simple and reasonable questions about public expenditure, all I can say to him, Mr. Speaker, when I reflect on my knowledge of him, when I become an old man probably grey like my friend from Couva North—because my hair might grow back—I do not want it to be said that I had a colleague who served in the Cabinet with me, who was Minister of Finance with another government and who went to jail. I do not

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want to have to say that, Mr. Speaker. So I call on the Minister of Finance to report properly to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

There are those who believe that his short and skimpy budget presentation is something to be hailed. I am saying that is an excuse for having nothing to say, because as my friend from Diego Martin East has pointed out, it may very well be that he spends too much time in my constituency. I am sure he has not had a vote down there, yet. That brevity that is now becoming his hallmark may very well be the large curtain behind which a lot of public misconduct is taking place. *[Desk thumping]*

The winding up of his presentation in the recent past is nothing short of a dereliction of duty. His presentation here today is also an embarrassment and I hope that when he gets up here this evening, he will spend more time, not talking about his personal affairs and his affection for whom, but focussing on the finances of this country and telling us, in a way to give confidence, and without deceit which could lead us to believe that all was well and as soon as the budget has been passed, the reserves in the bank are raised and interest rates have gone up. *[Desk thumping]* You are fooling no one.

This Government came into office and like a bicycle on a slope, would run downhill very easily if it stays in the saddle; when it gets down on the flat ground it will run out of momentum. Sooner rather than later, if this Government does not get its act together, it will be called upon as it is now, to pedal the bicycle, and you know what happens when you try to pedal a bicycle on a cross bar and your foot comes off the pedals. That is what is going to happen to this Government—testicular discomfort. *[Laughter] [Interruption]*

The Prime Minister has just driven me to ask—he is asking me what is he expected to do about the situation at the National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited. I want to say to him today, what I expect him to do is to answer the questions asked by the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union: Who is Ken Soodoo and what is he doing at the National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited? Two very simple questions and I will add, through you, Mr. Speaker, by way of a document I will pass to the Clerk. *[Document passed to Assistant Clerk of the House]* I will ask whether, in fact, he has taken any steps to find out who was the Minister and the member of a board of a state enterprise who asked a foreign firm for a bribe and what has he done about it. That is what I will ask him. I am hoping that the Parliament will proceed in the way we expect to proceed, whereby, by way of questions in Parliament, he will answer when the time comes, rather than shout across the floor.

Mr. Speaker, this country right now is enjoying the benefits of the hard work and the dedication of previous administrations. We now have an economy which is doing reasonably well, but this Government's lackadaisical, "vaps" arrangement has the potential to derail all the good things which exist in Trinidad and Tobago today. With a Minister of Finance who is not prepared to do his duty in the way he should, by way of reporting properly and timely and in a way that the people can see what is happening with their money, as well as not facilitating his friends into dipping their hands into the Treasury, I say that this Government is seeking to change the code of conduct in this country and to deny us access to an improved quality of life.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I simply support my friend from Diego Martin Central who has pointed out that with all the hoo-ha about revenue-raising measures, this Government simply does not know what it is doing and, in fact, the only thing it seems to know what it is doing is facilitating massive corruption in various aspects of state enterprises in Trinidad and Tobago and that is not good enough. This Government which talks so much about creating opportunity, it seems as though its idea of national unity is to unite all the ne'er-do-wells under one umbrella.

All ne'er-do-wells, come unto me; all you who are burdened and heavy laden, come unto me. If your intention is to get your hands on the Treasury, even if it means selling the seat the people gave to you in Point Fortin, or Arima, even if it means that, whatever it means, this Government seems to have no limit beneath which it will not sink in furtherance of its beliefs that it is unassailable. [*Desk thumping*]

But I end on the note, Mr. Speaker, to the Panday Administration, and all those who accuse me of taking the wrongdoing in this country, that "time longer than twine". [*Desk thumping*]

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

3:50 p.m.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Trevor Sudama): Mr. Speaker, these are amazing times. We are supposed to be debating the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 1997. I sat here and listened to all sorts of accusations, innuendoes and aspersions on people's character.

Dr. Rowley: Just in case you are talking about my reference to the individual at National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited who came from First Citizens Bank, would you tell this House whether that person was fired from First Citizens

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Bank for misconduct and whether he is at National Petroleum in some nebulous position, earning \$26,000? Is that innuendo or a fact?

Hon. T. Sudama: I am coming to that.

Dr. Rowley: Come now.

Hon. T. Sudama: You want to jump the gun.

Hon. Member: You have no gun.

Hon. T. Sudama: I want to deal with you in some sequence because I am also coming to talk about National Fisheries and National Quarries. Mr. Speaker, seldom in this House have I witnessed the depths plumbed by the Members on the other side—talk about corruption without any evidence of corruption.

Mr. Manning: What did Deyalsingh say?

Hon. T. Sudama: Did Deyalsingh's order not go to court?

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Hon. T. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, so much *mauvais langue* started in the budget debate by none other than the pseudo leader, the Member for San Fernando East. I have a copy of the Member's contribution and I will deal with it simply because the same theme has been followed by the Members for Diego Martin Central and Diego Martin West.

It is indeed a sad day when one has nothing to say, when this Government, as the Member rightly said, is unassailable, you come here with attacks on character, reckless and unfounded accusations of corruption, lack of morality and integrity coming from the other side and, of course, fraudulence and misdemeanour. The performance on the other side is pathetic. I had no intention to speak on this particular Motion but they have reduced this House to the *mauvais langue* language of the marketplace that one associates on the streets. They talked about Dole Chadee and he was asked a question. The Member was the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources responsible for state lands. Why did he permit Dole Chadee to occupy state lands for such a long period when he was not entitled to occupy such lands? I will tell the Member why. Because Dole Chadee was a drinking partner of his political leader at Pino's in Marabella, which I know.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, this is being taken too far. I just want to make it clear for the record of this honourable House that I do not know who Mr. Dole Chadee is. I know him as a name and it is not correct to say that he is any drinking

partner of the Member for San Fernando East. But I will talk; it is all right, you press on.

Hon. T. Sudama: A man who was a frequent visitor, a house guest, of the Member for San Fernando East. He is now coming to talk about Dole Chadee. The Member said:

“...when this Prime Minister took office, I emphasized to his Government the gravity of the drug menace...”

An associate of Dole Chadee, speaking to this Prime Minister about drug menace in this country. Here we have the Member for San Fernando East speaking about menace and moral authority. And the attacks have come.

The Member for Diego Martin West said a Government that fosters and fertilizes corruption in this country. What is fostering and fertilizing corruption? Tell us what it is.

Dr. Rowley: I told you.

Hon. T. Sudama: The Prime Minister instituted a public enquiry into procedures at the airport which, when held, was a matter of court proceedings. What did the court say?

Dr. Rowley: I am very grateful for the courtesy of the Minister in giving way and to ask him, specifically as Minister of Planning and Development, to tell this House and the country what we spent \$100,000 on.

Hon. T. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, the Member had his time to talk but he is continuously getting up. File questions, go to the police, as we have been advised time and time again under the previous regime. If you have evidence that Soodhoo committed fraud at First Citizens Bank, do not come here under the cover of Parliament. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries spent a lot of time in the Senate talking about the Soodhoo affair and what is happening at National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited. I suggest you read what he had to say. What Soodhoo is doing at National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited and whether he was involved in any irregularity or fraud, take it to the police. The Member is coming here to talk about fraud in National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited today when we still want to find out how National Fisheries was sold, the circumstances under which this was done and whether it was sold to the highest bidder. Tell us also what transpired at National Quarries.

Mr. Speaker, this very, very efficient and corrupt-free Member for Diego Martin West. National Quarries was operating in the days of the boom and it made a small profit in only one year of the whole period in which it was operating. Then subventions were taken from the Government and put into an account in a certain insurance company—this Member for Diego Martin West—so as not to spend these subventions for the operation of National Quarries. This is the operation of National Quarries and this Member has the gall to come here to talk about—

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order under Standing Order 36(5).

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, 36(5) of the Standing Orders, on the contents of speeches, states that:

“No Member shall impute improper motive to any other Member of either Chamber.”

One is now talking about a particular state enterprise in which it is being said that moneys were being put into an account of some insurance company while the Member for Diego Martin West was in charge. I would simply say, hon. Members, that is sailing very close to a contravention of the Standing Orders. One is not saying in so many words that the Member for Diego Martin West did that but all I am saying is that it is very, very close to a contravention. If hon. Members feel that this is the way we should proceed, or that we should continue sailing close to the wind in the new year, we could consider that. I rule in this case that what has been said does not, in fact, contravene that Standing Order, but I ask the hon. Member to be circumspect in his approaches.

Hon. T. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, I am not making any implication, I am merely making a statement of fact.

Mr. Speaker: I have dealt with the issue which was raised. I have ruled for whatever it is worth, that it is possible to get extremely close to contravening the Standing Orders. I think that is where you are and I have simply asked you to be guided. If we want to argue, we could but I have simply asked you to be guided by that.

Hon. T. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, I must have been in a different House when the charges were being made by the other side, of corruption and a veil under which all sorts of activities were taking place. I am amazed that no action was taken to deal with those unfounded and reckless charges which have been made in this House under the cover of parliamentary privilege. One person's name has been brought into this House, and he has no opportunity to defend himself, here.

Mr. Speaker: Obviously, Members of the House, things are getting out of order and I would simply say to the hon. Member who is questioning that, that the rules do not yet deal with allegations and implications against persons who are not Members of this House. There are some Houses that do that but I was just dealing with implications against someone in this House.

Hon. T. Sudama: We heard talk about criminal activities and its escalation. I just want to ask the other side, when did this start? Did this start on November 5, 1995?

4.05 p.m.

When was the germ for criminal activity in this country laid? Under this regime? It is those people on the other side, who by their behaviour and corruption in Government exceeded—the O'Hollorans and the Prevatts were not under this Government. And as one comes down the line, those who were identified with corruption were not under this regime. Of course, my good friend from San Fernando East was a long-standing Member of the other side who was party to all this, and, today, he talks about criminal activity and about poverty.

Mr. Manning: Long-standing could be applicable to me, but not to you.

Hon. T. Sudama: *[Interruption]* Where is the evidence? Tell us. The Winsure report went to a committee of which the Member was chairman. What did the committee say?

Mr. Valley: Did you read it?

Hon. T. Sudama: There is no evidence of irregularity or impropriety.

Mr. Valley: It said that!

Hon. T. Sudama: But you come here under parliamentary cover. Why do you not go outside and say the Minister of Finance is involved in some sort of irregularity?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I think this has gone too far. I will deal firmly now with Members who insist on shouting across the House while another Member is speaking. One can make a comment or so, which is common but, quite honestly, what is happening is quite unnecessary.

Hon. T. Sudama: Figures about poverty were quoted. Do you know the figure was quoted that 35 per cent of the households in this country are under the poverty level? What they did not tell this House was that those were the figures of a survey done in 1992.

Mr. Valley: Would the Member give way?

Hon. T. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to give way. The poverty level in Trinidad and Tobago, since this Government has taken office, has been reducing. Unemployment has been reducing since this Government took up office. I will give the figures in a little while, and yet, they said about 35 per cent poverty level when the survey was done in 1992, under whose watch? The Member for San Fernando East. The Member came and talked about poverty, criminal activities and what is going on. They talked about Caroni (1975) Limited. Let us deal with Caroni (1975) Limited.

The problems with Caroni(1975) Limited did not start overnight. What should have been done to restructure Caroni (1975) Limited should have been done a long time ago under the regime of the PNM. This Government has only been in office for two years but the corruption, the mismanagement in Caroni, of which the Member speaks is a direct result of those things initiated under the PNM regime and, indeed, continued under the Member's administration as the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources.

Mr. Speaker, they did not tell this country when the administration at that time went into heavy involvement in the state enterprises that their cronies were selected and put in all these state enterprises to manage matters of which they had no knowledge, and also to engage in corrupt activities. So that today, how many of the state enterprises in which they had put their friends and cronies to run, including Caroni (1975) Limited, could have been viable and financially self-sufficient? Caroni (1975) Limited was never in crisis before. Suddenly, in 1997 and 1998 Caroni (1975) Limited became a matter of crises. "What Caroni (1975) Limited should be doing is allowing farmers to engage in the cultivation of canes." When the Member was the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources what did he do to facilitate farmers in engaging in cane cultivation? "And, that they should only engage in producing 140,000 tonnes sugar; and that there should be the human resources to match that and, therefore, you should have done something about it." What did the Member do in his four years as the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources? He also spoke about the non-sugar lands.

It is amazing to me that people who had an opportunity in government for 34 long years to restructure the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, and to make the state enterprises viable—they had an opportunity to put this country on the sustainable growth path, and they had the resources to do it. Between 1973 and 1983 anything like \$60 billion of oil revenue passed through this country, which

they frittered away, which they mismanaged, where, on the other side, there is much corruption, where a lot of money left this country by millions and billions to land up in safe accounts in Toronto, London, Panama and elsewhere facilitated by the PNM who were in charge, and by their cronies. Today, we hear talk of what this Government is doing to restructure the economy and to put it on a growth path.

By their administration over the years if it is anybody who has no moral authority, it is Members on that side, particularly, the Member for San Fernando East. The Member comes to talk about integrity. When you are in charge and you lose an election you should resign. That is the democratic parliamentary position. One should resign when one loses an election and is thrown out of office; one should hand in one's resignation. If we feel that is the practice in other countries—the hon. Mr. George Chambers—and may God Bless his soul—lost the election, the following morning he submitted a resignation as the leader of the political party which he led to defeat.

When the former Member for Tobago East lost the elections in 1991, the following day, he submitted a resignation. The Member for San Fernando East lost an election and he would not for life, do the decent thing and submit his resignation.

4.15 p.m.

Anybody who looks at the Star Trek series would see a specie from outer space called the cling on. I believe that the Member for San Fernando East has some association with that alien specie called the cling on. He would not give up. Anybody who looks at cowboy films would know that when there is a criminal, a photograph would be put up with the word "WANTED" above. When a photograph of the Member for San Fernando East was put, the word was "UNWANTED". They do not want him there. They are even paying to get rid of him, but he would not go. He is holding on like a political leech on the body of the PNM. The majority of the party does not want him, but he hangs in there. "Patrick Manning, Unwanted".

He talks about integrity. Does he know the meaning of the word integrity? He is also referred to as a political eunuch, a person whose virility has been removed by the Member for Diego Martin West and others. He still thinks that he is politically virile. This man and his colleagues accuse this side of lack of propriety, integrity, and engaging and condoning corruption in Trinidad and Tobago.

With regard to the Guyana debt, the first thing they should tell us is when it was incurred. Let us go into some history. What was the status of the economy as

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money was being pumped into Guyana? What was the purpose? It was not for the benefit of the Guyanese. It was to prop up their friends in Guyana in a corrupt regime who used to rig elections, left, right and centre. This Government did not lend Guyana any money. This Government came and met a loan which was given to the Government of Guyana by the PNM. For what purpose? They knew there were squandermania, corruption and all sorts of irregularities in Guyana. They did not say a word but kept pumping money to keep that regime in Guyana afloat. You talk about irresponsibility! They should take a jail for irresponsibility. The other thing they do not say is that by far, the bulk of what is considered the debt is interest charges. The writing off of interest charges is common in the commercial and public sectors.

My colleagues remind me of debt forgiveness. The Member for San Fernando East now wants debt forgiveness.

Mr. Assam Death or debt?

Hon. T. Sudama: He is already dead. He cannot be asking for forgiveness from death.

He wrote a long letter about debt forgiveness. He has certain obligations. The bush lawyer that he thinks he is, he took a matter to court ill-advisedly. Now, he has to pay, and he said that he has no money. How much did he contribute to the democracy fund? He contributed the grand sum of \$15 to the democracy fund to save the life of a dead man from San Fernando East. He does not want debt forgiveness for Guyana, but he wants it for himself and his friend, the former Minister of Planning and Development.

In the case of Guyana, they could plead inability to pay. How does one collect a debt from a country that is so heavily indebted, that is the subject of debt relief by the IMF and the World Bank? Guyana is one of the most heavily indebted countries in the world. He wants to collect money from a country which cannot pay. *[Interruption]* If they have assets he should seize them. When he was in power, why did he not seize their assets? How much money did they get Guyana to repay during the four years of their regime? Not a red penny, were they able to collect. The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism informs me that all their commitments on that agreement have been paid up to date. They are like recurring decimals. Whenever the Member for Diego Martin West speaks, it is either about Guyana or Caroni (1975) Limited. They have nothing to say. Does he have any ideas about how this economy should be restructured and in which direction we should go? What are the constraints and development in the country?

I have the contribution of the Member for San Fernando East. Bankrupt as usual! There is not an iota of idea in this contribution in which he spoke for one and a half hours, rambling about integrity, corruption and the gravity of the drug menace. He sold his car to questionable characters involved in the drug business from Cocoyea, and here he talks about the drug menace. He only knew the names, whether it was Dole Chadee or somebody else from the newspapers. He had no association with these people. They were alien to the Member for San Fernando East, but all the information is otherwise. He said that such a process should be implemented by people of integrity, ethics and morality; if there are any such people on the other side, it is difficult to tell.

4.25 p.m.

Over the last two years this Government has done exceptionally well. As a new regime coming into office with a very thin majority, we have held together as a cohesive unit and we have improved our majority, and the economy has also improved. Some of the sectors in which we have recorded significant improvement are the agricultural sector which has grown in 1996 and 1997 and we have had increased production in the poultry, pork, food crops, fishing and other subsectors. Under the PNM regime, the agricultural sector was under a state of decline. *[Interruption]* What is the financial viability of those orange fields right now? The oranges are bearing but in Dole Chadee's estate which he occupied courtesy the Member for San Fernando East.

Manufacturing, and exports, particularly to Caricom markets, have been increasing by leaps and bounds. This is what this Government has been doing.

Mr. Valley: What has he said about manufacturing?

Hon. T. Sudama: You said that this economy was not performing, that there was no growth and I am merely responding to you. The export manufacturing sector in 1997 registered a strong growth of 6.6 per cent and strong performances in the production and export of the various subsectors: food, beverages; tobacco; dairy products; wood and wood products; chemicals and non-chemical minerals; and miscellaneous manufactures. It is under this regime that the manufacturing sector, particularly the non-oil export manufacturing sector, has been given its edge and we have had this tremendous increase.

In the services sector, which is a very significant portion of the economy—in fact, today services comprise anything like 61 per cent of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. Of course, that is inclusive of Government and other services. This

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sector has expanded by an average of 4 per cent over the past two years and the most notable expansion has been in the tourism sector. I want to give some figures of what has been happening in the tourism sector.

In 1996, there were tourists stay over arrivals of 263,000; in 1997, it shot up to 319,000 and, indeed, our projection for 1998 is that tourists stay over arrivals would be of the order of 339,000 under this regime. Under the Panday Administration we are making Trinidad and Tobago more tourist-friendly. The figures are here.

Apart from tourism, we have recorded expansion in the distribution and restaurant subsectors of the services subsector and we have also increased our activities in set diverse areas as transport; storage and communications; the port services; and the telecommunications industry. We have had Internet, servers, computer software and hardware distributors, and repair service dealers in this area which have all rapidly expanded. In 1998, the telecommunications and information technology services industry will become a larger portion of services in Trinidad and Tobago.

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

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.07 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Hon. T. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, when we took the adjournment for tea, I was attempting to answer the charge by the Members for Diego Martin West and Diego Martin Central, that this Government had taken no new initiatives, that the economy was on a down-hill trend and that we had taken no new measures in order to promote new growth and development of the economy. I was trying to point out to this House that, in fact, in significant areas of the economy: agriculture, manufacturing and the services sector, we had achieved growth. In fact, in the services sector we had expanded and diversified the number of services in which the people of Trinidad and Tobago were now engaging and we were intensifying that approach.

They also spoke about unemployment. Mr. Speaker, under this regime, we have, at the end of 1997, reduced unemployment to 14.9 per cent; the medial rate was 14.5 per cent. The third quarter showed a slight increase but we are there, and that is an indicator that we have in the economy a kind of growth that is job-creating. These improvements have taken place despite increasing participation rates. There are more and more women coming into the labour force and, of

course, the labour force is increasing by about 1.8 per cent per annum. Therefore, despite these factors, we have a declining unemployment rate.

We have estimated for the two years, 1996 and 1997, that 22,900 jobs have been created and that, of course, is significant. I would hasten to add that while the employment growth has been led by the construction and financial services sector, other areas of the economy have experienced growth in employment. Mr. Speaker, they said that we have taken no new initiatives. We recognize that skills development is an area on which we have to concentrate, given the demands in the petroleum energy sector and, indeed, throughout the rest of the economy. I want to inform this House that we embarked on an intensive short-term programme to produce skilled graduates. In 1996, of the programme undertaken by the Metal Industries Company, which is also responsible for the National Skills Development Programme, we were able from the short-term programme to produce 602 graduates. In 1997, we produced 11,000 graduates as a result of this thrust in skills development. We are proceeding with the Youth Training Employment Partnership Programme and other programmes under various ministries, whether it is the Civilian Conservation Corps, whether it is a programme in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs or under the Unemployment Relief Programme. We are targeting that area of skills development at all levels. I am not saying this is all that is needed to be done, we have to do much more, but I want to counter the argument that we have not taken any additional initiatives to deal with that problem.

Mr. Speaker, much has been said about savings and investments, particularly, today and previously by the Member for Diego Martin Central. I want to inform Members of this House that foreign direct investment in 1995, averaged US \$295 million. However, over the 18-month period January, 1996 to June, 1997—of course, this is under-estimated—foreign direct investment inflows came up to US \$912 million.

We have also noticed that while there have been important investment gains as a result of what has been taking place in the energy sector, the level of domestic investment has increased substantially. I may even state that the policy of the Government is that, not only should we increase the overall level of domestic investment but we have to increase the efficiency of that investment, and we have to increase the level of the non-energy tradable investments, which is critical if we are going to diversify and sustain the export efforts and so forth.

5.15 p.m.

In 1997, we had a 17.5 per cent savings rate, and that is projected to reach 19 per cent in 1998. Those are very encouraging signs, and the Minister of Finance, in his budget presentation, gave an indication of the number of things we need to do in order to increase the pool of domestic savings, whether it is via pension reform; whether we have to put additional financial instruments on to the market to induce people to save more; whether we will deal with the question of consumption patterns and inducement to consume less and save more; whether we will do it by providing avenues for investment whether in the small business area or for risk purposes. This is the policy of the Government. We recognize where we need to put the emphasis and, indeed, we are putting policies in place to do just that.

I may merely add, Mr. Speaker, that savings by the Government in 1995 stood at \$50 million, but by 1996, we had increased it to \$744 million. So, not only are we encouraging private sector savings, but the Government is doing its bit in order to increase the overall rate of savings. All these initiatives are being taken, and it is our view that in time, these policy prescriptions will mature, and we will be seeing better times.

I have indicated elsewhere that we have done very well in 1996 and 1997. We have managed the economy well; we have created the enabling environment for investment; we have maintained and improved the macro-economic fundamentals. All of these things have been done, but we cannot rest on our laurels, we have to do better. That is what this Government's approach is: that instead of just going along with a 3.5 or 3.7 per cent rate of growth, we are going to increase that level over the years as we look into the medium term. We are engaging in capital market development in the expansion of the financial sector, encouraging new people to come into the investment stream and, of course, we are doing our bit on the Public Sector Investment Programme. That is a significant programme.

Since the Member for San Fernando East is so eager to hear me speak on the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), let me say a few things. Let me make a few comparisons. I have before me the *Public Sector Investment Programme—1993*, which ought to have included a report on the 1992 performance. I have looked through this, and I cannot find a paragraph on the 1992 performance of the Public Sector Investment Programme. There is not a single paragraph. This is their potent government in action.

Let me go to the 1994 *Public Sector Investment Programme* and quote from page 2. This is a report on the 1993 performance. It says:

“Significantly, a recent review of the outturn in respect of the segment of the PSIP carried out by government ministries, agencies and statutory bodies has pointed to deficiencies in the implementation machinery as being a more important determinant of the low rate of investment than financial constraints in 1993.”

That lower rate of investment was the princely figure of 54 per cent. That is what they were able to achieve in that year.

“This is underscored by the fact that the drawdown of resources available from multilateral institutions for project financing has been particularly sluggish.”

Then they go on to quote the more important contributory factors:

- “(a) difficulties in fulfilling conditions precedent to first disbursement of loans and grants from multilateral sources;
- (b) slow procurement of goods and services;
- (c) delays in securing approvals or inputs from regulatory agencies; and
- (d) projects caught up in litigation.”

But, they come here with the “brass face” to accuse this Government of mismanagement when our implementation rate has been far superior to anything they were able to achieve in the four years they were in office.

It is all here. Their mismanagement and inefficiency are all on record in the *Public Sector Investment Programme—1994*.

Secondly, the oil recovery project. They projected to spend \$18 million; at the end of 1993, they only spent \$15 million. This is the potent performance of the Member for San Fernando East. Water and sewerage, they could not even spend \$20.6 million in a whole year.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. T. Sudama: As usual, the Member for San Fernando East has something to fear.

Mr. Manning: You are the most impotent one!

Hon. T. Sudama: You are an eunuch!

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I appeal to you one more time to be serious and to cut to a minimum the skylarking in the House. Please! It is most unbecoming for one person to be shouting to another on the other side of the House that he is an eunuch. It just is not done. Let us resolve that, at least, for the beginning of the session in the new year we will try to keep the standard up.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, could you just ask the Member to be relevant? Could he speak on the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order?

Mr. Speaker: Again, the Member for Diego Martin Central would know that if he thinks the Member is being irrelevant, that is not the way it is done. Under the Standing Orders, which he knows extremely well, there is a way in which he could raise it and I will deal with it.

Mr. Valley: I will do that, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. T. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, I was just making the point that we have been accused of not being able to perform, and I was just refuting that argument being thrown from the other side, and pointing out their own performance over the period 1992—1995: gross impotency, mismanagement and inefficiency! Housing and Settlements, they budgeted \$85 million to spend throughout the year 1993 and could only have spent \$46 million.

I could give you other examples of the incapacity of the regime under the Member for San Fernando East; their total impotence and incapacity to be able to spend money effectively. Business expansion, they allocated \$22 million in 1994 and they were able to spend only \$4 million.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, in accordance with Standing Order 36(1), the Member is completely irrelevant.

Mr. Speaker: I rule against you. Will the Member continue, please.

Hon. T. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, I was just answering the charge that we have not delivered and that we are taking this country downhill and our Public Sector Investment Programme has not been performing.

The Member for Diego Martin East is not here—the then pungently potent Minister of Works and Transport. In 1994, there was an allocation of \$50 million for roads and bridges, and out of an allocation of \$50 million, he could only have spent \$18.5 million in 1994. Maybe he was chased too much by blue flies and could not concentrate on his job of providing roads and bridges in this country. Under the Minister of Health, the current Chairman of the party, an allocation of

\$86.9 million was provided for the health sector in 1994, and it was projected that only \$36 million would have been expended by the year's end. This is a very vibrant administration under the Member for San Fernando East.

As we go on, there are all sorts of illustrations to prove that even on a smaller Public Sector Investment Programme they could not even perform. They could not achieve minimally reasonable targets under a smaller programme. We have expanded the programme in 1996 and 1997. Mr. Speaker, I just want to quote from the 1997 PSIP, part I on page 1:

“Based on the performance of the PSIP as at October 1996 total expenditure for fiscal year 1996 is expected to be \$946 million, or 82 per cent of the planned PSIP. The estimated outturn for central Government expenditure...”

As one knows, the PSIP is state enterprise expenditure, capital expenditure and central government capital expenditure.

“...as shown in Table 1 below, the estimated outturn for Central Government expenditure is \$689.8 million, or approximately 91 per cent of planned expenditure for 1996.”

I hope that I have dealt with this foolish, nonsensical argument devoid of any foundation that this Government has not performed under the infrastructure of Public Sector Investment Programme either in 1996 or 1997.

Mr. Speaker, he wanted to hear about that, and that is why I thought I would speak about it today. I have already indicated the thrust that we are making in the export sector, and that non-oil exports have been expanding and, in fact, the contribution of non-petroleum categories amounted to some 25 per cent of total exports during the period January to August 1997. That is a trend. What we have forecast is that the percentage will be increasing over time, which will be an indication of the diversified nature of our exports and, indeed, of our economy. This is what this Government has been doing.

5.30 p.m.

Despite all their talk about corruption and irregularity, they spent a lot of time talking about people who are stealing money, we were told about people who are permitted to engage in all sorts of fraud; these are the wild, reckless and unsubstantiated charges coming from the other side simply because they have nothing to say. The country is enormously satisfied with the performance of this UNC/NAR administration—as the Minister of Finance says, this Panday Administration which is as effective as it is transparent.

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They wanted a commission of enquiry, we gave them a commission of enquiry; they wanted a matter brought before the Public Accounts Committee, we brought it before the committee. But despite all this, come these aspersions and innuendoes about the character of people on this side and their associates without any shred of evidence. If they have the evidence, take it to the public, take it to the police. Do not come here under the cloak of Parliament to create and engage in mischief at the start of the year, 1998. When we thought we would set a new tone and pattern in this Parliament, we see the level of the contributions coming from that side. Of course, at the end of last year the contribution coming from the Member for San Fernando East sunk to the depths. Nothing to say!

Mr. Speaker, we know where we are going despite what they are saying. In the agricultural sector we are going to continue to implement our agricultural sector reform programme; we are going to deal with infrastructure of drainage and irrigation; we are going to improve the agricultural support services and marketing efforts, especially in penetrating external markets and in maintaining a foothold in niche markets. Of course, we are going to deal with the whole question of efficiency in that significant factor of production called land; increasing the factor efficiency there and opening up the land markets so that the market would have a more effective role in deciding what lands are utilized for agricultural purposes and what lands would go for other purposes.

In the manufacturing sector we have promised to bring the Investment Promotion Act to this House very early in this year and we are going to look at how we will reduce the number and burden of taxes on the non-oil business sector to put it in a more competitive mode. I have spoken about improving the skill level of the workforce and of accessing relevant technology in order to assist in the manufacturing sector. We are extremely mindful of the fact that there ought to be greater flexibility in the market and we are making provisions and taking initiatives to increase that flexibility.

Of course, my friend from Nariva has been fostering harmonious industrial relations in the country, where we have not had any significant industrial disputes over the last two years. All these go together to create a climate for putting our manufacturing sector in a more expansive, efficient and competitive mode. As I pointed out earlier, tourism is taking off and we are doing our very best for small businesses and providing the information, technology and credit to facilitate the improvement in small business activity.

Mr. Speaker, when one looks at what we have been doing, whether in the area of investment and savings, the fiscal area, the stabilization of the monetary situation in Trinidad and Tobago, to increase factor productivity and in the social area, no other Government has come to this House with the kind of initiatives that we have taken in the social area.

This year, our health sector reform programme will be speeding ahead. If I were to detail what we are doing in the education sector, from the pre-school right up to tertiary level in this country, this would take up a whole 45 minutes.

So that, we know what we are doing to improve the human capita in this country. This Government knows where it wants to go and how to get there. This Government of the UNC/NAR/Independents knows it is a Government of national unity, it incorporates everybody. One by one we will be taking people over from the other side to incorporate them in the Government of national unity. I understand the Member for Tunapuna who was so badly dealt with in the budget debate, who was so distressed in the budget debate—I understand his feelings of disappointment in the budget debate, the only time that he is permitted to speak. They suppressed the speech. Free speech! And they are talking about a democracy fund. The democracy fund starts with the Member for Tunapuna, let him speak in this House and let him do so freely.

Mr. Speaker, our initiatives in the educational and health spheres and in community service organizations in trying to deal with the alleviation of poverty, we encapsulate that merely in two words: empowerment and infrastructure. Empower people and provide infrastructure for them, that is the only way to deal with poverty on a lasting basis. This is not a Government of hand-outs. When we help people, we help them to try to improve themselves. This is a different philosophy, not this derelict PNM philosophy of the last 35 years with people void of any vision for a society that is going to improve and stand on its own. A confident, independent, creative society, this is what we are aiming for, this is the vision we have for Trinidad and Tobago and since we are here for a very long time, that vision is surely going to be realized. When we transform Trinidad and Tobago—the Member for Diego Martin West is so correct—they will not recognize the transformation that we have made in Trinidad and Tobago from the PNM mentality to a vibrant nation taking its place in the world today.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Patrick Manning (*San Fernando East*): Mr. Speaker, it was not my intention to intervene in this debate at all. But first of all, when I sat here and

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listened to the contribution of the Member for Couva South I was convinced that it was necessary to make a contribution, however small. That view was confirmed when I heard the total irrelevance and impotence of the Member for Oropouche. *[Interruption]* I use it in the widest possible sense as it relates to the Member for Oropouche.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by my congratulating the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central on a very lucid exposition in this honourable House today. Mr. Speaker, you listened to him and then you listened to hon. Members opposite, it was my colleague, the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, who made the point that the Government is corrupt and in so doing it has been demonstrated on many occasions by the Member for Diego Martin West that the Government is indeed a corrupt Government. It would have been bad enough if that is where it ended, but the Government also constitutes people who are unable to speak the truth. One of the first things I learned in this Parliament when I came here in 1971 was, when you speak—

Mr. Speaker: I want to say to the Member for San Fernando East that people's vision about corruption in life may differ, but I ask him to bear in mind the relevant Standing Orders and when one says, in the manner in which he has, that the Government is corrupt, I think it is contravening those Standing Orders. I know that one has to develop one's point, but I ask you please to be careful about the way in which you are presenting your arguments.

Mr. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, as you know I never made statements in this House without substantiating them and I intend to substantiate those statements in due course.

Just coming back to what I learned in 1971, that is, that when you speak in a debate you try to be as relevant as possible and to hold that discussion as tight as possible, lest in doing otherwise, you open up a debate which was never intended nor contemplated by the matter before this honourable House. Today, it was the turn of the hon. Member for Couva South to have made that error. Almost in a fit, almost in a frenzy he began to speak in such manner as to open up the entire debate today. If it is that they are trying to apologize to the people of Trinidad and Tobago for not contributing to the budget debate and are now seeking to do so, then so be it. We are ready, willing and able to take them on at any time.

When the hon. Member for Couva South made the point, aided and abetted by the hon. Member for Couva North, that we voted against the increases in pensions

to old age pensioners, if the word "liar" were not an unparliamentary term, I would have used it. Because they understand one thing. They understand that in the system we use here in the Parliament, we are not called upon to vote selectively on any particular measure, but we are called upon to vote on a budget as a whole. They know that. That is known by them. Some of them have been here for a long time. Therefore, it is not proper to say that we voted for this, against that and so forth, but that on a balance, it is our view on this side of the House that the budget they presented to this Parliament last month will not achieve the objectives they say the budget was designed to achieve. Nor do we believe, whether they like it or not, that what they have passed here for a budget is in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the fact of the matter.

5.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, it was one week before the budget was read in this honourable House that at the Chaguaramas Convention Centre, in addressing an annual convention of the PNM, I took the opportunity on behalf of the old age pensioners in Trinidad and Tobago, to ask the Government to implement the promise it had made to the pensioners two years earlier, which was to increase the old age pension by a certain figure. I think it should have been \$350. They have not done it in the budget. They have increased it, but not by the extent they promised. Indeed, in increasing it they would have had to pay due cognizance to the point that was made in Chaguaramas on behalf of the old age pensioners in Trinidad and Tobago.

Therefore, for them to come to Parliament this afternoon and say that we voted against an increase in pension for old age pensioners is to distort the facts and to put an imputation on the system of government that we run, which is entirely out of order and certainly not intended by those who framed it in the first place.

This is not an isolated case, it is a basic approach of that Government. They are strangers to the truth. When the Member for Couva South gets up—or is it the Member for Oropouche—the totally impotent Member for Oropouche—

Mr. Panday: I think you will know. *[Laughter]* How would you know?

Mr. P. Manning: So I am told, Mr. Speaker. Come outside and I will tell you by whom.

Mr. Speaker, when the Member for Oropouche talks about the Member for San Fernando East being a drinking partner of Dole Chadee, a convicted drug overlord of Trinidad and Tobago, he just says that because he has the power to

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speak and he could get up in the House and say it and nothing would happen as a result. Because everything stays in this Parliament—say it outside. *[Interruption]* That one escaped me through you, Mr. Speaker. Say it again. The Member for Oropouche, who should know better, got up in this House to make the point that the Member for San Fernando East is a drinking partner of a former drug overlord.

At one time in this country's history, I was the chairman of the National Security Council. I still believe that I am duty bound to keep certain things secret, therefore, I cannot say all that I know especially on matters of national security. One has to be responsible. I would say this, the National Security Council concerned as it was about the drug situation in Trinidad and Tobago, took a decision to target certain drug overlords in the country, one by one—that was the reality—and the first one we targeted was the one we thought was the biggest. It was Dole Chadee. *[Interruption]* I know him as a name.

Hon. Member: You know it?

Mr. Bereaux: The Attorney General knows him better. He used to defend him. He has money for him.

Mr. P. Manning: In due course when the facts could be told, it would be seen quite clearly that had it not been for the activities of the National Security Council under the chairmanship of the then Prime Minister, Dole Chadee may not have been behind bars today.

I will go further to say that in the context of that *Pratt and Morgan* judgment of the Privy Council, we on this side are watching anxiously to see whether you are going to allow Dole Chadee to escape the hangman's noose.

Mr. Maharaj: We do not decide cases.

Mr. P. Manning: Why is the hon. Attorney General getting so jumpy? Let me answer the Member for Oropouche. The drinking partner of Dole Chadee was not the Member for San Fernando East but the Member for Couva South. *[Desk thumping]* That is the man!

Mr. Maharaj: May I put it on the record, I never met Mr. Dole Chadee and I never drank with him. I never sold any motor cars to him.

Mr. P. Manning: Fair enough. I am alerting the national community, we are just waiting to see whether Dole Chadee would be allowed to escape the hangman's noose under the watch of this Government and the Attorney General.

Hon. Member: I would tell the Chief Justice.

Mr. Bereaux: The man wrote a long letter to you asking that you do not sell the house.

Mr. P. Manning: They profess they are doing this and that, if today the Government of Trinidad and Tobago could move on Dole Chadee's estate, it is because of what the Government of yesterday did. There is no question about that. *[Interruption]* Let them pretend that it is otherwise. You are quite free to do that. Let them say what they wish. They believe that when they get up and say something that makes it right. That is how they operate; right and wrong are merely what you could get away with. They do not have a proper concept of right and wrong. Therefore, I am not surprised at all by what emanates from some of them on the other side. No credibility whatsoever!

The hon. Minister of Planning and Development got up and talked foolishness about them maintaining growth in the economy. In 1994 there was 3.6 per cent economic growth; 1995, 3.8 per cent, up comes the Minister of Finance in the budget to say that they have done so well, they have done in 1996 and 1997, 6.7 per cent!

Mr. Maharaj: Why did you not put Dole Chadee out?

Mr. P. Manning: Do you know why he put it that way? He put it that way to cover the fact that when it was 3.8 per cent in 1995, it went to 3.5 per cent in 1996 and 3.2 in 1997. *[Desk thumping]*. In other words, we left it going in that direction and they put it in that direction.

Mr. Maharaj: Why did you not put Dole Chadee out from the land?

Mr. P. Manning: When you have a chance to speak you must speak. We will take you on anytime, anywhere.

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Mr. Maharaj: You gave him a duty free car.

Mr. P. Manning: I could not believe my ears this afternoon when I sat here and listened to the hon. Member for Oropouche and Minister of Planning and Development virtually acknowledging that there is further debt write-off to Guyana. When the statement was made in this Parliament in response to the budget on December 17, it was the Minister of Finance who had denied it: "It is simply not true!" That was the view of the Minister of Finance. The Member for St.

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Joseph was worse. He behaved as though there was malice in the statement emanating from the Leader of the Opposition. Then the Minister of Finance again denied it.

To come this afternoon and hear the Member for Oropouche, the Minister of Planning and Development, talk about how much money the PNM lent, who incurred the debt in the first place, it is a question of interest charges and Guyana is one of the poorest countries in the world. All that dotish talk we did not hear from the Minister of Finance. He was categorically denying it, aided and abetted by the Member for St. Joseph, the Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister of Consumer Affairs. Up we come this afternoon to hear this impotent and irrelevant Member.

Mr. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, the Member is misleading the House.

Mr. Speaker: Would you mind indicating the relevant Standing Order that you claim is being infringed?

Mr. Sudama: I think it is Standing Order 35.

Mr. Speaker: No, Standing Order 35 deals with interruptions. [*Laughter*] Please proceed.

Mr. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, and they like to boast about how long they are in this Parliament, who knows Standing Orders and who is this and that. He does not even know how to rise on a point of order. He did not have to, if he had asked me to, I would have given way.

Mr. Sudama: Nowhere in my contribution did I say that there was a further write-off of debt for Guyana. I merely spoke about the historical antecedent of that debt and how we went to the Paris Club and accepted its conditions in order to write off two thirds of what is owing. That is a matter of record and that has been there since 1996.

5.55 p.m.

Mr. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful to the Member for Oropouche for that last contribution. May I put a question to him? Has there been any further debt relief given to Guyana or not? I will give him an opportunity to answer.

Mr. Sudama: The Minister of Finance will respond to you.

Mr. P. Manning: He had a chance to respond before.

Mr. Sudama: He will respond this evening.

Mr. P. Manning: He is going to respond this evening?

Mr. Speaker, they went to the Paris Club—they thought we did not know—and they agreed, under the heavily indebted poor countries initiative, to a further debt write-down of US \$52 million to Guyana. Now they come talking foolishness about who is responsible for it. We did not ask them that. At a time when URP workers were not paid on Christmas eve day and have to be demonstrating on old year's day, all they can do—

Mr. Sudama: Where is your evidence for this?

Mr. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I have been generous so far with the hon. Member for Oropouche. He has now exhausted my patience. Do not rise again. If he rises it must be on a point of order. He is just wasting the time of the Parliament.

What is bad about it is the attitude of the Government that the debt was incurred, as they like to put it, because the PNM, as they have said, was propping up a corrupt regime in Guyana. It is that kind of loose talk in Trinidad and Tobago that is causing the Government of Guyana to take the position that it is taking in respect of the country's liabilities to Trinidad and Tobago—especially from the Minister of Finance. Indeed, I have a communication that puts it this way. My understanding is that Minister Jagdeo of Guyana considers this a God-given entitlement and does not extend the most elementary courtesies of polite upbringing to his Trinidadian colleague.

Mr. Sudama: Is that a quotation? Where are you quoting from?

Mr. P. Manning: Who is the Speaker here? You?

You understand, Mr. Speaker, when they get on that way, that is what the result is. A sum of US \$52 million; Guyana goes to the Paris Club, believes that they have an entitlement to it and the Government of Trinidad, just like sheep, go and write-off US \$52 million worth of debt and they could not care what goes on in Trinidad and Tobago. Then you know what they are going to do? They are going to split the URP all over the country, reduce the allocations to the URP in the urban parts of the country where the real problems exist, and when they end up with a social problem in Trinidad and Tobago I suppose they will then blame the PNM again.

Mr. Sudama: You are inciting people to violence.

Mr. P. Manning: Do you hear him? I am inciting.

Mr. Speaker, Caroni (1975) Limited. My colleague, the Member for Diego Martin West, made the point that if there was any government that was too benevolent in respect of Caroni (1975) Limited, it was the government of the People's National Movement. Do you know why? Because we were aware that any actions in that part of the country could be misinterpreted or could be misrepresented to the people in Central Trinidad that it had an ethnic base and bias. That is what they spent their time in Opposition doing, dividing the country on race. Now, having found themselves in Government with an expectation from their own constituents that they will redress the so-called perceived imbalances, they are now doing all kinds of things that are dividing the society and will bring us to strife.

Mr. Speaker, we wrote off \$2.4 billion in debt to Caroni (1975) Limited. We did that. We entered into an agreement in respect of Caroni (1975) Limited of which the hon. Member for Couva North was a signatory as a member of the union. They signed the agreement. In other words, we brought about consensus in the industry as to the industry's future. At a time when the government that preceded us had adopted a plan to reduce the size of the industry, we agreed to increase the size of it. Of course, when we did that we did not take into account the Minister from Princes Town who, in one fell swoop, has done more damage than the NAR could ever have done at the time that they did it.

Mr. Speaker, today I noticed that the target for the crop is 95,000 tonnes. What they did not say is that last year's target was around 120,000 tonnes and the year before that they made 127,000 tonnes. But this year it is 95,000 tonnes. Crop should have started today, January 2, but no crop has started. On what basis? The weather is good. This is the best spell of weather that we have been having in the sugar industry for a long time. What dotishness is that? They are bringing their friends from India to give them a contract in respect of the sugar factory in Ste. Madeline. No bid. Just take it. They say, "Do you want a contract? That is yours." \$20 million. How much is it? You lose your tongue? You do not know? Let us give it to them, Mr. Speaker. And then they are unable to get the factory ready, that is why the crop is delayed. They did not get any factory. Now we hear it went from the second to the fifth, then we heard it will start on the fourteenth, now it is the sixteenth. God alone knows what date it will be by the time the sixteenth comes around. That is how they run it and they want to talk foolishness about the

PNM. They do not have a clue and the longer that Government stays in power the worse it is for Trinidad and Tobago in respect of Caroni (1975) Limited. Our *bona fides* have been well-established.

They cannot talk the truth. The Minister of Planning and Development, the hon. Member of Oropouche, comes to this Parliament, just in the closing stages—we should have wound up since five o'clock—sorry, what time did he start to speak? Four o'clock? We should have wound up since five minutes to four. Minutes to six he got up and said no other government has come with such a complete plan for the development of the social sector. Mr. Speaker, I could not believe my ears. And then, you know what he alludes to as evidence of that? The Government's activities in health.

Mr. Speaker, they inherited a health programme, a comprehensive health reform plan from the PNM and they adopted it without changing one comma. They talked about the regional health authorities. For the purpose of this discussion I will exonerate the Minister of Health. They had everything to say about it. They have come in and met the very same health programme and adopted it lock, stock and barrel. They changed not one comma, not one fullstop, and they are shameless men, all of them sitting there.

Mr. Speaker, they talk about education, completely oblivious to the fact—*[Interruption]* You want to talk? Get up and talk—that we had put a team of experts in place in education. We had brought together some of the best experts we thought available in the country. They took 10 months to do a basic document and after that document was done, they used it as a basis for consultation up and down Trinidad and Tobago. Even after that was done, we held a consultation at the Chaguaramas Convention Centre chaired by the Prime Minister at the time. Arising out of that widespread process of consultation—a democratic process—what emerged was an education plan for 10 years, 1993 to the year 2002. Yet the Member for Oropouche gets up claiming that he has a comprehensive plan. Mr. Speaker, they do not have a proper concept of right and wrong. He will do that because he feels he will get away with it. As indeed he can make that statement on the social sector because he feels he can get away with it.

Listen to what the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs had to say. Trinidad *Guardian* December 31, 1997, "Soup Kitchens to be expanded". It is a perfect example of what the Government is all about:

"The UNC Government is expanding the Relief Centre (Soup Kitchens) project which was started by the previous PNM administration.

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The expansion was mentioned by Community Development Minister Daphne Phillips during her contribution to the 1998 Budget in the Senate. She said Government plans to expand the project to include training..."

Let me repeat it:

"She said Government plans to expand the project to include training so people can divorce themselves from the 'soup kitchen mentality'."

Mr. Sudama: Empowerment.

Mr. P. Manning: Okay, since you said empowerment let me read the whole article. I was going to leave the rest out because she said this as well:

"Within the \$25 million plan for single mothers, she explained, is a project for women to sharpen their skills in community-based programmes.

One aspect will involve an Empowerment Enhancement programme to allow women to hone skills they already have. This will be complemented by a Homework Centre for children of women undertaking the programmes."

Mr. Speaker, if you go back in the records, you would notice that the government of the PNM had a number of programmes in place designed to impact heavily on the social sector. Not only the Relief Centre Programme. There was also a programme called the Retired Experts Programme. Do you know what that was all about? It was a programme designed to take the expertise of retired persons and bring that into effect in impacting on the upbringing of the young people of our society. It was anticipated that at times, during the day or night, when parents are away or are unable to properly oversee their children, the state could press these retired experts in communities into service, causing the young to interface with the elderly in a symbiotic relationship that has the effect of community development. It was the reverse of the geriatric/adolescent programme. They do not understand these things. In the geriatric/adolescent programme it was the turn of the young people to do something for the elderly. They have been trained; they come to their homes to talk to them, clean their houses, provide for them and so forth. A very successful programme.

Mr. Sudama: Where was that done?

Mr. P. Manning: They feel that merely by saying where suggests that that answers the question. *[Interruption]* You go and check.

Mr. Speaker, I have a document here called the *Relief Centre Programme*. This is a report from June 1996 to May 1997 when they were in Government. They do

not understand the concept of the programme. The soup was only incidental. It was a means of identifying who are the persons in need and then you talk to those people and design programmes to take them out of their state of dependency, put them on the road to being proper citizens making a contribution, not only to the country's development, but also earning foreign exchange as they export stuff produced in a manner that they would have been taught in the relief centre. This is 1997. The Minister is telling us in the Senate and elsewhere that it is to be done.

6.10 p.m.

Listen to this:

“During the period of review the Relief Centre Programme operated three (3) Centres, with three (3) Sub-Centres located at Sea Lots, Beetham Estate and St. James.

The major centres are located at John John, George Street, and Dunlop Drive, Cocorite.

Nine (9) Community Kitchens were also in operation...

For the period in focus a minimum of three hundred and twenty five thousand, four hundred and twenty two (325,422) meals were served.”

That is the food side of it. They are serving these meals, looking to see who are the people who come to collect these meals and participate on a regular basis, identifying them, therefore, as the core group of people in need; then somebody begins to talk to them to see what their problems are, to see how they can involve them in one of several programmes run, either at the relief centre itself, or elsewhere in Trinidad and Tobago. Carefully thought out, but that means nothing to them. The Minister is talking foolishness about things changing. This is how it goes.

"Within the said period a total of five thousand, six hundred and eight (5,608) persons were exposed to Training and Development Programmes.”

But while that is happening under her ministry:

“She said Government plans to expand the project to include training so people can divorce themselves from the ‘soup kitchen mentality’.”

Mr. Speaker, if anybody has a soup kitchen mentality, it is the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women’s Affairs, regrettably.

Mr. Maharaj: What is a soup kitchen?

Mr. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, it is a report from her ministry. It says:

“There are sixty four (64) products developed for the market place.”

If you have not tasted any of the products yet, I will purchase some to make available to you, Mr. Speaker, at no cost. I would wish you to know the kind of people we have in the Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: There is a Latin expression.

Mr. P. Manning: *Timeo Danaos.*

Mr. Speaker: No. *Et dona ferentes.*

Mr. P. Manning: I am not a Greek at all, Mr. Speaker. I quote:

“There are sixty four (64) products developed for the market place.”

The report from the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women’s Affairs goes on:

“Two hundred and twelve (212) persons have been placed into jobs through the programme, for said period.”

What has that got to do with soup? The soup was only incidental. The soup was designed to attract them to the centre so we could see who they were, who were the people coming to the centre on a regular basis and, therefore, who were the persons most in need of the benevolence of the programme. It says:

"Four sales and distribution offices are soon to be opened, where only products made by clients, shall be offered for sale, as they are put on the path to full empowerment.”

Let me read it again, Mr. Speaker, for your benefit and for the benefit of other Members opposite:

"Four sales and distribution offices are soon to be opened, where only products made by clients...”

Not necessarily at the centre, because what the programme envisages is this: that after you spend a limited time in the relief centre, you are able to continue your production at home, similar to the Export Centres Programme, without the supervision that would have been the case while you were at the centre. By then you would have been expected to achieve a certain standard and, therefore, be able to go out on your own. What has that got to do with soup? The soup is only the inducement. The Minister comes now to talk “dotishness”:

“Clients of the Centres, were trained and assisted by the programme to enter the five regions of the Sector Improvement Programme. This led to a display of products at Regional Fairs, such as at Brian Lara’s Promenade, Harris Promenade, Sangre Grande, Tobago.

Approximately fifty-nine (59) courses have been conducted.”

And while those courses have taken place during the period under review, according to this report dated June 1996—May 1997, the Minister comes to Parliament and says:

“...Government plans to expand the project to include training so people can divorce themselves from the ‘soup kitchen mentality’.”

Mr. Speaker, the programme was expanded long before the Minister came into office. It was conceived in a certain way long before the Minister came into office. And all this was happening notwithstanding the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women’s Affairs.

It goes on:

“A skill Bank has been established, listing over fifteen hundred (1500 +) clients, ready for employment.”

That has nothing to do with soup. What soup? The soup is only an inducement. The soup is what is used to get people to come to the centre so that people can speak to them. When they are spoken to, then some kind of programme can be devised to ensure that they do not have to come eternally for soup at the centre.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Couva North, went to one. I do not know what deficiency they identified for him and what programme they put him in, but when he left the centre, he commented adversely on the fact that the soup did not have enough salt. That is what he said, not realizing that the people at the relief centre are aware of his heart condition, as a consequence of which, out of consideration for him, they did not put too much salt in the soup he got. He does not understand that. *[Interruption]*

Okay, Dr. Maharaj. All I would advise the hon. Member for Couva North is, not to eat by the Member for Couva South. He will do him the world of good with salt. It goes on:

“Various cultural projects have been executed by the programme, inclusive of a community festival, in the streets of Port of Spain last June 16, 1996.”

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What has that got, in God's name, to do with soup? What has the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs got to do with all that, in the light of what is said here in Parliament, in a place of privilege. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, she was not thinking very well on that day, but probably was contemplating her defence in the context of matters which are now before the courts of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Sudama: Oh, oh! That is the level. You have to understand a man's level.

Mr. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I go on:

“The twelve communities, in which preliminary work has been completed, await the availability of funds for:

(a) Infrastructural Developments...”

Mr. Panday: That is an attack on women.

Mr. P. Manning: Attack on what? No, no. Stand up and say that. Mr. Speaker, ladder or no ladder, ply wood or no ply wood, I do not engage in attacks on women, to which some of them on that side are prone.

Mr. Panday: You make up that. We have evidence of your involvement.

Mr. Maharaj: You authorized it. You spoke to the policeman and one of your colleagues used to beat the lady.

Mr. P. Manning: Could I continue, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: I believe you are on your legs.

Mr. P. Manning: Thank you very much.

“One client of the programme is in the follow-on process to provide 10,000 packets of Cassava Chips to Japan as a trial Order.”

That is what the programme is about. Do not care how it is said. It is shouted from the roof tops; they feel that by constantly saying otherwise outside, that that is the truth. They do not have a proper concept of right and wrong, Mr. Speaker. They do not know the difference between truth and falsehood. That is how they do it all the time.

This is a report from the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs. It goes on:

“Other products have been and are being sent to Barbados, St. Vincent, St. Lucia and New York.”

This is out of the ministry of the Minister who goes to the other place and talks foolishness about:

“...Government plans to expand the project to include training so people can divorce themselves from the ‘soup kitchen mentality’.”

A minister saying that in Parliament, after her ministry makes a report like this.

Then, Mr. Speaker, when we say they are strangers to the truth, you want to know why, to substantiate it. They are strangers to the truth; they are corrupt strangers to the truth.

“Soon to be launched is a labour supply company for the construction industry.”

The Minister of Planning and Development got up to talk a lot of foolishness. Has he accounted yet for the Public Sector Investment Programme of last year? He has \$100 million spent, but on what was it spent?

Mr. Sudama: You cannot hear well. Those who cannot hear, will feel.

Mr. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I repeat:

“Soon to be launched is a labour supply company for the construction industry.”

That is the soup kitchen. The Minister comes and says we are going to expand it. But, the trouble is this, the one thing I have learnt in government is that the Government takes its character and personality from its leader. It goes on to say:

“Existing is a Security Services and Maintenance Services unit of the programme.”

All that is in the programme, yet the Minister comes to the Parliament and says that next year they are going:

“...to expand the programme to include training so people can divorce themselves from the ‘soup kitchen mentality’.”

Strangers to the truth. They cannot speak the truth. It comes from the Member for Couva North. That is where it starts and when you look at them across there, they are a whole sorry lot. Look at all of them.

Mr. Maharaj: File a substantive motion.

Mr. P. Manning: This is one report.

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“Twenty-four (24) persons have obtained on-line contracts with a Garment Factory.”

Yet, the Minister comes to Parliament and says they are going to expand the programme to get away from the soup kitchen mentality. That is how they live. They live a lie and when the pack of cards comes tumbling down around them, they would not know why it hit them, because they live a lie. They are strangers to the truth.

So, Mr. Speaker, I have not finished. This thing goes on. Just let me continue on that:

“Inclusive among achievements are:-

Contemporary dance classes, Remedial Learning, Scholarships, Music Developments, Social Graces.”

All of that at the relief centres.

Mr. Valley: Sudama should do that.

Mr. Sudama: Why do you not join that class?

Mr. P. Manning: My one regret is that the Member for Oropouche does not qualify, but would do well to spend some time at the relief centres.

In the same way that we have been able to demonstrate this evening that in respect of the relief centres they are strangers to the truth about the entire programme, it could be demonstrated that that is so in Caroni (1975) Limited, in the airport project, in almost every area of governmental activity. With respect to the Guyanese debt, let me tell the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism, the next time Guyana comes to him for debt relief, may I suggest that he indicates to Guyana that he would like to get assets for it. Heavily indebted poor country.

Mr. Maharaj: You still think you are Prime Minister. Wake up; you are in Opposition.

Mr. P. Manning: One of the things that is well known, Mr. Speaker, is that however heavily indebted and poor Guyana is, it is seen as one of the countries with tremendous potential; it has resources. Therefore, one option for a country like Trinidad and Tobago which is a creditor and a significant creditor at that—I think we are the largest—is to convert some of our debt into natural assets.

Mr. Speaker, I sincerely hope that I have been able to shed some light on a few matters here this evening. Thank you.

6.25 p.m.

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister of Consumer Affairs (Hon. Mervyn Assam): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for allowing me to participate in this debate. I thought that we were supposed to be debating this afternoon the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 1997, a relatively simple document, and a document in which there is really only one area in which the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism is altering the taxation measures in the country in relation to the excise duty on tobacco and cigarettes.

I am surprised that we got here at 1.30 p.m. and it is almost 6.30 p.m. For five hours, except for a short tea break, we have been almost like Jules Verne, that book which I read when I was in elementary school, *Around the World in Eighty Days*. Members opposite took the opportunity to go around the world in a few hours.

Mr. Manning: With the agreement of the Speaker.

Hon. M. Assam: What is particularly sad about this debate is I have heard time and again, the Member for San Fernando East in his hypocritical fashion rise and excoriate Members of this honourable House indicating to them that there is a standard of debate and parliamentary conduct that behoves everyone in this honourable House, and that when he was the Prime Minister he insisted that his Members observed that standard of behaviour and he wanted to impose or, perhaps, impart the same standards to all of us. But, I was amazed, shocked, and saddened that that man heaped so much vituperation on a female minister who is absent from this honourable House. The Member took the privilege of Parliament to make all sorts of denigrating statements about a female Cabinet Minister who is not present, and I think the Member should rise; I will take my seat and allow the Member to rise and unreservedly withdraw the statement.

I see the Member is not man enough—notwithstanding his name is Manning—to do like the Member for Diego Martin West who, during his contribution to the 1998 budget debate, did indicate that at some stage in the life of his party they had made an error and that is why I said that he was a magnanimous person, and more fitting to assume the leadership of the party. A simple measure as increasing the excise duty on tobacco and cigarettes has generated over five hours of debate centering on personalities. In the first instance, the Member for San Fernando East mentioned my name in his contribution stating that I was so outraged when it was said on that side that this Government had reduced Guyana's debt.

I have just finished looking at my contribution I made from the *Hansard* and there was no part in the *Hansard* report that the Member for St. Joseph spoke about the Guyana debt. In fact, my only comment about the Guyana debt was when I was speaking to both the Members for Diego Martin Central and San Fernando East outside of this honourable Chamber, and I told them then that I had absolutely no knowledge and I am absolutely sure that this Government had not reduced the stock of debt of Guyana. I maintain my statement now as I said then, that this Government has not reduced the stock of debt owed to it by the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

Mr. Valley: If the Member could give way. That was not what I heard. What the Minister told me was that there would be no further debt relief for Guyana, he was going to fight it within the Cabinet.

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Speaker, I am quite shocked that the Member for San Fernando East could come today and say that we have reduced Guyana's debt by US \$52 million. I do not know why Members opposite come to this honourable House and mislead the Parliament and, by extension, the national community so often. I find it very sad, and for my good friend, the Member for Diego Martin Central, to say I told him what he just said, is not true. I told him precisely what I said as he was entering the Chamber, that I have no knowledge that this Government has reduced the stock of debt owed to it by the Republic of Guyana and I maintain that. As far as I am aware, up to this moment, January 2, 1998 at 6.30 p.m. this Government has not reduced the stock of debt owed to it by the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

Mr. Valley: If the Member would give way. Would the Minister inform this honourable House whether there has been any debt relief, whether it is by way of accrued interest or reduction in the stock or any other consideration. In other words, has any moneys owed by Guyana to Trinidad and Tobago, from interest or whatever, or from the repayment of principal been forgiven or is being considered?

Hon. M. Assam: I will only repeat my statement: that I reject unequivocally the statement made by the Member for San Fernando East that this Government has written off US \$52 million in debt owed by Guyana. Secondly, this Government has not reduced the stock of debt owed to this country by the Republic of Guyana. I maintain what I have said and I stand by that.

Mr. Speaker, I could well understand Members opposite taking the opportunity of this very simple Motion to introduce all kinds of vicarious and irrelevant matters. When the Member for San Fernando East began to say that this

Government has no concept of right and wrong, I began to wonder whether he has a soul. I was reading a book recently by Thomas Moore called *Caring of the Soul*. I think, my good friend, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, has read that book because I saw him browsing in the bookstore in Miami airport one day, and he may have read it. I was wondering whether the Member has looked into his soul and taken care of that soul. He talks about right and wrong and he pontificates and he hoists himself on his high moral petard, lecturing to this honourable House on moral theology and all kinds of conduct, and he is one of the most guilty human beings of perpetrating wrongs when he was the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. I shall illustrate.

Do you know what the Member for San Fernando East told this nation on the occasion of firing the former Honorary Consul of Hong Kong by fax? He said he was firing Mr. Lau in order to promote him.

I do not want to relive the pain that must have been experienced by my colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Member for Naparima. Do you know what the Member for San Fernando East said when he relieved the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of his portfolio? That he was making him a Minister in the Prime Minister's office in order that he could better make inputs into the conduct of the foreign policy of his Government. The Member was being removed as Minister of Foreign Affairs to be a Minister in the ministry of the Prime Minister's office so that he could make better inputs into the foreign policies of Trinidad and Tobago.

6.35 p.m.

I can go on and on. That is the nature of the Member for San Fernando East. Something is wrong with him. Do you know what is the unkindest cut of all? It was when he suspended the freedoms and the Constitution of this country to house arrest a woman who held the high office of Speaker of the House of Representatives. He just denigrated the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs in the worst possible way. He talks about truth and who has a concept of right and wrong.

I can go on, but I would not belabour all these points, because I find it undignified to stand here and recite all these things, in this honourable Chamber. I did not come here to do that. I came here to do the people's business, to pass this Motion to give effect to a taxation measure which will enable the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism to collect higher excise duties on tobacco and cigarettes, among the other measures contained in the Order.

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I find it quite disgusting that I have to come to Parliament week after week, to listen to drivel, insincerity and hypocrisy emanating from the mouths of those opposite. Do you know what is so revolting? They call people's name such as Mr. Soodoo. I do not know who is Mr. Soodoo. I never met him. They use the occasion of Parliament, parliamentary privilege and immunity to say all kinds of things about a man's character and he does not have an opportunity to respond to defend himself. That is the lowest form of cowardice! Some of us should go back into our previous lives and examine ourselves and what we have done and have not done. Maybe, before we accuse others, we should say, *mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*. [*Desk thumping*]

I thought I had made it unequivocally clear in a previous contribution about two matters which were raised here this evening. Those are the common external tariff and the export allowance. For the Member for Diego Martin Central to raise this matter which I am sure I dealt with satisfactorily, is most unfortunate. Perhaps, it is a measure of his lack of understanding that he has to raise the matter once more, and not the fault of the Member for St. Joseph.

On that occasion I told the House that it had nothing to do with respect to protecting manufacturers or the fact that we did not want them to become competitive. We are aiming for that. We want Trinidad and Tobago to be one of the most competitive countries in the world and that we can be as high as possible on that competitive index when it is published on an annual basis. We said that we are reserving our right to review the implementation of the common external tariff to 20 per cent until such time as we are satisfied that the other members of Caricom have fallen in line.

I quoted, but I did not read the whole speech, when the Member for San Fernando East was chairman of Caricom and he was quite unhappy with the rate of implementation of the common external tariff with his fellow Caricom colleagues.

Mr. Manning: What year was that?

Hon. M. Assam: I am sure he does not remember when he was Prime Minister. I do not understand why the Member for San Fernando East is asking me what year was that. He does not remember the years he was Prime Minister of this country and when he was in the Chair of Caricom. I am not going to remind him. I would leave him in his folly.

That is the simple explanation about the common external tariff. It has nothing to do with revenue considerations and shielding manufacturers. As a government,

we reserve the right to do so. That is what we are doing. Whenever we decide that it is appropriate and propitious to go down to 20 per cent we would do so. It does not affect intra-Caricom trade whatsoever. It would not be injurious to our Caricom partners if we did not go to 20 per cent as of yesterday.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, if the Minister would give way. It begs the question. If it does not affect intra-Caricom trade, then why is he concerned with the pace of implementation of the other Caricom countries?

Hon. M. Assam: Because it is a very simple matter. If all heads of government meet at either intercessional meetings or at Heads of Government meetings, and decide on a measure, we expect that all members would implement the measure as decided. Trinidad and Tobago should not be the one that is always first and in front to implement measures and decisions taken by Heads of Government at those meetings and the others are lagging behind.

Mr. Manning: I thank the hon. Minister for giving way. He is saying that it has to do with Trinidad and Tobago's competitiveness *vis a vis* Third World countries. If that is so, why has he refrained from implementing it?

Hon. M. Assam: That is a non-question.

I will proceed to deal with the second matter which was raised with respect to the export allowance. Again, I was very embarrassed to hear the Member for Diego Martin Central who was a former Minister of Trade and Industry and during whose tenure, the World Trade Organization came into force. I do not know if he were in Marakesh. I believe the Minister of Foreign Affairs was there. Although the World Trade Organization agreements are voluminous and it takes much time to go through and understand them, one of the conditions which was imposed is that by 1999, there are four years within which to remove subsidies, including export subsidies. The year 1999 is the cut off date.

I am amazed that he is talking about 2005. I do not understand that having left office two years ago that his memory is so short, or maybe, he never understood. The point is that Trinidad and Tobago has an obligation as a member of the World Trade Organization, to honour those obligations because we signed the Treaty of Marakesh as he knows. It is unfortunate that he is making those side statements. The common external tariff is not a part of the Treaty of Chaguaramas. Maybe he he never read that treaty when he was the minister. The Treaty of Chaguaramas is entirely different from an arrangement or decision taken by Heads of Government to successively, overtime, reduce the common external tariff to 20 per cent. It is not contained in the Treaty of Chaguaramas.

From there, they went on to the question of soup kitchen mentality. That was another attack on the Minister. Do you know what was interesting about one of the statements the Member for San Fernando East made? He said that they had introduced these relief centres and soup kitchens as a kind of smokescreen and inducement. Typical PNM deception to bring people into the hot soup kitchens to entrap them. He said that it was to remove them from their state of dependency.

6.45 p.m.

Who brought all these persons into a state of dependency? It is amazing, and this afternoon was a great revelation. They all should be writing the book of St. Augustine, *My Confessions*, for they have been confessing all their sins, errors and omissions this afternoon. They have brought them into a hot soup kitchen to lay them there and further entrap them so that they could be removed from their dependency. This kind of lack of logic for a person who was the Prime Minister of this country is frightening. That this man held the highest executive position in the land and we are subjected to this kind of lack of logic, it is amazing, Mr. Speaker.

Instead of having a debate on this relatively simple fiscal measure, the question of an increase in excise tax on cigarettes and tobacco, the whole afternoon was one of character assassination. It almost reminded me of the French Revolution when they took one by one to the Place de La Concorde and put the guillotine on all of them. He tried to put the guillotine on the Minister of Finance and Tourism; the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs; the Minister of Planning and Development; the Attorney General, and the Prime Minister and these people call themselves legalists. Indeed, they are executioners, no wonder they wear a black tie; executioners always wear a black hood and a black tie. That is what they are. *[Desk thumping]* They came here today to execute the front bench of this Government. That is what they came to do, rather than deal with this very simple fiscal measure which should have taken this House maybe an hour at most and it is now over five hours and we are still going. We had to listen to the pain and boredom and the nonsensicalities uttered from the false, hypocritical mouths of those opposite.

They want to ask questions and they wish direct responses and I have no difficulty with that. I try to respond as honestly as I can with respect to the knowledge I possess. Neither the former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, the former Prime Minister, nor the former Minister of Trade can tell us why they allowed Mr. Chadee to occupy over 100 acres of state land, but not only occupy it, but put up beautiful structures or edifices. *[Interruption]* Relax, you will

put your foot in your mouth again and I would not like to see that. I would like to know why they are afraid to answer that question directly. They must answer it directly. They were in government for four years almost, we are in Government for two years and it happened in less than two years with us. Why did they not take the opportunity?

Dr. Rowley: I am very grateful that the Minister has given way because the question has been asked over and over. As the Minister responsible for lands I was totally unaware of the occupant of that piece of land. *[Interruption]*

I am trying to answer the question, let me answer it. I was totally unaware of the occupancy of that parcel of land by an unauthorized person. I will also tell you that it turned out that the occupancy was taking place a lot longer than when I was in office, when you were acting Prime Minister it was so. And I ask my friend, the Member for Princes Town, if he knows for a fact, every person who is illegally occupying every parcel of state land in this country.

Mr. Valley: You were the acting Prime Minister. What did you do?

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Speaker, I told you so. I have some regard for my friend, the Member for Diego Martin West, because he is one of the persons on that side who is sometimes illuminating and I did not want him to put his foot in his mouth again. Can one imagine a former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources saying to this honourable House this afternoon and, by extension, the national community that he was not aware that an individual was squatting on over 100 acres—not a plot, but over 100 acres of Government state land—a man who has had the reputation which Dole Chadee had when he was the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. You are telling me that you did not investigate the tenancy, the occupancy, the legality of that man in Piparo? I am amazed. That is a terrible confession to make. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order, order!

Hon. M. Assam: All I can say, Mr. Speaker, that is tantamount to ministerial irresponsibility and ministerial dereliction of duty; that is all I can say. It has to be tantamount to that, it has to be. Anything that happens in my ministry the buck stops here with me. I take the blame for it.

Mr. Speaker, we are yet to hear the true explanation of why Mr. Chadee was allowed to continue to occupy well over 100 acres of state land. There are so

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many people in this country who are unable to get one lot of land to erect shelter for themselves. There are people in this country who, by some means or the other, illegally squatted on Government land during the regime of that former Minister of Agriculture, and the former Minister of Works and Transport, took almost a demonic delight in breaking down people's shelter in the still of night or in the early morning. But these little persons can be identified and their little 3,000 and 5,000 sq. ft. plots of land on which they were squatting would be destroyed in the dead of night as well as the peace and tranquillity of family life of these poor unsuspecting defenseless persons. But he did not know that Dole Chadee was squatting on over 100 acres of government land. That is an admission! To me, that is the saddest admission which the Member for Diego Martin West has made. That is what is called defending the indefensible. They want to come here and praise themselves, self-congratulation. My mother used to say self-praise is no recommendation.

They wrote off—*[Interruption]* That is all right, she is dead, I will tell her to pray for you. I am sure her good soul is in the right place. She will pray for you. They come here and try to congratulate themselves by saying they wrote off \$2.4 billion of Caroni's debt.

I said it before and I will say it again that the PNM administration had a totally wrong approach to almost everything it did; to the whole question of state enterprises and how they were funded, the question of poverty alleviation, the question of the social order, education, policing, and community development. I do not think that you fellows are total devils because you must have had some goodness in you. God made all of us and we are all in the image and likeness of God except that some of us have taken more likeness from Mephistopheles.

Mr. Speaker, this is my view, but I think even if it had good intentions it went about so many things in the wrong way and Caroni (1975) Limited was one of the things. If I owed a lot of money and you came to me as a good godfather and said Member for St. Joseph, I am going to write off your debt, it does not mean that you have left me in a viable, solvent, developmental position after that, because after having written off my debt you did not put structures and accountability in place, and you did not do what you were supposed to do in terms of employment reduction and moving the whole shift from one aspect of cane growing to another and inventories and so forth. If these things were not put in place and you merely removed a debt of \$2.4 billion, what did you expect to happen immediately after you had removed the debt?

The point is, that company should not have run up that debt in the first instance and, therefore, they come today, and yesterday, and last week and last month because the Member for Diego Martin West seems to have changed his address and is now clearly living somewhere in Princes Town or maybe he is still in St. Clair Circle because he seems to get information and he probably has in-house officers there. To come here with regularity month after month, and week after week and their ches about this write-off of \$2.4 billion is not good enough. It clearly shows that not only are they bad politicians, but they are equally poor managers. So stop coming here every week and every month and talking about Caroni. Cut it out, Member for Diego Martin West. You will perhaps reap better rewards if you concentrate your energy and fire on persons to your right. I suspect you will be successful one day, you are a young man and you are pretty bright. You will succeed one day.

Mr. Speaker, having attempted to deal with all these scurrilous matters raised by Members opposite, which are totally unrelated to the measure before us, and have no relevance to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order 1997, I hope that in future when we come to debate important matters affecting the very vital and fundamental interests of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we would be relevant. Not only should we not waste the time of Parliament, but I also hope that the Member for San Fernando East, who claims to be a leader—although I suspect that this is very much in question—will attach the same conditions and codes of conduct to his Members as he has preached so often to us.

With these few words, I beg to support the measure presented by the Minister of Finance so that we can approve the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order 1997.

Thank you.

7.00 p.m.

Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Mr. Speaker, as I rise to engage in this very important debate on the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 1997, or what purports to be same, I want to—unlike the Member for Oropouche, in particular, and to a marginally lesser extent, the Members for Couva South and St. Joseph—be more relevant to the terms of the Order.

First of all, I want to support, wholeheartedly, the suggestions put by the Member for Diego Martin Central, who argued, initially, that this document which purports to be a provisional collection of taxes order, is almost totally removed from that. In fact, it was admitted by the Member for St. Joseph that only one item

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in this three-page Order is really about taxes, and that by implication, he accepts that everything else therein has no place in this Order.

Of course, the Member for Couva South who has some experience in the business of law, and who is the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago, has sold himself as a key and major legal luminary. He entered the debate after the Minister of Finance and he sought to justify the procedural impropriety which we saw in this Order today. What did he say? I do not wish to quote him, but I shall paraphrase, Mr. Speaker. He said that they had decided, as a matter of policy, not to take any chances, since they were not sure whether it was a tax matter or not, that they had decided to throw all in, so in the event that it was, they will be all right; if it was not, it does no harm in the first place. Mr. Speaker, that is the *vaille que vaille* and “vaps” approach of the Attorney General, a pot-pourri, as was said by the Member for Diego Martin Central.

Just as we are creatures of physical habits—observers of human kind told us that we put the same side of shoe on our foot first on each occasion, we start combing our hair on the same side, for those of us who do, brushing our teeth on the same side—so too we are creatures of mental habits; mental blueprints. That was, indeed, a revelation coming from the Member for Couva South. It demonstrates the mental blueprint that this Government has come to be known as, *vaille que vaille* and “vaps”; just patchwork government. Just like its membership, Mr. Speaker, patchwork; a bit here, a little dregs there, whatever they could grab, then to present a facade to the nation, calling itself the Panday Administration.
[Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, we of the People’s National Movement, with 42 years of cumulative political wisdom and experience, recognize, immediately, impostors when we see them. We have taken on the position, whether in government or in opposition, to discharge our duties to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We have one commitment at this stage and that is to demonstrate to you, Mr. Speaker, and the national community, that that which passes for a government is nothing more than a sham, and it has mastered what we have now come to call the “20/80 trick”, and I shall explain what I mean by that later.

The Attorney General said there are two schools of thought in an effort to slither out of the predicament in which he and the Minister of Finance, embarrassingly put the Government. I am a lawyer myself and one of considerably less years in practice than the Attorney General, but it does not take very much experience to read the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, Chap. 74:01. In

section 2 of that Act, the definition of tax obviously appears. Upon reading that definition of tax, I had absolutely no difficulty, as a matter of fact, it was an application of human commonsense and human understanding, I had to apply no legal philosophy or jurisprudence to understand, as I read:

“Tax includes assessments, fees, charges, impositions and such other levies as form part or are intended to form part of the general revenue.”

Mr. Speaker, having read that, having imbibed the rather simple meaning of that definition, I do not understand, for the life of me, how the Attorney General could have any difficulty in understanding whether the other aspects of this Bill, which have no place here, should be taxes or otherwise. However, I am not surprised. I have come to understand, as I have explained a moment ago, that this Government has mastered the art of fooling people and now it is on the verge of fooling itself. There is where the biggest threat lies, Mr. Speaker.

Much was said in the budget debate and in today’s debate about old age pensions. I was gratified to hear the Member for San Fernando East explain, as he did, in his response to the budget, that one week before the budget debate, we, at a convention in Chaguaramas, had the benefit of hearing the leader of the PNM and Member for San Fernando East explain to the nation that we had, and therefore urged the Government to increase the pension to old citizens to the amount which had been promised. I consider that to be very significant because as I came into the political arena in 1995, I read and listened carefully to much that was promised by the United National Congress party as we approached the general election in that year. They promised many things, among them, to deal with crime once and for all. They promised to give substantial increases to old age pensioners, to settle the debt to teachers, and public servants in general. Mr. Speaker, I sat here for two years waiting, and waiting, remembering Whitney Houston, perhaps, in *Waiting to Exhale*. Nothing, Mr. Speaker. But again it was an attempt to deceive the population and, unfortunately, to some extent, it did.

I have, just like any other Member of this honourable Chamber, many elderly people—old age pensioners, as it were—living in my constituency. I understand full well the hardships they must endure day to day as they seek to find a better way of life; a more meaningful experience in their golden years. Many have worked hard in the public service and otherwise, looking forward to the day when they would have retired, when they would have been able to put their legs up, when they would have been able, with a cold glass of coconut water or orange juice, to enjoy the evening of their years. However, inflation and all the other

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economic difficulties militate firmly against all this. *[Interruption]* I am hearing the Member for Oropouche telling us, yet again; he does not learn, Mr. Speaker. The Member for San Fernando East explained, during his contribution in today's debate, that we did not have occasion to vote for any single item in the budget, we had a difficulty with the entire package. We felt that it was not going to achieve the distance, it was not going to achieve the promises that this Government said it would have achieved, we had other reasons for our objections to it, but he continues to talk about the pension.

Mr. Speaker, poverty is not unknown to the Member for Laventille East/Morvant nor, indeed, any Member of this House. We all have poor people in our constituencies, some to a greater extent and some to a lesser extent.

7.10 p.m.

We understand the hardship and suffering that the poor experience in the society. This is why the People's National Movement called on the Government to significantly improve pension payments to the citizens. But, Mr. Speaker, not only did they fail the senior citizens of the country and, given the fact that this Government, as is well-known, is better able than any other government to engage itself in social enhancement—after the work of the last PNM administration, of rebuilding the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, creating international linkages, opening up new trade markets, giving fresh hope and inspiration to Trinidad and Tobago; it came to dinner and met a table properly well laid out. This Government is better able than any other since 1988 to engage in enhancing the social needs of the society.

We have seen, as was explained a while ago by the Member for San Fernando East that, unfortunately, the growth rate seemed to be taking a declining position, and he took pains to explain correctly that in 1994 we had a 3.6 per cent growth rate in Trinidad and Tobago. The economy grew by 3.6 per cent. In 1995, it grew by 3.8 per cent. In 1996, the economy grew by 3.5 per cent. One year after this Government came to office, apparently as he describes it, the brakes started to be put on, and the growth moved from 3.8 per cent in 1995 to 3.5 in 1996 and, in 1997, it went to 3.2 per cent. So they had not the courage to face Trinidad and Tobago and explain that while we were still having some economic growth, the rate of growth was declining.

What did the Minister of Finance do? He disguised it. He told the nation that between 1996 and 1997, the country experienced growth of 6.7 per cent. He put the two figures together to disguise the fact that there was a declining trend. I

make that point yet again to demonstrate the treachery and the capacity of this Government to hide the facts.

Mr. Speaker, a declining trend in the growth rate is not good news for the People's National Movement, given the fact that we toiled hard. We inspired manufacturers, the workforce and the teachers. We inspired all who existed in the operation of the economy in this country to generate the kind of growth that we put in trend. We are not celebrating that fact, but it is our duty to point out to this Parliament and to the nation that the trend is shifting and that shift is consistent with the coming of the United National Congress.

The Member for Oropouche and the Member for Couva South spoke about the question of raising taxes in order to pay people's salaries and pay police and teachers, and to fix roads, but the Member for Diego Martin West pointed out that the only provision here for raising taxes is the tax on a packet of cigarettes from \$2.10 to \$2.50—an increase of 40 cents per pack. If the argument, as was put by the Government, was a concern for the nation's health, then we have seen time and time again in other countries—and it was demonstrated here earlier on today—that that has no real impact on slowing down consumption. It is a health education programme which would do that.

The spurious argument about raising moneys—one tax order, 40 cents on a pack of cigarettes—was demonstrated to be a farce this evening, because as was correctly pointed out, one would require 600,000 packets of cigarettes in order to raise \$26,000 per month. That is a significant figure given the fact that this Government has quite immorally, improperly and unashamedly kept a man who has blemishes to his character holding high executive office in a state enterprise.

Mr. Speaker, I had the displeasure like you and other Members of this House of seeing a young citizen of Trinidad and Tobago outside of the office of the Minister of Finance in the run up to Christmas. It was reported that he spent Christmas Eve night and Christmas night at that location on a hunger strike protesting the fact that he was not in receipt of his salary; one that he worked for under the Unemployment Relief Programme. As I speak of salary, I remember a few weeks ago we made a fuss in this Parliament, properly so, and demonstrated that the Ministers of Government effectively had a significant increase in salaries and they did not even have the mind to inform the national community. It was done yet again under the table and rather surreptitiously, making everything appear nice and rosy on the outside but rotten and stifling on the inside.

That young man was protesting the fact that he did not receive his salary. The Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) is known for all kinds of confusion, but we have never seen confusion at the level that we have been seeing it over the last few months. That is because, as was explained by the Member for Laventille East during the budget debate, this Government has tried rather foolishly to use the URP in a certain manner to play politics. It has found itself up a creek, so to speak.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has many questions to answer, because many people, including some of my constituents, were unable to enjoy the dignity of a proper meal on Christmas day and, in some cases, to feed their families. The explanation that came from one of the officials, the senior man now in the URP, was that they were investigating some irregularities. He explained later that they went ahead to pay some of the money, demonstrating that some of the investigations were entirely unwarranted. In any event, it was reported in the newspapers that the young man of whom I spoke was from the constituency of the Minister of Education, Tabaquite, and yet he was complaining about non-receipt of his salary having worked in Belmont, the area in which I grew up.

The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre pointed out during the budget debate that now that the URP function has gone from the Ministry of Works and Transport to the Ministry of Local Government, he hoped that there will be no more corruption in it, which was an admission that under the previous manager of the system, there was a lot of corruption. The URP was designed to assist those persons who were to some extent socially displaced, to give them an opportunity to earn an honest dollar and to do some measure of work for that. It was designed to bring relief to people in their communities. So, it is expected that people from Belmont would generally be working in Belmont area. It was reported that this man was from as far as Tabaquite. I do not know if, like the Member for Tabaquite, he could not find his way and was not sure whether he was living in Belmont or Tabaquite. I think the Government should answer that.

The point about the URP must also be made, because I have always been one—as the representative of the people of Laventille East/Morvant—to indicate to those persons that the URP was never intended to be any career. It was intended to be some kind of palliative for immediate employment problems. As they say now, it is suitable for some kind of income between jobs. It was never intended for people to make a career out of it and that, indeed, is a problem. But, the point has to be reinforced that the Government is moving towards reshaping the URP. The Government has moved it from the Ministry of Works and Transport to the

Ministry of Local Government, and one can never be sure of what really is the Government's intention.

I do not care what the Government's intention is. One thing must be said, that the favourable balance of the distribution of URP allocations, whether it is in terms of job or expenditure, along the East-West Corridor, in the urban areas, was set so for a particular logical and quite healthy and proper purpose. The reason was, as all could see, the people in the urban areas along the East-West Corridor, and other urban centres around the country, were unable to access agricultural land and sea ports, and the intention was to provide them with some measure of relief, given the circumstances in which they were put. As a result of that sound logic, one had a favourable skew in respect of those areas, but the Member for Oropouche is on record—and no doubt the Members for Couva South and Couva North interpreted that skew as if it was some kind of political concoction to keep votes alive in the East-West Corridor, totally oblivious and ignorant of the fact that there were sound and logical reasons for that kind of arrangement. By the time they came to Government, they had one intention, and that was to rearrange that perceived imbalance.

I want to say one thing, and it has to be reinforced. Whatever they do with that programme, they must bear in mind that the circumstances of these people are inherently different to the circumstances of people who live in areas where they can access natural resources; areas where there are industrial sites established, like Point Lisas and, therefore, they need more help than usual.

Mr. Speaker, the question of training women is nothing new. Over the last few months, we heard the Minister of Works and Transport, who was then managing the URP portfolio, boast on the television and newspapers that he was training so many women through the URP. That is nothing new! We heard time and time again, the Member for San Fernando East explain our Export Centres Programme. He was at pains this evening to explain the rationale, the purpose and intention behind the so-called soup kitchen.

7.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I had an experience just about one week before Christmas about which I must tell you. Perhaps it is the exception, because they do not understand the programmes. Many of the people who have been trained over the last few months, I suspect, to do things under the URP underwent training for about three months to do various things; to make little products and what have you. Most of them see that just as a means of getting some income and they do not always take

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it very seriously. So that, they come, sit around, learn and then they go off and never continue developing the skill that they used during that programme.

About one week before Christmas I sat in my constituency office. One young lady came to my office and explained woefully that she was now homeless; she had no place to go and she had five children. She occupied the home of a friend temporarily, and the friend was a mother of two children living with her common-law husband. I am just explaining a real life situation. Shortly after her going to the house, in fact, about a week later, the friend and her common-law husband had social difficulties and the friend took her two children and left, leaving this woman in the house with her five children and her common law husband. He, like so many people that we see and know well, without a high moral posture, attempted to impose himself on this poor woman. She came to my constituency office in tears. She told me that the night before she had a very difficult time and she wanted a place to go immediately.

I told her, well yes, that is the way forward, but I said, you will have to pay rent. She told me that she was unemployed. I asked her, what can you do? She said that sometime ago she learnt in the community centre—because we ran a number of programmes in the community centres training women for years—to make flowers. I told her she should come to my office the following day and I would give her further advice and assistance in terms of getting a little business started. She came and I managed to source some assistance for her. What was important and beautiful, she came with two flowers that she had made the night before and it was, in fact—and I say it in sincerity—I was shocked by the beauty and quality of these flowers. She took cocoyea and she wrapped the green masking tape around it, she took a small bit of cloth, she stripped it, she got the pattern threads and she made a beautiful flower, the other one was made with kite paper and the same cocoyea. I was overly impressed. I was enthused and I got her the assistance she needed.

That young woman, that single mother, up to two days before Christmas—and I am excited to report—was up and down the streets of Port of Spain. One morning, about two days before Christmas, she passed at my office and she had 145 of these flowers and she was busy doing business up and down Port of Spain and she was on her way. When I spoke to her last she was able to tell me that she managed, in addition to feeding herself and her family for the period, she was able to save \$675. [*Desk thumping*]

So that if Government, in its ignorance, believes that the people who they speak about in a certain manner are without brains and common sense and cannot

make good for themselves, they have another thought coming. The question of training women is not unknown to us and we have seen the benefit of that.

It is well-known to all of us in this Parliament that milk farmers in this country receive something in the region of \$10—\$12 million a year in subsidies. Rice farmers, cocoa and coffee farmers, businessmen receive subsidies in one form or another, all kinds of production incentives. So that I want to place on record, yet again, in this Parliament, that the URP programme, offers some kind of governmental assistance to people who are unable because of their geographical setting, to access resources and life is more difficult for them than others. It is no privilege, it is indeed Government's policy and to some extent nobody is doing them any favour by extending this facility. Mr. Speaker, I suggest that the Government proceed very carefully in the way it deals with this programme. I will not say more, because the minute one says anything further one is accused of all manner of improprieties.

What we of the PNM understand fully well is, that once people are inspired and motivated and given some kind of help, they can make good. The Government announced in the budget that it was availing more money to assist people in starting up small businesses. FUNDAid is one of the agencies through which this money is dispensed to members of the national community who wish to start small businesses. The reality is, and I am informed by persons who have engaged the FUNDAid programme, that the interest rates are particularly high and in some cases prohibitive. I attended—not the last function but the one before—the awards function of the FUNDAid programme; I think the Prime Minister, the Member for Couva North, addressed it recently, I was unable to attend. They have quite a success rate in terms of people who have come in, but what is not clear is how many people are unable to meet their obligations when things go a little rough because of this very high interest rate.

Mr. Speaker, as I was indicating earlier and as was made clear as well by the Members for Diego Martin Central, San Fernando East, and Diego Martin West earlier today, when this Government proceeds in the manner that it does, and maintains the position of holding on to ministers who have erred, who have come to this Parliament and told abject lies; when this Government holds on to a Minister, for example, who has demonstrated the optimum of incompetence in the handling of the education function in this country, when this Government holds on to a Minister of Works and Transport who, a report of an investigator stated clearly, was the subject of some misconduct and the Government holds on; when this Government maintains—and the Prime Minister sat in the Parliament today

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and replied in response to the Member for Diego Martin West—“Who me, I have not appointed any board”, and he washed his hands of the situation like Pontius Pilate. Well we heard his name already in here, now a chief executive officer at the National Petroleum Company. Those kinds of things send terrible signals to people across the national community.

Mr. Speaker, I am the representative for a very difficult constituency. I interface with young men up and down this country every single day and the psychology of that kind of immoral behaviour on the part of the Government has a trickle-down adverse effect on these young people. Because many of them, as we seek to counsel them, shape them, and by example send them in the right direction, look at us and say, "wait, look at the Government, that Government is doing this and doing that", and they describe very carefully all the things we have described here this evening. The Government simply does not understand the debilitating effect that its immoral conduct is having on the minds of the so-called "bad boys" in this country. I am saying that it is true. That is the response we are getting, that I am preaching violence. I am far from a violent man. I am simply describing a social fact, Member for Nariva.

Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Finance read his budget statement a few days ago in this Parliament, we noted that he was very silent on many issues. Well, of course, the Member for Diego Martin West took time out to point out today that that silence may be contrived. It is not because he is necessarily a silent man, but it may very well be a big wall behind which this Government is hiding many interesting and revealing facts. Someone described the budget as a bikini budget, it was short on words and it made history for its shortness. The Minister of Finance made history with his brevity, seven minutes in a winding-up. There were editorials to follow. Journalists in the country, political commentators were astounded at the approach that this Government took to its most serious piece of legislation in its life.

I am reminded, \$14 billion, and the Government was silent on a number of major issues, but we, with the eyes of cumulative wisdom and experience, have taken a closer look. So that when many people jumped and said what a good budget it was, old people got a few dollars more, we were able to point out to them that we were on the verge of taking it even higher. We reminded them that one week before we demanded that the Government increase the pension, and no doubt that is the reason the Government decided to increase the people's pension. When many people jumped and said what a good budget it was because the Government offered whatever they said they offered to the national community by

way of this budget, we took a more discerning look at things. Our business is to point out that it is all a sham. It is now becoming quite clear to members of the national community, indeed quite clear to us, that we have to be very, very watchful of that Government and that silence.

Mr. Speaker, I read with great interest, and my colleague, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West also, page 24 of the Minister of Finance's budget, under the rubric of "Empowering Our Communities" and under it, the subrubric, if I can call it that, of "The Unemployment Relief Programme". Mr. Speaker, I want to show you how this Government is tricky. Deceitful is really the word. Listen to this, from about three-quarters of the page down:

"They best know the urgent needs which would be met by the URP, and they are in the best position to ensure that they get appropriate value for the money expended in this programme.

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

Speaking about URP! Maintaining Government buildings! Hear the next line and this is the treachery.

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

URP workers will be employed to assist in carrying out maintenance and repair works on these buildings."

Mr. Speaker, listen to the treachery! Inside of this thing about repairing and maintaining Government buildings through URP, one gets a statement that is of such purport and significance; it almost blows your mind. What the Minister of Finance told us in that sentence, snugly hidden away in a discussion about URP, is that they are now moving the management of the Government properties from the Ministry of the Prime Minister's Office to the aegis of the Minister of Finance. Mr. Speaker, first of all, can you or any sensible or reasonable person tell me what that important policy decision has to do in a discussion about URP in the budget statement? Tucked away!

Well listen to the implications of this. We, of the People's National Movement—I was not privileged to be a part of that powerful management team in the years 1991—1995, but my understanding is that the PNM administration of

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those years recognized that there was a clear need to rationalize the management, the ownership and all that had to do with Government properties.

7.40 p.m.

In so doing, Mr. Speaker, it was necessary to sell off some to rationalize the entire thing; nothing new, nothing strange. This Government decided to continue—same horse, different rider; same bicycle, different rider—until the time comes to go uphill, having rolled smoothly down on PNM momentum for the last two years.

In fact, there were two bids for Salvatori Building, a major government property: one from a certain individual and the other from a Member sitting in this Chamber. I would say no more. The bid by the Minister of Finance for that building was unsuccessful. It was rejected, so it became quite clear that he was a property speculator. He had concerns about that particular property and speculating in properties in general. Whenever the PNM, as a government, sold government properties it did it in the proper way, it advertised, encouraged tenders and the procedures were carried on through the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance (TTMF). *[Interruption]* That is a very pertinent question. Was the Chief Justice's house advertised? Was the public told that the house was up for sale? *[Interruption]* I imagine tucked away just like this very dangerous line. I cannot believe anything any of you say. We did things in true openness and transparency.

What is the purport of this? I want the Minister of Planning and Development to take note. We are now clear that the Minister of Finance is into property speculation—in his private capacity, of course. You move the management of government properties, including the said Salvatori Building, under the aegis of the Minister of Finance. I mean to cast no aspersions. I simply say that we of the PNM would be watching very closely and carefully at the developments in respect of the sale of government properties including that particular one.

All we are saying is, while there is a clear need to rationalize this portfolio, we see nothing wrong with leaving it right where it was. Suddenly the Minister of Finance finds it necessary to put it very close to him.

Mr. Sudama: The only brief you can get is a watching brief.

Mr. F. Hinds: The Member for Oropouche—if I might touch briefly because he opened up the debate—said that we made a contribution stating that about 35 per cent of the people in this country are in poverty. Nobody on this side said anything about that. I observed and it appears to me quite clear—I heard of the

reputation of the Member for Oropouche. I heard that he was a very fiery and potent speaker. Now he has lost his potency and the word about Oropouche is that he is clearly impotent. He demonstrated that this evening.

One of my constituents who journeyed into Oropouche some months ago said that they were shocked to see a certain Member of this House—I do not want to call any Member's name—dancing on top of a table with a certain—[*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, I think I need say no more. I observed that from the time you intervened, set the Member for Oropouche on course and pointed out to him that he was sailing very close to being in breach of a Standing Order of this honourable House; thereafter, he lost his composure entirely. He became dishevelled, disoriented and never found his bearing. That Member for Oropouche has lost his sting and must go. He has lost his sting, literally and rhetorically. His contribution today was all but useful.

Mr. Sudama: You want my sting? [*Laughter*]

Mr. Manning: You could keep what is left of it.

Mr. F. Hinds: You better keep your sting for Balroop.

Mr. Sudama: I have to look at you in a different light.

Mr. F. Hinds: When it came to the Member for St. Joseph, fortunately he spared us some of the usual jest for which he is known.

Mr. Sudama: You have revealed yourself.

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. [*Dr. K. Rowley*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I am entirely grateful to you and the Members of this honourable Chamber for extending my time.

I was just about to make a point to deal with the Member for St. Joseph. He spoke about these lovely and beautiful black Balisier ties. He cast aspersions. I think there must have been a tinge of envy. I remember as a child seeing ministers of government walking to and from their offices and around this country. The thing that stood most in one's mind was the beautiful Balisier flower on that distinctive black tie.

I cannot say truthfully that I held any immediate political aspirations as a child. I never imagined myself being a Member of Parliament. I certainly know that when

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I saw these distinctive black ties it surged some joy and admiration through me. When I saw the deceased Right Hon. Dr. Eric Williams—may his soul rest in perfect peace—that beautiful founding father of this land, that man who will stand tall in the annals of our history. I remember that distinctly. I felt so proud to stand behind this tie when I first wore it—God alone knows. Every time I put this tie on a surge of pride comes through me. I remember all those in the PNM who have gone before me wearing this tie.

When I hear the Member for St. Joseph talk about this black tie and executioners, I remind him that the Member for Couva South sought to wear one and was rejected. The hon. Minister of Finance wore one and he, too, was rejected. The Member for Naparima wore one proudly for years, he still has his own. The Member for Princes Town came to wear one but he, too, was rejected. The Member for St. Augustine came begging for one at Balisier House and he too was rejected. The Member for Fyzabad, he came too. He used to come with his hypocritical prayers around PNM meetings and also wanted a beautiful, black Balisier tie and he, too, was rejected.

Mr. Speaker, I have nothing to say about Arima and Point Fortin. In fact, they have denigrated this Balisier tie and sold it, one for \$3 and the other one for a doubles or some such thing. They have so greatly denigrated this.

Mr. Griffith: I stand up for you.

Mr. Bereaux: You could stand up for anybody.

Mr. Speaker: Please be seated.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House continues to sit until the debate on this measure is completed.

Question put and agreed to.

7.50 p.m.

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Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Obviously this evening hon. Members are not prepared to take the Speaker seriously. Will the Member continue.

Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I am obliged. As I was saying, so upset were the persons who, like me as a child, saw this beautiful black tie and was inspired by it. Mr. Speaker, I understand that the Member for Arima attempted to walk through the market in his home town a few days ago, and he was roundly booed, jeered and run away by the people. That is a fate he will have to suffer until—The booing did not stop with him. I understand the Member for St. Joseph got his share. He is following in the footsteps of the Member for Couva North, he is now taking boo brassfaced. Mr. Speaker, since the Member for Couva North was roundly booed in a certain—

Mr. Assam: You are a rumour-monger as well.

Mr. F. Hinds: According to the newspaper report, the Member for Couva North was invited—like me—to the opening of the Best Village Programme this year. He did not appear. I do not know why. I remember the time before when he came there was good reason for him not to want to appear again. The booing thing seems to be part of the gifts from the nation to the UNC Government and I am told that the Member for St. Joseph got his good share on the weekend. He irritated the people no end and they demonstrated their opprobrium.

Mr. Speaker, I heard this evening in this debate some comments about certain state lands that were occupied by a well-known drug dealer in this country. I have one comment to make on this. We of the People's National Movement, recognizing clearly that the state up to—because the computerization of government records is a fairly recent development. Prior to computerization, as we well-know, we relied on handwritten records in various books and documents. With that antiquated system, small as Trinidad and Tobago might be, it must be difficult to maintain a clear overview at any one time to get a snapshot of the state of affairs in respect of state lands across the country. Recognizing this—*[Interruption]* I am not dealing with what you dealt with. Recognizing this, I have one suggestion and that is that the Government hastens the computerization and the rationalization of state lands and its occupancy around the country. That will be good for Trinidad and Tobago. We started it, please continue and that way you will be able, at any one time, to get an immediate picture as to how state lands are—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to get involved in that. I want to proceed with this very important debate. The Member for St. Joseph was asking the question in his contribution, and I think the Member for Oropouche as well. He said we came here and we boasted about writing off Caroni (1975) Limited's debt. We did that but it did not stop there. This Government is a deceiving Government, anybody

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listening to them without hearing the other side will form the view that all the PNM did was to pump money into Caroni (1975) Limited, write off its humongous debt and do nothing else. They are forgetting that a tripartite agreement was entered into which spelt out, apart from making the institution, Caroni (1975) Limited, more bankable, what should be done to rationalize it and make it profitable into the future. It is not that they do not know, but they tend to want to deceive and, consequently, I must repeat the obvious. A tripartite agreement was entered into which spelt out everything, including rationalization of the human element in the sector.

Mr. Speaker, as I traverse my constituency everyday, I have to drive under a flyover at the bottom of Picton Hill by Tokyo panyard, an area that the Minister of Housing and Settlements and my friend from Port of South know quite well. There are some towers there that stand to burn his heart and mind everytime he sees them. When people in my constituency, and the constituency of my friend from Port of Spain South, come—this is the psychology of the thing: the fire victims lost their homes; buildings were established for them and for a few more persons. Anytime persons from the area comes to me and says they are homeless immediately they tell me, “Mr. Hinds, there are some houses here empty. What will we do?” It really is a serious matter and the Government must make up its mind as to what it is doing with that, and more than that, do it quickly.

As I drive pass that area every single day, as I traverse the streets and corners of my constituency, telling them to be careful and to watch out, my children, for the impostors who will be coming to tell you that they love you, that they will give you gifts and every single gift they give is state—I cannot tell you. The Minister of Works and Transport was up and down Laventille for months, in Laventille West, Laventille East/Morvant, Port of Spain South and San Juan/Barataria, cutting ribbons, as my friend said, up and down the place and you know when you look at it everything that he has done was all done, like every other Minister, with state resources. But he comes handing it down as though he is doing a favour to the people. Some people, sadly, are foolish enough to engage in negotiation for what is already their own.

As I have demonstrated earlier in this debate, the favourable skew in terms of the distribution of the URP allocations is necessary for solid reasons as I have already explained. Therefore, I tell them, “Watch out, my children, they have a fella called Lucifer and his head is white like powder and he has a team.” He said he went some time ago—and, in fact, I am told that the Member for Couva South went to India some time ago—and he came back here. I saw him on the television

with his wry, smart grin and he was saying, “too much antagonism in the society, too much rancour, too much viciousness.” It was almost like crying, Mr. Speaker, and behind that was a wicked steel talon. But we know him well.

A friend of mine told me maybe he did not really see Sai Baba but he must have seen Ali Baba and learned how to manage the 40 thieves.

Mr. Maharaj: How could you—

Mr. Panday: How could you call Sai Baba, Ali Baba?

Mr. F. Hinds: I never did. I have great respect. As a matter of fact let me put it on record.

Mr. Panday: You have no respect for religion.

Mr. F. Hinds: I have the greatest respect for him. Let me put it on the record. Over the Christmas period I sat in front of my television and I saw a programme on Sai Baba as he delivered his sermons to the people of the world and I was enthralled, I was taken in, I was so impressed. I learnt so much; I came away with a further—I always had great respect and reverence for the man and I came away with even more, having watched at him. What I see from the Member for Couva North and that side is almost inconsistent with everything I heard sitting in front of my television. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, having made my contribution to this debate I agree entirely with the position taken by the Members of this side in respect of this debate. I want to conclude by saying—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members—

Mr. Panday: Monday morning I want a copy of this *Hansard*.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members on both sides. Member for Laventille East/Morvant, please continue.

Mr. F. Hinds: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Panday: You have no respect for religion.

Mr. F. Hinds: The lies of your mouth will take their effects in the right place.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am simply trying to see whether one could bring a little order from the disorder. I asked you to continue and it would be great if you would speak to me. You are courting a lot of disaster by trying to speak directly to the other side.

Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I am obliged. Having spoken for the last few moments in this debate, in particular over the last five minutes, I suggested that according to my information, the Member for Couva North journeyed to the subcontinent of India and there he reported to the national community, having returned, that he met and spoke to the great man Sai Baba. Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I formed the opinion, based on the conduct of the Member subsequently and previously, that he did not, in fact, see Sai Baba but he in fact went to see someone else called Ali Baba. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, I want to put it on the record to re-enforce what I said and to prevent the distortions that are well known to the Members on the other side, that I abide entirely by the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago like I have learnt in the PNM. I appreciate and respect, as an individual, every single religion.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the House will be suspended for 10 minutes and could I please see the Leader of the House and the Opposition Chief Whip. The House is suspended for 10 minutes.

8.05 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

8.24 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I wind down my contribution to this debate. I just want to remind us that the Minister of Finance, the Member for Oropouche and others on that side tried to indicate that we, on this side, were very wrong to have voted against their budget proposals for this year. We demonstrated during that debate that we had good reasons for taking the position that we did. They singled out the question of the minimum wage, old-age pensions and such like, the computers, saying that we voted against these things.

Mr. Speaker, I recall shortly after the budget presentation, some journalist got the attention of the Member for Couva North and when asked a question about the minimum wage, he asked the question: "What is wrong if a man works for US \$1 per hour?" What he did not understand was that that kind of very loose and irresponsible comment could have the effect of wiping out any of the potential gains that they tried to identify in the budget statement. As a result of that kind of statement and the question of signals to the banking and business community in general, Mr. Speaker, we have seen over the last few days—

Mr. Panday: You are still on that?

Mr. F. Hinds: I am speaking about what happened after. We have seen over the last few days, the Central Bank taking action, Mr. Speaker, to defend the

integrity of the Trinidad and Tobago dollar. When that happens, by pulling money out of the spending stream, in order to protect the integrity of the dollar as it were, what you find happening is that the cost of borrowing is increasing, business people are now paying more for money and they pass these on to the very people that the Government was attempting to assist.

Mr. Panday: Because of the minimum wage?

Mr. F. Hinds: These people include my constituents and I have a responsibility to put the Government on notice that this kind of irresponsible comment—and we have heard many of them over the last two years—does no good and it stands to negate any of the potential benefits they were trying to boast of in the budget presentation.

In conclusion, the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism told this honourable Chamber in his budget presentation that the oil price per barrel had been estimated at US \$19. In the other place, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, who presumably advises the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism on the price of a barrel of oil, described the suggestion of the price of US \$19 per barrel as a risk, as a gamble, another very irresponsible comment from the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, who, the investors, the business community and all concerned in the oil industry and banking, would latch on to as some kind of signal as to where they need to set up, how to operate.

Mr. Speaker, that kind of irresponsible judgment could land us in a similar kind of trouble that I described a while ago, because if per chance—and we do not want that for Trinidad and Tobago, we are far too concerned about Trinidad and Tobago, too nationalist in our orientation for that. God forbid if there was a fluctuation in the oil price and it went down, it would have the effect—and the irresponsible comment that he made, he described US \$19 as a risk and a gamble, then it is not based on solid evidence, solid data, solid thinking.

Mr. Panday: He never said gamble.

Mr. F. Hinds: That could have the effect of wiping out all the gains they spoke about; the surplus they boast of in the budget could be immediately wiped out and that could have direct consequences on the Public Sector Investment Programme and when there is a fall in the Public Sector Investment Programme, that has a trickle down effect, affecting my constituents and the constituents of all of us. When that possibility is coupled with the unexplained major shortfall in VAT revenues last year, you have a serious set of circumstances to contemplate.

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Mr. Speaker, I would leave the balance for the Government's own thinking. We cannot teach the Government how to do its work. We have tried our best; we have done our utmost from this side, for the sake of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, to indicate a more responsible approach to the management of the economy. We did so with a very good example between 1991 and 1995. With those few words, I wish to conclude my contribution by saying that we of the People's National Movement are prepared in this House to support that which we are convinced is good for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and any time we assess with our cumulative, political acumen that it is not the case, then we are forced to take the other position.

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

Mr. Hedwige Bereaux (*La Brea*): Mr. Speaker, I did not intend to enter this debate and even if I did, I wanted to be very short because I want to deal in particular with those areas of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order which I think would impinge directly on the constituency of La Brea which I have the honour to represent at this time.

It is said that if you sit by and hear a misstatement being made and you say nothing, you are guilty of not just making a mistake but of terminological inexactitude yourself, by omission, to make that statement. I heard the hon. Attorney General, the Member for Couva South, talking about Dole Chadee and lands. I do not want to get into what he does or what he did not do, only to say that anybody who is involved in criminal activity, I am against that. But the fact is that the lands at Piparo form part of the Tabaquite oilfields, which were owned by Texaco and by the Textrin Vesting Act, No. 38 of 1985, assented to on December 12, 1985. I will read from here:

Mr. G. Singh: He was involved in that matter.

Mr. H. Bereaux: No, I was not involved in the Texaco matter, but I know it. It is law in that time. I am aware of it. It says at section 3:

“The assets of Textrin as set out in the Schedule are transferred to and vested in the State as at noon on the 28th February, 1985.”

Among those in the schedule is the Tabaquite oilfields. Remember, this Act was assented to on December 12, but dated back to February 28. Then, in the Vesting Act, it says:

“The transfer and vesting contemplated under subsection (1) may be subject to such conditions as the Minister may determine.”

Section 4(1) says:

“The Minister may by Order transfer and vest the assets or any of them, by this Act vested in the State in any corporation wholly owned by the State.”

As a result of that, subsequently, there was an order which vested some of those lands in Trintoc and some in Trintopec. That took place in 1987. Shortly thereafter, around 1988 or 1989, that particular oilfield area was farmed out to Coastline. For those persons who do not know, Dole Chadee's real name as we know it in business circles, is Nankisoon Boodram. I am not making excuses or defences for anybody, but I am saying with those facts—*[Interruption]* Yes, I have read it; I know it is correct. I want to say just one other thing, there is one person in the Parliament—not in Parliament now—in the political circles, who was known to be a close confidant and representative of Nankisoon Boodram, as we know it from court—

Mr. G. Singh: Who is that? Name him. Full disclosure.

Mr. H. Breaux: No, no. I am not going into that and I will not be goaded by the Member. That person is not and was never a member of the People's National Movement; he was a member of the National Alliance for Reconstruction and a close associate of the Member for Couva North. I will just stop there. I only wanted to deal with this Act because I do not think that is what my constituents voted for me to come here to do, so I will now deal with the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: What is the point?

Mr. H. Breaux: I will put it on the record and you can read it. It is just there for the record. I will just give the names and if you cannot get the point, that is your problem, not mine.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: No, not the names, the Vesting Act.

Mr. H. Breaux: I will just make the point for the record that when the land became vested in the state, the Act was passed in December 1985 and it went over to state companies thereafter, then to Coastline. So, whoever is responsible, tell me that.

Mr. Speaker, the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 1997 states, in particular, at section 5(a).

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“47A. Notwithstanding sections 45 and 47, fifty per cent of the monies collected pursuant to this Part, shall be allocated to the Ministry with responsibility for local government for the sole purpose of repair and maintenance of roads under its purview.”

Mr. Speaker, I have had cause to come to this Parliament to identify a number of roads in the constituency of La Brea and, in particular, the La Brea side of the constituency. I speak in particular of the Sobo Road which is a road handled by local government. During last year, materials intended for that road were taken to pave Murray Street. I see that the Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre, the Minister of Local Government, now has substantial resources at his disposal. On a previous occasion, when there was \$16 million to be spent in maintaining and upgrading roads, the hon. Member came to this Parliament with a list of roads to be repaired and, by virtue of the majority which they possess in this Parliament, they were able to allocate moneys for those roads, none of which were in the constituency of La Brea. I am appealing and making it known to this Parliament that Sobo Road really, because of the state of total disrepair of the La Brea Main Road, is the road used by a number of heavy vehicles and almost everybody bypass La Brea en route to the LNG site at Point Fortin.

Mr. D. Singh: How long have those roads been that way?

Mr. H. Béréaux: They have been there for a long time. That road has a particular utilization now, way beyond what was contemplated at the time it was built. I am identifying it here today for special treatment and, in particular, if the Government is as committed as it claims to be, to industrial development and the utilization and monetization of gas, that road cannot be excluded; it needs not only paving, but building; because it is the only suitable bypass to the road that is already bad, that the Member for Fyzabad and the Minister of Works and Transport have neglected. I am identifying the Sobo Road, as well as the Los Iros Road which is also an important road. We are talking about tourism; we are talking about the environment. Persons who were down at Los Iros beach yesterday cleaning it up will know that the road is horrible and I am identifying it.

8.40 p.m.

I am going to identify those roads which are not main roads. I am doing it in this Parliament so that they can be on the record for posterity: High Road, La Brea, Boodoo Singh Lane, Salazar Trace, and for those who do not know there is a part in Salazar Trace that is called Bangladesh—which is where Iwer George was referring to in his calypso—Deppe Street, Fortune Mc Carthy Street, in Vance

River. I have just identified these roads so that they could be properly treated. Additionally, I have noted that one of the hon. Members on that side talked about pensions. I just want to identify a few matters about pensions.

If one looks at the decrease in the Trinidad and Tobago dollar and the failure to remove the common external tariff in real dollars, although, I believe that pensioners are entitled to an increase, and if they get one I am happy for them. But I am also pointing out—and I said this in this Parliament before—that in respect of government pensioners they retire at a certain date, and it takes them several months, sometimes years to get their pensions.

Earlier today I was at the funeral service of one of the pioneers of steelband in Trinidad and Tobago, John Edward Slater. I met a retired school supervisor who, after 40 years of teaching in the government service—she retired as a curriculum officer. It is now 18 months and she has not been able to receive a pension. When I spoke of a similar situation on another occasion the hon. Member for Chaguanas indicated that I was exaggerating. I took him at his word but I have met another person today on the same situation. I could give the hon. Member her name because I asked her if I could call her name. Her name is Mona Slater. I have identified these points.

One finds that normally a Provisional Collection of Taxes Order should take a short time but it is more a question of whether the Opposition agrees that the funds it is agreeing to allow the Government to collect, will be applied equitably in Trinidad and Tobago. If that happens and if we believe that could be done—we have gone through the debate before in the budget but we are not sure that can happen. When we see little tricks being tried on us even in the debate here, we are seriously concerned.

As I said, I did not intend to speak very long and I will not speak very long. I wanted to point out this one thing. In law, I do not know, but I want to believe that the hon. Attorney General knew, or if he did not I would like him to check it. The land, up until December 1985 was under the control of Texaco. We all know about oil-mining leases. Even if it was only a lease the state cannot do anything on the land once there is an oil-mining lease. One has to apply to the company because the entire surface is technically under the control of the company.

With those few words, I end my contribution and, unfortunately, I am unable to support this Motion.

The Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Mr. Speaker, I just want to clarify a point that was made by the hon. Member for

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Diego Martin Central. When he spoke he gave the impression that there was a difference of opinion on this side with respect to legal matters. He mentioned that some time ago in the last budget debate the Minister of Legal Affairs had said that the Order must be submitted to the Parliament within 21 days and there was a difference between submission and what is happening here today.

I want to repeat what I said at that time. That was a different order. This is an Order that is being made under the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act. That Order was the CNG Order. I was advised then by the Treasury Solicitor. In fact, I was holding on for the Minister of Finance at that time. It is very clear in my mind—and in fact, I have just looked at what the hon. Attorney General said in his debate—that a part of this Order deals with something that came into effect on December 13 which is paragraph 7 of the Order. The rest of it deals with matters that came into effect on January 1, 1998 so that it is very clear that we are dealing with two different sets of dates.

Mr. Speaker, just one other thing I would like to say. We have just come out of a very holy, blessed and beautiful time in our lives, Christmas time. All over this country, including this Red House, has seen the lights to the glory of God and that is why today, I was so disappointed when the Member for Laventille East/Morvant who professes to be a holy person and who believes in God would come to this Parliament to denigrate the religion of others. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, they had their time, and as we come out of Christmas and into 1998, the first working day, I wish all Members a very blessed, holy and prosperous 1998. I thank you.

Mr. Martin Joseph (*St. Ann's East*): Mr. Speaker, like the Member for Siparia, it was not my intention to participate in this debate. The Members on the other side are attempting to do something that while they may gain short-term political points, over the longer term they are setting a dangerous course for this society.

Mr. Speaker, we all sat and listened to the contribution made by the Member for Laventille East/Morvant and the Member never denigrated the Holy person to whom they referred. It is that side which is attempting to score political points that is trying to do otherwise. The Member for Laventille East/Morvant was absolutely clear in what he said.

I sat and watched Members and they said, “Ah hah, you see how easy it is to trap him.” It is all entrapment on their part to give the impression that the hon.

Member said what he did not say. That is my only short contribution because when the history is being written, we keep making the point that while we are here we have a responsibility to the country and when we attempt to score cheap political points at the expense of the wider good of the country, all of us are going to suffer. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

8.50 p.m.

The Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. Speaker, I really do not know how to begin this winding up. Firstly, I would start with the accusation that something is wrong with my brevity. Notice I did not say shortness. From what I saw this evening, there is no doubt in my mind that brevity should have been the hallmark of this debate. Firstly, if it were, we would have been home long ago with our loved ones or otherwise. Secondly, many of us would not have been in trouble.

I remember my grandmother used to tell me that a still tongue keeps a wise head, far more for Kuei Tung, of course. In essence, that is the reason I end up staying out of trouble. If one does not get into trouble, there is a way that one's size eight or nine would fit in one's mouth. I find that if one is brief and sticks to the point, one would not get into trouble. That is why my economy of words work for me. It is the same way I manage the economy—focus on the points dealing with salient matters. You would notice that I do not get involved in calling names. My mother always says that when you call names look in the mirror first and you will see whose name you are calling. They can continue to call names and say who is not corrupt and who is a stranger to the truth. I am not in that. The names of persons who are not here are being called. That is unfair! We should not use the cover of parliamentary privilege to hide ourselves and call the names of persons who perform financial improprieties. These persons are not here to defend themselves.

I thought I would come here to deal with a fairly routine matter. I have been advised. Unlike, the Member for Diego Martin Central, I do not give myself legal advice. I do not think I am qualified to do that. I do not interpret law. I ask people to help me do these things. I was advised that the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order was signed on December 12, gazetted on December 13, and within 21 days of either the date of the Order or the coming into effect of the measures under that Order, I needed to come here to have it confirmed by resolution. Being the good boy that I am, Member for Diego Martin Central, I have done that.

One of the measures came into effect on December 13, 1997. It meant that 21 days from that, I had to be here by January 3, 1998. Today is January 2, 1998

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which is also convenient for the other measures which came into effect yesterday. We could have come on Monday. I am told that under the Interpretation Act, if the last day falls on a Saturday, I can go on the first working day thereafter. I chose today because I thought it was convenient and everybody would have been quite happy to do the nation's business.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I want to make the point that we did not have to come here today. The only measure which took effect on December 13, 1997 required a resolution under the excise order. That is the point his good colleague made last year. It is just as compressed natural gas which requires an excise order. Tobacco also requires an excise order. Last year she made the point that it had to be submitted to Parliament. It did not have to be confirmed under Chap. 78:50. In other words, it does not belong in the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: It is back to the same thing. I see an increase in excise duty as additional tax. I do not give myself legal advice. It was a variation of tax which was already there. Having turned up on the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, I came here to ask the House to confirm it.

I do not want to spend time getting involved in the myriad of issues which turned up in this debate. I would answer some of the matters which were raised that affect the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tourism. The first question asked by the Member for Diego Martin Central was about vehicles used for disabled persons. I do not want to do like my colleague and ask if he is against disabled persons.

Cabinet had decided long ago to assist disabled persons by allowing them to bring in their wheelchairs duty free, whether they were received as gifts or purchased abroad. Because the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order is a variation—I know he may argue that it is not a variation—and I consider it a reduction in duties, we put in it the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order because we are interested in helping the poor people in this country. Every time they see a measure which they think is good for the country, they say it should not be done. They do not like it and vote against it. If they do not want us to do the right things, at least, they should allow us the opportunity to do them and then criticize them by the time another election comes along. They should not criticize the measures which are being taken here to help the poor people live better. That is what we are about.

He raised the matter of returning nationals. He said that I raised a hullabaloo about returning nationals who could bring cars. I explained that. Let us get some background on it. On the question of returning nationals, I was not in Cabinet at

the time. That was done on August 1, 1994. I had left government and had no part in it. When it was set up the Member for Diego Martin Central knows that there was a tremendous loophole which cost the government over \$60 million. I would not add or even confirm the rumour that the first car which came into this country from a returning national was his son's. A total of \$60 million to allow his son to bring in a car duty free was a tremendous loss to this country.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: And whose was the last? Ish's?

Mr. Manning: The one you are driving is whose?

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: I am driving my car. I took the advantage of the privilege afforded me that everyone of them enjoyed at the time.

Mr. Maharaj: But you did not sell yours to Dole Chadee.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: I objected to the fact that a measure would be put in place to allow a returning resident to buy a car from a dealer in the country and get all duties and taxes off. I had a problem with that. I objected to it, went back and studied it and put in place a regime which would not allow anyone to return to the country and buy a new car here. To me that is discrimination of the highest order. Now there is a regime which allows a person to bring back his car and he would get rebates or concessionary rates of duties based on the age of the car.

Let me talk about pensions. In my first budget I tried to regularize certain things which existed. There were what I regarded as nuisance taxes and they were removed. We tried our best to clean up a number of administrative problems which existed with Inland Revenue as far as the tax regime was concerned.

In 1996, I presented a budget which said we wanted to go one step further. We wanted to simplify the Pay As You Earn system (PAYE) for individuals, so that they could make reasonable claims and a simpler return.

I had at the time a debate as to whether we should keep things like pension or unit trust or credit union and I said at the time, if the returns are kept cluttered, we would get nowhere. Therefore, as a first measure, let us see what we can get away with in terms of bringing it all around to one allowance and that was used for a number of things: it could be used for pensions, or for one's mortgage interest and that was it.

9.00 p.m.

Mr. Valley: What about the alimony allowance?

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: I explained that the last time. It would benefit you as much as it would me. *[Interruption]* You could just refuse to pay your wife alimony. So recognizing that the pension regime had to be reformed in any case, we came up and did a number of measures and I will bring pension reform legislation here and I undertake that when I do, you will begin to understand what I am doing.

As far as the question of money purchase or defined contribution, or defined benefit is concerned, my friend the Member for Diego Martin Central went into a long explanation about what money purchase is and what defined contribution is as opposed to what defined benefit is. I do not think I want to clutter anyone's mind with that, but then he asked why we are interested in surpluses if we are not going to have a surplus if it is a defined contribution and a money purchase plan.

Mr. Speaker, just for his own understanding, I was referring to the problems of pension surpluses that exist now with plans that have been bound up or those that had found themselves with huge surpluses. There is no clear legislation which says how surpluses are distributed and, therefore, I am merely signalling that we are going to have the law amended so that the distribution of surpluses is going to be understood better so that persons do not have to guess or now make application for all special circumstances just for the surpluses to be distributed.

The other matter which the Member raised was about the energy holdings and the fact that we are going to scare investors away. Let me inform this honourable House that the concept of an energy holding was articulated by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries in another place, and at that time he clearly indicated that as part of his negotiations with foreign investors who may wish to get concessions. Now, any foreign investor can come and set up business in Trinidad and Tobago and if he does not require any concessions, he could ignore the Government. But as long as he wants to get concessions, we are responsible to the nation about those concessions. We say we would like you if you want concessions to, at least, allow some part of your shareholding to be made available to the public and nationals of Trinidad and Tobago. How could you argue against that? How could you say it is going to scare investors away? Again, you are just trying to use your lack of information to scare people. This is typical.

Let me talk about my good friend, Mr. Soodhoo. I am really disappointed that the Member for Diego Martin West would use this parliamentary coverage to talk about Mr. Soodhoo. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries has made a comprehensive statement in the other place about Mr. Soodhoo. *[Interruption]* I

cannot force it down your throat, I am merely trying to explain what has happened. At the time he said clearly that Mr. Soodhoo is a consultant. You have asked what he is many times. He is a consultant, he is no longer on the board, he resigned from the board, all that was said. You do not accept that either? He said at the time that other consultants—and he applied like any national of Trinidad and Tobago, an advertisement was put out by NP for a consultancy and he was cheaper and more qualified than those who came up.

Dr. Rowley: Would you give way, please?

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: Let me finish, and if you are still not satisfied I will consider giving way. Because the board had heard about the comments the Member is pushing, that the man was guilty of some financial impropriety and was fired, it—and that is what the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said—wrote FCB and asked if there was any reason why they think he should not be hired based upon his performance at the bank. The bank wrote and gave the board a clear, full, unconditional—

Mr. Panday: You are tarnishing his name.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: The NP board did everything that was required of them but instead, we come here and start talking about how the guy was fired for financial impropriety and so forth.

Dr. Rowley: I must thank the Minister sincerely for giving way. I have two questions: Was Mr. Soodhoo dismissed from FCB, and are you saying that the bank which dismissed him has since written a letter of congratulation and recommendation to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries? Is that what you are saying? If that is what you are saying, I accept it.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: I do not know whether he was fired. I am merely saying that because there have been rumours around about things like that, the NP board wrote the FCB board asking precisely that question. I do not know whether they sent any letter of congratulations. This is semantics.

Dr. Rowley: Would you give way?

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: No, no, it is late in the day.

Dr. Rowley: You know we are not going home now. We cannot be late for public business, we are talking about serious business here.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: You all did not even want to come.

Dr. Rowley: We are here. You have no idea about my coming and my going.

Mr. Speaker, I am asking the Minister, is he telling the House that even after all this furore made by the OWTU and the public inconvenience of a day of no fuel that he is now saying that he has no knowledge of whether or not Mr. Soodhoo was dismissed from FCB, a corporation sole in charge of the bank and of NP? That is what I want him to answer for me.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: The Member said that he did not know about 100 acres of land occupied by a man. I am saying that I do not go and ask every state corporation whom they fired, whom they hired, and whom they promoted. If that is what you are suggesting, I do not know. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order, order!

Dr. Rowley: When the Minister called the chairman of the board and tried to get the block, he did not know?

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: The Member is moving on to something else.

Mr. Speaker: What happens is that the Member for Diego Martin West has asked the Minister to give way and he gave way. He was then asked to give way a second time, he gave way. The answer which he gave may not suit you but you may have asked him to give way again and he may or may not have given way but it is not right while he gets up to continue his contribution to be shouting across the table. It cannot work like that.

Dr. Rowley: We expect the Minister to tell us the truth.

Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the Minister of Trade and Consumer Affairs dealt with the question of why he deferred the common external tariff from January 1 to June 30, but I would also mention that whereas St. Vincent did it on January 1, what I am told is that they also raised their consumption taxes to offset the loss of revenue they would have experienced. We have no intentions of raising any kind of consumption taxes. As a matter of fact, you would recall that one of the reasons this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order is so brief is because I had said that there really should have been no new taxes.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I went back to the 1994 Provisional Collection of Taxes Order which is on page 465 of the Chamber's copy which I had borrowed and I was trying to research it to see whether they had brought any matters that were not in the budget, but when I kept going, and going, and going, I understand their difficulty is that they love to tax the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Their

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Provisional Collection of Taxes Order in 1994 was 100 pages of taxes long, whereas mine is three pages.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move. *[Interruption]*

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 1997 be confirmed subject to the following modifications:

By deleting clause 8 and substituting the following clause:

“8. The Excise Duty (Tobacco Products) Order 1992 is amended in relation to cigarettes under tariff heading number 2402.20, by deleting the words “\$2.10 per pack” and substituting the words \$2.50 per pack.”

Motion made and question proposed, That the House do now adjourn to Friday, January 16, 1998, at 1.30 p.m. [Hon. R. L. Maharaj]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 9.14 p.m.