

*Leave of Absence**Friday, October 23, 1998***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, October 23, 1998*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, leave of absence has been granted to Dr. The Hon. Rupert Griffith, Member of Parliament for Arima from October 20—26, 1998 and Mr. Chandresh Sharma, Member of Parliament for Fyzabad from today's sitting.

PETITION

**Request for Hansard
(Attorney Stanley Marcus)**

Mr. Kenneth Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have the honour to present the petition on behalf of Attorney Stanley Marcus.

I now ask that the Clerk be permitted to read the petition and that the promoters be allowed to proceed.

*Petition read.**Question put and agreed to, That the petition be granted.*

The Prime Minister (Hon. Basdeo Panday): Mr. Deputy Speaker, something must have happened to the Minister of Finance; he is usually not late.

PAPER LAID

Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 1998. [*The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Ganga Singh)*]

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Ganga Singh): Mr. Deputy Speaker, having regard to the absence of the hon. Minister of Finance under whose portfolio this matter falls, we would like a short break.

Agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The sitting is suspended for 10 minutes.

1.38 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.50 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

PROVISIONAL COLLECTION OF TAXES ORDER

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Trevor Sudama): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in the name of the Minister of Finance:

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 Supplementary Appropriation Bill, the President may, for the purposes 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 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 whereas the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 1998 was made under section 3 of the Act, whereby provision was made for the imposition or variation of taxes in the written law 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 30th September, 1999”.

And whereas it is expedient to confirm the said Order:

Be it resolved that the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 1998 be confirmed.

The Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, Chap. 74:01, provides that where proposals for general appropriation of public funds are made to the House of Representatives and are embodied in an Appropriation Bill, the President may issue an order providing for the imposition of any tax, or the variation of an existing tax, in order to raise revenue to meet the expenditure specified in the Appropriation Bill.

The Provisional Collection of Taxes Act also provides that an order varying an existing tax shall cease to have effect if the order is not confirmed by a

resolution agreed to by this House, with or without modifications, within 21 days after the commencement of the Order. The Provisional Collection of Taxes Order 1998 was made by the President on October 5, 1998, and came into effect on that same date which is also the date on which the order was published. That Order must be confirmed by this House by October 26, 1998. Today, of course, is October 23. Failure to confirm the Order by October 26, 1998 will result in the additional taxes raised pursuant to that Order being treated as unauthorized payments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the Minister of Finance presented the Budget statement for the financial year 1998/1999 in this House, a few days ago, he outlined certain fiscal measures which have been translated into legislation through the Order of which I am now seeking confirmation. I do not propose to trouble this House with much discussion. This is a rather simple Order and this budget, of which this Order forms a part, has been the subject of considerable debate both in this place and the other place, and certainly I do not want to engage this House in any extraneous matters about who beat whom and so forth. I want to confine this debate to the matter that is before us, that is, the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order and the items which are listed in that Order.

I will, however, seek to clarify some of the issues which have arisen as a result of the measures contained in the Order. Paragraph 2 of the Order sets out the new structure governing the special registration fees payable in respect of locally assembled motor vehicles using foreign parts. The special registration fee payable on a motor vehicle with an engine size not exceeding 1799 cc is now \$30,000. The fee payable on a motor vehicle with an engine size exceeding 1799 cc but not exceeding 2499 cc is \$50,000. On a motor vehicle of engine size 2499 cc but not exceeding 2999 cc the fee is \$70,000, and on a motor vehicle with engine size exceeding 2999 cc the special registration fee is \$90,000.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government has not been unmindful of the concerns expressed by persons affected by this measure and the Government will be addressing these concerns against the complaints about the foreign used car industry so that the best interests of this country will be served.

It will be observed that the customs duty payable on a foreign assembled motor vehicle has also been increased by 5, 10 and 15 per cent, depending on the cylinder capacity of the imported vehicle. This measure is to be found at paragraph 5(c) to (j) of the Order.

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The measures contained at paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Order are intended to make the bonds issued by the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company Limited to facilitate lending to first-time home owners more attractive to investors. The Income Tax Act as well as the Corporation Tax Act have been amended so as to exempt from tax the interest income payable on these Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company Limited bonds.

The Minister of Finance in his budget presentation stated that customs duties on all computer software and VAT on all computer hardware, parts, accessories and software would be eliminated with effect from October 5, 1998. Paragraph 5(a) and (b) as well as paragraph 6 of the Order seek to give effect to this measure. There has, however, been some doubt as to whether certain items of software are covered under the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 1998. The approval of the Caricom Secretariat will have to be obtained before the customs duties on some items of software can be reduced and it is expected that this matter will be clarified in the Finance Bill which should be submitted to Parliament in a couple of weeks' time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the primary intention behind these measures is not—I repeat, is not—to increase the burden on taxpayers. Some of the measures are instruments of fiscal policy while others will provide some of the needed revenue to meet the expenditure specified in the Appropriation Bill 1998/1999.

As I said earlier on, this is a rather simple motion. It is a routine procedure and just merely laying before this House for confirmation, those items of adjustments in the fiscal measures which came up in the Appropriation Bill 1998/1999. I am sure that this simple matter will not take up too much of the time of this House.

I beg to move.

Question proposed.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Hedwige Bereaux (*La Brea*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I begin my contribution, I wish to congratulate the hon. Member for Oropouche, the Minister of Planning and Development, for taking his rightful place, as we all expected when the UNC came into Government, that he would have been the Minister of Finance. Of course, an impostor is in his place. [*Interruption*] What I mean is his political impostor, someone who came through the back door and all of us here were elected by the people.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There is no back door Member in this honourable House or in the other House.

Mr. H. Breaux: I said it in a political sense.

Mr. Speaker, the behaviour of the hon. Minister of Finance is reminiscent of what happened here a few days ago in the budget debate in that he was so hurry to leave that he caused the hon. Member for Oropouche and Minister of Planning and Development to have to cut short his contribution in the House so that he could attend to his other business. Today, he has failed to be here. He is breaking l'école biche, as we would say in school and has not come to the Parliament to do his job. So, he has reduced the hon. Minister of Planning and Development to have to pinch-hit for him, to use a baseball term.

I could well understand the brevity of the contribution of the hon. Minister of Planning and Development, and I really would like to take my cue from where he started. He said he was not going to trouble this honourable House with much discussion because we have had so much discussion on the budget, and I quote: "...this budget of which this Order forms a part..."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I quite agree with him, because it is impossible to deal with this Order with any degree of coherence and completeness without making reference from time to time, to the budget statement which was delivered in this honourable House—and I propose to do that with some degree of detail.

We ran into a problem during the budget debate—and I could have heard a number of Members on the other side expressing their concerns as to why a budget which appeared to do so much for so many people, there was such a groundswell of disapproval of it, and one would remember they could not understand why.

The basic reason was that the budget is not anchored in any long-term plan for the country. One could have seen that the Minister of Planning and Development had found himself in a position where he was like a fifth wheel on a coach and did not need to complete his contribution. For instance, one would have expected that the Minister would have been able to outline the Government's plans and programmes, not only for the medium term, but for the long term. I do not know if it is because they do not see themselves being in government pass the year 2001, somewhere around March. One would have expected, and particularly having regard to the position in which this country finds itself today, that there would be a planning mechanism.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order—I am going to demonstrate from time to time how this Government did not seek to plan and is not operating on a plan and that is why there is such discordance in their policies and programmes. For instance, we are here today with this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order.

Before I get to that, let me just point out that the hon. Minister indicated that items 5(c) to (j) are the items in this Order relating to the taxes on motor vehicles. I noticed that item (c) say, “under Tariff Subheading Nos. 8703.219, 8703.229, and 8703.232, in the column entitled “Rate of Duty”, by deleting the word 20 % and substituting the word ‘25 %.’” All the others are worded in similar fashion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no explanation in this as to what we are talking about—and right down—as to why that is so. It would seem that they are ashamed or trying to hide something. The Minister explained it had to do with duties on motor vehicles but he was very apologetic in his approach. They do not want the persons whom they encouraged to bring in vehicles, they do not want the persons whom they encouraged to spend their money—and one young man said—I saw him speaking over the television—that he had mortgaged—he was 28 years old—his and his relatives’ properties; he owed the bank and they did not want to hear, and unless something was done he would be dead. He was talking about hanging himself, and grammoxone, and that is how I translated it.

2.10 p.m.

They are now bringing it here. They have abandoned the people they have encouraged, coerced, and sweet-talked into going into business in the South, and now they are trying to slip it through in a very nebulous form, not explaining anything.

Look at what they did in respect of orthopaedic appliances. In clause 6:

“Schedule 2 of the Value Added Tax Act is amended by inserting after item 27, the following items:

‘28. The items contained in the First Schedule to the Customs Act under Tariff Heading No. 90:21, being orthopedic appliances, including crutches, surgical belts and trusses; splints and other fracture appliances; artificial parts of the body, hearing aids and other appliances which are worn or carried or implanted in the body; to compensate for a defect or disability, other than items in Tariff Subheading Nos. 9021.21 and 9021.29, being artificial teeth and dental fittings.’”

They explained that completely. However, with respect to the motor vehicles, they tried to hide it. It was the same when they were being severely criticized and checked on the question of the budget and their conduct in this country was being brought to book. They fled like cowards from this House. They tried to hide it, but I am here to bring out what is correct.

They have raised the licence fees with respect to foreign-used motor cars. Even though I hold no particular brief for the people in the foreign-used vehicles business, I wish to point out that they had no plan.

In 1997, this matter was brought up in the budget

“Motor Vehicle Regime

Accordingly, we will introduce early in the new year a Regime to govern and regulate the used car market, including the re-assembly of imported used cars. This regime will provide for:

- The importation of fully assembled right hand drive motor vehicles by dealers for retail trade;
- The registration, licensing and inspection of all motor vehicles dealerships, spare parts, outlets, service shops and garages;
- Regulations relating to the age and quality of imported used vehicles, and locally re-assembled used vehicles, as well as standards for the inspection of all used vehicles and garages undertaking refurbishing and structural work;
- The provision of warranties, and the guarantee of supply of spare parts.”

They came with a whole list of things. Where are the regulations they promised? Because they did not do anything about it, they ran into a problem. By 1998, there is a problem.

I recall hearing the hon. Minister, non-performer of the year and of years to come, Sen. Sadiq Baksh, the man who has Caroni, Palo Seco and everywhere under water, talking recently about fraud in the Licensing Division. He talked about changing engines to reduce the sum paid. He has been talking about it and divorcing himself from it. That is his Ministry! Now they want us to agree with them to raise these payments. No! They must get their act together.

He is talking about fraud in the Licensing Division, but he is their boss. The buck stops with him. I do not know if he is committing fraud. I did not know that

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any Minister was beating his wife either, but I am now hearing that. I do not know who is the fraudulent person. As a result of that, we are concerned about the fraud. Before we agree to any increase in duties or payments, we must be certain that they are regulated their business at the Licensing Division.

I was looking through the newspapers today and there were various editorial comments. The *Express* editorial says:

“Clean up the Licensing Office.

That ‘dirty money’ and corruption exists in the foreign-used car business, as Transport Minister, Sadiq Baksh revealed in the Senate on Wednesday, provides no justification for the drastic increase in the vehicles’ registration

That is what the *Express* says. Its owner is the good friend of the Member for Caroni North. When he sued the Member, he could not get a— [*Inaudible*].

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I would just like to read Standing Order 36(6) to the Member for La Brea.

“No Member shall refer to any other Member by name.”

You have been mentioning the name “Sadiq Baksh”.

Mr. H. Bereaux: I said, Senator.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, by name.

Mr. H. Bereaux: So, you do not want me to call his name. Sorry. I am indeed moved by your desire to protect the hon. Senator from any barrage I may shoot his way, having regard to the fact that you have been on the receiving end of substantial ill-treatment.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the question of these foreign-used vehicles, we have the editor of a renown newspaper saying that “the revelations of alleged corruption and dirty money provides no justification for the drastic increase in the vehicles’ registration fees”.

When the hon. Minister of Finance was here explaining to us why he thought that there should be an increase in the registration fee he said several things. One was that the bottom had gone out of the used-car market in Trinidad and Tobago. He meant that those of us who had bought new vehicles somewhere in 1996 and were about to sell those cars, having regard to the fact that the tax concession we

received would end around the end of this year, we could not sell for the high price that we hoped. We would have to keep those cars for three years before we can sell them and get the same concessions. That is what it translates into.

When I hear people talk about buying a car for \$340,000 and not being able to sell it for \$120,000, they are not speaking to me. I cannot buy a car for \$340,000. I cannot afford it.

2.20 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I hear the Minister of Finance saying that, and I recall in a different administration when he was spoken to about selling Mercedes Benz, he said he did not take any vow of poverty and my recent checks with the various religious orders have not indicated that he has joined any of them to take any vow of poverty. The prime beneficiaries of this piece of legislation are the very people who come here and try to make us believe that they have the concern of the people in Bamboo. No! They are all for themselves and we have come to show that this Government had no plan in what they were doing.

Here is a Government which decided to bring in foreign-used cars and when it was done, they spoke about the spin-off industries and so forth, but now, suddenly they have realized that there would be problems with the environment. If this was a Government with a plan and not one of “Vaps”, going from one vote catching activity to another, they would have set the regulations in place and what I would have expected them to do, if they were concerned about the environment, is rather than raise the fee across the board for everybody, if they brought in foreign-used vehicle and fitted them with CNG which is clean fuel, and there would be no harm done to the environment, then the new fees would not apply and there would then be more CNG vehicles coming onto the market, the use of CNG extending which we know is an environmentally friendly fluid. That is what we expected, but this is a Government without a plan moving from “Vaps” to “Vaps”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government talks about the environment, but it took me more than one year in this House to get them to recognize the environmental disaster facing the country in Parrylands. They believed by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries just going into the Senate—knowing that I was coming here today—and trying to forestall me by saying they were going to close it down would have prevented me from reading into the record of this House the most dastardly and irresponsible behaviour of this Government. On the one hand they

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...speak about the environment, but I am reading from the *1996—1998 Medium Term Policy Framework* in respect of energy and it says:

“In the area of health, safety and the environment, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, in collaboration with other relevant organisations, will be pursuing appropriate projects/policies aimed at ensuring that adequate health, safety and environmental standards are established and maintained.”

The 1996 plan, of course, was already put there in the days of the PNM and in that programme, it also addresses the question of looking at the environment with respect to energy industries, but they have left it out completely. They said that in consideration of the environment and health impact of energy production, Government would continue to promote the use of environmentally friendly fluids in domestic transportation in 1998—2000.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the use of CNG would have been a very convenient adjunct to any programme in respect of foreign-used or used vehicles generally. They did not say anything about that, they were only concerned that having already insulated the few persons who had supported them and who, I understand, may be still supporting them via one foreign-used car per year in respect of certain persons, they were concerned about them. Allegations are that there were leakages in respect of the actual fees which were to be paid.

I now get back to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order itself, and I read earlier in respect of clause 6 the items contained in the first schedule to the Customs Act being orthopaedic appliances and that is a measure which I believe is one that we can support. Just the measure. But when one looks at that solo measure, as against this Government’s performance in the health sector, its ambivalence assumes tremendous proportions. This Government’s performance in the health sector is nothing but scandalous, but if we want to really look at it I propose to look at their non-performance in respect of the *Public Sector Investment Programme 1996*. On page 26 they said:

“Formal negotiations, which were previously scheduled for late 1995, have been delayed at the request of the new administration to permit a review of the programme.”

Their first act is to delay and they went on:

“...implementation of the HSRP will commence on a modest basis in 1996...

...\$33.0 million has been projected to take place under the programme during the fiscal year. This includes upgrading of the Port of Spain General Hospital,

relocation of radiotherapy services to the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, commencement of construction of a new health facility at Couva, upgrading works at the Sangre Grande Hospital, and rebuilding and refurbishment of various health centres.”

That was the *1996 Public Sector Investment Programme*, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *Public Sector Investment Programme 1997* on page 28.

“116. The Health Sector Reform Programme will be advanced significantly

And some statements are identified there.

- “(a) upgrading and equipping of five (5) regional hospitals at Port of Spain, Mt. Hope, San Fernando, Sangre Grande and Tobago;
- (b) the refurbishment/construction and equipping of ten (10) district health facilities and four (4) enhanced health facilities at Port of Spain, St. James, Arima, Couva, St. Joseph, Chaguanas, Roy Joseph St., Princes Town, Point Fortin, Siparia, Mayaro, Sangre Grande, Scarborough and one (1) additional site to be determined by Government;”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you notice they promised Couva in 1996 and in 1997 and they want us to agree to give them money to do what? Nothing. They were upgrading Sangre Grande in 1996 and in 1997. Let us look at 1998 to see if we were any more fortunate.

On page 29, 151.

“151. Implementation of the Health Sector Reform Programme, which was delayed in 1997, is expected to gain momentum in 1998. The Ministry of Health has been allocated \$127.3 million to carry out the programme during the year.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is the programme?

“Commencement of the first phase of construction of District Health facilities at St. James, Couva, Princes Town and Point Fortin;”

They were talking about Point Fortin in 1997, they audited in 1998, they were talking about Couva in 1996, they audited in 1997 and in 1998 they are talking about Sangre Grande.

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It says:

“refurbishment and enhancement of the hospital and health facilities at Port of Spain and San Fernando General Hospitals and the Sangre Grande Hospital;”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the points which I have made in this Parliament more than once, I will now make again. In respect of what is beneficial to the people of Trinidad and Tobago particularly the less fortunate, be it the less fortunate in La Brea, or Point Fortin who have to go to the Point Fortin Hospital, or be it the less fortunate in Couva who have to go to the Couva Hospital, this Government does not discriminate. They are against all and I want to repeat the statement made by Mr. Basdeo Maharaj, former Executive Assistant to the Prime Minister which was reported in the *Independent* and some other newspaper that he said: “You think Basdeo Panday have time for little people?” I leave the country to judge the Prime Minister who would play golf in Tobago while Chaguanas is under water. *[Desk thumping]*

In 1998, we have the same thing—refurbishment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre has just addressed me with an unparliamentary word, he said I was lying. I would like you, Sir, to speak to him if you heard it, if you did not, I would appreciate that you indicate to him he is not to say it to me again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, the Member for La Brea has asked the Deputy Speaker to ask the hon. Member to refrain from using unparliamentary expressions.

Mr. H. Bereaux. Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the benefit of the Member for Nariva I am reading from the *Public Sector Investment Programme* page 30 paragraph 153, second line on that page: “refurbishment and major repair work at the St. Joseph and Gasparillo Health Centres.”

2.35 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I go on to the *1998/1999 Public Sector Investment Programme*, again, on health, at page 38. Paragraph 175 says:

“The Health Sector Reform Programme will be advanced significantly in

Does that sound familiar, Mr. Deputy Speaker? It is the identical sentence that was used in reference to the 1997 PSIP. It says:

“The Health Sector Reform Programme will be advanced significantly in

Mr. Deputy Speaker, not even, in respect of their language, do they have any originality. Let us get down to what they propose to do, and see if we recognize it. It says:

“- refurbishment/construction and equipping of seven (7) district health facilities at St. James, Couva, Chaguanas, Point Fortin, Princes Town, Siparia and Mayaro; and four enhanced health facilities at Oxford Street, St. Joseph, Roy Joseph Street and Scarborough;”

What we have, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a litany of promises, a litany of saying that we are going to do certain things. From here, we see cogent and irrefutable evidence of the lack of performance, not only, in particular, of the Ministry of Health, but also of the entire Government, and the failure of the Ministry of Planning and Development to properly direct the phasing of these programmes. So when they tell us about health care in this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, we have a serious problem.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they tried to close down Point Fortin Hospital instead of managing it properly. The Point Fortin Hospital is a place where there are more patients being seen in the hospital than being recorded on the books. Cards cannot be found for some of the patients. I am repeating it, because the doctors at the Point Fortin Hospital are bringing in their private patients through the back door, and collecting moneys. I have done an investigation, quite recently, on it and I am saying that is going on at the Point Fortin Hospital. Maybe if you go now, you would see some patients who come in, nobody knows anything about them, operations are being done on them and they then leave. They are taking the places of other persons in need.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one expects that to happen where there is a government that appears to condone, tacitly, corruption because: “If the priest could play, who is me.” If it is at the head and you go down, what do you expect, Mr. Deputy Speaker? *[Desk thumping]*

We are talking about orthopaedic appliances, and all these health elements and we are talking about the environment and health. Marijuana, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is not good for health. As a result of that, I want to warn the Member for Nariva that he should stop encouraging people in Nariva to plant marijuana. I want to warn him about that. *[Desk thumping]*

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was saying that the health sector in this country is in complete disarray. Imagine, we have spent substantial sums to build the Mount Hope Medical Sciences Complex—*[Interruption]* Mr. Deputy Speaker, I note the Member for Caroni East and a number of other Members complaining, but I know that the hon. Minister of Planning and Development will not say that, he has more sense than that. That complex is now called, “Mount Hopeless”, under the UNC Government, after they have been in office for three years.

A particular nurse went in there as a patient and she was treated badly, but she documented the mistreatment that she received. It turned out that she died. She went in for one thing and they took out the next. What we have is a Minister only saying, yes, he understands that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for La Brea, I understand your exuberance, but let us talk about crutches and so forth, because you are straying way off the point into what has happened. I know you are concerned about the health of the country, but let us stick to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order in regard to, as it mentions, clause 6.

Mr. H. Béreaux: Mr. Deputy Speaker, with due respect, you have told me that I am off course, so I would like to point out to you the situation in the context in which I was speaking. I was speaking in the context of the statement made by the mover of the Motion, the budget, of which this Order forms a part.

The hon. Member has opened the debate wide, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I am going through the apertures that he so kindly presented me. *[Desk thumping]*

As I was saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the question of health in this country has reached alarming proportions, and I will read from the newspapers. There are about three epidemics in this country at one time. We have red eye, some kind of fever, meningococcal and dengue. When we see that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have to be seriously concerned about what this Government is doing.

For instance, clause 3 says:

“The Income Tax Act is amended in section 8(1) by inserting the following after paragraph *(la)*

(lb) with effect from 1st October, 1998, interest payable to resident individuals on bonds issued by the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company Limited for the purpose of providing loans to first time home owners.”.

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the other one is a corporation tax. Having once been the Chairman of Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance, and knowing the competence with which that organization operates, I am the first to support a move like that. That move was also in the context of the Government's promise to sell certain NHA houses or apartments to the tenants.

I want to deal, Mr. Deputy Speaker, first and in particular, with the question of the apartments themselves. To the uninformed and to the person not *au courant* with the legal framework in respect of selling apartments, the normal way to do it is to, what we call in law, condominiumize it—make it a condominium. The Latin word “condominium” means common ownership. The common ownership means that each person will own one apartment and then the walkways, pathways and the common areas will be in common ownership of everybody else. Even when two brothers or two sisters or a brother and a sister own property as tenants in common, it poses problems.

In order to deal with this matter, the law seeks to do it in a way whereby you form a management company. The management company has control over the common areas, the passageways and so forth. That management company would have its superintendent and its various functionaries. Those persons would see about cleaning, painting and doing whatever else there is to do—repairs to certain areas, the outward walls of the buildings and so forth. If the building has, say 100 apartments, each owner of an apartment will pay a one hundredth part of the cost of running the management company, and with the management company doing its work, that money is usually billed quarterly. The way the agreement is done, when that is done if you do not pay, the sum owed becomes a charge on the apartment that you have. So it means you may have an apartment which is first subject to a mortgage, but yet there is the ability to superimpose a charge on the particular apartment in order to secure the management fees.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, why I am saying that and why I thought I should go slowly through this particular process, is because I listened and was quite pleased with the length of time that the various parties would have to pay. I was also concerned with the fact that, one, from what I read in the newspaper today in respect of rents paid in NHA apartments, it said they were bringing all rents—I read an article by Ria Taitt. She is quoting, I think, Sen. Cuffy-Dowlat. I quote:

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“The National Housing Authority plans to institute a minimum monthly rental of \$100 for its units, Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Housing Carol Cuffy-Dowlat told the Senate on Wednesday night.

Earlier she said the monthly rental rates for NHA’s 8,113 housing units

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

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mr. Kenneth Valley*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. H. BÉREAU: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I thank hon. Members for extending my time, which I propose to use to its fullest.

As I was saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have had a situation here where of the 8,113 housing units of the National Housing Authority, the rents range from \$9 to \$350. They have now decided to raise those rents to a minimal of \$100. One knows that even if one buys an apartment for \$15,000 or \$20,000—and I am using small numbers—and has to pay it back at \$100 a month, it is going to take a tremendously long time, even with no interest. So that is one point.

The more important point is the fact that while you are in the night sleeping and there is a crack or something on the wall or wherever it is—you are not thinking about it, some subsidence—the management company that is responsible for the common areas will go ahead, repair it, pay their staff and do whatever. Then, at the end of the quarter, total the sum of money and divide it by 100 if there are 100 apartments, or 50 if there are 50 apartments, and that bill is yours to pay together with the mortgage. That payment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a charge also on your property, and for the uninitiated, a charge is the equivalent of a mortgage. So there is a hidden payment.

Be mindful, I am not saying it is any different from the condominiums elsewhere. I am not saying it is going to be more. All I am saying is, to use the oft repeated statement, all that glitters is not gold, the payment of the mortgage is not the only debt which will come and which will be an encumbrance on the property. Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I caution that whereas you may find areas where you can deal and certain persons whom you may want to sell these flats or houses to as the case may be, I suggest that you first start with the houses so you could circumscribe how it is dealt with.

Then I go to the other point, because I know that the hon. Member for St. Augustine has a vision for housing—possibly one of the few persons on that side who has any kind of vision at all, and one can understand why the country is going in the way it is going—for urban renewal. I am suspecting that this is a very cleverly disguised move to implement his plans for urban renewal, by making these flats all in Nelson Street and so forth, that are today prime property in Trinidad and Tobago; making these people rush for it and then luring them to dispose of it; as one developer comes, give everybody and grab it. I am putting it on the table in this honourable House so that the nation will be aware of my suspicions and fears. If it does not happen I will be the happiest person, but I am warning that it could very well be that. It is my business here to point out the loopholes and the possibilities and let the Government be either guided in one way or be deterred in another. I hear my hon. friend, the Member for Port of Spain South, talk about the plans for Picton and so forth.

Whereas I agree a number of persons living in those flats will be only too glad and want to buy; whereas I agree that making homes available is good—I prefer people choose to own—but when you try to hang your hat where your hand cannot reach, you become worse off, although a little stretching is good for the body. You always try to keep yourself challenged but when you overchallenge, it is difficult. I am also saying that the temptation will be there for persons to give up their apartments unless certain clauses and certain caveats are put in to give it up to some developer who would take over the whole of those good positions. So there are things which have to be done, and I am just putting that out so that we could deal with it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was speaking earlier—and I am following the trend set by the hon. Member for Oropouche, that this debate forms part of the budget. I came in this honourable House some time ago and pointed out that the contractor doing the Caparo River was R. Mahabir and Sons, who had a capital of \$50,000 and a paid-up capital of \$4. When I said that it was a \$4.00 company, the hon. Minister of non-performance, Works and Transport, said that it was some Inter-American Development Bank loan or whatever, and it did not matter once the person had the competence to do it.

Well, it is common knowledge and it is history, that the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas, the hon. Manohar Ramsaran, said that the engineering works on the Caparo River were improperly done. I heard it on the television, I heard it on the news. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, he said that. Now that we have

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established—and he is correct—that the engineering works in respect of the Caparo River which had the effect of flooding all of downtown Chaguanas; which had the effect of creating floods in an area that has never been there before—
[*Interruption*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am following—

Mr. Partap: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order please, 36(1).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 36(1) says:

“Subject to the provisions of standing Order No. 12 (Adjournment—Definite Matter of Urgent Public Importance), debate upon any motion, Bill or amendment shall be relevant to such motion, Bill or amendment, and a Member shall confine his observations to the subject under discussion.”

Overruled. Member for La Brea.

Mr. H. Bereaux: As I was saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker—this is in your style, Member for Oropouche—the Chaguanas Main Road never flooded before.

Mr. Hinds: It was like a waterway.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Yes. People lost millions of dollars in damage through professional negligence of the \$4.00 company.

Mr. Hart: That is for sleeping with the devil.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Please, please, gentlemen. Mr. Deputy Speaker, millions of dollars were lost. I read where a shop owner was saying, “Where is Humphrey now and his grandiose plans for dealing with flooding?” [*Desk thumping*] The point about it is that damage was caused, and when damage is caused as a result of professional negligence, somebody must pay. [*Desk thumping*] A right of action is open, but the engineers and the company in particular that was responsible for doing it is a \$4 company.

Mr. Hart: Four is dead man.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Four dollars! They cannot pay. This Government, therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a result of foisted, improper and bad management; a company that is payless—or at least they have \$4.00 on the population—to do an important piece of work like that, this Government is vicariously liable. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Maraj: What?

Mr. H. Bereaux: Vicariously liable. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to take the opportunity—

Mr. Sudama: He never got the opportunity to use it.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Mr. Deputy Speaker, what you have here is a situation where the flooding problem does not stop. This Government has not cleaned the Erin River.

Mr. Hinds: They only clean the Treasury. [*Laughter*]

Mr. H. Bereaux: Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant. [*Desk thumping*] They have not cleaned the Erin River, and as a result of not having done so, we have the worst floods we have ever had in years. I am using this forum to inform the people who own the oil that went in my constituents' yards and houses, that they are going to make a claim for compensation.

I do not want to have to deal with it, but the hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant made a comment here, and I think I would not leave it—about cleaning out the Treasury.

Mr. Ramsaran: He said “clean”.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Cleaning the Treasury. I only want to remind this Government of one thing. I know they have been commenting on Mr. Claudio Loser's—the International Monetary Fund official—good statements about the economy. When he spoke of the new conditionalities set by the International Monetary Fund, I quote from *The Guardian* newspaper of Saturday, October 10, 1998. He says:

“It encompasses very important issues such as improving the efficiency and accountability of the public sector, tackling corruption, fiscal decentralization and establishment of an efficient, productive relationship between the public and the private sector.”

If we had ever thought we had cause for concern, the statement of the hon. Minister of Works and Transport in respect of the Licensing Office, and more importantly, about the corruption and the various misdemeanours and other offences involved in the foreign used car business—he said it and he is the man in charge—tells me we have a problem.

3.05 p.m.

“In this context, poor government could be associated with the loss of revenue because of favouritism or poor tax collection. It could also include the situation where the large corporations and well-connected do not pay their share. In that case, the burden falls on the salaried workers who are easier to pursue.”

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More important, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are talking about health in this country, and I have spoken about the health of my constituents in Parrylands. Now that the honourable Minister, Finbar Gangar, has seen the light, having been encouraged to do so by the forceful representation brought to the floor of this Parliament by none other than yours truly, I want to remind him also that there is a financial responsibility which the company will have to the children and the individuals in that community who have suffered.

One person died. One young child was brain damaged as a result of inhaling the fumes. I am not going to let them get away by saying simply that they are closing down the plant. I want the record of this Parliament to read this record of the readings from the monitors which were set up by the school:

“On September 17, 1998, volatile organic compounds which should only be three parts per billion—that is the amount that a 25-year old person can tolerate—at 930 p.m. it was 4.9 parts per billion; at 10 p.m. it was 6.5 parts per billion; at 10.30 p.m. it was 6.6 parts per billion, and on September 21, 1998, it peaked at 12.6 parts per billion.”

In addition, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where in respect of carbon monoxide—which kills people—maximum tolerance for a 25-year old person is 10 parts per billion, but on September 22, 1998 at 11.28 a.m. it was 21 parts per billion; at 12.30 p.m. it was 29 parts per billion. At 11 a.m. on September 23, 1998 it was 19 parts per billion; at 12.19 a.m. on that same day it was 26 parts per billion, and at 12.22 p.m. it was 29 parts per billion.

A few of those poor people were teachers:

“24.9.98	Kimberly Matthews of Standard One complained of feeling ill. She vomited three times and received medical treatment at Petrotrin health facilities at Point Fortin.”	
25.9.98	Beverly Sookram	12.00 noon
	Tara Ragoonath	12.00 noon
	Mohess Ramoutar	12.35 p.m.
	Vediah Pheboo	1.45 p.m.”
23.9.98	Raphael Renaud of Standard Three became ill on the compound. His mother withdrew him to seek medical attention.”	

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a litany of neglect. It is a sad record of the failure by this Government to so manage and arrange for the management of the state enterprise that they are causing the death of and the serious injury to persons in my constituency.

As I was saying, they have failed to pay proper attention to the health of the people there. They are so vindictive that they do not care! It is just that they do not care about poor people. I say poor people generally: in Barrackpore, in the Naparima constituency—and I do not want to attack my good friend from Naparima, but the fact is that there was a gas leak in Barrackpore for days until they threatened and then they came and did something about it.

If they think I am coming here to say that they are discriminating because of ethnicity, no; it is not that. I have now realized that they do not care about which race they discriminate against. They ride on them once they are low down. [*Desk thumping*] They do not care! Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I was saying, I have come to this House from time to time to speak on water for my constituency, and when I performed here, it might have been disorderly, but definitely not disgraceful as it got what it needed to get.

When I did that, we got water, but the mismanagement of this country and, in particular, by the Minister of Public Utilities, we had in the heart of their constituency a blow up! They said that the pipeline blew up. Anybody who knows anything about pipelines will know that if there is a blowout, one is able to bypass the system. I am not an engineer and I know that, having been close to industry for more than twenty years. In WASA there was a blow out, and all I could hear on my television every morning is not how we would get water, but some sort of explanation? Plenty explanations and no water, and they wonder why it is the Divali site did not have many people on it. They could not bathe! [*Laughter*] They wanted to bathe but they could not. That is why they had to stay away.

I noted that my time is getting closer, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Inaudible interruptions*] It is said that we are always beating funeral marches to the grave, if they do not know about that, so that is not a problem. My time will come for dealing with them, because if I do that, it would be what the people would like me to do, so do not worry about that.

As I was saying, I wanted to point out that the problem with the budget is that the population does not understand, and they see no reason to make any sacrifices to pay any taxes, because there is no plan as to where the country is going. For

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instance, we heard the hon. Member for Tobago West some days ago point out they were talking about tourism all over the place, but the health in Tobago was not good, the water was a problem, the food that the tourists would have to eat would have to come from abroad or from Trinidad, and the fishing—imagine the picture painted in respect of the ability of people to get gas from the NP facility that it would take almost a whole day to get gas. The reason is because they do not have a clear, cogent and long-term plan.

I would have thought that the hon. Member for Oropouche would have, in his contribution, somewhere here or elsewhere, having regard to what he considers using their own numbers, the growth of the economy, the inflation rate and the reserve which, incidentally, is not the highest reserve we have ever had. I will use their figures for the while. This was a time when the Government would seek to get all the parties in the country together to produce some sort of blueprint for where we would go in the next 10 years. It does not matter that they are going to lose the next election. They are the Government of the day and they must do it.

Therefore, I want to commend to this Government the notice of the Motion which was sent by Sen. Dr. Eric St. Cyr. He is not a PNM Senator, neither is he a UNC Senator; he is Independent. It says:

“Whereas economic activity thrives best in an atmosphere of clearly understood and stable economic policies;

Be it resolved that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago articulate its broad economic philosophy particularly regarding public participation in industry, economic liberalisation and human resource management and its strategies for furthering the economic well being of the nation.”

If we sit and all contribute to the creation of a plan like that, when the time comes and the population is called upon to sacrifice and to hold things because we are going into the future, assuming, and I may be a bit optimistic to assume that the Government is not as corrupt as it is, we will have support. But, in any event, I cannot, under those circumstances, support this order.

I thank you.

3.20 p.m.

Mr. Kenneth Valley (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I must confess that since I got the Order Paper for the sitting today and the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, I was extremely confused as to exactly what was

happening. I want simply, first of all, to look at what is required by the section of the legislation which allows for the provisional collection of taxes. As the Motion says, and I would read the first "WHEREAS"

"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 Supplementary Appropriation Bill..."

And this is the important part, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

"the President may, for the purposes 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 is imposed or varied shall be payable.

So that, we see that the whole purpose of a provisional collection of taxes order is to raise revenues, to meet, in part, the expenditure appropriated via the Appropriation Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I take you now to the Order. When we look at this Order we see that it has six clauses.

The first clause merely says:

"This Order may be cited as the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 1998."

Clause 2 talks about the increase in fees on the motor vehicle tax and, of course, that is a revenue-raising matter.

When we look at clause 3, one would see that it talks about an amendment to the Income Tax Act to the effect of really allowing for tax free bonds. So one will note that is not a revenue-raising matter and, therefore, according to the legislation, has no place in this legislation.

Clause 4 is the same thing, it deals with the Corporation Tax Act, with respect to the interest payable on bonds issued by the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company. Again, giving an exemption. So it is not revenue raising and it does not fall under the provision of the legislation.

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Clause 5 is the same thing. It talks about changing from 5 per cent to 3 per cent, so that is not revenue raising. So clause 5 does not belong here either.

Clause 6 talks about exempting some items from value added tax. Clause 6 does not belong here.

So really, the only clauses which fit here are clauses 1 and 2.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I went to the previous legislation. I just want to cite the legislation for Members. Members can go as far back as 1991. If they were to look at the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, Part B on page 39 of the 1991 legislation they would see the revenue-raising matters, and they are all there. I do not think I need to go through. But I looked at the previous legislation with respect to that and we were talking about revenue-raising matters. I am making the point really, that clauses 3—6 have no place in this legislation whatsoever. That is the first point I wanted to make.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wonder whether you will permit me to do something else. I want to really go off slightly on a tangent, because I think we would be failing in our responsibility here as a House to fail to recognize one of our own who has departed this life. On behalf of Members of this side of the House, I want to express our deepest sympathy to our former colleague, Dr. Max Awon, who served in this House over the period 1966—76. As you know, Dr. Awon was a former Minister of Health, and Minister of Local Government. But I think one would know that Dr. Awon really excelled in our culture. As a matter of fact, in our folk culture, first of all, in the area of stick fighting and, more recently, as a mas man, not only as a band leader, but as king of a band, having won Band of the Year in the Medium Sized Category, both in 1987 and 1988. As you know, he was a stalwart of our party and I think we ought to pay tribute to him, to his service to Trinidad and Tobago and wherever he may be, may he rest in peace.

Coming back to the legislation before us, Sir, I made the first point that really, from clauses 3 onwards, that is not properly before us. One can understand, therefore, why the Minister has absconded today, they cannot find him, we had to suspend the House for some time. Even though we gave him time to get here, no where could he be found. I believe if my colleague from Diego Martin East were here, I am sure he would have known where he is. *[Laughter]* But the Member for Diego Martin East is absent today. Cannot find him. He is not in this House, I do not know, he might be in somebody else's house. The Member for Caroni East could not find him by cellular. I know all Government Ministers have cellular. He

has taken that off also. He does not want to be found. I can understand, because by now, he is out of range. I hope he is not beating anybody.

Let us come back to the legislation. I make the point that the only revenue-raising matter in this legislation concerns the change in fees with respect to used vehicles. Of course, it is a very vexatious provision, especially given previous promises by this Government. I remember when the Government came to this House with that legislation, we counselled them, because we told them we looked at it. If one was thinking about foreign-used cars at all: why does one want to talk about this concept of locally assembled foreign-used cars? Understand what that means. They were sending persons from Trinidad to Japan to disassemble a motor vehicle, to ship it into Trinidad, to reassemble the thing to sell. For the life of me, I do not know what sense that made. First of all, to my mind, if you were doing that, therefore you were increasing the risk of accidents and of vehicles splitting in half and all of these things.

So that, we said first of all, put regulations in place, say that the vehicles must not be more than five years old; let the vehicles come in as fully assembled used vehicles and let the customs duties and existing legislation apply. I mean, one simply had to say that, fine, if it is the same thing, 3,000 cc or what have you, or higher; then there is a certain rate of duty that would apply if it is lower and so forth. One went through a whole complicated scheme as it were, all with a view to compensate certain persons.

I do not know what has happened. I do not know whether the Government or members of the party have requested further contributions which are now denied and, therefore, they are getting back at them. But all of a sudden, out of the blue, we see this Government attempting, really, to cripple that industry that has, in fact, served the small man.

What is most disheartening, I think my colleague, the Member for La Brea, made the point. But in 1997 when the Minister came to this House, he set out a whole regime that he was going to implement to control the industry. The question is: Why has there been this dereliction of duty? Listen to the Minister with respect to the used vehicles, after speaking about the problem in the 1997 budget speech:

“We will introduce early in the new year a regime to govern and regulate the used car market, including the reassembling of imported used cars. This regime would provide for:

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- (i) the importation of fully assembled right-hand drive motor vehicles by dealers for the retail trade;
- (ii) the registration, licensing and inspection of all motor vehicle dealerships, spare parts outlets, service shops and garages;
- (iii) regulations relating to the age and quality of imported used cars and locally reassembled used vehicles, as well as standards for the inspection of all used vehicles and garages undertaking refurbishing and structural work; and
- (iv) provision of warranties and guarantees of supply of spare parts.”

Up to today, this has not been done. Instead of that, you simply have the crippling of an industry.

Now, I must admit, this whole concept of locally assembled used cars baffles me. There can be no such industry. If you have a used-car industry, you have a used-car industry. The used car comes into Trinidad and Tobago, put the guidelines, say that you do not want old iron in Trinidad and Tobago. So you put some type of controlling: the cars must be no more than five years old and what have you; you have existing legislation and let the thing work. The question is: Why has this not been done? When there are no logical answers coming from the Government, then the perception must be that there are other considerations. We are not being told what those other considerations are.

We know, for example, that the Member for St. Augustine is a big defender of foreign-used vehicles, even while I was in Government. He made representation with respect to having licences for some of them, some people say he has about three foreign-used vehicles. There is the perception in Trinidad and Tobago that there was a high level of campaign financing from the people in the Bamboo to that party. The perception outside today is that they have asked for more, that they have become like Oliver Twist, asking for more. And because the boys there said, “Oh God, you want to cripple us!”, they said, “We will really cripple you”, and that is what has happened. That is the perception, that is what is being said outside. That is what it is.

I am saying that we need to have a regulated industry. As a fact, I remember it was early 1996, a public servant met me and said, “Could you imagine I am a public servant for 28 years and I cannot buy a motor vehicle?” The fact that they
[*Interruption*] No we were not! All we were saying at the time—

3.35 p.m.

As a matter of fact, when they came into Government they would have met a note from the Ministry of Trade with respect to this whole issue.

Mr. Sudama: We met a note, we did not meet anything else.

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I tell this Government, at any point in time there would be work in progress, and governments come and go. The point I am making is that this issue was dealt with at the Ministry of Trade and there was a recommendation which came after a study including persons from the Licensing Division, the Ministry of Works and Transport and from the Ministry. When they came with their suggestions, we told them of those recommendations. One year later, they came with theirs, they did not implement ours, but then, we ought not to say anything because we did not implement theirs in 1977. Therefore, one is at a loss to know really what is the real reason for this about face.

I made the point that there is only one item in the Order that really refers to the raising of revenues as required by the legislation, because as a fact, the main changes in revenue are of a fictitious nature. They are not tax increases but merely coming from thin air. While the norm is that a Minister of Finance who is suggesting new revenue measures or a significant change in a revenue item should explain carefully why he expects this level of increase in revenue, that was not done.

I simply refer to the Draft Estimates of Revenue, look at some of the items. We mentioned some of these in the budget debate, and we are yet to get an explanation. What we heard instead, is the Minister of Finance who came to the Parliament and told us the he is not concerned with the figures, that he is concerned with bread and butter matters. In other words, he does not care about the integrity of the numbers that he brings to this House [*Desk thumping*]. This is where we are! When we he said that, I said to myself that my whole career has gone up before me! Because no longer are you able to make decisions based on facts and figures, you are now supposed to make decisions, as it were, by pulling out of thin air.

But I ask quite simply, if these revenue estimates are wrong, how are we going to get bread and butter? Ask the army personnel who cannot even buy food. [*Desk thumping*] Ask the nurses who were marching the other day. Because if your revenue figures are wrong we can expect that at the end of the year, the Minister

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of Planning and Development would come back and tell us that there is under performance in the Public Sector Investment Programme. More than that, the Minister of Health would come back and tell us that he did not have.

I heard the Minister of Finance talking about the amount of money in the appropriation, I could tell him from now that he is not going to get it, because he has a whole heaping set of fictitious revenues that he is not going to get. He plans to borrow a whole heaping set of money that he would not be able to borrow, and that is the reality of the situation.

Let us look at page 33 of his revenue estimates. He talked about water improvement rates and he plans to get some \$81.6 million there, and I want the Minister of Public Utilities to tell me what that is. I remember his coming to the Parliament and passing an affirmative Order with respect to water improvement rates. But that money is the Water and Sewerage Authority's revenues. How is it getting into the Consolidated Fund? I want the Minister of Public Utilities to let us know this afternoon. If, in fact, that is WASA's revenue, you can cross that of.

We can also go to page 25 on which there is an item called "Share of profit from Oil Companies under Production Sharing Contract". In 1997, actual is nil;, the 1998 estimate is nil; 1998 revised estimate January—September is nil, but for the new financial year he is expecting to get \$170 million from some "Production Sharing" agreement. Perhaps he is going to get it, but if, in fact he is, he has a responsibility to this House to tell us the source of that income. [*Desk thumping*]

Then there is this other item "Custom Users Fee". I think he expects to get some \$141 million. Up to now he had two occasions in the Lower House and in the Senate in his opening and his closing address, but up to now we are none the wiser . What is this "Custom Users Fee" about? Nobody is telling us! Is it coming from thin air? That is \$114 million. If it is fictitious, as I think it is, then kiss it good-bye. Even if it is not, when will the legislation be in place so that the Government, Customs or whoever it is, would be able to collect it? When will the legislation be in place?

When you consider the corporate taxes on page 6, I am saying the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order is a joke. The one measure that is logically there is the increased fees with respect to motor vehicles. If they cripple the industry then there is no tax revenue to get from that! That is not revenue raising in any case.

Consider page 6, taxes from oil companies for the 9-month period, the revised estimates was \$163.4 million. For the 12-month period the estimate is \$502.3

million. That is an increase of 34 per cent on an annualized basis. In other words, if we up the \$163 million and determine what it would have been had they gone for the whole year and compare it to the estimate for 1998/1999, that is a 34 per cent increase! That is a significant increase. The Minister has forgotten to tell us why he thinks he is going to get that much money in corporate tax, if this is what he expects to get for the 9-month period. If there is padding in that figure, then he is not going to get it, it is fictitious.

The same thing applies when you look at the other companies where the actual figure was revised: \$910.2 million revised estimates, that is what he expects. His best estimate when he is doing the budget, is that for the 9-month period he would get \$910.2 million. He expects to get \$1.4 billion for the new year. That seems to be at least \$150 million padded.

Individual tax revenue is the same thing and one can go on. You look at the VAT revenues which were high in this period because of the plan and so forth, but you have to give refunds, and that does not appear to be factored into the calculation at all. Therefore, the VAT revenue estimates for the new year is about \$500 million off, by our estimates.

The simple point is, while this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order talks about this one mickey mouse measure, the real revenue and financing items for the Minister's expenditure are these fictitious revenues that he is not going to get! When he tells about some individual—I think it is Dr. Loser—saying things are dandy, he has missed the real import of the gentleman's address.

The gentleman was saying that previous governments have done a wonderful job. [*Interruption*] That is what he said quite clearly! I would just read a part:

"In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, following the collapse of oil prices, real GDP has declined by one-third over the period 1983—89, which meant that by the end of the decade of the 80s, the standard of living was roughly equivalent to that of the late 1960s. To reverse this decline the government of the day initiated a programme of macro economics stabilization and reform with financial support from the Fund. This program was implemented with a discipline and commitment that have been continued by the present administration and we are seeing the good results today."

He said that. I do not agree that this administration is continuing, but the main point he made—if you read the address, which is 18 pages long—is, "Listen,

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previous governments have set an excellent platform for growth in this economy. They have done everything, taken hard decisions, and do not mess it up." In Trinidad language he was telling them, "Doh mess it up!".

These people are very diplomatic and so forth, read what he said. He talked about some of the things that they ought to guard against:

"the crisis brought to top of the economic agenda issues of transparency,..."

He talked about fairness in the award of contracts, the avoidance of corruption and so forth.

In other words, the fellow was lecturing them and as though they were not aware of that at all. It reminds me of a line in a song that goes, "you're so vain you probably think this song is about you". They missed the whole concept and tone of the man's lecture. There is not a soul in Trinidad and Tobago which believes this Government has anything to do with our present economic circumstance. That is the reality.

I think in the Senate, my friend, the Acting Minister of Finance—I do not know what he is, poor fella. They do him all kinds of things. Sometime I really feel sorry for him. [*Interruption*] If I were him, I would tell them that there is no way—. You are not prepared. You come here to participate. The Minister of Finance is not here and he treats the House with disrespect, and your Prime Minister tells you that you have to do it. [*Interruption*] Why do you not tell him to go and find his Minister of Finance, because you were there all the time.

When you were working in the vineyard, where was he?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Please address the Chair.

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am saying that they do my friend every single thing, no wonder he has heart trouble. [*Interruption*] That is none of my business! [*Cross talk*]. You treat people with disrespect, that is what you do. You pick up an individual you did not know. "You could have asked me and I would have told you about him. Why do you think he left the PNM? Why do you think we needed to get rid of him? Because he was good? "Yuh" now finding out! You would find out more!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Speak on the Bill please!

Mr. K. Valley: I am on the Bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There are many people who could talk nice and sell themselves, but, listen, you find them out rather quickly. You could have spoken to me, I would have told you.

Mr. Panday: You are envious of the man!

3.50 p.m.

Mr. K. Valley: I was making the point that—Kuei Tung fixation. People do not even think about him. I tell you; I bet he makes a deal.

I read a comment in a newspaper where the Member for Oropouche was asking: What advice could the PNM give to avoid the repercussions of the world recession? Am I quoting the Minister correctly?

Mr. Sudama: The Member wants to insulate us from the world recession.

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I say here we have an individual who is prepared to throw his hands up in the air saying, “Oh God! There is a world recession. There is nothing I could do. Take me to the world! Nail me to the cross!”

Since 1996, we have been telling this Government that it got an inheritance, that it was reaping but not tilling the soil; it was not replanting. Up to today, the fact is that they have done nothing. There is not one new project; not one new idea to move this economy forward. So that now that the rains are coming, do not come to us. It is like—who is it?

Mr. Sudama: PNM will revive the world.

Mr. K. Valley: It is that one must light one’s candle and if one fails to light one’s candle, when the darkness comes, do not come to talk to me. I think the Bible spoke about the businessman who gave three talents to his people. Not so. He gave one five talents; one three talents; or something of the sort. Some buried them. I think one of them reinvested them. But these did not even bury them; they put them in their pockets and ran.

Now, they come asking us for advice. What they should have been doing from 1996/1997, they should have been implementing new measures—

Mr. Sudama: In world recession? What foolishness is the Member talking?

Mr. K. Valley:—to take us to higher levels of growth, so that even if the world recession were to come, we would be protected at a higher level of standard of living. But, right now, they are leaving us completely exposed to the world environment. There is nothing for the rainy day and that is what it is, dreaming.

Mr. Sudama: The whole world is in recession but the PNM has a plan to keep Trinidad and Tobago insulated.

Mr. K. Valley: The whole world is in recession so that they would stand there, because they have done nothing over the period, which is why we are so exposed now. [*Interruption*] They have absolutely nothing to do with that. As a matter of fact, the economy has been on autopilot since November, 1995. That is the reality. They have been coasting. [*Desk thumping*] What is happening is the economy is about to come to a standstill.

Mr. Panday: You wish; wishful thinking.

Mr. K. Valley: That is what it is. Listen, I am going to be here. As long as God gives me life, I shall be here next year and I want God to give the Member life, also, because I want him to be here next year. Does the Member think I am guessing? I am not guessing.

As I said, over the next 12 months, unless Mother Lakshmi blessed us—and all that rain that came for Divali, it was washing out all the devils; for those who sleep with the devils and for those who slept with the devils, washing out all those devils. That is what it was doing.

Mr. Sudama: Is the Member saying the people of Chaguanas are devils?

Mr. K. Valley: The hypocrisy, the deceit and the deception.

Dr. Mohammed: The Member just said that!

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, some of the other fictitious items are land and building taxes. If that item is looked at on page 7, these are fictitious revenues. What is amazing is that the Minister, when he cannot defend his figures, would come here and say, “Not my work. That is public servants. I am not a bookkeeper”. Then he lifts his Budget Statement—this guy has to be a real did not attack the budget; they attacked the numbers”. So that he believes that his public relations statement is, in fact, the budget.

The budget is, in fact, the revenue estimates, the expenditure estimates, the Public Service Investment Programme and so forth. It is a package. That is the budget. So it is not this statement where he comes and gives all kinds of promises that he does not intend to keep. That is a public relations statement. But, he knows nothing of the concept of ministerial responsibility. He does not know that he takes responsibility for these books when they come to the House. I can tell him, not only was I a Minister in the Ministry of Finance, but I worked in that ministry from 1978 until 1985 and there is not a public servant who would put these fictitious numbers in, unless directed by a Minister.

In the old days, the Minister had to write and direct them—I do not know whether they still do that, but look at land—[*Interruption*] The Member should check it. Look at land and building taxes—\$56.6 million in 1997. The revised estimates in 1998 is \$54.3 million, but he expects to get \$93.1 million in the new year. Fictitious income.

Mr. Sudama: We will do a revaluation.

Mr. K. Valley: They are doing a revaluation. Where is it? If it is being increased, it is not in the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. When will this revaluation be done? Even if a revaluation is being done, when are they doing the legislation and bringing it to the House to be passed?

Mr. Narine: Devaluation coming; not revaluation.

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look at everything, we see that the main direct hit in this budget, other than what will come from the fact that the numbers are fictitious and so forth, is that increase in the NIB fees. Our only safeguard is that they have to come with separate legislation with respect to that and also that it is subject to actuarial review.

When we look at the increases implied in VAT, we see, really, that is a massive tax. The joke is, when we look at the benefits contemplated coming out of that, we say somebody has to be making a joke. But then, there is always this ulterior motive and, for a time, I did not believe it. I thought my colleague from Diego Martin East was simply making it up but, more and more, one sees clearly that when the Minister of Finance comes with anything, there is that ulterior motive. What is it?

So, there is a situation where the National Insurance Board is forced to pick up the WASA bonds and financing for Piarco. Piarco, as is noted, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has been moved off from funding from the Government; it is now to be funded via the National Insurance Property Development Company and when they were coming here and saying it was a NIPDEC transaction and NIPDEC made the offer, Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt got up in the other place, as I read in the newspapers, and said categorically, a note came.

Poor “fella”, as he turns his back, they do things behind his back, without any comment from the Attorney General’s Office. They probably hid the note from the Member and said NIPDEC did it. But that is when people like to travel; they

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like to jump on planes and not account for the people's advances. But that is a different story. We will speak about that another time. But that is what it is.

The Attorney General was out of the country; the Member was out of the country; they brought a note and passed it, directing NIPDEC to give the contract to their friends.

Mr. D. Singh: That is not true.

Mr. K. Valley: Listen to the next one saying it is not true. He must have been sleeping in the Parliament or beating somebody somewhere. This is what happened and now that they have to finance—

Mr. Panday: You did not beat your wife.

Mr. K. Valley: I cannot beat my wife. She will beat me and he together, if you know the lady. That is one person for whom I cannot play “bad John”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, now that they cannot find finances for the airport on the market, they have to force NIPDEC to pick up the bond; so, as they force NIPDEC to pick up the bond and the same thing with WASA, NIPDEC has to pull \$500 million out of the system. What they are doing here, by providing these rates, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the increases are calculated, it would be seen that the expectation is some \$500-odd million for the period 1998—1999. That is money that they expect the National Insurance Board to pass to NIPDEC so that it can continue financing the airport.

Now, understand what that means, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It means that the taxpayer would be paying for the corrupt ways of this Government. People have said that they can build that airport for 50 per cent of cost and give away some.

Mr. Panday: Elias.

Mr. Sudama: What has Elias built under cost?

Mr. K. Valley: It was very easy to test that. All they had to do was go out for public tender. That is all they had to do, but by failing to do that, the perception must be that the transaction was corrupt, especially when this Government has been maintaining that it is NIPDEC that made the award, denying their involvement, in the same way they are trying to deny their involvement in that Innocogen deal. Denying their involvement until in the Senate, the lady Senator could say that is what happened on July 2, while the Prime Minister was away: the Minister of Works and Transport was at play, again, fixing his friends. The Prime

Minister was away; the Attorney General, who has been opposed to this transaction in this manner from day one—both of them were away—he said,

Mr. Sudama: Come back to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order.

Mr. K. Valley: I will come back to it. I want to talk about the corruption. I am talking about it, because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am saying that what we are seeing is a big plan to make the little people in Trinidad and Tobago—the ordinary guy—pay by increasing the National Insurance Board contributions, taking his contribution to fund an airport which is at least 50 per cent overvalued—at least 50 per cent going into people's pockets. That is what is happening, so that every little Tom, Dick and Harry in Trinidad and Tobago, who now has to pay that higher contribution, is making a contribution to their friends—every one of them. That is what we see.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to me, it is really getting sickening and it is getting extremely sickening because—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was making the point that for me, I am getting extremely scared. Normally, one expects that while there might be those in government who may want to touch what is not theirs, one also expects that the leader of the Government will be that real check to ensure that men and women are kept in line.

4.05 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when serious allegations are made against the head of Government, as those which were made during that budget debate with respect to a certain Narine who is supposed to be the Chairman of a UNC party group in New York; when there is that perception and when the Prime Minister fails to say yea or nay, then we have serious concerns. The thing stinks to high heaven. Let us make no bones about it. You have the head of your Government, the Prime

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Minister, when there is that perception of corruption from the very top, we really have a problem. [*Desk thumping*] Let us face it. Who will guard the guards? What is the name of the calypsonian?

Mr. Bereaux: King Austin.

Mr. K. Valley: King Austin. That is what it is, from the very top. On this morning's *Trinidad Guardian*, there is this advertisement by the company called InnCogen. One reads it and it raises more questions. The advertisement starts by stating that York Research is 100 per cent owner of InnCogen. So one asks what would happen with this plan that they would have 47.5 per cent; the other firm, Design Build Professional would have 47.5 per cent and the facilitator—in other words—InnerCob have 5 per cent. What has happened with that plan?

Mr. Bereaux: That is the million dollars he carried to England. That is what bought the house.

Mr. K. Valley: Remember that InnerCob is the one who brought Design Build Professional into the deal. It is they who brought York Research into the deal, so if they are now out of it we want to know the terms. [*Interruption*] We want to know what is the agreement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr. K. Valley: What is the agreement that York Research entered into with InnerCob and with Design Build Professional so that they no longer have shares? They bought out the shares? For how much? So they have started making profit even before T&TEC gets one megawatt of electricity? It is becoming more interesting, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And you ask the other question. If this company is now 100 per cent owned by York Research, why do they have to form this subsidiary in the first place? York Research is recognized. As they have said in the article, they are a big company, they own NASDAQ and so forth. Why will they form InnCogen, this new company? Why do they not do it under York Research? [*Prime Minister leaves Chamber*] Why are you going? Why are you going? We want you to answer these issues.

Hon. Member: You could run but you cannot hide.

Mr. K. Valley: More questions. Understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, then, do you know what they say in paragraph two of this advertisement? They say that the companies that InnerCob is going to bring require 15—20 megawatts. But do you know what they are building? They are building 220 megawatts. In other words,

10 times the requirement. [*Interruption*] I am under Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thanks. So that a requirement, the “decobbing” they say, with cogeneration, but the cogeneration is 10 per cent of the capacity they are building. So the excess is 90 per cent. Normally excess is 10, 20, 30 or even 40 per cent. This company’s excess is 90 per cent, and obviously, again, the questions are there.

One asks very simply, why T&TEC could not go out and by public tender, find someone to provide electricity and as they find that person, they provide the 15—20 megawatts needed by InnerCob. Because that is a small requirement—the 10 per cent, but they are going off. Listen, these people are jokers. I do not know why they put out this advertisement. They have more questions to answer and we want to hear from the Minister of Public Utilities and the Prime Minister because they are implicated. [*Desk thumping*]

I will tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister has not spoken in this debate as yet so that he can deny it. But I am told—I got a call the night I spoke in this Parliament—which said that when the Minister of Public Utilities was doing his Master’s Degree in New York, Mr. Narine took care of him.

Hon. Members: Oh! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Valley: He can deny it.

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to indicate to the hon. Member for Diego Central, I did not do any Master’s Degree in New York.

Mr. K. Valley: I know you did it in New Jersey.

Mr. G. Singh: You said New York.

Mr. K. Valley: No, no, no. I said when you did it in the United States.

Mr. Sudama: You said New York.

Mr. K. Valley: I am sorry, it was New Jersey. The question to the Minister is, did you know Mr. Narine Singh before this InnerCob fiasco? Did you know him while in the United States doing your Master’s Degree? Did the Minister have any connection with him whatsoever? Answer. Answer. Answer. [*Mr. Valley sits*]

Mr. Hinds: And tell us while you are on your legs, who is “OuterCob”.

Mr. K. Valley: Do you understand? This is what it is, Mr. Deputy Speaker. All I am saying is this thing begs further questions. That note where the ministry

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directed T&TEC to delink the power generation from the other plants because they knew from the beginning that there would be no other plants. [*Desk thumping*] One reads the *TnT Mirror* and it is clear that all of those were a mere sham. The fact that these people who are supposed to bring this company to provide generating power for them will now be using a mere 10 per cent of the power they are bringing, indicates quite clearly that the whole thing was a sham from day one, to get around the tendering procedure in Trinidad and Tobago; trying to bless it, trying to christen it as cogeneration. When there is that perception from the top down, something is terribly wrong in the state of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is the reality. It is hard for me to say that.

I have known the hon. Basdeo Panday since 1983/1984 when we served together on the board of Workers Bank. I am telling you today, there is a big question mark in my mind concerning the integrity of the hon. Prime Minister, and I do not like to feel that way. [*Desk thumping*] It does not matter who the Prime Minister is, I want to feel that even though there might be those others—the underlings—that he can deal with it. I had my first suspicion when we worked as a team, both sides, on that Maritime affair. He got the report and not a thing was done. Not a thing. The Prime Minister got up in this Parliament, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and sent the Airports Authority to the Deyalsingh Committee. What did he do? Now they are writing notes to Cabinet and the same fellow got back the contract.

I was here when the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries brought that report and put it on his desk. He sat there talking to the Attorney General, “I do not know why this fella bring this thing for me. He expect me to read that?” I am sure he has not read it up to today. That is what it is and we ask what is happening. While we can understand those boys doing their—no, we cannot understand it—but we want to feel that the person on top will take care of it. We do not have that confidence in Trinidad and Tobago today. [*Desk thumping*] We do not have it. From top down, it is rotten—or so it appears—

Mr. Sudama: You had it under Manning; the confidence under Mr. Manning.

Mr. K. Valley: —and we want to hear about it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look at the fictitious revenues contained in this document, we see certain clear consequences for this economy over the next year. One would recall we made the point that in the new financial year the Government will be called upon to repay some \$2.7 billion in debt, some local,

some foreign. To repay that debt the Government plans to borrow \$1.9 billion—just under \$2 billion—in the external market. If the Member for Oropouche would take time and read Mr. Loser’s speech, he would come to the same conclusion that I came to, that it is going to be extremely difficult for Trinidad and Tobago to raise those sums in the external market in the new fiscal year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if one looked at the *Trinidad Guardian* this morning, one would have seen that for the second time the \$200 million bond offering had to be postponed. That is being done on the local market by local banks. If we are having difficulties in getting \$200 million at this time, when one considers that my friend is leaving us to the world and the world recession would bite harder six months from now, one can understand the difficulties that a country such as Trinidad and Tobago would have to find that more than US \$300 million in the external market. Understand that. So we are not going to get that but we have repayments. How is that going to finance external repayments?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition, the Government plans to borrow \$1.3 million already on the domestic market. So if on top of that planned domestic borrowing, we have, in fact, to finance our external debt repayment from our domestic source, one sees clearly what is going to happen. There would be a drain on our foreign reserve with the implications with respect to the devaluation of our currency; with respect to a general tightness; with respect to fewer funds available for investments; and so compromising the economic growth that we talk about.

Further, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have already shown that the Minister came to the House with a gross untruth, stating that for the first time in some 18 years we were having growth of 5 per cent. Yesterday I was out of the country just for one day, and on coming back I picked up the *Caribbean Beat*, September/October issue. The article talks about investing in Trinidad and Tobago. As a matter of fact, it says:

“The Trinidad and Tobago economy is back on a sustained growth path, after an almost decade-long decline in the eighties and early nineties. 1997 was the fourth successive year of real economic expansion, with growth of 2.9%, according to Central Bank figures. Growth in 1996 had been 2.8%, in 1995 3.2% and in 1994, the best year for the nineties so far, 5%.”

Mr. Sudama: Who said that? Is that CSO figures?

Mr. K. Valley: What is good about Central Bank is that it is independent of the Ministry of Finance. What is commonly known is that the Minister comes and

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talks— But more importantly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the point I really want to make is the fact that I would be the most surprised person—and I am sure my colleague from St. Joseph would be also—if, in fact, this economy turns out with a 5 per cent growth rate for 1998. Would the Member not be?

Mr. Assam: I will ensure it—trade and tourism. I will ensure it.

Mr. K. Valley: Our portfolio, trade, because it is there. But what about the rest of the economy? Say nothing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, then the Minister talks about 6 per cent for next year. He is dreaming. I do not know where he lives. The next year is going to be difficult, simply because we have the Minister of Finance—or let me say mainly because we have a Minister of Finance—who fails to admit to reality. He has colleagues who do not appear to be able to shake him out of his slumber into the world of reality. There are persons in that Government who know better or who ought to know better: The Minister of Planning and Development; the Minister of Trade and Tourism; even I would say, the Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Marine Resources ought to know better; well, I am sure the Minister of Foreign Affairs knows better but he prefers, given what happened on the last occasion, perhaps, to keep a still tongue.

Mr. Sudama: In the PNM?

Mr. K. Valley: He prefers on this occasion to say nothing. No longer are we hearing about lectures on leadership and so forth, but I would very much appreciate hearing some on economics. I know the Minister of Finance was asked during the Budget debate to explain his figures and he assured us that he would. We are still waiting. I thought you came here today feeling that the Minister would be here to give us some explanation but he is absent without leave. The Prime Minister is looking for him; he is nowhere to be found, not even by cellular. Nowhere.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is time really, for this Government to take stock. It is time they realize that they have a Minister of Finance who does not know what he is doing and unless they shake him into reality, he would take all of us down that slippery slope. And that is the reality of the situation. His coming and telling us that he is not interested in the integrity of numbers, I think he should tell us exactly where it is. The fact that he can show this disrespect to this House today is further evidence, and I would just wait to see what happens.

4.25 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not know if you have heard it around town, that the Minister of Finance goes around town saying that for every dollar he collects, 30 cents is for the Prime Minister. He says that, and the more things like these happen and there are no repercussions, the more it is confirmed in people's minds. I rest my case.

I thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Jarette Narine (*Arouca North*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know that on many occasions Members on the other side say they do not want people to speak in this country, but as long as I have a voice, and as long as I am a Member of this Parliament, no one like the Member for Nariva will stop me from speaking. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I congratulate my colleagues today for indicating to you that this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, Chap. 74:01, really deals with a lot of non-revenue items, but mainly, the provision for the revenues that will be derived from the increased taxes on foreign used vehicles. [*Interruption*]

The URP is a whole other chaos and corrupt practice. While we are dealing with the large sets of corruption in Piarco, NFM and the Minister of Finance giving \$52 million to his friends to bail out an insurance company, if one looks at the hundreds of small items that are taken care of by the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, and adds them it can go as far as the airport. That scandal will be joke to what he would have attained in five years; not only with URP but with the Ministry of Local Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the Member for Point-a-Pierre wants to interfere with me today, I am going to take a long while in explaining why he was hiding for me to speak in the budget. He wanted to speak after me, but I do not care where I speak. When I speak in this House he cannot answer because when you are dealing with persons who do not care about small people in Trinidad and Tobago, and who feel that they can rant and rave all over this country, treating people with discontent, then he is no minister as far as I am concerned. He is a representative of himself and not the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

They got zero ratings earlier this year and they are the cause of the Prime Minister getting a three per cent rating—the Ministers on that side who are not performing their duties as ministers in this economy of Trinidad and Tobago. The

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Member for St. Joseph can boast that he will do his part, but what about the others? They have frittered away the taxpayers' money in Trinidad. After he got the Unemployment Relief Programme from the Ministry of Works and Transport, \$200 million was spent. He has spent \$130 million again this year and he has nothing to show for it and now I am seeing that it is now going to be funded under the PSIP when the Minister was boasting about funding going to police stations and so forth. I will deal with this Minister as I go along.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as my colleague mentioned, this part of the provision is simply to increase the taxes on foreign-used vehicles and we have heard much about foreign-used vehicles over the last couple weeks, since the budget was read. I submit that concerning a certain businessman in Trinidad and Tobago who owns a company that imports Cherokee vehicles for the Government—and 70 per cent of those vehicles are not operating at the present time—a fiasco took place about two weeks ago in the Arima area. Eight Cherokee vehicles were chasing a Datsun Bluebird which was stolen in Cunupia. When they got on the Blanchisseuse Road, because of the winding road, they had to turn back.

Although 70 per cent are not functioning at the present time, those are the reports coming from the police service. I am saying that the real reason for this situation is that the very person who is importing those vehicles also imported the Tata from India; he also imported the Murti from India and also imported the Opel. The range price of those vehicles, one would have rather bought a foreign-used vehicle.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The sitting of this House is suspended for half of an hour.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. J. Narine: Mr. Deputy Speaker, before we took the tea break in last week's sitting in the Parliament, our political leader had made the statement that Government was capable of stealing an election, and I understood why he said that.

Before the House was suspended for the tea break today, I was dealing with the issue of foreign-used vehicles, and I was indicating that my colleagues and other persons in Trinidad spoke at length about this issue. There are other matters which concern the used-car dealers in Trinidad and Tobago, in that Platinum

Motors have brought in vehicles from India: the Tata, the Murti; and the Opel. Those vehicles can be purchased in the vicinity of \$40,000 to \$50,000 for one.

Persons who have to buy a used car, and they can pay the same amount of money to purchase a Sentra or another Japanese vehicle, would always use that option instead of buying a new vehicle. It is possible that this was done because of the ccs on those vehicles and the cost of those brand new vehicles which were not selling over the last two years, and because of what is taking place presently in the foreign-used car industry, Platinum Motors will now have the opportunity to sell those vehicles that they have brought; the Opel, the Murti and the Tata from India.

Mr. Partap: The Opel is not from India.

Mr. J. Narine: The Opel is from Germany. The other vehicles from India will be sold here so that they will get rid of the obsolete stuff that they had over the last two years. If it is that we in Trinidad and Tobago have to follow this Minister of Finance who made himself unavailable this afternoon to debate the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, I am certain that one would agree with the economist who said that the Minister of Finance was living “in a fool’s paradise”, and after hearing the Member for Diego Martin Central this afternoon, I am convinced beyond reasonable doubt that the figures in this year’s budget will not meet our expenditure. The only two things that I am seeing here is that additional state enterprises will be sold to make up the deficit in the 1998/1999 budget—and there may be a devaluation in the TT dollar—the two possible things that could happen in this budget debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the Minister of Finance delivered his budget presentation, it took an entire week after, and even Ministers on that side could not understand some of the matters that he related to in that budget presentation.

Today, we see out of the six items one revenue collecting item for foreign-used vehicles. How are we going to meet the budget when the income tax schedule will now allow persons who are receiving an income under \$50,000 not to fill the income tax return? I hope that the Ministry of Finance and the Inland Revenue Department already has its staff in place to deal with this. If one has a refund to get, they will fill out the income tax return but if they did not have a refund to get then they would not do so. Sections of revenue will not be collected. If it is that anyone who is working in the Government daily-paid service or otherwise is under the \$50,000 bracket and they have not paid the correct amount of taxes, then there would be a fall in the collection of taxes.

There is another matter that the Minister of Finance had raised by saying that the daily-paid workers of Government will be allowed a pension plan in the new year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, coming out of the trade union movement that represented daily-paid workers, I have heard a lot of rhetoric that all agreements were settled.

A female labourer in the government service is now getting a \$10.00 increase per day which is \$100 per fortnight more. At 26 fortnights that would mean they would be receiving \$2600.00 more which took them into another bracket, so that they will be paying more taxes. That particular female labourer is now receiving actually \$6.00 increase instead of the \$10.00 because the other \$4.00 went to pay taxes. Apart from that, the pension plan for daily-paid workers as from January would also be a contributory pension plan as the Minister of Finance indicated. I am saying that the rest of the \$6.00 will be taken away from the daily-paid worker. In truth and in fact, they did not get an increase in salaries for this year when one has taken away that from them.

I would come to the national insurance later down in the debate but as of now, the daily-paid workers in the Government service are seeing themselves getting a small increase. It is given in one hand and taken away in the other, so that you have done nothing for them while claiming that you have settled all the negotiations and so forth. What you have actually done is a master con game on the daily-paid workers in Trinidad and Tobago.

I am calling on the Minister of Finance to have this pension plan non-contributory as the public service pension plan. I remember some years ago when the 10 per cent, cost of living allowance and increments were taken away from workers in this country. They classified everyone as public servants. There was no daily-paid and monthly paid classified at that time. They said everybody was a public servant.

I am appealing to the Minister of Finance, when he is negotiating with the union, to have a pension plan for the daily-paid workers in the service, which we have fought for, for years. I commend him for starting negotiations to have this pension plan introduced in the year 1999, but it should be non-contributory.

5.10 p.m.

I would like to know from where the revenues would be collected to satisfy the \$100 hike in the old-age pension. Much has been said about that hike in old-age pension. The cost of living has risen over the last few years which has made it

impossible for the older folks with grandchildren under their care and expenses such as medical bills, water rates and telephones. When one has reached retirement age, and is home alone, it is important to have a telephone to reach persons quickly.

I remember the Minister of Public Utilities standing in this House and saying that pensioners would pay \$100 less on their WASA bills. I have been checking in my constituency and have not been able to get any information from persons 65 years and over, who have received the \$100 off on their WASA bills. Persons who went to the WASA office at Arima and asked for the reduction in their rates were not given the reduction. I am appealing to the Minister to check that. While he takes \$100 off here, he is adding it to the WASA bills. In truth, he has not given the old-age pensioners any increase.

The next part of the pension plan in which I am very interested is something that has been raised time and time again in Trinidad and Tobago. The money a retired public servant—some of them 85 years—has been receiving in pension benefits is no longer relevant in 1998. We should look at that. At the present time, their pension, which is being taxed, cannot meet their needs because taxes and food have gone up. There are people on the verge of resignation whose salaries would give them take home pension that would not satisfy their needs for too long. One pensioner who resigned earlier this year has told me that in two or three years, once he is alive, he will find himself in much difficulty.

Persons who have applied for computers because of the provision to get a loan, never got it. Computers for schools was welcomed by the national community. Computers for public servants was not a reality this year.

I have a daughter attending a secondary school in Arima and they have 20 classrooms. A room to be built should be air-conditioned so that pupils can attend computer sessions from time to time. Saying that each classroom should have a computer is public relations. The Minister should say that the schools would be allowed computers.

We were about to do that in Arima when the Member of Parliament for Arima told the principal not to take the cheque from the Old Boys' Association. I had to stand in front the school with an enlarged cheque, because they did not want to accept the money from the Association, which was intended to buy computers.

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[*Interruption*] Because there is a non-Member of Parliament who advised the principal.

On Friday he said that he would accept the cheque on the Monday. When I went on that Monday, he said that he was advised by senior officials not to take the cheque. I asked if on the Wednesday we would be allowed, as “old” boys to give the cheque to the principal. He said, “No”. He said that a grocery opposite the school decided to adopt the school and all kinds of rhetoric went on that day. I do not think that the school received anything up to today. Months have passed and they are still making statements—lip-service as usual.

What worries me is that, like the case of the Cherokee Jeeps and other things, they are the people who will benefit from bringing in these computers. Who will supply the software? Who will do the maintenance? It will not be my worry, but it is another way of getting the boys to get what they want. That is the situation and that will happen.

Every move this Government makes is to fill someone’s pockets. If the Old Boys’ Association from the Arima Boys’ Government School had been allowed to hand over moneys to purchase computers for the school, they would not have had to give Arima Boys’ Government School computers. They would already have had them. The Old Boys’ Association would have worked towards getting more computers for the school.

Arima Boys’ Government School has a history of persons coming from that school who have done well in education. It is a school of which we are proud. It is in the heart of the town of Arima, and is a school that has a history of sportsmen and other persons who did well.

Where are the revenues going? The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources goes back to subsidies for people who want to dig holes behind their houses to get water to supply their gardens. We had that situation years ago and we know how this system can be corrupted.

The Member for Tobago East has always boasted that he lived on a farm on the base, but the farm had no animals. My cousin had a farm next to his mother’s farm. That is the farm he took over. I would really like people to see that farm. An agricultural economist who ran down a farm in Wallerfield, which he received with animals? I do not know. [*Interruption*]

The Member would not even know where that farm is. They had to use the old train line to get there. The Member for Tobago East had to buy a Land Rover to get to that farm. *[Interruption]*

I know very well because we met at the wake when my cousin died and he indicated that he was neighbour to my cousin, who had a very prosperous farm next to his. A banker tells how to spend money. How many of them have you seen start a business from scratch? Not because someone is qualified in a certain field, can one operate in it.

The best economist I know is my mother. She is an economist of repute in my family: 82 years old and having five children to support in the days when things were not nice.

5.20 p.m.

Today I admire her for her astute management of the funds my father brought home. This agricultural plan looks like “Plan B” for the agricultural plan, and “Plan B” is bobol for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources for this year to come. I am seeing it that way.

Today, we have heard that the minimum for the rental of the National Housing Authority’s apartment would be \$100.00. There are persons who are already paying \$100.00. There are pensioners in La Horqueta, Maloney and other areas who are paying that amount, even down at Point Lisas Gardens in Couva. What is very interesting is that those persons who are pensioners and have to pay \$100.00 or \$150.00 also have extended families and they have always had that problem to pay their monthly rental.

To purchase the apartment would be optional. The Minister of Housing and Settlements has said that already, but what I am worried about is who would maintain these buildings. There are high-rise buildings at Maloney that are four-storeys high. The tenants would paint inside their apartments, but when the top floor has a defective toilet system, then it affects everyone going down throughout the four floors so the maintenance of these apartments is critical to the people who live there.

At present, and for a couple years now they have had that problem of maintenance of the apartments. There is a pile of reports at the Maloney office stating that doors were not closing, there are toilet problems, the bathroom tiles came out and so forth. Are you saying that when these apartments are sold owners

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would have to maintain these apartments? I would like the Minister of Housing and Settlements to clarify that matter for me, for we have many housing areas in the East and we need to find out what is taking place with them.

I would like to raise a matter, but with a different slant to that of the Member for Diego Martin Central and that is about the National Insurance increase. I am saying, as others were, that if you take the funding out of the Consolidated Fund for the Piarco International Airport, then obviously, NIPDEC would have to use National Insurance Board funding for the Piarco Airport and the increases of the NIS for small businessmen would be detrimental to their business.

Recently, they were asked to pay \$7.00 minimum wage which most of them are paying. I do not know if they are not paying in your area, but I know in my area the businessmen have been paying the \$7.00 an hour, with complaints. One businessman in Arima told me normally the girls who work in the store have a bill book and when he walked into the store around 5.00 p.m. and asked one what were her sales for the day, she did not sell a single item. He said he would have to pay her the \$56.00 for the eight hours, so he is paying her and from the revenues which come to the store—even if she had sold that amount—it is out of the profits he would have to pay the salary .

What is very interesting is, I went to a small company which employs about 35 persons and all now fall into Class 8 of the National Insurance Scheme. The employee would have to pay \$6.45 per week while the employer would be paying \$12.90, which is double the amount the employee would have to pay. That would be a total of \$19.35 per employee and that multiplied by 52 weeks and by the 35 employees would be \$35,217.00 paid to the NIS, and that is the old contribution.

Employees' contributions would have been \$11,739 while the employer's contribution would have been \$23,478.00, a total of \$35,217.00. What has to be taken into account now is that 15 of those employees would now pay \$9.10 per week, that would be \$9.10 multiplied by 52 multiplied by 15 which would give us \$7,098.00. Ten employees at \$13.02 per week the amount would be \$6,770.40, and six employees would be paying \$17.08 per week by 52 by 6 which would be \$5,328.96 . Four employees would be at the higher bracket of \$22.68 per week, so when that is multiplied by 52 and then by the four employees, that would be \$4,717.44.

We are now looking at the old figures of \$23,478.00. The employer would now pay \$46,829.60. The new figures would now be \$71,744.40, an increase of

\$36,527.40 so you are looking at the employer increasing and the employees' increase in the NIS has gone up by 100 per cent. Those figures would not bring revenues to the employer, but he would have to disburse funds to meet these requirements and would now have an additional cost to him. Where would this cost be passed? To people like you and me, the consumers would have to pay more.

Some of the benefits would increase, but I did not hear the Minister of Finance indicate whether the funeral grant would be increased, or whether the survivors' benefits would be increased. As a matter of fact, there is a situation where one is earning \$1000.00 and his NIS benefits for \$338.00 would now go up by 25 per cent to \$423.00. He would be able to collect the \$620.00 old age pension and when that is added those who qualify would have received \$1,043.00.

The second category where persons were receiving \$338.00 and earning more than \$2,000 per month would go up by 79 per cent which would go to \$606.00. They would be qualified for old age pension in the first two categories, the \$423.00 and \$606.00, and their old age pension with the NIS contribution would be \$1,206.00.

Let us go further up the line where a person is going to collect \$1,055.00. That person would not qualify for the old age pension. This means that the persons in this category would be receiving \$1,055.00. The lowest category would reach \$1,043.00, so actually somebody in the second category who would be receiving \$1,206.00, would be able to earn more take-home at the end of the month with the old age pension and the NIS contributions.

I do not think that the Minister of Finance thought about this thing properly, so I am looking forward to an increase of the survivors' benefit allowance because when the breadwinner in a home has died there may be children to maintain—recently in my village there was a common law relationship and four children between the ages of 16 and 6 survived. The father died at an early age of 37. They are now applying to get NIS contribution and they came to me for a letter to indicate to the National Insurance Board that there was a common law relationship until death and the children came out of that relationship. I gave them that letter, but the minimum amount of money which is given to these survivors and to the children who have to pay more for school books, transport to go to school and who have to, at least, get a proper meal, I think that survivors' benefit needs to be raised. The funeral grant is also very small and if you are now paying

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an increase, then, of course, that grant should go up. All we have heard up to this time is about the pensions that would be placed in that area.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the Ministry of Works and Transport most of the time when allocations are made on a budget there is shortfall, and the Ministry of Local Government is another example of that. The development funds for the Arima Borough Corporation was \$1.2 million this year, what we actually received was \$70,000 and if I am wrong, I would like to quote from the development programme where the Arima Borough Corporation received \$70,000 this year for the development funds. I am certain that the Minister cannot doubt that.

While the Member of Parliament was collecting over \$200,000 a year, his constituency received \$70,000.00 for development. Is that fair to the people of Arima? *[Interruption]* I am not speaking about who applied and when they applied. You gave them \$70,000.00 and frustrate them all the time. The Minister has changed the programme manager for URP in Arima and has now fired him this week I understand. After all the hullabaloo, three accountants in one year have been changed, not even in one year—in nine months—and it is the Minister who appoints them. He speaks about corruption: it is his people who he puts that he has to send home because they are corrupt. But follow the leader—what would you do?

That situation which took place this week—I thought the Member for Chaguanas should not have made that statement that flooding is a thing of the past, after taking up two old refrigerators and two old stoves in Chaguanas.

5.35 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know what happened there? Now the engineer is saying what I said in June of this year. When they got the first flood—*[Interruption]* You said that flooding was a thing of the past! I heard it, I read it and people are still willing to give you a chance to retract that statement, but you would not.

Mr. Ramsaran: I thank the hon. Member for giving way. What I said when we launched the Caparo River—this is the second time I have to say it in this House—was that when those works are completed, we could stand and say, flooding is a thing of the past. The Member must not come and misquote other Members of the House. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. J. Narine: How easily we forget. Mr. Speaker, I am amazed. I know this gentleman for years and I know that because he is a politician today he twists his

words and says things that he did not say. He said that after. I am speaking about the first “lend-a-hand”, like what was done for NAR, when he came into office in 1996, not when he started the Caparo River, but we will come to that.

When the Member for Chaguanas did the clean up in Mayaro and Manzanilla, removing old stoves and refrigerators, and so forth, he said that flooding was a thing of the past. Like it was never cleaned before; no roads were paved, no drains were built. *[Interruption]* How could he sit there and make that kind of statement? He is not worth being a Minister. That is so and it would never change.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in June of this year when Edingburgh 500 was flooded, I went there and I saw an engineer that I do not know. As a matter of fact, they told me he was a mechanical engineer. That is the same engineer he is talking about now, who said that he got wrong instructions. He is making money for somebody, so whether he is told to take Phase III and make it the first phase, he does not want to know that. Once the Government pays the contractors their money, that is what they want.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will tell you what happened at that time in the first phase of that Caparo River project, retention dams were supposed to have been built to hold the water. *[Interruption]* If you listen, you will learn. The second phase was supposed to be a sluice gate at the river’s mouth at Felicity. The cylinders under the highway, which was built so many years ago, sank, so that there was need to cut across the highway and build a bridge that would take that flow of water out of the Caparo River.

The third phase was to straighten the meandering of the river. Any school child with a primary school understanding would know that the meandering of a river is to slow down the flow of the water, but they did not know that. The Minister of Works and Transport who is—well I would not say much about him at this present time. The entire population in Trinidad and Tobago is seeing why this Minister of Works and Transport is a non-performer. He talked for three years, he cannot talk any longer, and he has done nothing for those three years. He is only walking up and down the country saying what he will do.

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

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. *[Mr. H. Bereaux]*

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. J. Narine: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *[Interruption]* You would understand why he wanted to speak after me in the budget debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the last phase is done first, and the Caparo River is straightened, then the flow of water is increased and, therefore, the entire area must be flooded. I sympathize with the store owners where that disaster took place in Chaguanas. They lost millions of dollars. I am saying that if the Government could pay WINSURE to clear off debts for certain persons, then those flood victims must get some relief.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know who should get some relief, too? Remember when Workers' Bank was closed under the NAR administration, there are persons, like myself, who had paid shares to that bank and up to this day we have heard nothing about it. As a matter of fact, Sen. Wade Mark was a champion for that cause, but today he is saying nothing about the millions of dollars owed to the small people in this country, the workers in the union who paid \$5.00 per fortnight to gain shares in that bank. *[Interruption]* Because there was a director like the Member for Couva North, and one in the Senate who has bought a Volvo motor car on his name and told the union that the car belonged to it. That is how it happened. *[Interruption]*

I voted at the Labour Congress for this Prime Minister to be a director of the Workers' Bank. I did that, but one must know that it is only when someone is given a job to do then one knows how capable that person is. I am saying today, if we had known at that time what we know now, certainly, those two persons would not have been directors of the Workers' Bank. The people who had shares in the Workers' Bank need their money. The Minister of Finance should not only be allowed to give it to Maritime Life, it should also be given to the First Citizens Bank so that we could get back our shares in that Bank.

Dr. Mohammed: Would the Member please tell this House who gave loans from the ADB to pay off their debts in the Workers' Bank?

Mr. J. Narine: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have much to say, and I would not want to be railroaded. I am saying that workers are owed, and instead of paying Maritime for WINSURE's debt, pay Workers' Bank's shareholders; the poor people who worked in the ministries.

Another fiasco, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while they are fighting to collect revenues, the Minister of Works and Transport continues to waste the valuable funding that is paid by taxpayers of this country.

The Mosquito Creek project is another fiasco. I am certain that if my colleague from La Brea had sufficient time, he would have spoken about it. The survey that was done for Mosquito Creek, Mr. Deputy Speaker, showed that there were underpasses that took the high tide into the “mange,” and when the tide dropped the water would recede which would give vegetation and life to the mangrove. What happened was that some private owner went by the Godineau Bridge and filled acres of land, which took away that catchment area. It was simple, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that if there were cylinders underneath that Mosquito Creek highway, they should have been removed and replaced with new cylinders.

5.45 p.m.

The Minister of Works and Transport is an engineer, so he came up with a different plan, that he would build an embankment on the swamp and a rubble drain—like when one is building a cesspit at one’s home—to take the water out. So they dug the entire length of Mosquito Creek, brought in sand, put in polythene and then realized that it would not work. Right now, if one passes there, one would see that they have to dig that back up and put down concrete blocks to build a drain. Am I correct?

Mr. Bereaux: Quite correct.

Mr. J. Narine: That is what is happening! They have square pegs in round holes and when they make these mistakes, it is taxpayers’ money which is being frittered away. It is the same contractor down there who is operating at Caparo River, R. Mahabir. I do not know how these things happen. Because they have no equipment, they have to sublet to other persons too.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would also like to raise a matter here for the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation. I would like to congratulate you for your statement yesterday. [*Desk thumping*] Someone has to take the bull by the horns. The situation with the pumps along the Caroni River—in Bamboo No. 2 there is a pump which needs to be refurbished. It is a pump that was placed there when the Member for Point Fortin, just a couple years ago, regularized that area. The pump is no longer functioning. On Divali day when I called my friend inside there, he said he could not come out, he could not light a deya. The flood subsided Divali night and the following day it came back up. Because when the rains fall in the Tamana area and so forth, the following day is when one would get the flood levels rising. So that, I am saying like you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these pumps must be repaired.

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They went by Roundabout Plaza and played they were beautifying and put down one little drain and because it is in the public's eye, the Minister of Works and Transport is getting credit for it. Roundabout Plaza flooded out.

They went into Beetham and said that they were going to make there a tourist attraction. There was a drain leading across the Beetham Highway and going into the swamp which was clogged. What normally has to take place there is that, one has to get a vacuum, or if there is no vacuum to pull that silt out, one has to get the workers to oil themselves and work short spaces to get under there to clean out that place. So that, when they say that they are going to turn that area into a tourist attraction, if you look at that area today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is worse than it was when they went there to clean it.

Government Members: No, no!

Mr. J. Narine: It is worse. I am saying that, I pass there almost every day.

Dr. Mohammed: You pass with your eyes closed. Open your eyes when you drive.

Mr. D. Singh: He is lying again.

Mr. J. Narine: Mr. Deputy Speaker, can you imagine the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre saying I am lying? What did you do with the gun that they found? You gave back that one, but the one they found you with up Lady Young Road still there. I am not going into detail.

When one cannot find revenues and one has to take money from the Consolidated Fund to fund the Unemployment Relief Programme and other programmes in local government, then one is talking about chaos. One is speaking about day-to-day corruption, the bigger part we are seeing here at the national level with InnCogen or Piarco Airport or the rice that never came to Trinidad. I heard a gentleman on television last year speaking in the Upper House and he put it very clearly. What this total quality nation is about: this Government has brought this nation to the extent that only the PNM can bring it back.

Thank you very much.

The Minister of Housing and Settlements (Hon. John Humphrey): Mr. Deputy Speaker, by agreement on both sides, the House will pause for a few minutes—

Mr. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no agreement on both sides. I just want you to know that.

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Government, I beg the indulgence of the House to spend a few minutes remembering a Member of this Parliament who passed away a few days ago. So do I have your permission to proceed?

**DR. MAXWELL PHILIP AWON
(DEATH OF)**

The Minister of Housing and Settlements (Hon. John Humphrey): Dr. Maxwell Philip Awon died on Sunday 18, October, the way I think I would like to depart this earth, close to the family. He was enjoying a weekend at his own beautiful spot on the North Coast of Trinidad. Max, as everyone affectionately called him, was not only a good family man, but was a good friend, a good colleague, a good doctor and, most importantly, a good human being.

I knew him in his political period between 1966 and 1976 when he represented the constituency of Arima. He was Minister of Health and Minister of Local Government during that time. He was a highly qualified surgeon specializing as an obstetrician/gynaecologist. He served the medical profession with distinction as he served many organizations and associations, not only in medicine, but in business, politics and community activity of many sorts. Max got involved in carnival and organized and led his own carnival bands, joining with other band leaders to improve carnival and to ensure a high standard of presentations and revelry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it appropriate that we place on the record of this Parliament our appreciation for the life of a wonderful Trinidadian. The Government wishes to express our thanks to the Creator for the life of Maxwell Phillip Awon. May his soul rest in peace and may his bereaved relatives and family find comfort in his memory.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

PROVISIONAL COLLECTION OF TAXES ORDER

Mr. Roger Boynes (Toco/Manzanilla): Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have heard on our side earlier when we mentioned and we sent our condolences to the family of Max. It is a very sad time for this country that he passed away and we all join in expressing our sentiments of condolence. It is rather unfortunate that it is only at this stage that the Member for St. Augustine—as though they probably forgot poor old Max—*[Interruption]* No, no. I am saying that we have stopped playing games in this Parliament. Poor Max. We all feel for him and his family at this time.

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On that note, let me just mention that the agreements which I hear being mentioned in this House and the type of courtesies that one should display and give to the other side should be of a higher standard in this House. If I would take your mind back to what took place on budget day, one would no doubt appreciate the importance of a budget to a country, and moreso, the importance of contributions by Members of this House, regardless of what side one belongs to. It brings to mind the question asked by the Member for Chaguanas during the budget debate, when he asked the Member for Tunapuna if he ever sent in any proposal for a youth policy. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it shows me without a shadow of a doubt, that the Member for Chaguanas does not really understand that when a contribution is made at this level, at the highest level, after a Member has spent about six days and nights preparing himself and his constituency getting together to bring forward certain plans and visions for the development of this country, it must not simply be cast aside. This is the forum where we can put forward our dreams and visions for a better country and we expect the Government of the day to take notice of them and include them in their plans for a better country. I just wanted to put that on the record. For the good of all, let us stop playing games in this House!

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is very surprising to me today, as we venture to debate the Provisional Collection Of Taxes Order 1998, that the hon. Minister of Finance is not here. I am seeing the desk with the hon. Minister's sticker on it, but the Minister himself is missing. I am suggesting that this contempt that has been displayed today should not continue. I treat this as a very serious piece of proposed legislation and I find that the discourtesy demonstrated to this House should not be allowed to continue, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am suggesting that the hon. Member for Couva North should take the necessary disciplinary action so that in future, the hon. Minister would pay the type of respect that this House deserves.

Mr. Panday: When we have debates you must be here on time.

Mr. R. Boynes: When we look at the particular Bill before this House, we see that clause 2 deals with the increased revenue that would be collected from the registration of foreign used motor vehicles. We are reminded in this particular clause and when going through the four corners of this Bill, we come to the conclusion that—*[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for La Brea, when you were making your contribution, the Member for Toco/Manzanilla was very quiet while listening to you. I think you should give him the same respect that he gave to you.

Mr. Breaux: I was just replying—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand how exuberant you get, but he gave you due respect, I think you should give him his.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look at clause 2 in relation to the rest of the Bill before this House, we recognize that this is the only revenue-earning clause in this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. I wonder, how are they going to raise the necessary revenues to conduct the affairs of this country? I have to wonder. With respect to the foreign used vehicles, I am simply saying that during the previous budget debate, I am sure it probably brought some of the Members to tears when they looked at the television and saw people who were in the line at the licensing department, cheques in hand, waiting as they were, to pay for the registration of their foreign used vehicles, only to be told that they had to add \$10,000, in some instances, or more in others.

Many members of the public in my constituency, who were in the line, have come and put their cases to me. They have asked me to mention it today and indicate to Members that a moratorium period would have been such an easier way of dealing with this particular situation. It would give people time to be in a position to understand, to prepare and plan for the increased fees for registering these foreign used motor vehicles.

I must indicate to this honourable House that there were persons in my particular constituency who have built up their lands and put up certain structures to increase and develop this business more than they had before. They have gone to the bank and borrowed moneys, they took out mortgages and constructed—three of them in my constituency—massive structures and have hired a number of persons to work. Today, what do we see? The bank is knocking at their doors. They have experienced a 95 per cent drop in their business, they have to get rid of some of their staff and the bank is knocking at their doors.

I am suggesting that if they were given the time, these persons would have been able to plan their life better, than having the hon. Minister of Finance come like a "thief in the night" and causing them and their business to come crashing down. It is really a very sad story, and October 5 was a sad day in Port of Spain. I am asking the Members to understand that if we really are the champions of the poor—and all of us are supposed to be—we have to make legislation and pass laws that are really in the best interest of our people.

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I am just simply indicating what the situation is in my particular constituency. I hold no brief for any of the used car dealers—be mindful of that—I am just saying that the proper regulations should have been in place from day one, to deal with this trade, so that no amount of fraud—as we hear the Minister of Works and Transport stating in another place—would have been allowed to take place. If we really are to help the people, we have to understand that those persons who are now on the bread line have difficulties in earning a living now. Where are they going to get money to pay the bank?

I would make one observation: since the last budget, and even this one, we have been hearing many promises. I would just indicate to this honourable House how bad the situation of no money is and relate it to this Motion that is before this Parliament. When we only look at one of the clauses that is geared at revenue earning, we have to ask the question: where is the other side going to get the money from to deal with the country's business?

As recently as last week, a number of private attorneys had to actually buy toner for the CAT reporters' machine during an international case being tried at the High Court, because there was no money. The High Court has no money. Over the past few weeks jurors have not had the opportunity to have meals, there is no money for meals for them, and this is why I keep saying that I would have liked to have the hon. Minister of Finance here today. It is a serious problem.

A short while ago, a number of attorneys were called to the Bar. Would you believe that the customary get-together afforded the young attorneys called to the bar, giving them an opportunity to mingle with the Chief Justice, other judges and other distinguished members of the legal fraternity, today, as we speak, there is no money for this get-together or any form of refreshments so they had to call it off. Hot off the press! [*Interruption*]

As we debate this Order here, it is no surprise to see that only one particular clause deals with any sort of collection of revenue. It deals with the collection of revenue and there has been a drop in that particular business by 95 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] In other words this Order is like a piece of paper or a fig leaf, there is absolutely no Order in this House at this moment for any real collection of revenue for the functioning of this country. [*Desk thumping*].

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at things like that, you have to wonder: how does the poor man make it in this country? I would always say, and the Member for Nariva knows, that the way you get to the source and help the people

empower themselves is through the cooperative sector. He knows that! If it is that you do not have money, you have to cause people to empower themselves.

There was no mention whatsoever in this budget about the cooperative sector or the credit union movement in this country. Over 300,000 membership in this country, quarter of the population, persons—[*Interruption*—ask the Member for Nariva how much functioning. They are functioning. They have assets averaging approximately \$2.8 billion; deposits in the sum of \$1.65 billion; shares in the sum of approximately \$1.7 billion, and yet there is no mention of them. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: What about liabilities?

Mr. R. Boynes: When the hon. Minister in 1997, took away the tax incentive from the credit unions, he came to this Chamber. I was here and on time. [*Laughter*] The hon. Minister mentioned that the credit union movement must operate on a level playing field, so much so, that the tax incentive had to be taken away. He said that what he would do is cause the proposed amendments to the legislation to be introduced to this Parliament in short time.

Even the Member for Nariva during his contribution in December 1997 when we were dealing with an Appropriation Bill, mentioned that early in the new year the proposed legislation would hit Parliament. But we are almost reaching Christmas of 1998 and all we keep hearing is that the proposed legislation is at the Attorney General's office, and the playing field for quarter of the population is still not levelled.

I ask the hon. Member for Nariva, and my good friend, the Member for Caroni East, if they could expedite things at the Attorney General's general office, so that the proposed legislation would be in a position to hit Parliament. We would debate it and ensure that we put a piece of legislation that would really be in the best interest of the development of the entire credit union movement and quarter of the population.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of the amendments are so basic and necessary, like the qualification of directors, to bring it in line with those similar to that of the Financial Investment Act. If we have, for instance—

Mr. Partap: Thank you for giving way. I think that the hon. Member for Toco/Manzanilla very well knows that the legislation we are planning is a revision of the Co-operative Societies Act. It is well on the way, and we are discussing it with our social partners. As soon as we have it properly firmed up, it would be brought to the Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Boynes: I made some gentle inquires and I was told that it was at the Attorney General's office. [*Cross talk*]. We would like it to be expedited as soon as possible.

6.15 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I may just mention, when I talk about the fact that there are no moneys and the Order does not provide for the collection of any moneys and there is a deep concern by us on this side and by the general population about the manner in which we intend to raise the revenue to run the affairs of the country—because when we back track a bit and look, for instance, at the \$12 million that was promised to FUNDAid in the last budget, as recently as, I believe a few months ago, Parliament passed \$5 million for FUNDAid. But, do you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that today FUNDAid has not received one penny. FUNDAid has not received one red cent.

Mr. Sudama: We do not have red cents.

Mr. Hinds: They are laughing, you know.

Mr. R. Boynes: I do not have any factories in my constituency. I have none. The agricultural estates are closed down. How do I get the people to be empowered? Because I feel that—

Mr. Sudama: Give them power.

Mr. R. Boynes: —the system does not have the money to give to them. The system promises money to them, but they are not expecting it. The Government is promising them money, but they are not expecting. How do I treat with this situation? As I mentioned earlier, I am looking at empowerment.

Hon. Member: Leave it to Sadiq Baksh.

Mr. R. Boynes: What is happening now is that I utilized every possible means to get the people empowered in that particular constituency and FUNDAid is just one of the institutions that I have used throughout the length and breadth of that constituency. It has taken an office upstairs Yufe's cloth store. I sent my constituents there and they met an empty office. When I contacted FUNDAid's head office, they told me they did not have one red cent to furnish the office. I sent a number of my constituents whom I know are in dire need of moneys or about establishing a business to Port of Spain. Do you know why? They have the will to work. The whole doctrine of self-determination for the people of Toco and Manzanilla is second to none.

When they go to conduct their micro enterprises and the potential nuts man and the potential hairdresser go to FUNDAid, as they have been going for the past few months, not one red cent. FUNDAid tells them they have no money. It is unfortunate because I sat here and this Parliament passed money for FUNDAid. I wonder if the Member for Couva North, the Prime Minister, knows that FUNDAid has not gotten a red cent as yet.

Mr. Hinds: He knows.

Mr. R. Boynes: I want him to know his hon. Minister of Finance is trying to undermine him. I wonder if he really knows that.

Mr. Hinds: He knows.

Mr. R. Boynes: Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the East/West Corridor, the number of persons conducting themselves in micro-enterprises from FUNDAid is 71.32 per cent. Do you know how much of that goes to the East? An amount of 54.89 per cent. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we do not have anything at all, but we have to try to empower the people. So, if we decide that this Parliament is going to pass any legislation to give moneys to any particular institution to the benefit of the people, at least, let the institution get the money. A lot of empty promises, again. I can go on and on.

When the \$25 million for single mothers is looked at, not one red cent. I am suggesting that—*[Interruption]* I will come to you Member for St. Joseph.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, collection of funds is not adequately provided for in the Order which we are debating here. But, yet, we have \$30 million allocated for the Small Business Development Company (SBDC). Do you know for what reason? For on-lending purposes. The SBDC is not in the business of on-lending and the Member for St. Joseph will let us know that. They are not in that business. Their mandate is to facilitate the development of small business and if I tell you what that mandate entails. They have to be proactive with the commercial banks in making the small business sector more accessible to its financial services. In other words, they have to be liaising with the banks; they have to be proactive and they must be liaising with the banks to ensure that the banks lend the persons who want to venture into small business, moneys together with the financial services.

SBDC would guarantee a certain portion of that loan. What SBDC is not even doing, when certain persons default on their loan, SBDC just pays the commercial banks and it does not go after all the moneys which are owed by the persons who

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are trying to get into small business. A number of these small businesses took the money and they are in the society. There is no mechanism for it to go after all these funds which left the SBDC via payment back to the commercial banks.

Do you know that the last balance sheet of the SBDC is at a deficit of \$4.2 million? Yet, they are trying to encourage people to get into small business. Imagine that!

I have a final draft which I do not even know if the Member for St. Joseph has seen as yet. It is a draft of an evaluation done by the European Commission. It has put out a final draft of their findings on the SBDC, *inter alia*, among other things. Do you know what it has said? It said the SBDC is not following its mandate and it is not getting involved in its competencies.

Mr. Hinds: Since 1995.

Mr. R. Boynes: They specifically mentioned that the interface programme of the SBDC—that means that people have to go out there to make sure that the business is a success—is a failure. Do not take it from me; if they want me to lay this in Parliament, I am going to. Do you know why the members of the SBDC do not know about this draft and it is about four months now it has been out? They do not even know where their directors are. They feel as though their headquarters are now in Antigua. Imagine that. The chairman—poor fellow—giving his life in culture to this country; his studio is now about to be sold.

But the strange thing about it is that in spite of all that, we are giving \$30 million to the SBDC for on-lending. They have no staff trained for on-lending; there is no system; there is nothing in place for on-lending; but yet, come to this Parliament and we allocate \$30 million to the SBDC for on-lending. Are we serious? If that is not another empty promise, then I do not know. That is another empty promise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Imagine that.

The credit union movement has 51 years' experience in on-lending in small

Mr. Assam: Could the Member give way? I think I will listen to the Member, but I think the Member is going off track—I thank you for giving way—because the Member is trying to ridicule the Small Business Development Company and I cannot sit here and accept.

Mr. R. Boynes: No. I am not doing that.

Mr. Assam: To talk about they do not know where the directors are, is totally false and misleading. The Chief Executive Officer went to Antigua to do an assignment there, to raise money. Because, one of the things we wanted to do with the SBDC is to get it self-sufficient money. It is one of the ways of earning money, so she went there. Do not say the director, she is not a director, she is the Chief Executive Officer.

Secondly, the SBDC is developing a leasing company. If the Member had listened to my contribution when I was speaking in the original budget debate, he would realize that we are trying to develop a leasing company which will facilitate small businesses so that they do not have to go to the bank and put that large outlay. They will lease equipment and have it amortized over a period.

The \$30 million which the Ministry of Trade and Industry has been mandated—and I said that in my contribution—to develop the mechanisms for on-lending—it is not my duty here to be derogatory to anybody. It has been felt that the interest rates that the FUNDAid was charging were too exorbitant. The Member is talking about FUNDAid and does not even know the interest rates they charge. So, we decided to use that as an avenue for reducing the cost to the small business person.

We are introducing mentoring into the SBDC so that we can hold their hands so that they can be successful.

And, last but not least, \$150 million will be utilized by the financial institutions and the Government would be subsidizing the interest rates to ensure the success of small business.

So, do not stand there to say that the Minister is unaware of that report and it is four months it is out and the members of the SBDC are not aware of the report. Please, do not commit scandal in this honourable House.

Mr. R. Boynes: I think the Member for St. Joseph has really and truly missed the point here. Obviously, he has not read the report. The fact of the matter is that members of the staff at SBDC are complaining that the headquarters are now in Antigua. I am telling him that if he liaises with them he will get that information. Secondly, the whole aspect of putting \$30 million to set up a leasing company for the purposes of on-lending, is wasting money. My point is that once there are institutions already in place for on-lending purposes—

Mr. Assam: I did not say we were putting \$30 million for setting up a leasing company. Why is the Member misconstruing what I said? I was giving all the

various mechanisms being put in place to support and ensure the success of small business. The leasing company is only one of the mechanisms. The \$30 million is another; the \$150 million is another; the mentoring system is another; and we are putting the venture capital company under the administration of the Small Business Development Company. All these are the various measures we are putting together to ensure that small businesses develop properly, successfully, viably and sustainably in the country. Do not mix up the concepts.

Mr. R. Boynes: I do not accept that because the hon. Minister has not had the opportunity to look at the evaluation report from the European Commission with respect to the SBDC. He has not. What is happening here is that they are getting into an area that is not within the mandate of the SBDC.

They are looking to get into on-lending and it is no part, whatsoever, of their mandate. Their mandate is for the purpose of helping to facilitate the development of small business. That is their mandate. They have lost their competencies, because they are supposed to be developing small business but yet they are focusing on micro-enterprises. Do they know that there is a difference between small business and micro-enterprises? There is a fundamental difference and one of the functions of the SBDC is helping as a facilitator, not as a bank or credit union for on-lending. So, why do they not take that same \$30 million and give it to the credit union movement. That is what I am suggesting here. Give it to the credit union movement. [*Desk thumping*]

We already have about \$12 million which has been allocated via a grant for the institutional strengthening of the credit union movement. Much work is being done with the movement. The Member for Nariva knows that. Much work is being done right now. The last time the European Commission did a pilot project for small business enterprises, together with SBDC as the facilitator, they trained credit unions. Some money was put for the purposes of training where they trained several loans officers from credit unions and they did a pilot project where 2,000 young people were given money for entering into small business. During that exercise about 145 loans officers from the credit union sector were trained. Even the credit unions put out money to facilitate the training. Imagine that, and that was a very successful training programme—the pilot project was a very successful one. Yet, we are coming here now where we are allocating \$30 million. We are neglecting all the work done by the credit union movement; the 50 years of experience of on-lending to the small business sector. They have had that experience for 50 years. Yet, I am suggesting that rather than—

SBDC cannot be operating outside of its mandate as it is presently. Those are the facts and I am saying that rather than take the \$30 million, we already have an order where it does not provide for any revenue, save and except the 5 per cent of the money coming out of the foreign-used car transactions.

The Member for St. Joseph is going all over the place, simply because he has absolutely no answer for this evaluation report of the SBDC—none whatsoever—and I am simply suggesting that rather than give the \$30 million to the SBDC; give it to the credit union movement, because what is taking place, rather than say, “Dey go bus again”, it is over 300,000 people who are involved in the credit union sector and I say this: We on this side have confidence in the credit union movement. If the Member for St. Joseph does not have confidence in the credit union sector, in the month of credit unionism—October is credit union month—*[Interruption]* His utterance has just indicated as such.

I am simply saying that like any business, there will be good business where some businesses would succeed and others would fail. It is not a 100 per cent success story. They have had some problems in the past and I am simply suggesting, that based on the institutional strengthening programme that is well on the way and, also based on the confidence we as Members of Parliament should demonstrate to quarter of the population, we are confident that that movement, regardless of what regression is taking place outside—*[Interruption]*

6.35 p.m.

Dr. Job: Mr. Deputy Speaker, could the Member for Toco/Manzanilla advise this honourable House concerning the fate of the PNM Credit Union?

Mr. Valley: We want to know when you will pay back the loan.

Mr. R. Boynes: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Tobago East should be the last person on the face of this earth to ask about that, because when I went to access a student revolving loan to study law I was turned down because people like the Member for Tobago East did not pay back his loan. *[Desk thumping]* But he comes here to ask about credit union!

Mr. Sudama: You all “bust” the PNM credit union.

Mr. R. Boynes: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we would like to hear a bit more of how that \$150 million the Member for St. Joseph spoke about would operate.
[Interruption]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr. R. Boynes: I am looking and hoping for the best. I do not have a particular problem so far with the idea with respect to that \$150 million and I do hope the credit union movement would benefit from that money.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with respect to the moneys that were supposed to be allocated last year for Members of Parliament, as well as public servants, to purchase computers, I immediately found that was a good idea so I took a course and am now computer literate. I was one of the first persons who tried to access that computer loan. *[Interruption]* For my home. It was shocking to me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that when I tried to get the final form to access this loan, it was unavailable. I am saying that if the Government does not have the money, come and tell us so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, apart from having that sum of \$30 million allocated to the credit union movement, there has always been a problem with where the credit union movement should rest; whether it should rest under the Ministry of Labour and Cooperatives or with the Ministry of Finance. Recently it was again placed under the Member for Nariva’s ministry in its entirety where it is finally settled. At least now one minister is finally going to look at it and move on with the sector in a certain way.

I am suggesting, however, that if it is that we are to be serious about credit unionism, perhaps, we can have separate legislation to deal with the supervision of credit unions as financial institutions. We can have the formation and everything as part of the cooperative department within that ministry but with respect to the supervision we may need separate legislation to deal with the actual supervision. Seeing that the Government has recently signed an agreement with the IADB for the institutional strengthening of the Central Bank to supervise the financial sector in this country, I am saying that now is a golden opportunity for us to add the credit union movement to the list.

I understand that the Central Bank has put up about US \$340,000.00 and the IADB about US \$740,000.00 for the purpose of institutional strengthening of the Central Bank to deal with that.

6.40 p.m.

I am simply suggesting if we could probably add the supervision and the list of financial institutions to that programme as the supervisions of credit unions. There is a golden opportunity. Credit-unionism is a unique creature. If it is that one is strengthening Central Bank to supervise financial institutions, I am simply suggesting they should be trained to supervise credit unions as well. That is one of the things I feel would augur well for the credit union movement. I am not here to play games and throw picong at the other side. I am simply trying to put forward a case for the movement, because at this stage where we do not have as much money as we should, empowerment is the way to go. We should take some time out to strengthen our own and make Trinidad and Tobago the pearl of the world. We have that potential, make no mistake about it.

If I may just mention: the situation in the constituency of Sangre Grande, whereas I have successfully lobbied for the paving of several streets in and around Sangre Grande—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. R. Boynes: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank hon. Members very much. I have written and have lobbied very hard, and I continue to lobby that at the end of the five-year period, I would ensure that Toco/Manzanilla would be one of the pearls in the country.

The only difficulty is that I was looking at the health problem in the Valencia area—and I was glad to hear what the hon. Minister of Health said when he indicated that he understands the problems with these three diseases in Trinidad and Tobago. I listened to what he said in the debate and I want to indicate to this House that I will be calling on the regional corporation to institute a clean-up campaign in the region. I will speak with them and ask them for their trucks and call on all of the contractors whom I know who are willing to help in the region, for us to try to ensure that the town is fire bright. We have already had one death in the Valencia area and it is rumoured that there is another one on the way.

Dr. Rafeeq: I thank the hon. Member for giving way. When the Member has organized the clean-up campaign in his constituency, I would like him to let me know so I can also have the Insect Vector Control Unit assist him.

Mr. R. Boynes: Indeed, yes. I listened to the hon. Member for Caroni Central, and he mentioned the different departments that he would make available and I take this very seriously. I know the family whose child died. The child attended the Guaico Government School. The school population there still has not recovered from that, as well as the family. We are trying as much as possible to clean-up the area.

I also called on the Minister of Health on the last occasion when I brought up this issue of the shortage of doctors in the Sangre Grande Hospital. We both agreed that the problem is that it is not an accredited hospital and as such persons would not prefer to work out of Port of Spain or San Fernando—persons would not want to be posted to Toco as they may live elsewhere, probably in the West, Central or San Fernando. There has always been a problem in getting doctors for the Sangre Grande Hospital. The Minister did mention that in Parliament and I want him to know that I am looking on and I am hoping that he can implement that this year or as soon as possible. He mentioned there would be a package to attract doctors. I would like to see that in place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like the hon. Member for Chaguanas to understand that in the constituency of Toco/Manzanilla are some of the greatest sportsmen and women. If it is that we can be given a stadium in that particular region, I am sure we will be the sporting capital of Trinidad and Tobago. We have Ian Bishop, Mervyn Dillon, and the list is as far as the eyes can see. Even Kareem Abdul Jabaar was from Matura.

I know that one of the places allocated for a stadium is Malabar in Arima. I am asking the hon. Member for Chaguanas to look at the situation. The East does not start with Arima. The Sangre Grande region is like the gateway to the entire east of the country. People come from as far as Matelot. It is the gateway to Mayaro, Guayaguayare in the Nariva constituency and Tamana.

If we could have a stadium in the region of Sangre Grande, we would be able to capture all persons coming from all the far-flung areas. I am hoping that the Minister can consider putting a stadium for the 2001 Youth World cup as a site in Sangre Grande as it will augur well for the people of Sangre Grande.

Sangre Grande does not have any estates or factory in that particular constituency. If we can actually make a life out of sports, we are prepared to do so.

I also want to thank the Member for Princes Town in advance—I know on the last occasion he was working on the acquisition of the Non-Pareil Estate

Programme and it will augur well for the people because we anticipate, based on if that succeeds, about 450—500 jobs will be created. It is one of the richest estates in the country. I am hoping that the Minister could work on that as quickly as possible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the ferry service—I am sorry that the acting Minister of Works and Transport is not here. Since 1996, the people of Toco were promised that the ferry service would be up and running.

I am suggesting that the way we do it is to widen the road. It can be done just as was done in Maracas. I do not know if you have been turned down with the moneys, but the people of Toco are waiting with bated breath for that whole project to come on stream. They have been promised and they are going to hold the Government to that. I can only do what is my function as a representative: to continue to lobby at the highest level for that project to become a reality.

6.50 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me take the opportunity to thank the Self-Help Commission for the tremendous work that they have done in my constituency. I have moved with them throughout the length and breadth of my constituency and have touched on every village with projects. It has been a very tiring task. We do not have money; we do not have factories, but we have the will to get the job done. The people are willing to come out and work for free once they get the resources.

Most of the villages have contacted the Self-Help Commission and we are working hand-in-hand to make sure that we create a new Toco/Manzanilla. It is not simply because of my lobbying that a few roads are being fixed. It goes deeper than that. I have been doing many things quietly.

Let me just indicate to the Member for St. Augustine what is happening with the situation on the Valencia Stretch. During the debate on the Squatters Regularisation Bill, we had added Valencia North and South to the schedule. However, that area is a forested area and is protected, so it seems that the two Acts will conflict. At present, there are persons who have been brought to the Magistrates' Court in Sangre Grande under orders for their eviction. This flies in the face of the orders we did here. I would like that situation straightened out because it is causing mass confusion in this region.

In closing, let me indicate to the Member for St. Joseph that I need him to treat the request made earlier this year for beach facilities in the Toco region, with

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lifeguards, very seriously. There has been a death recently. Selma Arthur died when a tree fell on her on the beach. The region is in a dilapidated condition. There is need for renovation, probably not to the extent as was done at Maracas, but this daughter of the soil has died because we have not been able to move as expeditiously as we ought to have done.

I reiterate that, as Members of Parliament, we have to be conscious of our role. I know that sometimes when we step out that door, we are beaten continuously. The first thing that people say is that politicians are crooks and scamps. We have to start changing that image of politicians. I know that we on this side are very concerned about the image given to all politicians, and we intend to change that image. We want to let the people know that we are not here to play games, but to do their work. We want to let the nation know that when we come here and make submissions; when we give all our thoughts and ideas in a budget debate, it is not simply because we like to talk, but because we want to be a part of the upward mobility of the country. We would like to inspire the youth. We want to place Trinidad and Tobago as one of the greatest nations on earth. That is why we are here.

Do not just hear our prayers. Do not just hear our ideas. Do not just take our comments and brush them aside willy-nilly. I ask this House to get serious. We on this side are serious. We want to get the people's job done because we feel that we are the next government of Trinidad and Tobago.

From the highest to the lowest level, I assure the nation and you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we will continue in a disciplined manner to make certain contributions that will go a long way in helping the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We definitely will be the next government of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you.

Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to make a brief contribution on the debate on the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 1998.

I could not help but observe, at the point when the Member for Arouca North was rising, the Member for Oropouche was trying to get in. The same thing happened when the Member for Toco/Manzanilla was about to make his contribution. Now that the Member for Laventille East/Morvant is rising, the same thing has happened. What are they trying to hide? What are they trying to

avoid? What is this Government trying to cover up? Are they trying yet again to interfere with the liberty of the citizenry as represented through us?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are to debate this Order today. As has been pointed out by my learned friend, the Member for Toco/Manzanilla, there is one provision here that makes a serious attempt to raise revenue. When one considers that we have just come out of a budget debate—a debate is the highlight of a government's existence in a given fiscal period—one would think that members of the Government would be overjoyed at the bright news they would have announced to Trinidad and Tobago. One would have thought that those on this side would even have been inspired by the projects and the programmes that the Government has laid before us for the coming year. One would have thought that the citizenry would have been happy about what they have heard.

But what is the mood in this Parliament and this country? It is a sombre, sad and depressing mood. Why is that so? This is so because, on November 6, 1995, the Government of the United National Congress, a few stragglers, came together to perpetrate mischief upon this nation. Since then, it is as if a dark, heavy cloud has been hanging over Trinidad and Tobago. Everything seems to have been going wrong.

I hear the Member for St. Joseph shouting about 5 per cent growth. It appears that he has a short memory. It was only earlier today that the Member for Diego Martin Central pointed out to us that since 1992 the country has been experiencing growth. In 1994, growth was 5 per cent.

The International Monetary Fund told the world and its participating members recently that growth for the world will be 2.2 per cent for the coming year. Trinidad and Tobago's Minister of Finance tells us we can expect 5 per cent.

They also told us that they are likely to raise \$11.4 billion in revenues to balance the books for this year. As we went through the figures we demonstrated palpably, beyond any doubt, that that is not possible. This is not only our view.

7.00 p.m.

In the *Newsday* dated Thursday, October 22, 1998—the person or persons who wrote this editorial may or may not be an economist, may or may not have a full appreciation of international economic affairs, but under the rubric “A sugar-coated deficit Budget” the article starts off by saying:

“Government's determination to borrow—”

Dr. Mohammed: On a point of order, Standing Order 36(3) says:

“It shall be out of order to attempt to revive in any debate a matter or reconsider any specific question (other than a matter or question relating to a Bill returned with any amendment by the other Chamber) upon which the House has come to a conclusion during the current Session...”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am contending that the operations there have already been debated and passed in Parliament and I would like to invoke Standing Order 36(3).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Bill which is before us today is an extension of that debate and the Member has all right to do it, although, without tedious repetitions and irrelevance.

Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am most grateful. What is amazing is the Government's determination to use every method it could to avoid the glare of public scrutiny. *[Cross talk]* You can find it boring as much as you like. I represent 23,000 plus electors in Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, order! The Member has not given way. If it is a point of order or clarification, then you could stand. Let the Member for Laventille East/Morvant continue.

Member, please address the Chair with your contribution.

Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Deputy Speaker, again I am thankful. I was reading from the *Newsday* newspapers.

“Government’s determination to borrow \$3.226 billion for the new fiscal year is clearly designed to ensure that projects such as airport expansion and the desalination plant will go forward.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, during the course of the budget debate we made the point that the Government is taking this country very quickly back to the clutches of the International Monetary Fund.

Hon. Member: How?

Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am hearing the question, "How" from the other side. It appears that the Government is drunk with the power it has found, and is unable to appreciate and follow simple logic which the ordinary citizen would easily understand. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would not be distracted. Again I want to make use of the *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper of October 22, 1998, the same day as the *Newsday* article from which I read. On the front page it says: "Minister attacks foreign-used 'fraud'". This is directly relevant to the measure before us today, because the one measure which proposes to deal with raising revenues in this Order has to do with the regime put in place to deal with the importation of vehicles.

The Member for Arouca North has pointed out that as in every other thing which this Government does, there appears to be a sting in the tail. The measures implemented by the Minister of Finance in respect of collection of taxes or raising revenues by way of the importation of motor vehicles, may not be as innocuous as they may seem to Members on that side. They certainly do not appear innocuous to the people who are to operate in that industry because they have been predicting that within the next month or two at current rates, that industry would die a swift death. If they are right and the Government succeeds in raising the revenues it proposes to do in this Order, the Member for Arouca North told us that there are a number of vehicles which have been imported in this country by a known friend of the Government—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have said more than once in this Chamber. I know you might not be reinforcing the point, but when you continue to reinforce it more, it becomes too repetitious.

Mr. F. Hinds: I am obliged. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we as Opposition Members, recognizing the role we play in the governance of Trinidad and Tobago offering constructive criticism, pointed out to the Government that its irresponsibility, and its penchant for organized chaos has been manifested when it permitted as it did, the importation of vehicles on the terms that it did. We told them in no uncertain manner that it would open an opportunity for fraud and money laundering. We are on record as telling this "hard-ears" Government that. They ignored us and went ahead like a stiff-necked fool.

Mr. Assam: Be gentle.

Mr. F. Hinds: I cannot be more gentle with you. You all do not deserve one iota of gentility. A Cabinet Minister is now telling the country and the very Government that it gave rise to the problems which we had highlighted. It took this Government one year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we talk about laundering of money, it is not merely a question of lives being taken in the process. There is death, hunger,

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starvation, social chaos. This lack of equilibrium in the society is brought about by the laundering of which the Minister speaks and every single day we see it on the streets and the highways and by-ways of this country. So that today, every mother in this country who cries for her son who is suffering from the adverse effects of the drug trade can look squarely at that Government and say it has made a major contribution towards that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On a general basis, that kind of statement should be withdrawn. You cannot accuse somebody of that immense irregularity. Utilizing your arguments of money laundering and drug addiction and pointing a finger at the Government in question, I do not think that is considered in my view as parliamentary privilege. Could you just—

Mr. F. Hinds: I shall withdraw that particular comment very promptly, if it offends the sentiments of this House. The point I was making more subtly is that the Government has a leadership role to play in our society, it sets the tone. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Tom, Dick, Harry, Jean and Pearl in this country are saying that this Government is now labelled with the ugly word of "corruption". That is a fact and as the Member for Toco/Manzanilla said, we have a duty. We are also called politicians and the brush that taints the Government, taints the Opposition. When we walk out of this Chamber and people see me in my lovely balisier tie they say: "There goes a politician, those politicians are crooks. Those politicians are doing this and that." That is what they say. All we are pointing out is that to the extent that this Government is negligent, or encourages by way of its negligence the kinds of matters which I raised, to that extent they are blameworthy. That is what I was trying to say, and now that I have succeeded I have said it in more soft and gentle language.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when this Government tells us about its anxiety and eagerness to raise taxes, I remember last year the Minister of Finance told us that he had to put in place an internal revenue service for the purpose of collecting taxes. What has become of that? He pointed out that for the previous year VAT revenues had fallen drastically. What has become of that? When we look at the figures in this year's budget, we see where a significant amount of the revenues it proposes to raise are supposed to come from VAT collections and we saw the trick which the Government had perpetrated on this country.

We recognized clearly and pointed out that having brought the last financial year to an end after nine months, it had collected VAT revenues from persons or

7.15 p.m.

They are appearing to want to sweep \$30 million of dust under the carpet, because to this day, notwithstanding all the criticisms from the little, medium and large people of this country; from the media, from every Member of this side, no proper account has been taken of that big hole in our finances.

Hon. Member: That is not a big hole.

Mr. F. Hinds: That is not a big hole, one of them whispers. He does not understand that \$30 million can go a very long way in the lives of many citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. He does not understand, most of all, that when the technology of corruption is perfected in one sector, it, like bacteria, infects others. So a culture of corruption is being created in the country and once that happens, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Tom, Dick and Harry will practise the business of corruption.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I sat here today, and you may have heard me shout across the floor: "When you have no top, you cannot have no bottom". Mr. Deputy

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Speaker, \$30 million unaccounted for. We reminded them that the Prime Minister, and Member for Couva North's name was mentioned in the board minutes of the National Flour Mills. The records will show that he, according to one of the key players, instructed the enterprise to purchase the rice that has gone missing; rice that has gone rotten.

They want us to forget that. There are many people in this country who, this evening, cannot consume and enjoy a plate of rice. If I had my way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will get that \$30 million worth of rotten rice, and pile it up in Couva South, and I will ensure that as a matter of punishment, the Member for Couva North takes that \$30 million worth of rice, grain by grain, to Couva North. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a travesty.

Every time this Government comes to this Parliament with any measure to raise taxes, as it is doing now in this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, I cry. Anytime this Government comes here and talks about raising revenues, I am scared, because the more they get is the more that is frittered away.

When, in the next few weeks, we have to pay more for cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes and ochroes, we must put the blame for that, squarely, at the feet of that Government. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, as was mentioned—and I only mentioned it in passing—we saw floods on the Chaguanas Main Road for the first time in this country's history. A yacht could have gone down the Chaguanas Main Road. What was the reason for that? We are talking about raising revenues. But for what reason revenues are raised? When revenues are raised, it is expended on other projects.

The Government employed an engineer and utilized the services of the Ministry of Works and Transport to do some work on the troublesome Caparo River. What a waste. If the Government continues like this, every cent that it raises in these measures could be lost in measures as foolish as that.

Would you believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that under the so-called astute guidance of the Minister of Works and Transport, the hon. Sen. Sadiq Baksh—he oversaw a project that was designed to relieve the problem of flooding in Trinidad and Tobago, not in PNM's heartland, but in Central Trinidad—went about dredging the Caparo River, not from the bottom, where it is wisely and properly done, but from the top. Could you imagine that, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Do you know what the Prime Minister used to say when the UNC was in Opposition? He

used to say that rain is an act of God, but the flooding is an act of the PNM. Well, I want to know now, what that is?

This Government is inept, incompetent and downright dishonest with the people of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Interruption]* You could say what you wish. Those are the facts. We are the guardians of the people's interest in this country. They want us to deal with these issues. Honestly, I really could not care less about whether the Member for Oropouche wants to hear or not. I am not speaking to him, I am not speaking for him, I am speaking for the people of this country who want to see the back of the UNC. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, every nerve-ending in my body, every ounce of my energy would be used to bring about that objective. *[Interruption]* Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am hearing the "God" from St. Joseph who knows who will and will not be. He looks into the future. *[Interruption]* It is only God who knows what the future holds. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are recording our dissatisfaction with the management of the economy by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. We are registering our serious concerns—and this is not small political talk, this is serious concerns—about the corruption that is now rampant across Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for St. Joseph wants me to worry about Mr. John O'Halloran . I have heard that name but I have never seen that man in the flesh. If he walked in here now I probably would not recognize him. But I can recognize the Member for Couva North. I can recognize the Member for Caroni East. I can recognize the Member from the other place, the Minister of Finance. Why do I have to look into the long gone past when troubles are right before me? Why? *[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr. F. Hinds: The truth of the matter is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we have just come out of the festival of lights, and as we approach another festival of the light—Let me repeat that. As we have just come out of the festival of the lights, and as we approach the festival of the light, I feel sorry for Trinidad and Tobago. I seriously and honestly do. This Government is in shambles. The Minister of Finance, as the Member for Diego Martin pointed out, is not even here today. He spent 90 per cent of his time, during the budget debate, elsewhere.

The Prime Minister almost knocked me down as I was coming in through the same door he was exiting earlier today. I wondered why he was so hasty in his

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retreat. However, as I entered the Chamber I heard the word, InnCogen, and then I understood that word is as much anathema to him as rat poison is to rats.

7.25 p.m.

Talking about rats, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will know that the difference between human beings and rats is our capacity to think. We do not operate purely on instinct, there is an instinctive element of the human being, but that is minuscule in the scheme of things. We rationalize, we think, weigh alternatives, pros and cons. When one sets traps for rats, I am told, and I learned this from the so-called veterinarian from Princes Town, though he does not have a very healthy reputation in that, because he killed a few cows well, he expanded the froghopper population at a cost of TT \$150,000, which he gave to his friend.

Dr. Mohammed: I smoke ganja.

Mr. F. Hinds: Well, that is your record. I do not! So if you do that, it is entirely a matter for you. For me, it is illegal and unnecessary, and I do not.

Let me continue. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want you, from where you are sitting to take note of another major problem. The minute one continues to look at the nation's affairs purely in terms of dollars and cents, as they do, one will get confused and mixed up. The dollars and cents are getting frittered away, and then one's value system becomes warped. There are higher values than dollars and cents. There are issues that the children and the teachers of this country, our sons and daughters, must look at quite apart from money.

You will take note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, apart from the rampant corruption that this Government is perpetrating on Trinidad and Tobago, apart from creating a culture of corruption such as they cannot resist, they are classless. You hear the kinds of comments in this Chamber from the Member for Princes Town. It is really sad. The standard of debate in this House, the standard of conduct in this House, the standard of politics in this country, the demeanour, the esteem, the pristine quality of ministerial office have been tarnished, hampered, hindered, spoilt and corrupted since that Government came to office. *[Desk thumping]* We of the People's National Movement will have the task, not only of rebuilding the economy of this country, but also of building the moral and the ethical standards that Trinidad and Tobago once knew. You all are just hopeless! *[Crosstalk]* I will not be distracted. You see the kind of behaviour, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, hon. Members. Member for Laventille East/Morvant, just one more time. Just for the record and the movement of the debate at this hour. The phrases you are using, the words that you are saying, have been said before in some form of fashion by the Members for Toco/Manzanilla, Diego Martin Central and Arouca North. The accusations have been said also in the same manner. If you are going to make accusations, try to do it in a different manner. See that it is not repetitious.

Mr. F. Hinds: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I was making the point about rats. Rats are an instinctive bunch of creatures. *[Laughter]* When one sets traps for rats and one tries to trap them, they smell the human touch on the trap and on the food that one puts and, probably, the night before they would have gone after the cheese and the rat trap flew and they just escaped, but they know one is trying to kill them. So strong is the instinct they cannot resist it. To some extent, the persons in this country who know that they are corrupt and stealing from the nation's cheese or Treasury, realize that we are watching them, we are seeing them, we are pointing out their attempts to steal the nation's cheese time and time again, but instinctively, like rats, they continue and continue, but the trap will fly. *[Desk thumping]* And they will be caught! A word of warning.

I hear people in the country saying, and there was something I wanted to say about the schools, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because as you well know, it is a portfolio that I look at with great interest. There is something to be said about the nation's schools, how it relates to the raising of revenues. I see the principals saying they have not gotten a cent as yet! I understand the difficulties they face, chalk—No! I will not give way. There is much to be said on that. But I shall desist from saying it for the time being. I merely want to say that many people are now saying that “UNC” really ought to mean “United in National Corruption”. Perhaps, they may be right.

However, in closing, I want to join my good, noble and wonderful friends from La Brea; Arouca North; one who spoke so well and truthfully today, Diego Martin Central; and Toco/Manzanilla, and take this opportunity yet again to compliment the political leader of the PNM, the Member for San Fernando East. I saw only yesterday evening a video recording of his answer to the Minister of Finance's budget statement. I felt so wonderful and so proud. *[Desk thumping]* Thank God for the PNM! Thank God for the People's National Movement! Thank

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God for Eric Williams, George Chambers, Patrick Manning, and all of the people who have supported the PNM, given us their love and support for the years! They realize that in 1995 a mistake happened, something went wrong. And the people who caused that mistake they have already felt the pain, pangs and the sting of the UNC.

The Member for Tobago West felt it. She left and came over here. I had the pleasure and privilege of hearing her say, in the budget debate, in a most emotional way—I would like to quote, but let me paraphrase—“Thank God. I feel so good, so free to be away from the muck and the corruption. I could talk freely outside of the Cabinet”. She said so! [*Desk thumping*]

The Member for Tobago East, well he has already been stung, because the reports of the newspaper told us, as the budget was approaching, the Prime Minister summoned to his residence a number of economists, business operators, directors of firms and a few Ministers of Government to discuss the nation's, or some elements of the nation's economic affairs. The Member for Tobago East, poor puppy dog, as he calls himself, was not invited. I do not know why. I said rats are instinctive, I did not know puppy dogs were like that; but he went.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can imagine, I was a police officer and I worked on guard duty at the Prime Minister's residence in St. Ann's night and day for years. So if someone comes—especially if you recognize him to be a Minister of Government, handsome or not—and says, “I have come to attend a meeting”. The officer at the gate would look down the list of invitees and he would say, “I did not see the Minister's name”. What he will therefore do is pick up the telephone and ring the Prime Minister's secretary and say, “Madam, the Minister of Tobago Affairs is here and I would like to know what is the position”. You know what the reply was? Of course the goodly lady was not presumptuous to say “No”. She would enquire of: who? Outercob—sorry, the Prime Minister. [*Laughter*] So she calls the Prime Minister and she says, “Look a Minister of yours is at the door”. The message came back to the police officer, “Doh let him in”. [*Laughter*]

So he has already felt the pain of that Government. After the two political grasshoppers, who used to be on this side, jumped cheaply over on that side, he believes, perhaps, he does not have any need for Tobago East and West anymore. All the people who have supported that Government have felt their sting. The OWTU has felt it. The Tobago House of Assembly has felt it. The Members for Tobago West and Tobago East have all felt it. We understand, and now the nation

is feeling it. The Prime Minister is defending corruption. The Soodhoo report, as we heard here today, he has not laid it in this House. He has defended it. Nothing said about NFM. We have complained till our throats went dry. About \$100 million disappeared at the airport. On that too, no account.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what do you expect. The instinctive behaviour of the creatures of whom I spoke. As I leave, I can only pray, and I sincerely pray, that in early moments, in short order, we would see the back of the United National Congress and Trinidad and Tobago will find the light of Divali and of Christmas yet again.

I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Trevor Sudama): Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I sat here and I listened, I could hardly believe that we are participating in a debate on a Motion to confirm the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, particularly as I listened to the last speaker, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. I was reminded of something, about what happens when one eats a certain part of a chicken—chicken bottom, as they call it, it has a certain effect on one. *[Laughter]* It seems that the Member for Laventille East/Morvant was fed a lot on it, and we could have seen it today in the outpourings coming from him for such a long while. I sat here and I listened.

Mr. Hinds: I am strictly vegetarian.

Hon. T. Sudama: I am sure at some time in your life you did partake and it is now coming back, it is now being regurgitated and we all had the displeasure here in this House tonight.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I tried to take some notes about what was said and whether I had to respond to a great deal. Let me start with the Member for La Brea. He went on for so long and he said so little. I thought perhaps his tenure here in this House was so provisional, that he had to make up with the length of time that he speaks. He said that the budget was not anchored in any long-term plan for the country. Apparently, he has not heard of our industrial plan, agricultural plan, our plan for savings and investment, our plan for technological advancement, our plan for the export sector, our plan for increasing the level of domestic savings in the country and—of course, there are elements in the budget which address all these issues—our plan for improving small business development in Trinidad and Tobago, the enterprise support development to

support enterprise and entrepreneurship in Trinidad and Tobago. All these are elements of a plan.

I do not want to take up the time of the House at this hour to go through and to indicate to this House and to the Member a comprehensive plan. I will do it at some time when I have a little more time at my disposal. I want to inform the Member and the House that, in fact, this Government is not working by "vaps". If they say that we are on autopilot, this autopilot knows where it is going. [*Desk thumping*] We have had three years of solid growth, and we expect that in 1998 we will have the highest rate of growth in this country in 18 years.

I just want to tell the Member for Diego Martin Central, he said he worked in the Ministry of Finance, if he did work in the Ministry of Finance, he ought to have understood that the Central Statistical Office prepares figures and they prepare figures on a certain basis and those are the official figures.

7.40 p.m.

The Central Statistical Office figures never showed that we had a 5 per cent growth in 1994, but a growth of 3.6 per cent. The CSO figures show that we have a projected growth of 5 per cent in 1998. In the Central Bank figures there are two different series, and they would not produce identical results. The Central Bank uses an index number approach to measure changes in the real Gross Domestic Product. The periodicity is quarterly and changes in real output of the various sectors of the economy are combined to produce an estimate of the overall change in economic activity for the period using base year value added weights.

Mr. Valley: "Yuh understand what yuh reading there?"

Hon. T. Sudama: The CSO compiles national income data on an annual basis using as its major sources, the annual business surveys, administrative records and other relevant documents. The CSO constant price estimates are compiled and published in constant dollar value. Those are the official statistics. Therefore, if there are variants, then we accept the statistics of the CSO which showed that in 1998, for the first time in 18 years, a projected rate growth of 5 per cent is to be expected. I hope that we can leave that matter there to rest.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the other issue he raised was the question of whether all the items in this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order were relevant. He claims that the Order merely has to do with increasing revenues. He does not seem to

understand what he reads. It has to do not only with increasing revenues, but with a variation. I will read it for him again:

"the President may, for the purposes 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..."

Whether that variation is up or down. [*Desk thumping*]

It continues:

"and from the date of the publication of the Order the *Gazette*, the tax as imposed or varied shall be payable:"

Mr. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wonder whether the Member could adjusted tell me how it is by varying a tax downwards you would achieve the purpose of raising revenue?

Hon. T. Sudama: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is dealing with revenue whether on balance you raise it or whether on balance the revenue remains the same.

Mr. Valley: This Order talks about—[*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Members: Sit down!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Member is not giving way.

Hon. T. Sudama: This is a Provisional Collection of Taxes Order with adjusted revenue. [*Desk thumping*] You raise revenue in some and adjust revenue in other areas. This is what it is all about. He does not seem to understand. He has this Order Paper before him but he does not understand about variation at all. He does not understand what "variation" means. [*Crosstalk*]

The other issue is, that where in sections 3 and 4 we have made an adjustment with respect to interest payable on bonds and so forth, the reason for including it here is that we want to give this immediate effect. We could have brought these things into a Finance Act later on, but if it is brought here, it has immediate effect. All these other items in the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, sections 2, 5, and 6, paragraph 5(c) to (j) include revenue-raising measures which would bring in approximately \$13 million through the increase in custom duties on the importation of motor vehicles.

He tells this House that section 5 is not relevant in this case and ought not to be included in this Order, and he used to work in the Ministry of Finance! No

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wonder he had to leave, because he must have given them so much bogus advice they must have eased him out and given him VSEP. [*Crosstalk*]

I would put to rest this whole issue of what the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order is all about and what it seeks to do. The hon. Member does not understand what it is. How long has he been in this House? [*Crosstalk*]

Let us talk about the foreign used vehicles, on which all he could have done was leave a note. After he left office, he could not have done anything else but leave a note for the incoming government on a piece of scrap paper, about what he would have done with the foreign used car industry. But it is always the case of: "We woulda do this if we had—the woulda, shoulda, coulda government". [*Crosstalk*]

We decided that taking everything into consideration to adjust the regime for the record of foreign used vehicles, particularly addressing the situation for the low income groups. This is why we set a registration fee regime that put the lowest fee at the lowest engine sizes. Certain problems arose, but a government must always have the discretion to deal with problems as they arise. We have problems, we have to deal with them; congestion and pollution. The problem was that the imports were coming in at such a rate that we were not really prepared for the high volume, so we thought we would slow it done.

As I said in my opening contribution, this is a responsive and sensitive Government. We have listened to the representations of those people involved in the foreign-used car industry and we are also aware of the problems affecting it and the complaints against the elements in the functioning of that industry. Having looked at all these factors, the Government is going to make a decision in the best interest of the country. We have taken that position, I said it in my opening remarks and that is the Government's position at this time.

On the whole question of how much revenue we are going to make, the Member for Diego Martin Central talked about trickery and he used the word "fictitious". He himself is a fiction. [*Laughter*] As an insurance agent he was fiction, then as a Minister in the Ministry of Finance he was even more fictitious. Now he is saying that the Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs is fictitious. I would explain to this House the basis on which the revenue figure for taxes from the registration of locally assembled motor vehicles using foreign parts have been arrived at.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the collection from that source for 1997 was \$102 million, that was the first full year of operation. However, based on the actual collection to the end of August this year, it is estimated that collection to September would be \$128 million this year.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Public Utilities, and Acting Attorney General (Hon. Ganga Singh): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move a Procedural Motion under Standing Order 10(6), that this House continue to sit until the debate is completed.

Question put and agreed to.

PROVISIONAL COLLECTION OF TAXES ORDER

Hon. T. Sudama: Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I was saying, up to September 1998 it was estimated that the collection would be \$128 million, and up to the end of the year it was estimated to be \$170 million. We have noted that we have brought the new measures in place, and for the next fiscal year 1998/1999, we have adjusted that to \$152 million.

The reason we have done this—and many people feel it is too high—is because the vast majority of registrations are below the 1799 cc engine level. At that level, the registration increase is the most minimal. We felt that the effect on the total volume of taxes would be the least, because of the fact that most of the sales were recorded at that level where the car engines were less than 1799 cc, and as you know, the increases were from \$20,000 to \$30,000 there. At the larger engine levels where the higher increases took place, the sales were minimal. It was on that basis that the forecast was made, so this thing about fictitious, pulling figures out of the air and so forth, maybe that was he did when he was in the Ministry of Finance.

There were some other things he raised, and then he said that we got money from these fellows in the Bamboo for campaigning, but when we went to them to ask for more money and did not get, therefore, we decided to hit back at them. But as far as I am aware, there is no election in the air, so I do not know why he is talking about our trying to raise campaign money.

In any case, we are going to win the next election and we would get voluntary contributions, whether from the Bamboo or elsewhere. Because of the performance of this Government the contributions would come in. [*Desk thumping*] We are not going to solicit contributions again. A successful Government does not have to beg for money, the money comes to it.

Then he said that the figures in the budget were fictitious and he does not know how they were arrived at. One of the bases of which you try to access the revenues for the following year is to estimate the rate of growth. The rate of growth gives you an idea of the level of economic activities and commercial transactions which may take place in the following period. This is one of the indicators used. You may use other things specific to the particular sector where the taxation is going to bite.

Thus, if we are predicting a 5 per cent rate of growth of the economy, then that in itself will indicate that we would be projecting revenues of a certain order based on that.

7.55 p.m.

From that source, as well as from particular growth in certain sectors, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are other issues raised. Let me explain the question of bringing in the increase in water rates into their accounts. This is merely an accounting device. It does not mean that the money stays there. When we passed the Waterworks and Water Conservation Act earlier this year, Act No. 10, Chap. 54:41 was amended to provide for a water improvement rate to commercial and industrial sites or estates and, according to that legislation, the rates generated by this amendment must be paid into the Consolidated Fund and, if it is going to be paid into the Consolidated Fund, in the revenue estimates that has been provided.

The Water and Sewerage Authority is given the responsibility, under this Act, to bill and collect the rates imposed on the industrial estates and sites and to deposit these funds into the Consolidated Fund. After it is deposited there, then, of course, at a later stage as and when required, these funds will be disbursed to WASA. So, it is really an accounting item and it has to be accounted for in that way.

There is a big song and dance about the over-estimating of VAT and, again, we are pulling figures from thin air. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me inform this House that actual collections for VAT exceeded all expectations, because a new regime was put in place this year. Things were tightened up and so forth; the rate of economic activity increased, as my friend is reminding me; but, essentially, we put a most stringent regime in place for the purposes of VAT collection.

Actual collections for 1997 were \$1,624 million—these are net collections. For the first nine months of 1998, up to the end of September, collections were \$1,653 million. So, for the first nine months, we collected more in 1998 than we

collected for the whole of 1997. In 1997, refunds were \$1,100 million and for the first nine months of 1998, refunds were \$1,009 million. Now, the estimated growth collections for 1998/1999—this is our estimate—is \$3,234 million, of which refunds are estimated at \$1,195 million.

The way it is estimated is on a percentage basis of the non-oil GDP. The oil sector, as we know, is exempt from VAT. The non-oil sector of GDP is what is subject to VAT, of course, with certain exemptions. Over the past five years, the percentage of VAT collection to the non-oil GDP has averaged 6 per cent and that is the average we have used after having estimated what the non-oil GDP will be, and we have used that and come up with the figure of \$2,039 million which has been used in our revenue estimates.

I hope the Member for Diego Martin Central is being educated here tonight about the figures and the basis on which we arrived at them. The Member is quick to accuse people of corruption, “ratchiffee”, trickery and that sort of thing. He is quick to do that, because that is probably the way he operated in his time.

Then, he queried the share of profits from oil companies under production sharing. In the coming fiscal year, the Government has already entered into an agreement with two oil companies where the companies will pay upfront to the Government the share of profits derived and accumulated from the sale to the National Gas Company of natural gas produced from the areas contracted to the company. So, we are getting an upfront payment. The companies are British Gas and Texaco. In this connection, payments of \$117 million will be brought to account in 1999. That is how we arrived at that figure.

This is just a sample of the explanations for the revenue estimate that we have included in the budget. I do not want to take up the time of the House to give further explanations, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I hope I have satisfied Members on the other side and, more importantly, I have satisfied the country that this Government is operating in a rational way and properly presenting its facts and figures with respect to revenue, budget items and so forth.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, some concern has been raised as to whether we could borrow the level of funding that we have included in the budget item. Now, as I explained before, and also in the other place, the Government has the option to wait during the course of a fiscal period to see what is the best opportunity it will have in order to enter the market. It is not at all times that the market is favourable and we can get the best deal. So, it has that option.

The other thing is that for the US \$200 million bond that we are in the process of floating, a commitment has been signed between the Government and the consortium of local banks to deliver a 10-year US \$200 million bond. That commitment has been signed. The question as to when the banks go out there and try to seek sourcing of the funding for that, is a matter that will be left to the discretion of the consortium as to when it thinks it is the most opportune time to do it. But, we have no doubt it will be done; we have no doubt that on the basis of the management of the economy, on the management of the economic fundamentals over the last three years that there is a great deal of confidence in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. I also want to warn the Member for Diego Martin Central and the others on that side who attempt to undermine confidence in this country by shooting their mouths off about how there is going to be a devaluation, there is going to be a run on the foreign reserves of this country; they shoot off their mouths. They say all sorts of things without analyzing the situation, merely for cheap political purposes. That is what they do without understanding the potential damage they are doing to the international image of Trinidad and Tobago. But, that is their tone of behaviour.

What the Member does not understand is that what has been happening with the international reserves, is that while on current account we have been running a deficit simply because we have been importing much capital equipment for the various plants and so forth over the last two or three years—primarily over the last two years; on the capital account we have been running a surplus; so there has been significant investment inflows coming in on the capital account.

While that is happening and while we are pressing ahead with the manufacturing exports; while tourism is picking up and so forth; while we are trying to deal with the level of other imports; while all this is happening, we feel that we are in a proper position to manage the inflows and the outflows and to keep the exchange rate stable. That is our duty and our responsibility on this side and we will not be deterred by the propaganda which is emanating and issuing from that side. We will not be deterred.

I have just returned from Washington. I went to Ottawa and Washington. *[Interruption]* As is known, Canada is not the most hospitable place in the world to go to, but I do not want to get into that in this House. This Government was commended at every turn, whether at the Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting in Ottawa; whether it was by the World Bank, or the International Monetary Fund, or the Inter-American Development Bank; we were commended

for the manner in which we accepted the responsibility to manage this economy and manage it properly. So that while other countries were having so much difficulty in the region and in the hemisphere, we have been able to bide the tide, so to speak.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think what it all reflects is a kind of jealousy on the part of the Members of the Opposition, especially the Member for Diego Martin Central, who wanted the portfolio of Ministry of Finance; he sorely wanted that portfolio, but the Member for San Fernando East would not give it to him. The best he could do was a Minister in the Ministry of Finance; he never had the portfolio of Minister of Finance.

Mr. Valley: But the Minister did not even do that. He lasted one day.

Hon. T. Sudama: Therefore, every time he comes to this House—I think that is bugging him—he wants to show off his knowledge of finance and so forth in this House. I think it irks him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me raise two other issues. One, how the PNM has some kind of secret plan. Oh, this Government is throwing its hands up in the air and talking about if there is a world recession, it would not be able to do anything. If there is a world recession, there is a world recession. If there is a world recession, it means that the United States is in recession—they are our biggest trading partner and biggest source of funding; it means Europe would be in recession; it means Latin America would be in recession; the Caribbean would be in recession and, of course, Asia and Asian countries would be in recession. But, in all this recession, the PNM has a plan to insulate Trinidad and Tobago and to keep us thriving and on a growth path, insulated from all this economic and financial crisis.

I think these people must be living in some kind of dream world if they think that if the world goes into a recession, they can insulate Trinidad and Tobago from that.

What the discussion in Washington centred around, was how to avoid a world wide recession and we have our contribution to make to that debate, but a small contribution indeed, a small voice as I indicated. We are a small country and the matter really is in the hands of the big players in the world, the big economies which will have to do something to revive their own economies; they will have to do something about the international financial institutions; they will have to do something about world capital flows and world trade and so forth, and establish a

regime through which, when that is done, we are able to manage those flows and to revive growth on a world basis.

8.10 p.m.

Poor little Trinidad and Tobago can do its own part, manage its affairs properly as it has been doing for the last three years: having a proper regulative banking and financial system, watching the capital flows that come in, having transparency in its financial and economic affairs and indeed, in all its affairs, and through those means being able to do whatever it can do—and it has been doing that. For that Trinidad and Tobago has been getting kudos, whether it is from the IMF—it is not easy to get kudos from the IMF, the World Bank and these other institutions.

Finally, on the issue of corruption. As we sat here over the last three years there are only two issues that the other side speaks of, that is, corruption and race; and they have raised these issues consistently in this House and outside. They have nothing else. They have no plan, no vision for this country, no initiative, no ideas. Nothing, except to dwell on these negatives and hope that it will so convince the population that at the next election or elsewhere, the population will somehow believe the propaganda and will pitchfork them into office.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government is committed to inviting foreign investment into this country. This Government has told investors to come in. We need foreign investment in Trinidad and Tobago, and we have asked people to go out there—our own nationals who are resident overseas, we have asked them to do that. We have asked foreign nationals to come and look at the opportunities. They do not want this Government to succeed and they want foreign investment but only on their terms; if they could have a hand in it. If the Member for Diego Martin Central could have a hand in it like when he goes to the German Ferrostal Helm; and when the Member for San Fernando East could take a personal hand in getting the PowerGen deal off the ground in Trinidad and Tobago. I spoke at length on that. There was no response to what I said in the PowerGen deal in 1994. When Morris Marshall died, Mr. Manning took over the portfolio for three days in order to put his seal on the PowerGen deal and then handed it over to Barry Barnes. That is what was done.

Hon. Member: Public tender!

Hon. T. Sudama: Public tender. After he “cook up” everything, public tender.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, whatever charges of corruption they want to make they are free to make. We are going out to the public and will deal with the issue of corruption and the history of corruption as well, and we will see who this country will believe. We will put that to the test and I have no problem with that. When the acid test comes in the year 2000, we will then see who comes back to this Chamber as government and who comes back—

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 1998 be confirmed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Ganga Singh): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to November 13, 1998 at 1.30 p.m.

At that time, we will be dealing with a Bill entitled “An Act to establish the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation and for related matters”. It is a three-week period and we will deal with other matters, and Members will be informed prior to that.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 8.16 p.m.