

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD
AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON NOVEMBER 27, 1995

SESSION 1998—1999

VOLUME 14

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, January 08, 1999

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

CONDOLENCE

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, Mr. Narine Dookie, a former Member for Naparima South from 1971—1976 has passed away. I request that this honourable House stand for one minute's silence in his memory.

The House stood in silence for one minute.

A letter of condolence would be sent to Mrs. Dookie and her family from Members of this honourable House.

Mr. Patrick Manning (*San Fernando East*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not know that there is any other Member of this honourable House who was a colleague of Mr. Narine Dookie from 1971—1976; I was.

Well do I remember—and I have told this story several times before—that in the screening process to which the PNM subjects all aspirants to the office of Member of Parliament of this country, in 1971 there was a particular person who was screened for the constituency of Naparima North. That gentleman who shall remain nameless, had a very strong desire to become a Member of Parliament.

He was not successful and was called back by the screening committee and was told that Naparima North was already taken but what about Naparima South. His reply was that Naparima South was a DLP seat and he was not prepared to accept it, but Narine Dookie did accept it. That was the year in which there was a no-vote campaign and the People's National Movement won 36 seats.

It was that quality of Mr. Narine Dookie where he was loyal to his party, but if his party wanted him to be a candidate in the election, even if he felt that his

Condolence

Friday, January 8, 1999

chances of success were not great enough, he thought that if his party called then he should have responded. He responded positively, and it is now a matter of record that he served his party and country as a representative for Naparima South between 1971 and 1976.

Mr. Narine Dookie was also a very active trade union member. He was very active in the National Union of Government and Federated Workers, holding several positions, including one of the more senior positions in south Trinidad over the years. All this happened early in his life. He became a Member of Parliament at age 26.

While I was not able to attend his funeral recently, we were represented by one of our deputy political leaders, Mrs. Joan Yuille-Williams. I have been informed that a number of people at that particular funeral had much to say about the good qualities of the honourable gentleman in terms of his determination to assist those who may be in circumstances not as happy and pleasant as his own.

Therefore, not only do we mourn the loss of a former Member of Parliament and renowned trade unionist, but we also mourn the loss of somebody who has been very compassionate, and in my case, a very dear friend. May God bless his soul.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Basdeo Panday): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was not in this House when Mr. Dookie entered Parliament, but I was aware of the fact that he did enter in 1971. As my colleague on the other side said, the only reason he was a member of this House was because there was a no-vote campaign. I think it was the same year that he himself entered this House that he, too, became a member only because of the no-vote campaign. [*Laughter*].

The passing of any human being is a loss to all human beings, and in those circumstances we join with our colleagues on the other side in sending our condolences and sympathy to his bereaved family. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we agree entirely with your sentiments that the Clerk of the House do so on behalf of all the Members of this honourable House.

SEASON'S GREETINGS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, we have received correspondence dated December 24, 1998 from the Acting Clerk of the Tobago House of

Assembly, wishing all Members of this honourable House season's greetings. I would like your permission to relay the same to the Tobago House of Assembly.

Agreed to.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the accounts of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1994. [*The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the accounts of the Legal Aid and Advisory Authority for the year ended December 31, 1997. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the accounts of the Public Utilities Commission for the year ended December 31, 1997.
4. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the accounts of the Strategic Services Agency for the year ended December 31, 1997.

Papers 1 to 4 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

Piarco Airport Development Project

(Contract)

- 10. Mr. Colm Imbert** (*Diego Martin East*) asked the hon. Attorney General:
- (a) At any time between 1996 and 1998, did the Attorney General declare to be ultra vires any contract entered into between the NYC Consortium or Northern Construction and the Airports Authority or NIPDEC for construction work at the Piarco Airport Development Project?
 - (b) If the answer to part (a) is yes, what follow-up action did the Attorney General take to ensure that the NYC Consortium or Northern Construction was not the beneficiary of a substantial sole selective contract for construction work at the Piarco Airport Development Project, without public tender?

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Deputy Speaker, any legal advice, whether oral or written, given by the Attorney General to Cabinet, is given in his well-recognized professional capacity as legal advisor

Oral Answer To Question
[HON. R. L. MAHARAJ]

Friday, January 8, 1999

to Cabinet. It is, therefore, covered by legal professional privilege and is not open to disclosure on demand.

Any advice given by the Attorney General to Cabinet in respect of the question posed in paragraph (a) is, therefore, privileged. The following legal authorities may be relied upon to support this well-founded legal principle of public interest privilege: the case of *Conway v. Ryma*, 1968, 2 All England Reports (AER) at page 1260; the case of *Burma Oil v. Governor of the Bank of England*, 1980 appeal cases at page 1090; the case of *Balfour v. Foreign and Commonwealth Office*, 1994; 2 AER at page 588; the Attorney General Politics and the Public Interest by Prof. J. Edwards, that famous book at pages 212—227.

In the light of the answer given to (a) above, the question posed at paragraph (b) is not applicable.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, could the Attorney General inform the House whether he is aware of that principle in law that silence is consent?

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no such principle, but if it does apply it applies to criminal law when someone is an accused. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

NATIONAL RACING COMMISSION BILL

Bill to provide for the establishment and operation of the National Racing Commission and for matters connected therewith, [*The Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs and Minister of Tourism*]; read the first time.

GAMBLING AND BETTING (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend the Gambling and Betting Act, Chap.11:19 and for matters connected therewith, [*The Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs, and Minister of Tourism*]; read the first time.

BETTING LEVY BOARD (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend the Betting Levy Board, No. 35 of 1989, [*The Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs and Minister of Tourism*]; read the first time.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO RACING AUTHORITY (AMDT.) BILL

Paper Laid

Friday, January 8, 1999

Bill to amend the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority Act, Chap. 21:50, [*The Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs and Minister of Tourism*]; read the first time.

SALARIES REVIEW COMMISSION

(FIFTY-SECOND REPORT)

[SECOND DAY]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the debate on the following Motion which was in progress when the House was adjourned on Friday, December 18, 1998, would be resumed: "Be it Resolved that this House unanimously supports the recommendations contained in the Fifty-Second Report of the Salaries Review Commission. At that time, the hon. Member for Couva South was on his feet and had 20 minutes of his time remaining.

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [December 18, 1998]:

Be it Resolved that this House unanimously supports the recommendations contained in the Fifty-Second report of the Salaries Review Commission. [*Hon. B. Panday*]

Question again proposed.

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the adjournment was taken on the last occasion, the Government was responding to some of the criticisms which were levelled in respect of the conduct of the Government in relation to the report of the Salaries Review Commission.

The Government had stated that it was totally wrong to allege as the Opposition did, that the Government was fixing salaries for its own Members, when, in truth and in fact, the salaries were not being fixed by the Government but by the Salaries Review Commission. The Government had also contended that it would be wrong for the Government or Cabinet to rewrite the report, in that the Salaries Review Commission was an independent body under the Constitution given the power to fix these terms, conditions and salaries, and the Cabinet could reject or accept the report, or part of it. The Cabinet even has the power to send back the report.

What the Opposition was asking us to do was rewrite the report, and that was not permissible under the Constitution. The Government also contended that it would be wrong, as the Opposition when in government had done, to ask the Chief Personnel Officer or anyone else, to exercise their discretion in respect of the report, and for Cabinet to adopt that discretion.

Oral Answer To Question
[HON. R. L. MAHARAJ]

Friday, January 8, 1999

1.45 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is very instructive to see that the Government's point of view on this matter is supported by one of the leaders of the PNM, the Member for Diego Martin West, Dr. Keith Rowley. I am reading from the *Guardian* of November 22, 1998. The story was written by Mr. Louis B. Homer under the heading, "Rowley supports salary increase" in which he said that he supported the recommendations of the Salaries Review Commission but he cannot understand why we seem to lose sight of the important aspect and focus on the trivial. Dr. Rowley said that if anybody had a problem it should be addressed to the Commission:

"An Independent Commission was set up under the Constitution and if you have a problem deal with the commission or disband it.' The Opposition MP said: 'there are 679 persons who fall under the ambit of the Commission. MPs got the smallest increase, yet their emoluments are always an issue. 'An MP is now worth half of a Permanent Secretary', he said. Rowley thought the way to go was to have the commission send its report directly to Parliament. When it passes through the Parliament there are always political considerations. He said there was the same outcry in 1991. 'Let's argue with the commission, not Parliament or the Cabinet.' independent commission, and the President is the person to ask the commission to review the salaries'."

He said he was not taking part in any discussion because it was the independent Commission to do that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is exactly the position we have adopted. We have adopted the position that the Constitution has set up this body, the Salaries Review Commission. The Salaries Review Commission has adjudicated on this matter. It has sent the matter to the Parliament through the Cabinet. As a matter of fact, the Constitution specifically says when it goes to the President he passes it to the Prime Minister who takes it to the Cabinet and a copy is laid in the Parliament. It does not even have to be approved by the Parliament. That shows the importance of the Commission's findings.

What we have to decide here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that we did not hear the Opposition say that they did not agree with these proposed increases. Is the Opposition saying that the Commissioner of Police should not get the increase

that is proposed? Is the Opposition going to vote against the proposal by an independent commission for the terms and conditions of the Commissioner of Police? Is the Opposition saying it is against the terms and conditions and the salary proposed for the Commissioner of Prisons, the Chief of Defence Staff, the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly, the Police Complaints Authority, all these persons and officers who are covered under this report? Is the Opposition saying that it is against the increases proposed for its own Member, Mr. Draper?

As a matter of fact, may I quote the Member for St. Ann's West who is not here and has not been here for some time. Is he back? Mr. Gordon Draper on November 1, 1998 speaking on behalf of his colleagues and speaking on behalf of Members of Parliament said that the nation must be sensitive, he could not live on the salary because if he does that he would be reduced to living in poverty and several of his colleagues would also be living in poverty. He said that after Parliament takes out the moneys which have to be deducted and he pays his party, he does not have much money. Here it is on a serious issue like this the question is what was the Opposition's answer to it.

The Leader of the Opposition mentioned about tax free salaries for judges but the terms and conditions of judges are entrenched in the Constitution and the tax free concession to judges was given by a PNM administration.

Mr. Manning: No, Sir! Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to make it quite clear to the hon. Attorney General that is not correct. It happened in 1990 with an NAR administration. Sorry, on the eve of the elections in 1991 it happened. It was not a PNM administration which did that.

While I am on my feet, Mr. Attorney General, there is also the possibility of negotiating away certain things in return for other things. That is always possible and available to the Government. In fact, I understand you have been doing some of that with the judges.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not the function of the Attorney General to negotiate with judges or the Government to negotiate with judges. As a matter of fact, the Salaries Review Commission fixes the terms and conditions. The fact of the matter is that the tax free concessions for judges have been existing for a long time and there has been no proposal by the PNM in Government to abolish that. If the PNM was opposed to it there was no proposal to

Salaries Review Commission Report
[HON. R. L. MAHARAJ]

Friday, January 8, 1999

abolish it or any legislation to that effect. In any event if that has to be done it has to be done by separate legislation and one needs a special majority for that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that cannot be any answer to whether the Parliament would agree to this report. It also simply cannot be an answer that some Magistrates are dissatisfied with the report. The Leader of the Opposition said that magistrates would end up getting less. As I know it, if the magistrates have a grouse they will go to the Chief Magistrate who will then go to the Chief Justice and the Chief Justice will either approach the President or the Attorney General. May I say up to today I have not been approached by the Chief Justice on any dissatisfaction by magistrates in respect of this report.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, he also mentioned about the Industrial Court. May I say the procedure is the same. If the judges of the Industrial Court have a problem with any matter what they do is approach the President or they approach the Attorney General through the President of the Industrial Court and may I say up to today the President of the Industrial Court has not approached the Attorney General in respect of any dissatisfaction with respect to the terms and conditions contained in this report.

We do not know what the Opposition's grouse about this report is. It would seem to me that what we should do is, for the new year—and may I take this opportunity to wish Members of the Opposition and my good friend, the Member for Tobago West, a very bright and prosperous new year. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think what we should do for the new year is that in matters like these we should forget the politics of personalities, the politics of venom and the politics of spite and the politics of self-interest. We should cultivate a situation whereby the population would have confidence and respect for the Parliament. What would school children think when they see an important matter like this where we see that the Opposition is taking a position purely on the basis of self interest and for cheap political gains?

I would like to appeal to the Opposition that in 1999 we develop a culture in this Parliament, of respect for the Parliament and for its institution. There can be no better way than by showing that it is not a matter of self interest or of cheap politicking in a matter like this. It is a matter, as one of their leaders, Dr. Keith Rowley, the distinguished and hon. Member for Diego Martin West has said who supports the Government on this principle and they should follow him and take his lead.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would seem to me that we should really, on this matter, act on a matter of principle and not act in a manner in which it would serve our personal ends. I can only hope that in this debate the Opposition would rethink its position and would ask for God's guidance and for the vision so they would be able to see the way and give justice to the people who deserve the benefits of this decision including—and they must not give the impression this is for parliamentarians because I said on the last occasion in the House Committee they agreed to an increase. But quite apart from that, this is a matter—let me, for the record, say—not only for the persons that I have mentioned. We are talking in terms of the senior public servants, Permanent Secretaries, the head of the public service and we are talking of judges, justices of appeal, the Commissioners of Inland Revenue, Board of Inland Revenue, economic advisor to the Prime Minister, Director of Budgets, Chief Administrative Officer of the Tobago House of Assembly, National Security Secretariat. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to give the impression that this is an increase for Members of Parliament and for Ministers is not correct. They are included in it.

I wish to ask the Opposition not to come here with cheap politicking this year. Let us vote for this Motion.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin East*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us put our position very clearly on the record. We are not supporting this Motion. We make it clear again: we are not supporting this Motion. [*Desk thumping*] They can jump high or low we are not supporting it. I will now explain why.

In the first instance the Government is well aware that they do not require the support of the Opposition in order to implement the recommendations of the Salaries Review Commission. They know that. For the last 20 to 30 years, for how ever long the Salaries Review Commission has been in existence, all that is required is for the Report to be laid in Parliament.

As a matter of fact, the Attorney General alluded to it. The Constitution is very clear on this matter. Unlike the Elections and Boundaries Commission Report which the Attorney General misled the House on, the Constitution states that it is necessary for the Report to be laid in Parliament. It does not say it requires the approval or anything of that matter. Other reports like the Election and Boundaries Commission Report which was used as an example by the Attorney General requires the approval of this House. It refers to amendments and

to revisions all requiring the approval of this House. That is our Attorney General misleading the Parliament about the Constitution.

2.00 p.m.

Let me also deal with the matter of whether the Cabinet can change, or request to change the Report of the Salaries Review Commission. Whose decision is it? I will refer the Parliament and the Attorney General to a debate which took place on October 30, 1992 and I quote from the contribution of the Hon. Keith Sobion, Attorney General at that time, because they came with the same nonsense argument in 1992.

“Madam Speaker, when we come to the issue of whether or not the Chief Personnel Officer had any right to be involved in the exercise of the Salaries Review Commission, that is when we get to the point where the argument on the Constitution is put to stand on its head.

I think it should be made very clear, Madam Speaker: The executive power under the Constitution, by virtue of section 75, is vested in the Cabinet.”

[*Desk thumping*]

“So that when the Member for Couva North says that the power was not given to the Cabinet to alter the Report of the Salaries Review Commission, that is putting the Constitution to stand on its head. It is quite clear that executive power is vested in the Cabinet.

When one looks at the sections which establish the Salaries Review Commission, we can see that it was clearly intended that the Commission was a body which recommends to the executive authority in the country. It is quite different from some of the other commissions in that regard.

Section 141 says:

‘(1) The Salaries Review Commission shall from time to time with the approval of the President review the salaries...’

If one analyzes that part of the Constitution, which is Chapter 11, nowhere would you find any provision giving the Salaries Review Commission any authority to implement any of the recommendations...”

And this is the important thing. All the Salaries Review Commission does is recommend to Cabinet and Cabinet implements, totally different to the Elections and Boundaries Commission Report. The Salaries Review Commission:

“...has no power to do any such thing.

That is quite different, as I say, Madam Speaker...”

He was speaking to the previous Speaker at the time.

“...from other commissions. If one looks at the Judicial and Legal Service Commission, one will see that that commission, under the provisions of section 111, has the power to appoint judges. That is a power which is given to them: The power to appoint. The Salaries Review Commission only makes recommendations to the Cabinet in respect of certain offices in respect of the terms and conditions of those offices.

Having received these recommendations, it is for the Cabinet to implement those recommendations if it thinks fit. It is within the province of the Cabinet to seek advice on the recommendations...”

“...and, in this instance, the Government sought the advice of the officer who is most experienced in the question of classification in fixing terms and conditions, the Chief Personnel Officer.

...The Chief Personnel Officer has advised the Government on the recommendations of the Salaries Review Commission Report and the Government...has accepted those recommendations. They are here...for us to consider and approve.”

That was the statement of the Attorney General in 1992 and, as far as I am concerned, that was an excellent interpretation of the Constitution. Ten legal opinions could be brought here today and they will change nothing. The fact of the matter is that the Cabinet can revise the recommendations of the Salaries Review Commission; it can send them back to them with comments and say that it wishes A, B and C to be considered; why was X, Y or Z done and would it not be more appropriate to have these matters looked at in another way? The Cabinet has that power.

What is happening is the Government knows that this measure is unpopular. It knows that the people of this country do not believe that a Cabinet Minister

Salaries Review Commission Report
[MR. IMBERT]

Friday, January 8, 1999

should get almost \$30,000 a month because, when it is added up, it is a salary of \$20,000; housing allowance of \$5,000; travelling allowance of \$3,500; which is \$28,500; telephone is paid which is about \$1,000; a total of \$29,500. The people of this country are not satisfied with the performance of the present members of the Cabinet. [*Desk thumping*] They are not worth \$30,000 a month. They are not worth it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you see, misery likes company. They know that they are unpopular; they know that the people of this country do not want to pay them \$30,000 a month; so they want us to join them in their misery because misery likes company. But no. We will have no part of it and it will be unconscionable of us on this side to agree to a salary of \$30,000 for the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources.

Mr. Manning: God forbid!

Mr. C. Imbert: The Minister of Education; the Minister of Public Utilities; the Minister of Tobago Affairs. A sum of \$30,000 a month for somebody like the Minister of Education, who has errors in textbooks. My son is going to school and there is bad English in the textbooks. I must pay him; taxpayers must pay that hon. Minister who has resulted in a destruction of the English Language in schools in Trinidad and Tobago? No way! Absolutely not. No way! They cannot even speak English. The Member for Tobago East has put on the public record that the only people who can speak English in the Cabinet is the Member for Couva North and the Member for Siparia, [*Desk thumping*] not even the Member for Couva South can speak English according to the Member for Tobago East. Look at how he is laughing because he knows it is true. I must support a recommendation to give Members of this Government \$30,000 a month and they cannot even speak English; they are illiterate according to one of their own Members. No way, Mr. Deputy Speaker. No way. Let us really consider this matter.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wonder whether the hon. Member could tell us whether he would want the Commission to pay the Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs and Minister of Tourism \$30,000 per month?

Mr. C. Imbert: Does the hon. Member really want me to answer how much he is worth?

Mr. Valley: He is worth more than that. I say he is worth more than that.

Mr. C. Imbert: But we have to get serious in this country. Not only should Ministers on that side not be paid \$30,000 a month, but there are a number of anomalies in this report and it cannot be for the Government to just accept something like this *carte blanche* when there are glaring inconsistencies in the report.

Let me deal with local government representatives as a case in point. We have heard nothing from the Attorney General. In the report on page 276, there is a recommendation that the offices of chairmen and mayors be full time and salaries have been recommended to reflect full time status of those positions. Is the Government in agreement with that? Should the offices of mayors and chairmen be full time? We have raised this point. The Member for San Fernando East raised the point. Is the Mayor of Chaguanas going to sell the Red Parrot to work full time in the Borough of Chaguanas? We have heard nothing from the Attorney General on this matter so they are agreeing that mayors and chairmen should be full time and be allowed no other income from any other source.

Mr. Manning: It cannot be so!

Mr. C. Imbert: There are inconsistencies. The UNC has a large number of local government representatives. I think they have about the same or a bit less than we have.

Mr. Valley: Less.

Mr. C. Imbert: In this report, they want to give to the Mayor of Chaguanas \$7,200 a month, in addition to travelling allowance of \$1,800; so that is \$9,000 a month. But the representative of some district in Couva must get \$2,000 a month. Do they want to create riot within the local government system? They are saying that they accept this, so if the Commission had put \$1,000 a month for local government representatives, they would have said nothing. Look at the gross disparities.

The Mayor of Port of Spain previously got \$4,000, now \$10,000—150 per cent increase. Aldermen and Councillors—previously \$1,250; now, \$2,000; less than 100 per cent increase. What is the rationale? So that the heads of these corporations are working harder than the people out in the field, so the people out in the field must not get 100 per cent increase, but the mayors and chairmen must get 150 per cent increase. That is the way it is across the board—deputy mayor, \$2,000; new salary \$5,000. That is over 200 per cent increase. But the poor little councillor whom everybody on that side depends on to do all their work for

them—the Member for St. Augustine does not even go to his constituency office. He services his constituency by telephone. That is what I heard on television one night. They asked him why he did not go to his constituency and his answer was that was not his responsibility. He is available by telephone, but he is sending the local government representatives from St. Augustine and Tunapuna to his office to do all his work for him and he wants to recommend that they get \$2,000 a month while he is getting \$30,000 a month and a telephone bill paid, too. Must we agree to that?

That is injustice on local government elected representatives and that is why we say the Cabinet must have the guts and the courage to deal with this matter on its own. Send it back if it is frightened to bring in an advisor or whatever, and indicate the gross discrepancies and anomalies in the report and ask the Commission to review the process and bring it back. It has the power to do that. It is just coward.

One has to wonder when talking about self-interest. Who are the people to benefit here? It is them. When one looks at what a Minister used to get in 1995; the total was about \$15,000 when travelling was added. Now, they are going to get \$28,000 if the telephone is taken out.

They already engaged in sleight of hand when they hid a housing allowance in a report in a very surreptitious manner and then implemented it six months later and backdated it and so forth. Executive decision; interpretation of the report and push it up and send up the housing allowance to \$5,000. It is pure self-interest because there are several members of the Cabinet who are unaware of the fact that they could not receive both a housing allowance and supergrade quarters, who were busily engaged in the renovations of government quarters so they could move in. As a matter of fact, it is alleged that the Minister of Public Administration caused a renovation to a particular property costing \$300,000 and when he discovered that he could not get his housing allowance of \$5,000 and live in the government house, too—

Mr. Valley: He moved out, boy!

Mr. C. Imbert: Boldfaced. They want to collect housing allowance and live in supergrade housing. Boldfaced! The Minister of Public Administration. He did not move in again. He wanted the \$5,000. That is how they live in Trincity and pocket the \$5,000 so that it is pure self-interest with which we are dealing here.

2.15 p.m.

The Attorney General spoke about cheap political gain. This is expensive political gain for the UNC, there is nothing cheap about that. All the other persons who are mentioned in this report, Cabinet knows what to do about that, we do not have to tell them what to do. You cannot try to blackmail the Members on this side and say if we do not support the report that all the other persons who are listed in it cannot get their increase: that is utter rubbish. That is not the problem. They are afraid to implement an increase for themselves. They want it, but they are coward and what they are frightened about is the fact that if they keep their salary at existing levels, the permanent secretary would be earning more than they; that is the dilemma in which they find themselves. They know that they have to deal with senior public servants, members of commissions, and diplomatic representatives and so forth.

The Salaries Review Commission has recommended increases for these people. We on this side are not talking about that at all; we have no quarrel with that. If the Salaries Review Commission says that a permanent secretary is worth \$15,000 salary, give it to him. That is what we say, but do not try to embroil us in your nonsense. The Government has the power to give all these people, including themselves, these increased salaries. It is simply a trap for which we are not going to fall.

The outrage that would come from the population when they start to pay the Member for Nariva \$30,000 a month when his last pay cheque was \$3,000 a month, on a good month. I daresay that he was doing a better job at the *Express* than he is doing here. At least, he was peddling his political mischief on behalf of the UNC in the *Daily Express* and doing something. He was an underground closet for UNC pretending to be some sort of an unbiased reporter, but one could see all the inaccuracies, distortions and bias in his articles. When he was a candidate, I was not surprised. I used to wonder about this journalist who was always twisting everything and I wondered what was wrong with him and then we saw him as a candidate and understood that he was a plant inside the *Express*, but he was worth \$3,000 at that time.

What has the Member for Nariva done since he has come into Government? How much is he worth? Is he worth \$30,000 per month? We should pay him \$7.00 an hour. [*Desk thumping*] The Member for Nariva is worth the minimum wage of \$7.00 an hour. That is what he deserves as far as I am concerned. He is an unmitigated disaster. He brought a Bill to this Parliament for Occupational Health and Safety which was rubbish. It had to go to committee, it lapsed and all kinds of

Salaries Review Commission Report
[MR. IMBERT]

Friday, January 8, 1999

things. It is almost four years of UNC administration and he cannot deal with that. He changed the name of the Cipriani Labour College, and we must pay him \$30,000 per month. Rubbish! Not one cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If they want to pay that hon. Member \$30,000 per month, they have to do that themselves. We are not in agreement with that.

Mr. Hart: You are in Whitehall now, what more do you want?

Mr. C. Imbert: What about the Member for Chaguanas who was previously a customs officer.

Hon. Member: He is still running Customs.

Mr. C. Imbert: He is still running Customs? I do not know about that. Let us deal with the facts. Could you tell me what is going on in this country today? Four years of UNC administration and they have not built a community centre yet, not one.

Hon. Member: They refurbish.

Mr. C. Imbert: Refurbish what, they patch two galvanize and paint two walls. The ministry has done absolutely nothing for the last three and a half years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are three centres in my constituency which were almost completed in 1995. All they needed were a couple thousand dollars in plumbing and electrical work and nothing has been done, despite the representation made by the village councils that all that was needed to complete them was \$5,000 or \$10,000. There is a million-dollar centre standing there because of the incompetence of the Minister of Social and Community Development and we must pay him \$30,000. [*Desk thumping*]

For three years, my village council community centre in Maraval, River Estate and Belle Vue, all they need are two circuit breakers and a switch to get the light and electricity connection. For three years we have been begging and pleading with the Ministry of Community Development and the Minister was boldfaced enough to open that centre about a month ago with no lights and no electricity. And he is criticizing the captain of the West Indies team. He put a blight on the man. That is what he did, he blight him. [*Desk thumping*] Imagine the captain of the West Indies team is from Trinidad, the last country which should be openly and publicly criticizing the captain of the West Indies is Trinidad and Tobago, but our Minister was the only Caribbean Minister of Sport who “say to fire him”.

What does that do for the morale of the Captain of the West Indies team? And I must agree to pay him \$30,000 per month?

What is the performance of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources? He caused the country a loss of revenue of over \$200 million because of the froghopper disgrace and his experimentation with biological control. Two hundred million dollars went down the drain, farmers in crisis, Caroni (1975) Limited in pain. The Treasury had to bail out Caroni (1975) Limited all because of the incompetence of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources who has remained unscathed, perhaps, because he is related to the Prime Minister. That is the only reason I believe he is unscathed.

I heard that the Prime Minister said no one could attack his regime and remain unscathed. Well I consider losing \$200 million because of stupidity and incompetence as attacking the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, but you see, perhaps it is the family relation between the Member for Princes Town and the Member for Couva North.

We have had a litany of woes in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. Misrepresentation of records—a person who came sixth in an interview coming first after a little hopscotch and so forth. There are all sorts of things going on in that ministry: it is an absolute disgrace. The Minister is on record for misleading the Parliament with all kinds of nancy stories about the Agricultural Development Bank which he cannot substantiate. The board admits it is not true, but we must pay that Minister—who has cost this country hundreds of millions of dollars in losses through the froghopper infestation because of his own misguided strategy—\$30,000 per month.

We cannot forget the Member for Tobago East who has said that Hindus are dotish, stupid, ignorant and foolish. Imagine a Member of a Hindu-dominated Government saying that the majority of Hindus in this country are dotish, stupid and ignorant and causing all kinds of bacchanal in the newspapers. Maha Sabha writing and condemning him, letters to the editor, every Hindu group in the country in outrage. The Presbyterian Minister and all deviating from his prepared speech in the pulpit and castigating the Member for Tobago East. That is what is going on in this country. Someone who does not understand the principle of Cabinet and collective responsibility and simply keeping one's mouth shut when one is a Member of Cabinet—we must pay him \$30,000 per month? All kinds of race relations problems in the country are created by this Member of the

Salaries Review Commission Report
[MR. IMBERT]

Friday, January 8, 1999

Government, and he was not satisfied by saying Hindus are dotish and ignorant, he was not satisfied in calling 50 per cent of the population stupid, he said Members of his Cabinet are illiterate, they cannot read, and cannot speak English.

Hon. Member: He is speaking the truth.

Mr. C. Imbert: The money to pay these people—because this issue is all about Members of Government you know. This is not about the Chairman of the Public Service Commission, the General Manager of the Port Authority, and the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance or whatever. This debate is not about that; it is about the salaries and compensation packages for Members of the Cabinet. That is what the people of this country and “John Public” are interested in. As far as I can discern, if I am to believe what I hear on the radio and what I see in terms of responses to the Member for Tobago East, “John Public” is not in agreement with paying the Member for Tobago East \$30,000 per month. That is not the issue.

There has been an attempt to relate the salaries to what obtains in the private sector. The Salaries Review Commission, in my opinion, has tried to look at what takes place in the private sector and relate it to salaries which are paid to Ministers. In the private sector, you have the power of recall, for example, if the shareholders of a company are not satisfied with the performance of a company; or the managers of that company—and the Member for St. Joseph knows what I am talking about—and it is losing money, and and are doing things which are not in keeping with its principles and causing the company to lose money and bringing embarrassment and shame to the company; or if it is being mismanaged, or there is corruption in the company, the shareholders of that company can ask for an extraordinary meeting and ask that the entire management be dismissed.

2.30 p.m.

In the private sector, people have power. If an employee is not performing, one can take disciplinary action. One can suspend, dismiss, or fine that person. One has the power of recall. But what power of recall does the population have on the members of Cabinet? They have none. They vote once every five years. Mash up the country for five years, do all sorts of confusion and corruption, but the people have no power to deal with it. Having seen ministers get a salary of \$30,000 per month and forming the opinion that these people do not deserve this, they cannot do anything. They cannot summon a shareholders’ meeting; they cannot even write to anybody and say, “I do not feel that the Minister of Education

should get \$30,000 per month, because he has messed up the whole textbook system, and I want you to cut his pay to \$20,000 per month.” They cannot do that. “I want them to send him home for two weeks”. They cannot do that.

Mr. Manning: Send him home permanently!

Mr. C. Imbert: One has to be very, very careful, because once these salaries are approved, they are cast in stone. There is not going to be any reduction or negative change unless it is an administrative error, in the terms and conditions of members of the Cabinet. As a matter of fact, from experience, it is normally an upward movement all of the time.

So, it is not a simple matter at all. We have to start thinking about these things. We have to put ourselves in the shoes of the little people of Trinidad and Tobago who see their Cabinet members yesterday gallerying on the steps of Whitehall after having taken the budget for the restoration of that building from \$5 million to \$35 million in just over a year. We read in the newspapers about how they bought marble tiles from a special quarry in Italy. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is dangerous behaviour on the part of the Cabinet. When little people are starving and daily-paid workers are laid off on the eve of the budget—and several of them are still unemployed—earning \$1,500 to \$1,800 per month, they are still out on the street on the breadline.

The little daily-paid workers are looking at the ornate, ugly and ostentatious display of consumerism that has taken place at Whitehall. Gold chandelier, gold filigree on the ceiling, marble tiles from Italy, purple heart and green heart floor, and we see that no proper tendering procedures were used for this work. It is a complete ‘free for all’ where previously, the National Maintenance Training and Security Company Limited (MTS) had a contract not to exceed \$5 million—a ceiling figure. All of a sudden, they fired MTS and brought in all sorts of petty contractors, friends and family and so forth, and the budget went from \$5 million to \$35 million. I am sure that if there is an investigation of that project, it will reveal massive corruption, squandermania, waste and extravagance. I am certain of it!

The little people will see that they spent \$35 million on a monument to themselves. Dr. Eric Williams used Whitehall as his office and because the Member for Couva North wants to emulate Dr. Eric Williams, he must also reside in Whitehall. They spent \$35 million, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on an office for the Prime Minister with which to gallery on little people? No way! One of those

Salaries Review Commission Report
[MR. IMBERT]

Friday, January 8, 1999

marble tiles alone might have put lights in the community centre in Maraval—\$35 million. People outside are watching that and we are asked to join the UNC in this nonsense. We are not going to do it.

What is this my colleague handed me? What am I seeing here? I am reading a newspaper headline:

“Sadiq's wife complains: Too much money for Panday”.

What is going on here? *[Laughter]* *[Desk thumping]*

“At least one Government Minister's wife has expressed the view that the \$10,000 salary increase for Prime Minister, Basdeo Panday is not justified. Businesswoman, Champa Baksh, said it was her personal view that the increases recommended from \$15,000 to \$25,000 for Mr. Panday were too high...”

Mr. Manning: Sadiq tell her to say that!

Mr. C. Imbert: But check this out, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

“...but she felt the increase from \$12,000 to \$18,000 for Ministers was

What nonsense is this? *[Laughter]* So, the wife of the Minister of Works and Transport is on record saying that a \$10,000 increase for the Prime Minister is too high, but a \$6,000 increase for ministers is okay. That is self-interest! We heard the Attorney General talk about the politics of self-interest. That is the politics of self-interest. Her husband probably told her to say that. He must be afraid to say it himself. My goodness!

People must be careful about what they say. This is the spouse of the hon. Member for Caroni East.

Mr. D. Singh: A good looking woman. *[Laughter]*

Mr. C. Imbert: Sorry, it is not Caroni East. It is little wonder about the source from where it is coming; the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. Listen to the wife of the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

“I think the increase is justified. They should triple the salary in fact.”
[Laughter]

What arrogance!

“The wife of the Minister of Local Government is of the view that the salary should not go from \$12,000 to \$18,000; it should go from \$12,000 to \$36,000.”

For the sheriff, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Give me a break. One slap in 14 years is worth \$36,000 per month! *[Laughter]*

I understand what is going on. When one reads what is going on behind the scenes, they want the salary—they want it bad—but they want us to join them in their nonsense. It is not worth it. We are talking about a Member of Parliament who has been arrested and charged for assaulting a senior police officer, driving on the shoulder, flashing his gun to public servants, cursing some school teacher in South over something, pulling a cutlass for children, using obscene language in the Parliament and having no shame—actually confirming in the public record that he used obscene language, the “F” word in Parliament, and used it outside, too, to the press.

Imagine that! This is what Trinidad and Tobago has come to today. There is a member of the Government saying there is nothing wrong with using obscene language in Parliament or outside of Parliament. It is an offence that if little “John

John or Laventille used the obscene language to a policeman, it would be three months’ jail for him, but there is a member of the Cabinet saying he sees nothing wrong with using obscene language anywhere. As a matter of fact, if my memory serves me right, he feels he could strip naked and run up and down inside of Parliament.

They are talking about what would schoolchildren think? What would schoolchildren think if a Member of Parliament says that he feels he could strip naked and run up and down in the Chamber, using obscene language in Parliament, not to talk about all of his other sins. He is the first Member of Government ever to be publicly accused of wife beating in Trinidad and Tobago while in office, and the little children of this country must see that individual getting over \$30,000 per month? I think not! When one gives someone like that, over whom one has no power of recall—this brings me back to my point—if that person was the managing director of Lever Brothers or Neal and Massy and he was on television cussing and flashing a gun and threatening people with a cutlass, he would have been sent home a long time ago; the chairman would call him and fire him, but not with a Cabinet Minister.

The numbers are too small, the majority too slim, they could do whatever they want. Ask the Member for Tobago East and the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. They could do whatever they want and little children are watching that kind of behaviour. The Members of the Government are supposed to be the exemplars in our society. Little children watching this obscenity are then informed that this person has been rewarded with a salary increase of almost \$10,000 when everything is added up. No way!

Let me correct, for the record, a matter brought here by the Attorney General. I have before me a letter from the Industrial Court dated November 25, 1998 written to the Hon. Attorney General:

Mr. Maharaj: Signed by whom?

Mr. C. Imbert: We do not bring things in here without a signature.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: He is still not saying. Signed by whom?

Mr. C. Imbert: That is not the point.

“We the undersigned members of the Industrial Court feel constrained to write to you with great urgency and deep concern about certain of the recommendations in the Fifty Second Report of the Salaries Review Commission which pose a grave threat to the structure, functioning and integrity of the Industrial Court.

At the present time the difference in the remuneration packages of the two levels of membership of the Court (other than that of the President) is 2.87 per cent or \$6,000 per annum.”

(500 per month)

“However, the proposals contained in the said Fifty Second report...would increase that difference from 2.87 per cent to over 3,000 per cent or \$204,900 per year.”

Mr. Hinds: And the Attorney General said he got nothing?

Mr. C. Imbert: The Attorney General received this correspondence.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Deputy Speaker, on a point of order, I said there was no—

Hon. Members: What is the point of order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order! What is the point of order?

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Deputy Speaker, he is misleading the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: To which Standing Order are you referring?

Mr. Maharaj: Standing Order 35.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 35 states:

“A Member shall not interrupt another Member except—

- (a) by rising to a point of order, whereupon the Member speaking shall resume his seat and the Member interrupting shall simply direct attention to the point which he desires to bring to notice and submit it to the Speaker or Chairman for decision;”

It says nothing here about a standing order point. It just says: “rising to a point of order, whereupon the Member speaking shall resume his seat and the member interrupting shall simply direct attention to the point which he desires to bring to note and submit it to the Speaker or Chairman for decision”. What is the point of order?

Mr. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, could I say something before that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No. This is not open to debate. This is the interpretation of Standing Order 35. It says nothing about calling the point of order. Have a seat.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I withdraw my objection and I will get my Member on this side to answer.

2.45 p.m.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope I will get injury time.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Imbert: The Attorney General said that if there was any issue dealing with the Magistracy or the Industrial Court, then there was a procedure whereby

Salaries Review Commission Report
[MR. IMBERT]

Friday, January 8, 1999

they would advise the President or the Chief Justice as the case may be, and the Attorney General would be advised. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is clear that what the Attorney General was seeking to imply was that there was no issue; that he had no information; the Chief Justice did not communicate with him; the President of the Industrial Court did not communicate with him; all is well in the state of Denmark. That is what he said.

But here we have a letter written by judges of the Industrial Court to the Attorney General, received by the Attorney General, indicating their strong dissatisfaction with the recommendations of the report which we are debating today, indicating that the differential between the two levels of membership of the court is presently just about 3 per cent. When we look at the figures, they are saying that the difference of the compensation package between the Vice-President and the Chairman of the Essential Services Division and an ordinary member is just \$500 and it is going to a differential of \$17,000, or an increase of 3,000 per cent.

I raise this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to again put the argument of the Government on its head. When the Government receives communication of this nature, they cannot stand on ceremony and say, “Well, the president did not write me so I am not taking this on.” We heard the Attorney General first say two judges, then four judges.

I have before me the signature page and 11 judges have signed this letter. So I am asking the Attorney General to refrain from misleading the House. If anybody should be on a point of order it should be me. It is not two or four, it is 11 judges of the Industrial Court who wrote the Attorney General in November 1998, expressing their deep dissatisfaction. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr. C. Imbert: A total of 11 judges wrote the Attorney General and he is saying first two, then four.

Mr. Maharaj: I never said two or four.

Mr. C. Imbert: Oh, oh, your nose will grow. This is why we say this report has to be sent back. If the Government had done the correct thing and asked for the advice of a practitioner in the field—they do not want to go to the Chief Personnel Officer, no problem. Bring someone from the private sector who can

look at salary scales and terms and conditions, responsibilities and reward, and come up with recommendations on how to deal with this matter.

How can there be a situation where there is a very important service in Trinidad and Tobago such as the Industrial Court, which is resolutely opposed to this Salaries Review Commission Report and have deep dissatisfaction with it? What is going to happen if we on this side were so irresponsible as to just unanimously agree to this report as the Prime Minister wants us to? There would be a shut down in the Industrial Court because that is how judges got tax-free salaries.

The Attorney General's memory is subjective and selective. He does not remember that the reason the terms and conditions of judges in the High Court are now much better than they were is because these judges refused to work. They staged industrial action. Is that what we want to see now in the Industrial Court? What a joke! A court that is supposed to settle labour disputes, strikes and complaints about pay and collective agreement, a court like that—what a joke—dealing with terms and conditions, goes on strike because its members are not satisfied with terms and conditions. What parody, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we must agree to that? We cannot agree to that.

In the expectation that the Government will eat a little humble pie and seek to get some changes made to this report, I also wish to point out the anomaly of diplomatic representatives. There is, for example, a Consul General in Toronto, one in Miami, one in New York and there may be others that I am not aware of. Those are the ones I know about in North America. This report does not deal with them. It is only dealing with ambassadors and my investigations have revealed that is an oversight that has been in existence for many years. So I would ask the Government to do whatever is necessary to ensure that all categories of diplomatic representatives, especially at the level of Consul General, be included in any review of terms and conditions because it is unfair and is just another example of the discrepancies in this report.

The problem with magistrates. It is my understanding that one of the quirks in this report is that in standardizing medical access—because I notice this is what the Salaries Review Commission sought to do—certain categories of people can get free health care at Mount Hope, others have to go to the General Hospital, others do not get at all—like parliamentarians. Since I have been here at least two parliamentarians have died in office, I think in both cases from heart attacks—the

Salaries Review Commission Report
[MR. IMBERT]

Friday, January 8, 1999

Member for Caroni East and the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. And sorry, how could I forget my friend and colleague, the Member for Laventille?

Yet, we note that the Commission has been very careful in saying, okay, this one should get free health care at Mount Hope, that one at general hospital, this one none. So Members of Parliament, for example, are in the none category. They must get nothing, no medical attention at all, not even a contributory medical plan. Had I been working in a private company I would be happy to contribute to a contributory medical plan. I do not mind taking a percentage of my salary and putting it into a medical plan to ensure that my family and I and all the Members on this side are properly served. I do not know what the Deputy Speaker's position is and so forth. But nothing! No medical plan for Members of Parliament. But it is the Members of Parliament who are dying in office and there is no medical treatment for us.

I come back to the point I was dealing with on magistrates. My understanding is that magistrates and registrars, until this report came into being—and I guess it still holds because this report has not yet been implemented—had free medical access at Mount Hope. Magistrates are a very important category of public officials in Trinidad and Tobago. The Attorney General is always pontificating, boasting and carrying on about all the work he is doing to improve the Judiciary, Magistracy and so forth. He is always carrying on all about the place. Every time you look he is in some international court in Rome or falling down in a conference in The Bahamas as a result of exhaustion. The Member for Couva South is always boasting about how he is the hardest working Attorney General.

A total of 90 per cent of the cases in this country are dealt with at the Magistrate's Court level, but they, that hard-working group of people, that group of people who determine people's lives; determine whether you are a free man or go to jail; whether you are incarcerated; custody of children; whether a wife could take out a restraining order; whether a father can see his daughter or son and so forth, that category of person, according to this report, will lose their free medical access to Mount Hope. That is my understanding.

But this Attorney General comes here choraling with the PNM saying we must just accept this.

Mr. Maharaj: You voting against it because you do not like magistrates.

Mr. C. Imbert: We must vote against it because I do not agree that magistrates must lose their free medical access. I want them to get it. I want you to put on record that magistrates get free medical access to Mount Hope. *[Desk thumping]* I want the Government to fix the judges in the Industrial Court. I want the judges in the Industrial Court to get what they deserve. I am not saying they should get more than they deserve but I am asking that the members of the Industrial Court be treated as people.

It seems to me the only people there are in Trinidad and Tobago are Cabinet Ministers, and their wives are saying they should get three times the salary and the Prime Minister must not get and all sorts of things.

Mr. Manning: Non-performance at home and at work.

Mr. C. Imbert: The Industrial Court must not get what they are supposed to. Magistrates must lose their free medical access, members of local government must get \$2,000 per month when a—*[Interruption]* Well I just called an ordinary Cabinet Minister. Let us deal with the Attorney General—special case. The Attorney General gets \$20,000 per month salary, \$2,000 more than an ordinary Minister and a professional allowance, as well, of \$2,000 a month. So \$22,000 a month salary, plus \$5,000 housing, plus \$3,500 travelling, plus \$1,000 telephone. The sum of \$33,500 per month for the Attorney General.

3.00 p.m.

So why must the Attorney General get \$4,000 more than a Cabinet Minister? Because he gave himself silk? Is that why? Because he gave himself Senior Counsel? I notice some of his close relatives too. *[Laughter]* *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Manning: Friends and family.

Mr. C. Imbert: So I must agree that the Attorney General must get \$33,000 a month. I must agree to that. I must agree that the Attorney General must get \$33,000 a month and free medical attention at Mount Hope when a local government representative is getting \$2,000 a month, and if he falls sick, nothing for him.

Let us deal with local government representatives. Two thousand dollars a month and if one falls sick on the job, nothing for him. But the Attorney General must get \$33,000. That is justice in Trinidad and Tobago? So one Attorney General equals how many local government representatives? About 17! One

Salaries Review Commission Report
[MR. IMBERT]

Friday, January 8, 1999

Attorney General equals 17 county councillors or local government representatives.

This Attorney General declared the airport contract to be legal. This Attorney General directed that the Galbaransingh contract be put out for tender. I have the minutes of the meeting held at his office in November, 1997, I believe. This Attorney General declared a contract to be legal, that it should go out for public tender, sat and watched the contract not go out for public tender, watched a massive increase in costs and so forth, and did nothing. *[Desk thumping]*

But the people of Trinidad and Tobago expect their Attorney General to be guardian of the law. If it is one person who is supposed to be impartial and unbiased in his deliberations, it is the Attorney General. When he is giving legal advice, when he is dealing with legal matters and obligations of the Government, if it is one person who is supposed to protect the poor people of this country, it is the Attorney General; but he has not done so. He has sat idly by and watched the Prime Minister and his minions in Cabinet, the Ministers of Works and Transport, Finance and others manipulate the process to award a scandalous contract in excess of \$100 million of the correct price. That Attorney General has done that! *[Desk thumping]* Sit like a moo-moo with his mouth zipped saying nothing, but we must pay him \$33,000.

This Attorney General has seen serious questions on the InnCogen contract, a situation where a favoured son of the UNC was able to get a contract without tender which would win them \$900 million in tax-free profits. This Attorney General stood and watched that. He did nothing.

Thirty five million dollars squandered at Whitehall! I have to talk about that! I have to go back to that. Massive corruption and irregularity, gold chandelier, marble tiles from Italy; and the Attorney General does nothing.

A \$30 million loss in rice at National Flour Mills and the Attorney General does nothing. Imagine a UNC-appointed chairman of National Flour Mills determined that there was massive corruption in the order for a shipment of rice which this country never received. They got an internationally respected firm of accountants and auditors to do a forensic audit and determine all sorts of corruption and scandal; but the Attorney General and the Minister of Finance: what do they do? They ignore that. The Minister of Finance fires the auditors from Petrotrin and other state companies that they were auditors for and railroads the shareholders of National Flour Mills into accepting his choices on the board. The

shareholders revolted. They said, “No, we are not allowing you to push these people down our throat,” and that bacchanal went on and on for months, until they were obviously able to intimidate the Chairman of National Flour Mills. Eventually that chairman decided it was no longer useful for him to remain, I do not know if his personal safety had been threatened or whatever, so now they are railroading it. Imagine that! A UNC chairman finds massive corruption, but the Minister of Finance wants to get rid of the chairman.

This is the Government that came in on this anti-corruption thing, but they have reinvented corruption. [*Desk thumping*] They have perfected the phrase, “is we time now”. What that means is, “we time to thief”. This UNC Government is presiding over the most scandalous corruption seen in any country in the western hemisphere. [*Desk thumping*] There has never been corruption like this before! Over the table, on top the table, in our face!

Look at what is going on at the airport. The Chairman of the Airports Authority runs up a bill of \$200,000 on the credit card; tells the Light Airplane Club that they must leave the place they have been in for 20 years and go and rent a hangar from him; but the Minister of Works and Transport is encouraging that. The rest of the board wants the chairman to resign. The rest of the board of the Airports Authority is so scandalized by the corruption that is going on there that they want the chairman to resign. But what happens? Two ministers of Government, Minister of Works and Transport and Minister of Finance, are running up and begging the members of the board, pleading with them, hold it, do not insist on the resignation of the chairman, we will get him to behave and so forth. But I must pay the Minister of Works and Transport \$30,000 a month? I must pay the Minister of Finance \$32,000 a month?

When we have legitimate complaints and queries coming from the Member for Tobago West about lack of accountability in Tobago, the Minister of Finance runs over to Tobago interfering with Tobago politics and misleading the public with regard to the concerns raised by the Member for Tobago West.

Miss Nicholson: After I put him to sit there.

Mr. C. Imbert: What the Member for Tobago West raised was a question of accountability. For the illiterate Members on that side—they have at least 18 illiterate people on that side, according to the Member for Tobago East—accountability means that there must be justification for expenditure; that is what

Salaries Review Commission Report
[MR. IMBERT]

Friday, January 8, 1999

financial accountability means. That is, if you are supposed to spend \$1 million on a road and the road costs \$11 million, something is wrong!

Miss Nicholson: Certainly.

Mr. C. Imbert: When the budget for a school is supposed to be \$2 million and it is still being built and is \$4 million; something is wrong.

Miss Nicholson: And it is still being built.

Mr. C. Imbert: But the Minister of Finance decides, because it is becoming clear that they no longer command the support of the people of Tobago—
[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, order.

Mr. C. Imbert: I do not know what is wrong with the froghopper instrument on that side. I do not know what his problem is.

You see, when the UNC realized that they no longer command the support of the people of Tobago, they running quick to make mischief over there, but it would not help them. Non-elected people who nobody ever voted for, carpet baggers, people who hop onto parties and hop off of parties just for personal and financial gain want to attack elected representatives. People who were never elected are attacking elected Members of Parliament.

So before we hear some more propaganda from the Members on the other side, because we are going to hear propaganda, let me restate the principles. We on this side are of the view that there are serious discrepancies in this report, there are serious anomalies and that a number of categories of persons have been badly treated, including the magistrates, the ordinary members of the Industrial Court and local government representatives. As I said, there is that quirk with the Consul General. We believe a number of people have been badly treated. That is why we are asking the Government to exercise its power and deal with the amendments that are necessary to this report. That is one.

Secondly, we cannot support salaries of \$30,000, or in the case of the Prime Minister, \$35,000, for Members on that side.

Mr. D. Singh: Why?

Mr. C. Imbert: The population is of the view that you do not deserve it and especially the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, who has just arrived, gunman, sheriff—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You were going so well. You have just called somebody a discreditory word and I advise you to withdraw it.

Mr. C. Imbert: Certainly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will most certainly withdraw that.

What I meant was, someone who has been accused of flashing his gun and the gun was taken away by the Prime Minister publicly in this Parliament, someone who has been accused of beating his wife, someone accused of cursing, someone who has confirmed that he uses obscene language. The people of this country and I do not agree that he is worth \$30,000 a month.

Mr. Maharaj: Personalities.

Mr. C. Imbert: It has to be personalities because the population has no power of recall. If it were simply offices and, for example, if every year the population could recall a Cabinet Minister, they would give him the \$30,000 and recall him next year, but not for five years. Because what we have seen is that the behaviour of several Members of the Government is getting worse and worse. When they get this \$30,000 a month, they will behave even worse. They do not seem to understand anything. The reason the population does not want them to get a salary increase is because of their behaviour!

Mr. D. Singh: Do not speak for the population.

Mr. C. Imbert: You check the opinion polls, check the call-in programmes, newspapers, the people do not wish the ministers to get \$30,000 a month because of the non-performance, the scandalous corruption that is taking place in this country, and the fact that one can do nothing about it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You have one minute to wind up.

Mr. C. Imbert: So that, the Government knows it does not need our support. We will not support this Motion, they do not need our support.

3.15 p.m.

If the Government feels that the Members for Tabaquite, Pointe a Pierre, Chaguanas and Tobago East are worth \$30,000 a month, then let them decide it themselves. [*Desk thumping*] We are not helping them. If it feels that the Member for Nariva has demonstrated such performance that he should be paid \$30,000 a

Salaries Review Commission Report
[MR. IMBERT]

Friday, January 8, 1999

month then let the Prime Minister decide that for himself, and not take the coward's way out and try to embroil us in it.

As for the Prime Minister, I agree with the wife of the Minister of Works and Transport he most certainly should not get a salary increase of \$10,000. [*Desk thumping*]

Thank you.

The Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs and Minister of Tourism (Hon. Mervyn Assam): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise to join in the debate on this Motion.

This is the first sitting of the House in 1999 and I really thought that we were going to start the new year with some decorum and dignity, that we would have demonstrated a high level of parliamentary conduct and that the content of Members' speeches would be most elevating and educational, so that when we leave this distinguished honourable Chamber, the press would be able to report, at the beginning of 1999, a new era in the history of this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hart: "Not when all yuh tiefing so."

Hon. M. Assam: On December 18, 1998 when we left this honourable Chamber, the Member for San Fernando East descended into the worst form of parliamentary vulgarity, where he engaged in every form of vituperation against the distinguished Members on this side. I really thought that having gone through the great season of advent which is a season of peace and goodwill among men, that his Members would have chastised their leader and resolved to come here in 1999 and debate issues of substance.

Today, we see another manifestation of what Shakespeare wrote many years ago, "not all the multitudinous seas incarnadine can wash away the filth from his mouth." [*Desk thumping*] I thought that when the hon. Prime Minister had piloted this Motion with respect to the Fifty-Second Report of the Salaries Review Commission that we would have been treated to some financial, economic analysis of this report. We would have looked at the report and seen whether the members of the Salaries Review Commission had done their work, their recommendations were rooted in reality and their comparisons were just and fair, whether financially or economically they were unreal or realistic, or, in fact,

whether the report contained all of the analysis that Members of this honourable House would be looking for.

To the contrary, we heard all kinds of bile and vice introduced into this House with the Members for San Fernando East and Diego Martin East. Although in the time of Christ, the season out of which we have just come, because yesterday or the day before was the Feast of the Epiphany, which on the Christian calendar means the manifestation or revelation of God to his people, one would have thought that people from the east were wise, but we see both the Members for San Fernando East and Diego Martin East are totally opposite to anything that is wise.

Instead we were treated to *argumentum ad hominem* throughout, calling the names of Ministers, ridiculing ministers and their wives on the basis of newspaper reports that had not been verified or authenticated, and using the privilege and immunity of Parliament to do so. This is so sad really. Frankly, I feel sick on my feet. I really thought I was going to come here in 1999 and listen to valuable contributions. I feel sad to be a Member of this House, because for over three years I have sat here and listened to the most banal and obscene kind of attacks from the Members opposite on the Members of this side and even people who do not sit in this distinguished House.

We heard the Member for San Fernando East talk about the chairmen of the Airports Authority and T&TEC, and all sorts of persons who cannot defend themselves in this honourable House, using the immunity and privilege of Parliament to do so; how very sad! It is extremely sad! What the Members should be doing is not only coming here to argue cogently, with facts and figures and through proper research, their various points of view, they should be serving their constituencies. This morning the Member for Arouca South was on TV6, and some of her constituents called in to say that it appeared she was only the representative of Maloney and La Horqueta. What about Malabar and the other places? She gave some faint excuses. [*Crosstalk*]

There was a little article on page 14 of the *Express* of Wednesday January 6, 1999 that said, "Poverty and hell in Paramin" signed by Poly Romany. This was a letter to the editor which stated very clearly, addressing the Member for Diego Martin East:

"Paramin has poverty. There have been instances of parents being unable to send their children to secondary schools after the children's success at the Common Entrance examinations."

Salaries Review Commission Report
[HON. M. ASSAM]

Friday, January 8, 1999

What is the Member for Diego Martin East who represents that district doing about that? The article continues:

"Today, there are citizens of Paramin who sponsor children to attend school because their parents cannot."

Is the Member for Diego Martin East part of that group sponsoring? I can say categorically, no.

"One only needs to speak to the parents of the uniformed children who attended NLCB's adoption function. I suggest, Mr. Imbert that you obtain information from the school about needy children."

He should address his mind to the needs of his constituents rather than come here and engage in the vulgarities and obscenities to which he has grown accustomed. He speaks of green heart, purple heart, the golden chandeliers and candelabra at Whitehall, but that is precisely what he wants: a good green heart and purple heart. [*Laughter*]

The man in talking to the Member for Diego Martin East states:

"Further may I suggest that you also speak to (teacher) J B Romany. He is involved with the St. Vincent De Paul.

But we in Paramin are 'poor' in other ways. The people in upper Paramin from Goutierre up have not had a pipe-borne supply of water for more than four years now!!!"

This Government has been in office for three years. He was the Minister of Works and Transport in the previous administration. His party was in power for 34 years and they have not had water for over four years. He came today and said that the people in the Industrial Court should get more money, but they have been in power for 34 years! It is his government that instituted the ISA and the IRA and established the Industrial Court of Trinidad and Tobago. He came here today and said that they should get more money.

He said that magistrates should get medical attention, he and his government and his party were in power for 34 years and what did they do? He cried today like a cry baby and said that all Members of Parliament should get medical attention and only Cabinet ministers are seeing after themselves, but his party was in power for 34 years and they have never introduced a medical group health plan for all parliamentarians and local government bodies.

When I was chairman of St. George East County Council—and the Member for Arouca North could testify about this if he wants to speak the truth—we advocated that many times, and I am sure that he cannot deny that. We advocated better salaries, working conditions, allowances and staff, and more equipment for local government. His government was in power and they did nothing about it. Shame on you! [*Crosstalk*]

"But we in Paramin are 'poor' in other ways. The people in upper Paramin from Goutierre up have not had a pipe-borne supply of water for more than four years now!!! The water mains have been there all the time mind you." [*Crosstalk*]

When I read letters like this about people who are suffering, and directed to Members of Parliament who have been in office for so many years and they come here crying on our shoulders today, giving the impression that this Government has been responsible for all the ills and troubles of this nation, a Government that has been in power for three years—you know what should happen to the Member for Diego Martin East? He should disappear from the face of the earth!

For the feeble arguments he has put up against this report, I quote Shakespeare when he said, "conscience does make cowards of us all." He went on to say in another play Julius Caesar, "Oh, judgment thou has fled to brutish beasts and men have lost their reason." All of them on that side, brutish beasts, they have lost their reason! [*Crosstalk*]

He attacks Members on this side. A large percentage of Members on this side were professionals before they entered Government and earned larger salaries than they are earning today as Cabinet Ministers. The Deputy Speaker is a specialist. Does he think he could pay him to preside in this Parliament? The Minister of Health, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, the Minister of Public Utilities, the Minister of Legal Affairs, the Attorney General, the Minister of Tobago East and the Minister of Housing and Settlements are all professionals. I am a professional. We have so many professionals. The Prime Minister is also a professional. Does he think he could pay any of us? [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: If we do not pay, why did you come here?

Hon. M. Assam: The audacity of these political infants and mentally retarded people opposite, talking about salaries! Can they pay any of us, these

professionals on this side? Your first leader said that if he put up a crapaud the people have to vote for it, and that is what he did! He put crapauds, people voted for them and they paid them salaries. Some have absconded, like former Members for Tunapuna and Diego Martin West and a certain Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, and they were paid taxpayers' money.

3.30 p.m.

Many of the sitting Members here come late and leave early like their leader; come late and leave early like the Member for Toco/Manzanilla; even, sometimes, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant; the Member for Port of Spain South; come late and leave early. Do you know what the reason for that is, Mr. Deputy Speaker? They are all hustling to make a living. They are all scrunting and hungry. In fact, the Member for Diego Martin Central said in this honourable House that he would never accept a Cabinet position again until the salaries have appreciably increased. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West said he is not coming back here because one cannot live on a Member of Parliament's salary so he is squatting in London getting an end at the Commonwealth Secretariat and being paid by taxpayers' money but giving no representation.

Do you know why America broke away from the United Kingdom? No taxation without representation. The people in his constituency should string him up because he is not giving them any representation and he is being paid taxpayers' money. They want to come today and moralize. More than that, even the Member for Diego Martin East hustling up the islands. Many times he is not in Parliament because he is hustling up the islands.

The inequity and anomaly of the situation is that all the Members opposite can work; of course, if they have a talent or skill. All of them can earn additional emoluments provided, of course, they have a talent or skill or they are employable because I understand from the labour statistics that we are getting from the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives a lot of them are not employable. But those who are employable cannot come to Parliament early and they leave early like the leader who just left. Many times they have to send excuses to the Speaker because they cannot turn up; they are hustling somewhere to make an additional dollar.

I never feel angry because once you are earning an additional dollar honestly I have no problem because I understand. How can anybody live on a Member of Parliament's salary? One cannot even live on a Minister's salary far less a Member of Parliament's salary. Today I am going to break down for you and the

national community, by extension, the salary a Minister gets. A Minister gets \$12,000 per month. Out of that he does not see \$12,000 because at source 35 per cent is deducted as income tax. He pays 6 per cent of his salary as a parliamentary pension. He pays a few hundred dollars to his party. I think he makes a contribution of \$600 to his party every month. He has to pay NIS, health surcharge, loan and insurance for his motor car. Out of that \$12,000 I take home \$4,538. I get \$2,300 *[Interruption]* I am coming to that. Why are you so angry with me and impatient because I am speaking the truth? I get \$2,300 to take care of my motor car. Can that take care of a motor car? For gas, insurance, tyres maintenance and parts? Then I get \$5,000 for housing but they take 35 per cent in tax. They never tell the public, they say we get \$5,000.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have to rent a constituency office. I do not have a constituency office given to me. When I started out in November, 1995 I looked high and low, up and down to find adequate and appropriate space in my constituency. Do you know how much I pay to rent a constituency office? The Parliament gives me \$700 per month and I *[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: When the Member for Diego Martin East was speaking no one attacked him but they attacked Members around him like the Members for Tunapuna and Princes Town. The Member for St. Joseph is bringing his points across because he feels very strongly about it. It is not very gentlemanly to be taking money and flashing it in his face. If that camera picks it up, believe it or not you all will look like very stupid school boys. It will look like that but I know you all are not that. Please give him a chance to bring forth his ideas.

Hon. M. Assam: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You observed that when they were talking I said nothing. They even tried to draw me in about how much the Minister of Trade should earn; I said nothing. I kept quiet in the debate on Friday, December 18, 1998 and I kept quiet today again. I said nothing but I am telling you the Parliament gives me \$700 per month to rent an office. For three years I have been renting an office for \$1,500 per month. I take \$800 out of my parliamentary non-salary and add to the \$700, a fact that can be verified with my landlord.

I get \$400 for telephone and electricity which cannot, in any way, defray telephone and electricity costs. By the way, my telephone at home is not \$1,000 per month. It could be verified. I ask anybody to call the Permanent Secretary in my Ministry and ask what is my monthly telephone bill which the Ministry pays

Salaries Review Commission Report
[HON. M. ASSAM]

Friday, January 8, 1999

for my house. It is not even \$300 most months. All this propaganda and malice that they are spreading, “one day, one day congotay”; Member for Diego Martin East.

Let us come back. He attacked the Ministers of Labour and Co-operatives, Community Development and Local Government. Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know we have completed 20 new community centres in the last three years? Do you know we have completed several sporting facilities and complexes, and I give full and abundant credit to my colleague, the Member for Tobago West when she was Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. They are attacking the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives but what he has done in three years, in 34 years the PNM government could not do it because he brought in legislation to protect women from arbitrary dismissal after maternity leave. He allowed female employees promotional opportunities even while they are on maternity leave. The constitutional right enshrined for women to have maternity leave; in 34 years the PNM government never did that. National minimum wage, the PNM has never done that. National minimum wage to avoid exploitation of the non-unionized particularly women of this country.

For the first time a national human resource management information system has been put in place in order to develop a database for people. The PNM never did it. This system will provide labour market data so that the Government can do proper planning with respect to skills development which we are doing throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. Never before in the history of this country have we pulled together the resources under the national training agency with skills development centres all over, including Tobago, to bring about a higher quality of human resource development so that we can be prepared for the 21st Century. We are bringing people all over the country up to the standards of computer literacy which has never been envisaged far less implemented by the People’s National Movement.

An important labour legislation that the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives—you have been making all kinds of derogatory statements, that he is not worth this and he was only getting \$3,000 when he was a newspaper reporter as an underground closet—look at the words—for the UNC. Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act, Registration, Recognition and Certification Board (Amendment) Act, Workmen’s Compensation Act and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the plum, the crown, the jewel in all of this is the Occupational Safety and Health Bill which the PNM has tossed around for a quarter of a century in this country and

they are talking about the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives. He might be diminutive in stature but he is large in ability, vision and delivery.

He wants to attack the Attorney General reading a letter which he is purporting to have been signed by Industrial Court judges. How can one reduce Industrial Court judges to the kind of debate that the Member for Diego Martin East has introduced? How can one associate the dignity of an Industrial Court with the kind of poison tongue that inhabits the body of the Member for Diego Martin East? Just as the Member for San Fernando East wanted the Attorney General to send two policemen to lock up the Minister of Public Utilities—totally unconstitutional. I tell you, God, you have been so good to this nation to have removed the PNM. Look at what we have had. Divine providence moved the hands of the voters on November 6, 1995. He wanted to send policemen directed by the Attorney General to lock up the Minister of Public Utilities. The man locked up the Speaker, put her under house arrest, suspended the Constitution and declared a state of emergency.

He wanted to fire the Commissioner of Police and abolish service commissions. That is the kind of former Prime Minister we had. No constitutional guarantees. A usurpation of the judiciary and a derogation of the human rights of the citizens because they murdered a fellow called Glen Ashby under the pretext that he was being executed legitimately by the state. That is the bunch. “Oh, pardon me thou bleeding piece of earth that I must associate with these”—and I will not say the last word, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

They want to circumvent every legitimate procedure. They want to undermine every rule of law and destroy the democratic traditions. They want to do everything that will attack the rights of the citizens of this country. *[Interruption]* Attack the media? The Member for Diego Martin East threw out Natalie Williams forcibly from his office. I hate to say this because he is deceased but a former Prime Minister in the PNM administration who is now dead threw out the media. I was present at the Arima Velodrome immediately before the 1986 elections. Their first leader and Prime Minister tore up the Constitution and the *Guardian* and burnt it in Woodford Square. So what are they talking about? The derisiveness with which Dr. Williams dealt with the media of this country; the utter contempt and disrespect with which he dealt with them and they want to talk about us against the media. What utter nonsense.

They now want the Attorney General—where there is a proper procedure for approaching the Attorney General—to circumvent that and subvert it. The only person authorized to speak on behalf of the judges of the Industrial Court is the President of the Industrial Court who will make overtures to the Attorney General and then the Attorney General, in his capacity as a Cabinet Minister, will take the appropriate action. That is how it is done.

3.45 p.m.

We understand what are proper procedures. So that the Attorney General was right but, again, the Member for Diego Martin East has a capacity for distortion because of his convoluted mind to say that the Attorney General did receive; he did not receive a letter from the President of the Industrial Court.

But let us come down to the substantive areas of this report and this Motion. There are 677 posts for which the Salaries Review Commission is responsible for recommending salaries, allowances and terms and conditions of service. Of the 677—we are talking about political posts now—17 belong to the Tobago House of Assembly; there are 36 Members of the Lower House; well, really, there are 37 because the Speaker is a Member; and 30 of the Upper House so there are 67 Members of Parliament. In local government, there are 124 councillors, aldermen and so forth and there are 469 public servants of whatever categories they may be, whether they are judges—and I call them public servants loosely—permanent secretaries, commissioner of police, defence force or whatever; they are non-political, to be perhaps more precise. Non-political 469; 17 Tobago House of Assembly; 67 Parliament; 124 local government; making a total of 677; so that 69.4 per cent of this report deals with non-political positions in this country.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we are going to place some kind of ranking, which I hope Members opposite understand, on the importance of the job of an individual whether he does the job good, bad or indifferent is a different matter; but we have to place a ranking. It is like a senior counsel and a member of the outer bar—a member of the outer bar and a member of the inner bar. From the time one goes to a member of the inner bar who wears silk, his fees are automatic, whether he is good, bad or indifferent; whether he wins one's case or loses one's case; from the time one goes to a man or a woman with silk, their fees are different from somebody from the outer bar. The Member for San Fernando West will agree with that, whether he performs or not, those are his fees. If he fails to perform, he is not taken for a second or third time; he is gotten rid of.

The Members of Parliament are the same. He said there is no recall. There is a recall every five years. Maybe he does not like the length of time for the recall, but there is a recall. Every five years, we go to the polls and people in Trinidad and Tobago over the age of 18 who are registered to vote, have an opportunity to decide whether any one of these Members of Parliament is worthy of re-election. But as long as you are a Member of Parliament, whether you are a Senator, a parliamentary secretary, a minister or an ordinary backbencher, a labourer is worthy of his hire. We do not personalize things.

When the members of the Salaries Review Commission were analyzing facts, making comparisons, looking at financial and economic data, going through all the exercises they went through to determine and come to the conclusions written in this report, they were not thinking of names and it is very sad that Members can introduce names into this. They were looking at offices, what offices represent—

Mr. Valley: That is the same thing we are talking about.

Hon. M. Assam:—what are the responsibilities attached to these offices and it is very sad that people over there could sit and talk about Members here in an individual way, in such a deriding and derogatory way as if they have the capacity and capability to evaluate performance. Since when have they become human resource experts? Since when have they become experts in personnel management? Since when have they become experts in anything? Because they have destroyed the very fabric of this society in the 34 years that their party had been in power.

They destroyed education; they destroyed health; they destroyed the police service; they destroyed the public service; they destroyed the teaching service; they mashed up the infrastructure—no roads; no drainage; no water; no electricity. This country today is now enjoying the most dangerous legacy bequeathed to us by the most incompetent and irresponsible set of politicians who formed the successive governments of the People's National Movement and they had the temerity to talk today about all kinds of things about Members opposite.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is what agitated the mind. These are the considerations. This is what was put into the crucible when the members of the Salaries Review Commission were deliberating on what to do with the new terms and conditions proposed for the 677 persons or posts, I should say—not persons, but posts—under its purview. That is how it is done. But to say we are de-linking the salaries and the terms and conditions of Members of Parliament whether they

are backbenchers, parliamentary secretaries or ministers from the private sector, is to be completely deluding themselves. They must be deluding themselves. How can we de-link?

But, what is even more ludicrous and what is even more anomalous, Mr. Deputy Speaker, every Minister here who is responsible for a state company, or a state organization, or a quasi governmental organization, or a “quango” as some of them are called, every Chief Executive Officer and every top manager of all the state bodies in this country receive salaries two, three and four times in excess of a minister to whom they report and who is accountable and responsible to Parliament and to the electorate. How anomalous and ridiculous can they get?

Could you imagine that, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Managers, from the Chief Executive Officer and top departmental managers in state enterprises, “quangos”, quasi governmental organizations, whatever they are called, get salaries two, three and four times what a minister gets and they have to report to this minister who, in the final analysis, is accountable and responsible to Parliament and to the electorate. Could you understand that, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Does that make sense?

This is the most ridiculous conundrum that you must face. That is the most ridiculous conundrum that we have to face. That is the first conundrum, but the second conundrum is how can the compensation package of the Members of Parliament, whatever rank they hold, be de-linked from the private sector? Because it is this Government, all of us—Opposition and Government—that make the laws of this country even if in the final analysis they may say that the Government’s word, or the Government’s thinking prevails, although on many occasions, I have seen both in the other place and here, there have been many amendments as a consequence of suggestions from the opposite side.

But even if we were to argue that, in the main, the will of the Government prevails, we have to make the laws of this country. We provide the incentives, the facilitation, the environment for the investment, the environment for trade, the health services, the educational infrastructure; we provide the roads and water; without that, the private sector cannot operate.

So, are they saying that the people who are responsible for all this must be paid one-tenth, one-fifth or one-quarter of those people in the private sector whom we facilitate to make all the profits and the high salaries and get all the perks and get a compensation package which is suited to their talents, their experience, their expertise and so forth? Are they saying it must be different?

Now, if that is the kind of logic they are prepared to put forward, then I will have to sit and rest my case, but if it is felt that what I am saying is compelling logic, is rooted in reality, that there must be a relationship between Members of Parliament, whatever rank they hold and the state enterprises and private sector, then what Members opposite are saying cannot be reconciled with the criticisms that have been hurled on this side. It cannot be reconciled. It cannot be and the very fact that so many of them—and there is nothing wrong with it. Members of the executive cannot work; once someone becomes a minister or parliamentary secretary, that person cannot work. That is the oath of office one takes and that is the sacrifice one is prepared to make. But, they could work. They could go anywhere and do anything and earn extra dollars.

Mr. Valley: Earn an income.

Hon. M. Assam: Well, all right. The Member does not get an income. Fine. But whose fault is that? Your party was in office for 34 years. The Member said that he would not accept ministerial office at this ridiculously low salary. He said so in this House. So I do not understand why they want to personalize and say that the Minister of so and so does not deserve it. Why do they want to do that? We are talking about office now, because one day—[*Interruption*] I know he said it is still true. Sometimes, he speaks the truth.

One day, as the Prime Minister said in 2016, they may not be around, but maybe their party will be fortunate enough to be the Government. Maybe in 2016. But the point is, what we are doing today, every law, every motion and bill that is passed is for posterity and any succeeding government—because one Parliament cannot bind another Parliament—could undo what this Parliament has done, of course, within the framework of the Constitution. Nothing that is *ultra vires* the Constitution can be done, but they can unbind what they were bound to in a preceding Parliament. But, while we are here, we are legislating for posterity, so do not use the spurious arguments of an individual to use all kinds of vulgar, obscene and derisive remarks about other human beings and other Members of Parliament.

Do they know what they are doing? What they are doing, unwittingly and unknowingly, is denigrating the office of a Member of Parliament. That is what they are doing. Every time they stand—

Mr. Imbert: What about you?

Hon. M. Assam: I speak with dignity all the time, man. If a poll were taken in this country, it would say that Assam speaks with dignity all the time, every time; not all the time, but every time. [*Desk thumping*] People learn from me. The schoolchildren in my constituency whom I visit learn from me, not from the Member.

But in a real sense, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what they do is to denigrate the office of a Member of Parliament. That is what they do all the time and I often wonder how they can sit, as Members of Parliament, and day after day, month after month, year after year, denigrate an office that is supposed to carry with it a certain responsibility; a responsibility to make laws for the good governance. As they say, for the good order of this country. How can they sit there and expect people to respect them as individuals when the office they hold is denigrated, when they speak in a manner with that kind of venom and with that kind of poisoned tongue? They try to say the most vicious things about people. How can they sit there and do it? Then, they go outside and say they are Members of Parliament representing the genuine interests of people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am really totally confused. What is farcical about all this, is the Member for Arouca South this morning on television spoke about the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, the Minister of Local Government, coming into her constituency and without informing her, showing gross disrespect. I read something in the newspaper recently where the Member for Laventille West complained that the Minister of Works and Transport came into her constituency recently and showed disrespect because he did not inform her.

4.00 p.m.

They want respect I know that, all of them want respect, they are crying out for respect, they would do anything to get respect, but you cannot buy respect. You could cry blood and tears, you cannot get respect because respect is earned. You have to earn respect.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I really appreciate the generosity of both sides for allowing me another 30 minutes in order to make a contribution.

I hope it is being understood by both sides of this House and, by extension, the national community and the media what I am trying to do. I am not on my feet asking to be paid \$18,000 per month. That is not what I am trying to do. I am trying to put things in their perspective and to be contextual. I want to erase from the minds of the public and the media the kind of error, malice and mischief perpetrated by Members opposite, particularly by the Member for San Fernando East and the Member for Diego Martin East. That is what I am trying to do. Whether or not this Parliament passes the increase, so be it. Whether you vote against it or not, so be it. It does not matter. What I am trying to do is to show that you must have respect for Parliament, respect for parliamentarians, respect for Ministers and, by extension, respect for yourself because you have no respect for yourself, Member for Diego Martin East. Mr. Deputy Speaker, he has no respect for himself. I can tell you that. Whenever he gets up to speak it is clear he has no respect for himself. It is very clear to me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I would like to indicate to Members opposite is how do you evaluate a Member of Parliament's compensation package. We have entrusted the responsibility to, I hope, a group of professionals who are called the Salaries Review Commission. It is most unfortunate I think, that this group has to deliberate at the same time on a compensation package for both political and non-political posts so that those who hold non-political posts become embroiled in the savagery of the Member for Diego Martin East. It is so sad that they have to be embroiled in the savagery of the Member. I do not know if some mechanism, sometime in the future, could be developed to delink so that this kind of argument which is perennial would not touch those persons who are non-political.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in most jurisdictions I had the honour to do a number of researches into salaries and compensation packages of Members of Parliament in the United Kingdom, Canada, Singapore, Jamaica, Dominican Republic, Barbados and the United States of America Congress to compare with Trinidad and Tobago. I did this research on my own. Do you know there is an automatic mechanism in most of these jurisdictions for increasing the salaries of the Members of Parliament? They do not come to Parliament and expose all this dirty linen in public. I know this is what the Member for Diego Martin East likes. He should be working in the laundry room of some hospital where people's bandages taken from their wounds are sent to be cleaned. There is where he should be working because this is more akin to the type of mentality which he displays here every week which is so unfortunate.

Mr. Imbert: What do you have against hospital laundry workers?

Hon. M. Assam: Having done this research, I have come to the inescapable conclusion that this kind of debate which takes place every three or four years, wasting very precious parliamentary time should be avoided. I feel, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that some mechanism should be developed where there is an automatic formula or mechanism whereby you—*[Interruption]* You were in power for 34 years. You are now getting ideas, keep quiet! All you have is concrete in your mind and your brain.

Imagine the Member wants to talk to the Attorney General and Member for Couva North about law. This man only has concrete in his brain, he knows little about stress with respect to concrete and steel, but he wants to talk about law and interpret law to this Parliament. The audacity of this little runt. He should leave it to the Member for San Fernando West. I would even defer, perhaps although quite grudgingly, to the Member for Toco/Manzanilla or the Member for Laventille East/Morvant because I think that they went through the doors of some legal institution, but I would defer to the Member for San Fernando West. Please, Member for Diego Martin East, on matters of law be silent. You know nothing about your own profession.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if he was so good in his own profession he would not have been fired from the University of the West Indies (UWI). He was some temporary assistant lecturer and he had to be moonlighting in the *Guardian* newspaper to get a seat on a PNM ticket because he knew his dismissal was imminent. He knew that the termination of his acting temporary appointment was imminent so he started to write in the *Trinidad Guardian* week after week in order to get in through the back door to get a seat in the PNM's 1991 general election. He could not even get a permanent position, but he wants to tell us about who is bright and who is capable and who is moral and he could not even get a permanent position. As an acting assistant lecturer at UWI, he must have been getting a little \$3,500—\$4,000 but knowing that his little position was about to be terminated, he started to court the PNM and he wants to come and quote and interpret law and Constitution for us.

Dr. Mohammed: That is right.

Hon. M. Assam: And he could not even hold a position at the University of the West Indies. Could you imagine this thing?

Dr. Mohammed: Ask Kuei Tung.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Princes Town it is not correct to call another Member's name in the House. Refrain from that please.

Mr. Maharaj: Apologize to the Deputy Speaker.

Dr. Mohammed: I apologize.

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I was saying, in nearly every jurisdiction which I have researched, there is an automatic mechanism in place for members of the various Parliaments or Congresses or whatever they are called to receive increases annually and we do not have to go through this butchery every three or four years where people attack each other in order to make a political point and to make a document called the "Fifty Second Report of the Salaries Review Commission" a political football. It is totally unnecessary and it is a kind of a denigration of the Members who are serving on this commission, because if you appoint persons who are professionals to do a job, at least you could acknowledge with gratitude that they have done a good job. Nobody on the other side of this House has acknowledged with gratitude, and I want to put on record this Government's gratitude to the Members of the Salaries Review Commission who produced the Fifty Second Report to this honourable House.

Mr. Imbert: You must be glad.

Hon. M. Assam: I also condemn the denigration by Members opposite of these people who produce the report, and I want to have that on the record, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it is one thing to come here and attack politicians, it is a totally different thing to attack neutral professionals who are indefensible and cannot defend themselves.

Secondly, to embroil the non-political persons in this report with the politicians is also very cruel. As Shakespeare would have said, "The unkindest cut

The Member for Diego Martin East does not only play lawyer, he wants to play surgeon too, he likes to cut up people. He wants to play lawyer, he wants to play surgeon, but what he is supposed to be, he is totally incompetent at. I understand he is building stadia and houses up the islands and the governments are so unhappy that they want to withdraw the contract because there is something

called—is it specific performance? There has not been specific performance of the contracts I understand.

Why does he not mind his business and try to do what he is doing as best as he can rather than come here like some jack spañiard—and you know the red jack spañiard is the worst type—and try to sting everybody in this honourable House, and persons who are outside the House he wants to put his nest to sting them. Why do you want to do that all the time? You are like a “red jep” as they say. Why do you want to do that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to return to the issue. There is this automatic mechanism and I researched several jurisdictions and I would not have the time to go through all the figures, but in every case when you compare Ministers, Prime Ministers, Speakers, President of the Senate, whatever they are called in their respective jurisdictions, their compensation package is three to four times larger than Trinidad and Tobago including Caribbean countries like Barbados and Jamaica.

You may say you cannot compare with the United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada and Singapore, but in each case the compensation package—and when I say the compensation package I am not talking about absolute dollars, I am talking about all the perks associated.

I was in Singapore when I went to the Second Ministerial Conference in December 1996 and I had the opportunity to meet with a number of officials, plus a number of Ministers and I spoke to them about terms and conditions obtaining in their countries and I was amazed. Do not get me wrong, I am not saying that Trinidad and Tobago should pay, or could even afford to pay those salaries. Do you know what is the salary of a Minister in Singapore; a country of 1.3 million, or similar to Trinidad, a country which is one third the size of Trinidad, but very rich in terms of human resource, technology, services and all kinds of advanced systems of management? It is US \$66,000 per month. In addition to that he gets a free house, when I say a free house, it is not for himself, for the term he is a Minister. He gets all the staff, groundsman, servants, butler, in the house at no cost to him. Telephone, electricity, air condition, everything. He gets a big Mercedes Benz with a chauffeur and so forth, he gets an entertainment allowance of US \$100,000 a year, accountable, of course. He has to account for it. He gets travel every year, not official travel, he gets travel beyond his official travel and many other perks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the case of Singapore it is an incentive for people to produce, it is an incentive for quality, innovation, hard work and commitment. It is an incentive to take Singapore where it is today, at the top of the competitive index. That is what it is and that is why Singapore is such a great country, because they recognize that a labourer is worthy of his hire and if you pay people well, you will get commensurate results from them in terms of productivity, quality and commitment.

4.15 p.m.

I hear the spurious argument of the Member for Diego Martin Central who says he will not sit in this House and approve a salary increase until we bring in integrity legislation. I want them to understand from where he is coming. The PNM was elected in 1956 and served for 30 continuous years in this House until 1986. They were defeated in 1986 and came back in 1991 until 1995—less than four years—so they had almost 34 years in office. The Republican Constitution Act No. 4 of 1976 provides for the establishment of an integrity commission and legislation on integrity.

Do they know who brought the legislation on integrity and the establishment of an integrity commission? It was the NAR government which brought it in 1987.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to make the point that the Republican Constitution came in under the PNM government.

Hon. M. Assam: Is the Member for Diego Martin Central trying to educate the Member for St. Joseph on constitutional matters? I am amazed that he is trying to educate the Member for St. Joseph on constitutional matters. I pride myself on understanding the Constitution of this country, and not only the Constitution, but the constitutional history and evolution of this country better than him or anybody else on that side. I have followed it since I was fifteen years old and I continue to follow it—that is some time now. Even before Dr. Williams came on the scene, I was involved in the constitutional evolution of this country; long before.

What I was saying is that Act No. 4 of 1976, which is the Republican Constitution of this country, came while the PNM was in office. Everybody knows; I said they were in office from 1956 to 1986. Did I not say that? If Act No. 4 of 1976 was in 1976, who was in office? Not the PNM? But the Member is so superfluous in what he says. He engages in much superfluity! Everybody knows

Salaries Review Commission Report
[HON. M. ASSAM]

Friday, January 8, 1999

that. I said it, but I said notwithstanding the fact that they had it in Act No. 4 of 1976, they did nothing about it.

It was the NAR government that introduced it in 1987 when they came into office. That is historically correct. Why is he getting up like a little butterfly jumping up and down? I have been kind to him because a butterfly is a gentle thing. If it was the Member for Diego Martin East, I would have used another word, but he is an aquarian like myself so I am gentle on him. He is a good natured person most of the time, except when he flies off his handle some of the time. They try to put us off, but not Assam! My memory is like an elephant. I am always on the point. That is why the people out there like to hear me. [*Desk thumping*]

Notwithstanding the fact that they did not do it and the NAR government did it, the Member for Diego Martin Central is saying now that they will not agree to an increase. They want the increase! I want the members of the public to understand that. They must understand the total hypocrisy of the PNM. They want it badly, more than the people on this side. I want the whole world to know that. Total hypocrisy! They are the most deceptious people one could ever find. Deceptious is worse than deceptive. It is a stronger word than deceptive. They are deceptious people! They speak with forked tongues. Diabolical in nature. They want it so badly, but they do not know how to agree with the Government because they figure politically, it is not good for them. They already cannot win the next election. They figure if they support it, they will get double licks. [*Laughter*] They will get what the Member spoke about is in Whitehall: both green heart and purple heart.

When they want to link integrity legislation to an increase in salary, why did the PNM government in its 34 years not bring in integrity legislation? Let us say that perhaps their memory lapsed, the NAR assisted them in 1987. They came back in 1991. Why did they not strengthen integrity legislation in 1991—1995?

Mr. Valley: I really do not want to get involved in this debate. I just want to make the point that the Member talks about the NAR bringing integrity legislation in 1987. The integrity legislation in 1987, if anybody was to look at it, is a farce—

Miss Nicholson: I am not supporting that statement.

Mr. Valley: Because even if a Member was to declare that he takes a bribe to the Integrity Commission, the Commission is sworn to secrecy; it can tell no one.

That is a major loophole. The Member is aware that in the period 1991—1994, after the report, we set up the committee which has looked at integrity legislation which reported and I served with him on that Integrity Commission. We have reported, we started debate on that legislation, he allowed it to lapse, and it is not now before the Parliament. That is the history of the integrity legislation.

Hon. M. Assam: I thank the Member for the speech, but the legislation will be imminently placed before Parliament. Nothing has lapsed. The point I was making is that he is trying to link integrity legislation with salary increases.

Mr. Valley: Because all of you are ‘thieving’ too much.

Hon. M. Assam: It is so sad that the Member for Diego Martin Central could talk about ‘thieving’. I will let that pass because their own member—a former cabinet minister in their party—said, “All ah we Martin Central stood up and said, “You more corrupt than we”. In other words, if the UNC is more corrupt, the PNM was also corrupt.

Mr. Valley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: What is the point of order?

Mr. Valley: The point is that I never at any time made such a statement. The hon. Minister is misleading us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Would the Member for St. Joseph, when he gets some time, search the *Hansard* and bring it to this House? Until that time, just continue.

Hon. M. Assam: In fact, Mr. Speaker, at that time, the hon. Prime Minister was sitting there, and do you know what he said at that time? He said, “more corrupt?” That is exactly what he said.

Mr. Valley: If the Member does not check the *Hansard*, I will.

Hon. M. Assam: Does he want me to withdraw the statement? Okay. I withdraw it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order! Bring the *Hansard* to the House.

Hon. M. Assam: For the time being, I withdraw the statement. I know that some people cannot take legitimate licks. *[Laughter]* I told the Member for Diego Martin East that his memory is as short as his stature but I cannot say the same thing about the Member for the Diego Martin Central. They cannot take licks.

They want to give licks but when one tells them what they said, they say that one is doing all kinds of things. The Member for St. Joseph is one person who does not come and malign people, but do not trouble trouble because when they trouble me, I will sting them! I will be like a mapepire when they trouble me! I do not trouble anyone, but do not trouble me, man.

What I was trying to say is that the Member for Diego Martin Central is trying to link integrity legislation with increase in salary, which they never did. So, they have successively—during the 34 years of PNM administration—increased salaries as a result of the modification or recommendation of the Salaries Review Commission without introducing or improving integrity legislation. Do they understand my logic? What is good for the goose must also be good for the gander. They want us to introduce in advance, integrity legislation before the increase, but for 34 years they sat there, never introduced it, and had an opportunity to strengthen it, but nevertheless, they increased salaries in accordance with either the recommendations or the modifications. Do you see the double standard, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I want the members of the national community and the world to hear about this hypocrisy, double standard and lack of immorality on the part of that side, as espoused by the Member for Diego Martin Central.

I do not have much time left, but I just wanted them to have an idea of the kind of salary a Prime Minister gets in different jurisdictions. I already said that in Singapore, a Cabinet Minister gets US \$66,000; the Prime Minister gets US \$82,000; the Barbados Prime Minister gets Barbados \$341,000 per annum; the Dominican Republic President gets US \$399,000 per annum; the Canadian Prime Minister gets Canadian \$325,000 per annum; and the President of the United States gets US \$67,000 per month.

The point I am trying to make is that in all of these jurisdictions, all of the offices are paid much better and their perks are much higher than the Members of this honourable House. Therefore, what I said here this afternoon, whether this is passed or not, I am not making any case for increase or decrease or retaining *status quo*. If they want to stay hungry, stay hungry; if they want to go hustling, go hustling; if they want to come to Parliament late and leave early, so be it; if they do not want to come to Parliament at all—like some of them have absconded—do not come at all; but all I can say is, in the final analysis, when this country judges their behaviour, they will see that those people on that side have been most insincere, most hypocritical, and that they have not served the interest of uplifting

the dignity of this Parliament, of maintaining respect for parliamentarians, and for maintaining respect for some of the most important institutions that all of us should try to fashion and promote so that democracy can reign and all of us could enjoy a standard of living and live in a society where everybody has respect for law and respect for each other.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to make this contribution in order to ensure that some of the misconceptions, malice and errors that have been espoused on that side are properly corrected. Some of the attacks on my colleagues and myself have been, to some extent, addressed and the national community will understand better what we are trying to do in the Motion that has been piloted by the distinguished hon. Prime Minister. I thank you very much. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting is suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.29 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.01 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

The Minister of Tobago Affairs (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise to support this Motion concerning the Fifty-Second Salaries Review Commission Report. I want to express my horror at the way—since I am in this Parliament, I can only form the opinion that the objectives of some speakers on the opposite side are dedicated to the purpose of using a kind of tunnel vision attitude to corruption on one of the issues which I will raise later, as if the next election would be predetermined by the electorate concerned for hearing the same issue raised Friday after Friday after Friday.

I want to start off, however, by focusing the mind of this honourable Parliament on a problem that is indeed a national one. This country of Trinidad and Tobago will never achieve its full potential. It will never do as well as it can unless and until we get a little more honest and abandon what I have often called that attitude, that love affair with denial.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we cannot solve a problem we do not admit we have. To the extent that the language we use is unequal to the task of sensitizing the citizens of this country to individual responsibility for the serious issues in the country, we are not helping ourselves. When the Member for Diego Martin East

stood this afternoon and accused me of saying things which I never said, he was being part of a mischievous campaign to deny the public in this country, the benefit of his effort, the benefit of the Parliament, in helping them to deal with real problems in this country. He did go on to intimate that I was part of some programme to create a racial civil war in Trinidad and Tobago. Nothing can be further from the truth. In fact, I did say in the throne statement which he is referring to, that we do not want to have that kind of situation in Trinidad and Tobago. I never said that the Members of this side are illiterate. I never had the form of words to say so. I was answering a question from the reporters where I made a general statement trying to say that we have a problem with language in Trinidad and Tobago which is burdening all of us, not just one particular ethnic group. I made certain references to bring home the point that it is a national problem, that everybody is involved with it, not just one ethnic group. But the Member for Diego Martin East comes here this afternoon to accuse me of saying things I never said.

Generally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of the way issues concerning corruption and allegations made against Members of this side of the Government have been put in the press, many people in the public who are not by their education or culture, better prepared to analyse and deal with issues, are left imprisoned, crippled and hampered with understanding that those statements or allegations are false, flawed, mischievous, dedicated to the purpose of misleading people and not to helping this country develop.

Let us deal with the Member for San Fernando East. The gentleman spent a considerable amount of the nation's time accusing the Government of being corrupt. We are dealing with the Fifty Second Report of the Salaries Review Commission. We did not hear discussion of the validity of the issues in the report; the fact that 60 per cent of the officers are public officers of various kinds—Permanent Secretaries, Assemblymen, lawyers, the Director of Personnel Administration. We did not get an opportunity from the Leader of the Opposition to understand the essential verities concerning the fact that we have been doing Trinidad and Tobago a great deal of harm by not raising these people's salaries. Instead we had a long litany of cries, a monologue concerning corruption.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to spend a little time on a few of the statements made by the Leader of the Opposition. For example, he says:

“...then I have to give credence to the view that there is something about the governance of this country that is understood by the PNM, which does not appear to be understood by other political parties.”

There is something about the governance of Trinidad and Tobago which is understood by the PNM but not understood by the leaders and other people in other political parties, and in particular he is referring to the Prime Minister and his Cabinet and colleagues on this side.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is it about governance under the PNM that we should feel so proud about that we should emulate? I have no doubt in conceding that since 1956 Trinidad and Tobago has made progress. I have no doubt in conceding that in many ways we are better off now than we were then. The reality of our situation is that in many ways we are indeed infinitely worse off now than we were then. We cannot say that after three years of Mr. Panday's stewardship and the UNC Government that those areas in which we were so much more worse off now than we were in 1956 are as a consequence of the UNC. I want to repeat what I have just said. I have no difficulty in conceding that since 1956 this country has made progress. I have no difficulty in conceding that Dr. Williams was well-intentioned and well-meaning. I have no difficulty in conceding every PNM government in the 30 years they served, did things that citizens of Trinidad and Tobago benefited from.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is past amusing that the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues would come here Friday after Friday to regale us with this egregious nonsense that there is something about governance in this country that is understood by the PNM which does not appear to be understood by other political parties.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I stand here this afternoon, this country is in the throes, is struggling to abandon the legacy that has been the PNM legacy. The most important aspect of this legacy is in the backward ideas, the Peronist ideas, the statist ideas, the communist ideas that the PNM has burdened this country with. In the contribution of all the speakers over there, we are getting snippets, we are getting pregnant and potent symbols, language and phrases that are capturing the nonsense that these people were about for the 30 years they were in power since 1956.

The Member for San Fernando East, in speaking of the Attorney General is saying:

“In other words, he is the only Minister under the Constitution who must have a technical professional qualification to be able to hold a particular office. Therefore, there can be some justification—and it is with reluctance that we accept it—for paying him an extra professional allowance...”

And he goes on in that vein to say that all Cabinet Members must earn the same salary.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a profundity that is missed by the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues that I want to spend some time on. I am quoting here from the *World Development Report 1997*. This issue about PNM governance and PNM legacy, the sooner this country is able to abandon denial and understand that one of the greatest burdens that has hamstrung this country, one of the greatest fins of lead that has prevented this country from swimming freely, is the backward ideas of the PNM. I am quoting from page 9 of the *World Development Report 1997*.

“In many countries civil servants’ wages have eroded as a result of expanding public employment at lower skill levels and fiscal constraints on the total wage bill. The result has been a significant compression of the salary structure and highly uncompetitive pay for senior officials, making it difficult to recruit and retain capable staff.”

What does that have to do with the debate about corruption and that you should not pay this one, you should not pay that one or pay the other? This is pregnant with meaning in the sense that the legacy of PNM governance is a kind of equality which comes out in the statement here, that everybody must get the same pay. Substantially, that principle had been applied across the board in the country across institutions in the state, with damaging results in terms of the way it has caused this country inefficiency in an exodus of qualified people throughout the years of PNM stewardship and, indeed, even until now. A government in power for three years cannot turn around—a government is like a super tanker. If you want to turn it around down the road you have to start 25 miles up to turn the head.

So in the context of this thing called PNM governance, this attitude to equality in labour without allowing the market, without allowing scarcity, without allowing the choices of people, without allowing free contracts to establish wages and income, without doing those kinds of things, we have imposed burdens on this country that we are not able to account for. All that is as a consequence of an egalitarian idea, of a socialist communist imperative, of a communist imperative,

that was captured in Marxist's "to each according to his need, from each according to his means", or something like that. So you take and equalize and make everybody equal.

That is part of an idea of government which we have known to be costly and obsolete. This is the whole point of—

Mr. Valley: You were the first communist in Trinidad.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have to ensure that you, the House and the country, understand the consequence of PNM stewardship. I was asking the Minister of Education, I have in my hand a book which nobody has discussed sufficiently well in this country. It is normally called the Demas Report or the *Imperatives of Adjustment*. In this report we are talking about the PNM stewardship and government. I want to quote because these are the kinds of things that have never been done in this country and we need to get the public to understand that if we do not deal with these things we will not make progress. A lot of what this Government is trying to do is to unburden this country from the ideas about governance, the ideas about how markets work, that has left us inefficient and crippled.

5.15 p.m.

In 1983, the PNM was in power and their idea of governance was what motivated Demas, Euric Bobb and all these people to write these things. I am looking at page 30. They are talking about wages and salaries in the public sector. Now, why is this important? Every Christmas time under the PNM, they used to have backpay. That was their way of pacifying the people, like in Vietnam they had a pacification programme, you go and give everybody money, a pig, a couple chickens, to pacify them, keep everybody happy, but you are not doing anything for them. In the long run they created a disaster for them. What they were doing was setting up a wages and salaries structure that was unsustainable, except, according to them, by this time the price of oil would have been about \$1,000 per barrel. So they went on like that, then the price of oil went down in 1979/1980, around there, so we are now in 1983 and the wages and salaries bill, when you compare the trend line to the revenues that the Government is earning, one is going exponentially that way and one is going exponentially down that way. Demas and Euric Bobb said this:

“The reduction in real income is the inevitable mirror effect of the experience in petroleum, the country's principle prime mover. The reality is

that over the period 73—82 the country received and enjoyed an unlearned improvement in their living standards of almost 33 per cent because of favourable movements in the price of petroleum. It is inevitable, therefore, that when real oil prices fall by 37 per cent and real output falls by 12 per cent, that real incomes must fall by at least a fraction of this. There is no way by which a freeze in wages and salaries in the public sector can be avoided if the recurrent budget is to be financed, and unless the budget is financed it will not be possible to borrow on the local or international market or on any meaningful scale. Such borrowing is the sole source of funds for capital expenditure after 1983.”

Of course, given the PNM way of governance and their ideas, they never took heed of this, so by the time the NAR government came into power, they did, indeed, have a bed of thorns to lie on—not the NAR government as such, but the entire country was burdened by the dissipation of all the special funds, all the billions, the whole country's infrastructure, even as I speak to you today, is suffering from that debacle. We had to have a period where we had to pay back loans, the IMF conditionalities and all that.

I am saying these things because I want to make it quite clear that this idea that there is some special gift of God to Trinidad and Tobago called PNM governance is beyond credibility. It stretches the imagination to a point where credulity does not apply anymore.

We have to understand that this Salaries Review Commission Report and the way the Prime Minister—the Member for St. Joseph and I articulated it has to do with efficient management and running of a country. It has nothing to do with the particular ambitions or ideas of Government of a peculiar set of little men. It has to do with understanding that in the modern world you need to pay people if you want to get the right kind of people. It means that, according to the Member for St. Joseph, there are certain institutions of the state, offices in the state, that deserve a certain kind of dignity, deserve a set of appurtenances which are appropriate to them and given the nature of the market in which we are operating, given the way in which these salaries are organized, you need to, ever so often, adjust these salaries to make sure that they are appropriate to their purposes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, labour markets are not like markets where you have continuous brokerage like a stock market, the Rotterdam Market, or something like that, where you have continuous agreement between buyers and sellers, fax and Internet and all of that. A labour market is a different kind of market. You are

dealing with a resource that you cannot own. The only person who can own myself is myself. The only person who can own the Member for St. Joseph is the Member for St. Joseph. By law in Trinidad and Tobago slavery is not an option. So we are dealing with a very unique and special resource called human capital, human beings. You are dealing with that market where there are so many asymmetries in information in terms of arranging bargaining and contracts between employers and employees. You have to deal with expectations, information asymmetries and rigidities, which is the reason why all over the world, in all times and places where labour markets evolved, you had the idea of a contract, of an arrangement where you can set up terms and conditions and review them biannually, semi-annually, you can make a contract for five years with certain kinds of terms.

That is why you have the Salaries Review Commission Report. There is nothing in the Constitution and the law that is being violated by this Government by allowing the constitutional intentions and priorities to work where you have some people who understand these kinds of things, who have certain kinds of competences, they bring it to bear so that the salary of the Prime Minister and the Members of Parliament on both sides of the House and certain public officials are reviewed and made more appropriate. I say deliberately, more appropriate, because no set of men on the Salaries Review Commission can have the kind of competence and understanding equal to the task of negotiating contracts for every one of the 677 officers that will please everybody. That is not on.

So when some people from the Opposition are saying that the report has to go back, we will never deal with it because there is no way that you can send that report back to whoever they are recommending so that you get a perfect document or report. That is the reason we have periodic adjustment, to make sure that whatever inequities and inefficiencies which may crop up in this report, maybe the next time around we will do it a little better.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am trying to force the mind of the nation on to the fact that nowhere in the contribution of the Leader of the Opposition did he edify the public concerning what an important piece of work was done by the Salaries Review Commission Report in terms of making sure that all those inefficiencies, rigidities and wastefulness that are coming in as a result of not paying people properly, that we deal with them. To say that the people over here are not worth what they are getting is to say also that the people on that side are not worth what they are getting. Because they all were thrown out by the same electoral process.

We had an election in 1995. I was not one of the set at that time, I came in 1997, but the identical electoral process that turned up these people, turned up those over there. So if these here are not worth anything, then those over there are worth less than nothing! We have to understand that.

You are saying also that the electorate of Trinidad and Tobago have no understanding, have no sense of their needs—I am not saying the needs of the country—because when people go to vote, they go to vote for people who they think, in terms of the way the world is ordered, you need a Cabinet, a Parliament and politicians.

I do not know that any and everybody can become a Prime Minister. I remember some famous Trinidad historian, I liked his writing on cricket, I liked his writing on literature, but I do not like his writing on politics, I find them substandard. He said, “Any crook can govern.” That is not true! Not every crook can govern. If you want to be a bandit you have to be a smart guy, otherwise you get quickly killed and caught. Al Capone had to be a smart guy, and Lucky Luciano, they had to have special skills. You have to have special skills to be a Jimmy Swaggart to fool people and tell them you are going to carry them to heaven. All kinds of people in all kinds of professions, if they are to rise to the top they need special abilities and skills.

I wrote a book in 1991. Nobody remembers these things, but inside there I said Eric Williams was nonpartite in terms of his political sagacity and what he had done to this country. I recognize that as a politician, and I said so, that he was a competent and capable person. I made comments which I stand by and I do not regret because they came after much thought, that in terms of his economic analysis, the idea that slavery and the profit from it built up the industrial revolution; that is not on. So I said those things were very substantial, intellectually backward and inadequate. But as a politician, an Eric Williams is not born every day, a special kind of person.

I say the same thing for the former Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Basdeo Panday, who is now the Prime Minister. People like him are not born every day. There are people here, if you look at their careers and backgrounds, you see they have something special to bring to bear on the task they have. But quite apart from all that, I think it is very unfortunate that the people in this country are getting the idea that out of a legitimate and lawful constitutionally designed electoral process, you are telling the people that they turn up people who are not worth what the same Constitution says they should be worth. What the Salaries Review

Commission is doing is giving effect to the constitutional idea that these people are worth something that must be determined by that commission. So the question of the scarcity value, of the importance of what they do, of the role of the Prime Minister, his Cabinet and his colleagues in terms of running the country, all that is thrown out and you are sending a message to people that these people are worth nothing, so that the whole process of politics in this country is worth nothing.

It is a pity that I am just to make a few comments. I am responsible, as the person in the Cabinet, for Tobago Affairs, and the people in Tobago who are on the list of this who are to benefit from the Salaries Review Commission Report have asked me, have intimated to me their concern that there are people in the political process who are demeaning their offices and who are assuming they want to deny them what they think is a just and fair reward. I just want to say on their behalf that I concur, I think that they deserve what is recommended to them, I want to say for the benefit of my constituents in Tobago that, that indeed is the case.

I want to end up by dealing with another aspect of this issue of corruption. This Government, as far as I understand it, has not been in power for 30 years. They have been in power for just about three years. And the question of corruption I am quoting again from page 9 of the same *World Development Report* and it says:

“Where corruption is deeply entrenched, more dramatic efforts will be needed to uproot it. These efforts should be focused on better monitoring of official action—both by formal institutions and by individual citizens—and punishment of wrongdoing in the courts.”

The people of this country must understand that every time the PNM gets up and accuses this Government of corruption, they are, at the same time, exposing the moral bankruptcy of 30 years of PNM rule. After 30 years, we do not have the law, the appropriate institutions to deal with corruption in this country. The people who are writing these reports are telling you that to root out corruption you need institutions, laws and an appropriate culture. By an appropriate culture, I mean patterns of behaviour that have evolved over decades, over centuries sometimes, that instruct the citizens of a particular community of their relationship with each other to states and institutions that will prevent corruption.

So that, I have in my hand here a little booklet, *The Trouble With Nigeria*, written by a certain gentleman called Chinua Achebe.

Mr. Hinds: Would the hon. Member give way?

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: I do not have much time, so I cannot afford to give way. *[Laughter]*

Achebe goes through a whole analysis of why Nigeria is one of the most corrupt countries in the world. About four months ago I was on the Internet and there is a group called Transparency International which deals with corruption. They were saying in the article that Nigeria and India are either the number one and number two, or in the first five, but certainly in the most ten corrupt countries on the Planet Earth. I have a book here by a certain gentleman called Dilip Hero, *Inside India Today*. There is a whole lot of corruption in India. A whole chapter saying that in either 1975 or 1980 that 25 per cent of the gold mines in the world was involved in corruption in India. Same thing that Achebe is talking about in Nigeria. This has nothing to do with the genetic structure of the people there, it has to do with culture and institutions.

This is what the PNM failed to do. They have failed to develop a culture and a structure of institutions which are equal to the task of dealing with corruption. They are coming here everyday to talk about corruption, to absolve themselves of their delinquency, of their irresponsibility, of their moral culpability for corruption.

I have to remind the nation again—I did not write this book—*Behind the Bridge*, by Selwyn Ryan, Roy McCrae and Godfrey Bernard, published by the University of the West Indies.

I have from the *Express* of today, January 8, 1999, a poem. They call it a calypso and they say it is the words of a calypso. But it is really a poetic statement that is sung by Singing Sandra. I do not have time to read it out. I would have loved to read this whole poem or even sing it if I knew it, but I do not know it. *[Laughter]* But, everybody should read this. I just want to read a few lines for the benefit of the record.

Mr. Hart: Sing it.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: I quote the chorus:

“Cupboard always bare and scanty,
Ten people in a one-bedroom shanty,
Forced to sell on the pavement,

No vacancy, no employment;
 Cyar tell firecracker from gunshot,
 Blood does flow when tings get hot,
 I fraid to look out meh window
 To hear voices from de ghetto
 Crying, crying, crying,
 Voices from de ghetto
 Crying, crying, crying,
 Voices from de ghetto!"

It goes on like that.
 "No bail! Dat's de black man's choice;
 Like Shadow say poverty is hell."
 This is in today's *Express*.

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 1965 Derek Walcott wrote a poem that was even more brutally frank about the same situation. I would read a few lines:

"we dare a laugh,
 ritual, desperate words,
 born like these children from habitual wombs,
 from lives fixed in the unalterable groove
 of grinding poverty."

It talks about the same set of people and the same kinds of things:

"whose lives revolve round prison, graveyard, church.
 where the inheritors of the middle passage stewed,
 five to a room, still clamped below their hatch,
 breeding like felonies,"

That was in 1965. We are now in 1999.

In terms of corruption and what the World Bank report said, which is the point of focus I want to make, they are talking about corruption and not educating the

public that when corruption has become endemic it takes courage and laws to root it out. This is what it says here:

"Where corruption is deeply entrenched, more dramatic efforts will be needed to uproot it."

Am I to believe according to the Member for San Fernando East and his colleagues on that side, that the entrenching of corruption in Trinidad and Tobago has happened only three years ago? Was it started three years ago?

This book is telling us something about murder as a way of life that has been instigated and instituted by the people opposite. I would read from page 137:

"Projects are often invaded and disrupted while foremen are beaten up, or shot. Homes of managers are also being broken into or robbed by disappointed job seekers. As one URP regional manager noted in respect of Laventille. Egypt people can't work in Caledonia. Criminals from Egypt and Africa shot at the homes of other criminals. They drive to jobs in two and three cars. It was also noted that some recruiters were known to have murdered several persons and were only out of prison because the witnesses were dead."

Quoted in the *Sunday Express* of May 1996:

"Project work is, in fact, a prime political resource of the PNM in Laventille over which many a turf battle is fought."

It goes on in this same book in one of the essays to say that Errol Mahabir did a study sometime after 1970—and he was a PNM Cabinet member—which said that corruption was entrenched, endemic and was a way of political control.

I am saying this in the context of this World Bank report, *World Development Indicators* where they talked about the need to approach corruption as an ethical, cultural, legal, institution thing that takes time to uproot. As I know it, we have on the legislative programme of this party an equal opportunity law, a freedom of information law and an integrity law. All these things are to assist in developing those cultural circumstances, attitudes and institutions, just as this report demands and recommends. So that in the long run as the society evolves, our educational system improves, and the relationship between citizens becomes more humane and focused on justice and equity all of us would live in a less corrupt society.

We will never deal with corruption by having Opposition politics mobilize the instincts, sensitivities, insecurities and fears of people to drive us to get into power. This is what they are about. Friday after Friday they talk about corruption

in order to mobilize ethnic anxieties, fear, insecurities and weaknesses described in this poetic work called a calypso, in order to get into power. There is, in fact, a line here which says that all they are doing is using us here. It is somewhere in here:

*"With dented pride they soldier on,
Revolution's bait, politician's spawn..."*

Let me read it again:

*"With dented pride they soldier on,
Revolution's bait, politician's pawn.
And often their tragic story,
Does bring ah journalist glory,
No wonder they view the world with scorn,
From since de day dat they born,
Some call them rebels without a cause,
These social victims of unjust laws,
And yet they christen their heroes,
Renegades, Desperadoes,
Forever knocking on heaven's doors."*

Every Friday, instead of coming here to educate people, to guide the mind to responsibility to deal with the substantial matters that affect this country that are not Hindu problems or Tobago problems, but national problems, they are here bleating, braying and ululating corruption. I myself feel that the press, the leaders of the Opposition and the people in the Opposition, there is a legitimacy, a rightness, a moral duty to deal with corruption. But I would like to see in a matter like this that we use the opportunity for edification and to guide the mind of the audience in the national community to understand that a matter of salaries has to do with economic management and running the country properly. I did not hear that from the Opposition. I heard both the Members for Diego Martin East and San Fernando East spending all their time focusing the mind and emotion on the question of corruption and not a little time at all trying to lead people.

Mr. Speaker, I think I have made my point and the public must know—I would remind them that many years ago when there was a problem in the NAR

government with Ken Gordon and some house, I said, "What is the big hullabaloo about. If the man is a minister and he needs those kind of purchases give Gordon his house." I am not ashamed to say that maybe we should get twice time the salary they said that we should get. There is no question in my mind that the Salaries Review Commission in its wise judgment would have made a decision which would take into consideration what is best for the country. I am sure that the Government, in terms of how it is going to implement this increase, will take into consideration the impacts on the country generally.

In the context of this statement here—I do not have the time to explicate and go into details—where we are talking about the civil service and its structure, which is a legacy of the PNM, in many countries civil servants' wages have eroded as a result of expanded public office employment. One of the things that come out of this is that many senior people's wages in relation to the lower people are not significant enough to keep them there, so they are leaving. Thus, the public service is becoming less and less well managed. All those are issues we needed to have dealt with substantially as a responsible Parliament to help educate people and guide them in the future. This was not done.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I support the Motion as led by the Prime Minister and I thank the other Members for listening to me.

Mr. Hedwige Bereaux (*La Brea*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise to join this debate, and before I do so I would say "Happy New Year" to you all. More importantly, I just returned from the United States where I happened to have spent the Christmas holidays with all my children for the first time in many years.

I normally would not have entered this debate, but I would put on record for posterity how I think a matter like this should be dealt with. I would read the Motion again:

"Whereas it is provided by section 141(1) of the Constitution that the Salaries Review Commission shall, from time to time, with the approval of the President, review the salaries and other conditions of service of the President, the holders of offices referred to in section 136(12)—(15) of the Constitution, Members of Parliament, and holders of such other offices as may be prescribed;"

Before I get on, I would point out that I tend to agree with the hon. Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs and Minister of Tourism, the Member for

St. Joseph, that some effort should be made to delink the salaries of parliamentarians and politicians from those of senior public servants.

The reason for that is, those of us who are parliamentarians we normally come into Parliament via an election, especially in this House. Every election we have a manifesto which tells how each party would approach matters should it form the government. As I could recall, I saw no manifesto which indicated that the salaries of parliamentarians would be raised. I am not in anyway going to say I believe that the salaries of parliamentarians are adequate. When we speak about salaries we always use them for some reference point and some sort of evaluation. I know the members of the Salaries Review Commission and I know that they are persons of experience and they would have looked at this matter with a certain degree of care.

I also have had the privilege to sit in the adjudication on salaries of thousands of people on many occasions, and there are certain things that you have to take into consideration. When you deal with a large company you look at productivity, the earnings of the company and the projections. Although dealing with a company is somewhat different from dealing with a government, but when a government looks at revenues it is likely to be even more complex.

Let us see where we are in this country today in respect of Government revenues. We are facing an oil price that is lower than it has ever been in the recent history of this country. Notwithstanding all the boast the Government may want to make about the handling of the economy, the projections on the horizon are not pleasant. Here we are standing as legislators today, and we are talking about increasing salaries, and not just increasing salaries alone, but certain other perks. We are talking about doing that in terms of 50 and 60 per cent.

It is not as though we do not have an example to follow. In a similar situation, when the economy of this country was similarly disadvantaged, what did the then government do? The ministers of government set the example, they reduced their salaries by 10 per cent and the hon. Prime Minister would remember that. He was part of the NAR government which he left shortly thereafter. They set the example and then called on the state enterprises to do a similar thing.

I was a member of management of a state enterprise at that time. I could remember, we were sitting there and as you know I was on the other side of the political divide in respect of the government then in power. What did we do? I was one of the first persons to say that I agreed with the government and that I

would also seek to reduce my salary. We the members of management offered to reduce our salaries by 5 per cent.

5.45 p.m.

Look at what is happening here today. We are faced with a similar situation and we are now being asked to increase our salaries by 50 per cent and more in some cases. I need the money, I always need money; all of us need money, but do we need money at the cost of leadership? No. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we cannot sacrifice our dignity as Members of this Parliament and accept this salary.

I believe that first, in principle—since none of the parties who took part in the 1995 election had that on their manifesto—if at all we are going to think about raising salaries we should talk about it now and next election put it on the cards and let us deal with it. Let the population know that is what we are going to do. It is either we put it straight politics or first you delink the salaries of public servants from ours. Let the population know and let them vote on it or let us delink the public servants' salaries from ours. My attitude is that we here do not have the

moral authority to increase our salaries; not in the wake of all the difficulties that this country is facing.

Look at something again, we are talking about raising our salaries and perks and let us focus on the perks. The perks are nontaxable. *[Interruption]* Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have got up here to speak out of a genuine desire to address this matter. I will not allow and, please, will you ask the Member for Nariva whose business should be dealing with this matter to cease obstructing me. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Industrial Relations Act provides that when even the court decides to increase salaries or to approve an increase it must take into consideration prevailing conditions in the community.

Imagine we had the unholy spectacle of University of the West Indies workers out on the picket line for weeks because they were fighting for the difference between 7 and 9 per cent; 7 and 9 per cent, that was the difference. Some gentlemen well meaning and very qualified decided that our salaries should be raised. I have no doubt that on a proper assessment you might find that the quantum was correct, but what about the teachers? Who assessed them to determine that their salaries should not be raised? What about the other public servants? Who will assess them? What about the oil workers? *[Interruption]* Please, it is not a question of the unions. There has to be a whole reassessment of

jobs and salaries. It is not only the unions because when the unions thought that they were to get certain pay increases the Government said that they could not pay them. Now we are being asked to support this increase.

I have heard the Members on the other side who have spoken in this debate say that we need the rise too. Well, I will tell you, as badly as we may need the raise, we do not need it, as I said again, at the cost of dignity, at the cost of what is correct, at the cost of feeling for the community. How do you expect me—I do not know if they do not go in their constituencies but I have a constituency with a lot of unemployment and underemployed and they expect me, in the face of that, to come and accept this? No, they can keep it. If they want to do it, they have the ability to raise their salaries; they do not need my vote. They can do it by themselves. I am recording for posterity that I am totally against it, not because I do not need the money—do not give me any sort of explanations about what is happening elsewhere.

The other Members of this side pointed out your productivity. I am not going to deal with that. I am concerned that the economic climate of this country cannot withstand what you are going to do. The unions—and they would be correct to do it—will use it as a benchmark and all that will happen when the pressure is put on the employers, we will see an attack on the dollar. I warn you that is what is going to happen.

In the light of the attitude to labour and the pressures on this country, this raise we are talking about is obscene in the present context of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. I warn you that I have been listening well outside of this Parliament and from what I am hearing outside, the country is telling the Members of Parliament and the Ministers of Government do not take it. The anger outside is so great that I fear what will happen. I am not going to say it because I do not want to be accused of encouraging any sort of problems in Trinidad and Tobago but I certainly believe that having regard to what is going on, to accept or to offer this kind of increase is totally out of sync.

My bankers will tell you I need the raise but I cannot accept it and it has nothing to do with politics. It has to do with a simple desire to set a proper example. I do not think the Members of this Government understand what setting an example is and I do not want to adulterate my contribution so I am not going to give examples. But you all know you have to set an example for this country; if

Salaries Review Commission Report
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Friday, January 8, 1999

you want your children and those who follow you to tighten their belts, you must tighten too.

I would like to amend this Motion to say that we take a 10 per cent cut in salary because that is what we need. *[Interruption]* No, it is not charity. Vote for it. I am seeking no support from anybody. As I have said before, the greatest opportunity any one man gets is that others will say, “you speak for me”. I am speaking here for the dispossessed of the country and for my constituency. *[Interruption]* Those who would like to make a joke about it, go ahead. I can understand how you feel Member for Nariva but you are one of those who got an increase in your housing allowance. You were upgraded and so entitled to superhousing and you took an increase. You pay no taxes on it so you like that. *[Interruption]* I will vote for it. I will take a 10 per cent cut, that is what you should be doing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not alone in this view. The view in terms of the salary increases to be taken by Ministers and, in particular, by the Prime Minister himself—the wife of the Minister of Works and Transport is on record in the *Independent* newspaper. That is what you should be proposing, a 10 per cent cut. I quote from the weekend *Independent* of Friday, January 1, 1999:

“At least one Government Minister’s wife has expressed the view that the \$10,000 salary increases for Prime Minister Basdeo Panday...recommended by the Salaries Review Commission (SRC) are not justified. Businesswoman Champa Baksh, wife of Works and Transport Minister Sadiq Baksh...”

In some cases she differed from me but I would like to follow and support her view. He is not entitled, at least not today, at least not in the context of the economy of the country; he is not entitled.

I want to conclude, to put it in a nutshell, I cannot see why the Government is trying so anxiously to increase salaries. They have increased part of their salaries which they could do by themselves. They now want to include the Opposition in increasing their salaries even more. I vote along with the Members of this side to say we do not want it, keep it. They can increase it if they want, but the days for trying to bribe us and buy us done. We do not want anything, keep it. At the cost of my integrity and at the cost of my feeling for my constituents, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will not accept it.

Thank you.

6.00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Wednesday, January 13, 1999 at 1.30 p.m.

I did mention to the Opposition Chief Whip that on that date we will have a meeting of the Finance Committee and depending on what happens on that day, in any event on the Friday after Wednesday, we will have the debate on the Supplementary Appropriation Bill and deal with the report, so we shall be doing both the Report of the Finance Committee and the bill.

On next Wednesday, January 13, 1999 we will continue with this Motion and, time permitting, we will do the plea bargaining bill.

Hon. Member: What bill is that?

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: The Criminal Procedure (Plea Discussion and Plea Agreement) Bill, which is the next bill on the Order Paper.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.03 p.m.