

*Leave of Absence**Friday, January 15, 1999***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, January 15, 1999*

The House met at 1.31 p.m.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to advise that two Members of this honourable House have asked to be excused from today's sitting. They have been granted leave of absence. These are the Member for Diego Martin West and the Member for La Brea.

PAPER LAID**ILO Conventions
(Ratification)**

The Minister of Labour and Co-operatives (Hon. Harry Partap): Mr. Speaker, I wish to lay on the table memorandum concerning the decision to ratify the following ILO Conventions:

1. No. 138 concerning minimum age for admission to employment;
2. No. 147 concerning minimum standards in merchant ships; and
3. No. 159 concerning vocational rehabilitation and employment of disabled persons.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(SECOND)****Presentation**

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present:

Second Report 1998—1999 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the expenditure from the Public Revenue which were not included in the annual estimates, January 1, 1998 to September 30, 1998.

DEFINITE URGENT MATTER**Unabated Incidence of Rape**

Mr. Edward Hart (*Tunapuna*): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 12 of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing the following issue as a definite matter of urgent public importance—the unabated incidence of rape perpetrated on the women of Trinidad and Tobago and, more particularly, the women along the East/West Corridor most noticeably in the region from Tunapuna to Arima.

I contend that the matter is definite because it refers to something specific, to wit, the rape, grievous wounding and attempted murder of women, approximately 50 in number over the last three months, in the Tunapuna to Arima area.

The matter is urgent because women are living in constant fear as there has been no indication that the perpetrator or perpetrators have been apprehended and there have been no attempts by the authorities to allay the fears of our women.

It is of public importance because the situation, although particularly prevalent in the region of Tunapuna to Arima, is affecting the women of our country who are living under the constant threat of one of the most heinous crimes being perpetrated on them thereby affecting their psyche permanently.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to advise that the issue which the Member for Tunapuna has sought to raise is not one that could properly be raised on a Motion for the Adjournment of the House.

I draw the Member's attention to Standing Order 11 which provides for matters to be raised on giving three days' notice—matters which are not pressing and which are continuing matters. So, I draw the Member's attention to Standing Order 11 under which it is quite possible that such a matter could be raised.

**NATIONAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE
(PROGRESS REPORT)**

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Trevor Sudama): Mr. Speaker, I am today reporting to this honourable House on the progress we have made to date on the establishment of the National Community College.

Hon. Members are informed that in April 1997 this Government agreed that as part of our plan for the rationalization and development of the tertiary education

system in Trinidad and Tobago, the National Institute of Higher Education (Research, Science and Technology) Community College should be established along the lines of the community college concept in the United States of America.

Later in that same year—October to be precise—we approved a strategic plan prepared by NIHERST for the establishment of the Community College comprising of NIHERST College of Information Technology; NIHERST School of Languages; NIHERST Business Management Division; NIHERST College of Nursing; NIHERST College of Health Sciences; the Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry; John S. Donaldson Technical Institute; San Fernando Technical Institute; Government Vocational Centre, Point Fortin; Metal Industries Company and the Joint Services Staff College.

The rationale that governed Government's decision to establish a National Community College was that such an institution should form the foundation stone upon which a diversified tertiary education system could be created, incorporating both the public and private sectors.

As we are all aware, the present non-university tertiary sector is characterized by a number of small disparate institutions which I have just listed, offering a diverse array of programmes and courses of different levels to various target groups. The absence of a systemic structure that would allow for horizontal or vertical movement among these institutions has been identified as one of the major impediments to broadening aspects to higher education.

The creation of one system falling under the portfolio of one ministry is therefore the first step to improving the development of tertiary education in the following ways:

1. It will facilitate greater levels of efficiency in the utilization of the human, physical and material resources of the public tertiary institutions;
2. It will allow for the creation of a larger and more diverse pool of human resources to support the enhancement of the quality, comprehensiveness and range of programmes offered at the tertiary level;
3. It will provide the foundation for collaboration with the private sector;
4. It will facilitate the introduction of a unified credit accumulation and transfer scheme that can serve as a major step forward in the development of a seamless tertiary level education system which will support lifelong human resource and career development; and

National Community College
[HON. T. SUDAMA]

Friday, January 15, 1999

—most important—

5. It will enable planning within the tertiary education sector to be in keeping with Government's overall vision and planning for the country as a whole.

The mission of the National Community College is to provide the highest quality tertiary education and training in respect of specialized skills in a range of professions and occupations identified on the basis of the continuing education needs of the population and the demands of an expanding, diversifying economy. In so doing, the Community College will facilitate the personal growth and professional development of citizens so that they may more effectively contribute to the sustainable growth of the nation and region in a dynamic and changing environment.

Its vision is to play a major role in broadening access to tertiary education and training by responding to the needs of a wide range of learners and offering programmes which contribute to the quality of the life of the individual and community and to national economic strength. In fulfilling such a mandate, this Community College will pursue diligently the clear objective of becoming a high quality institution and a major provider of tertiary level education.

In that context, the strategic goals of the college are:

1. Rationalization of the existing non-university tertiary education sector to gain efficiency and synergy;
2. Increasing enrolment in tertiary level education and training;
3. Broadening access to non-university tertiary level education;
4. Provision of educational and training programmes relevant to the needs of industry and society;
5. Development of articulation with the University of the West Indies and international institutions and with YTEPP to ensure the creation of a seamless tertiary education system;
6. Development of effective college-based organizational structures and policies;
7. Enhancing graduate competency; and
8. Establishment of college quality assurance systems.

The National Community College will be established in three phases over a period of three years starting January 1998 and ending at the end of the year 2000. Phase I commenced in January of last year and the main achievements to date are:

1. A total enrolment of 2,427 students in all programme areas representing 80 per cent of the projected enrolment of 3,034 for Phase I.
2. Development of unified systems in key functional areas including policies and structures to govern the academic affairs of the college, college-based financial accounting and management technology to support the integration of information and communications system within the college and to facilitate the broadening of access to students.
3. Increased institutional capacity for strategic planning and budgeting through training. Capacity building in various aspects of curriculum design and development; establishment of a platform for the development of a national qualifications framework; an appropriate model for automated student records management; preparation of legal brief for enabling legislation for the college assessment of plant and facilities in existing tertiary level institutions to inform future space planning and, finally, relationships developed with well-established state-of-the-art community colleges for which critical technical support is being received.

1.45 p.m.

Another major component of Phase I is the acquisition of the necessary equipment to integrate the tertiary institutions technologically for purposes of administration, interinstitutional communication and programme delivery, as well as the ability to put in place the technological infrastructure for the development of distance education as the key strategy for increasing access.

Phase II would be implemented over the period November 1998—October 1999 and for this purpose, the sum of \$2,095,000 was approved in the 1998/1999 budget. It is expected that Phase II would result in increased enrollment to the National Community College which seeks to address the prevailing low participatory rate in tertiary education. This would be accomplished through the introduction of a range of new and innovative programmes in all the constituent institutions and the expansion of the existing programme offering information technology and foreign languages in Tobago.

The targeted enrollment for the period October 1998—October 1999 is 1,300 new students which represents a 55 per cent increase over new student intake in Phase I. Broadening of access to tertiary education to enable persons previously

National Community College
[HON. T. SUDAMA]

Friday, January 15, 1999

secluded from pursuing education and training would be achieved through the development of pilot projects in distance education by a multiple delivery mode; whether text, video, computer or audio and the development of personal text and challenge examination for selective courses to facilitate award and transfer of credits.

The development of an integrated college system to ensure efficiency, synergy and quality to the development of Government structure to the college. Initiation of phased programme conversion to a unified credit system, development and piloting of a mode of a centralized automated admission and record system, development of unified financial and human resource management administrative system and the development of an integrated library system.

Launching of the college as a legal entity to enable the college to fulfil its mission to the production of enabling legislation for the National Community College.

Implementation of a quality approach to tertiary education and training through the introduction of quality assurance strategies and techniques at the institutional level to enable continuous improvement of programmes and services.

Rationalization of educational and training programmes in order to increase efficiency and equality and relevance of education and training provision by making training more responsive to sectoral needs to targeted market research and development of articulation arrangements among institutions to promote student mobility.

Rationalization of plant and equipment to make more efficient use of current plant and facilities and identifying critical areas of upgrade to the completion of a fixed asset register for plant and equipment in the National Community College and development of policies and procedures manual for facilities management.

Promotion of the community college image and identity in order to attract students and foster community links through the development of community outreach programmes and the hosting of a higher education symposium.

The final Phase III is scheduled for the period October 1999—October 2000. This is expected to culminate in a modern Community College of Trinidad and Tobago functioning in an international complex in respect of organizational structure, programmes, curriculum development and delivery ensuring quality, and in relation towards ensuring its on-going relevance for our economic and societal needs.

Additionally, the foundation would be laid to position the college as the region's leading tertiary education institution with respect to programme innovation, integration of technology, and market responsiveness in order to obtain the objectives for Phases II and III which would lay the foundation for a fully functioning college by October, 2000. As I have already stated, our intention is to place the constituent tertiary level institution with the college under the purview of one ministry to ensure that development planning within each institution is in keeping with the National Community Colleges strategic goals and objectives and to facilitate efficiency in relation to scarce educational resources.

We are also proposing that the National Community College should be appropriately named to facilitate marketing positioning of the college in the mind of the public in the context of tertiary education in Trinidad and Tobago.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, it has been named the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago, its acronym is COSTATT

Thank you very much.

ILO CONVENTIONS (RATIFICATION)

The Minister of Labour and Co-operatives (Hon. Harry Partap): Mr. Speaker, I have laid a document recommending that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago ratify certain conventions, namely: Convention No. 138, Minimum Age of Admission to Employment (1973); Convention No. 147, Minimum Standards in Merchant Ships (1947); and Convention No. 159 Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (disabled persons) (1983).

Mr. Speaker, it would be known that ILO Conventions seek to set Standards which have the force of international treaties and binding on member states and requiring their observance in maintaining standards in their respective countries by their implementation to national law and practice. Of course, all the conventions and recommendations adopted by the ILO would not be relevant to every country, moreover, there would be circumstances which prevent ratification of certain conventions but there is a duty on member states from time to time to seek to develop their standards so that they may be able over time to ratify conditions relevant to their circumstances.

In this context, the ILO has held seven conventions to be core conventions in the sense that they are basic to human life and existence throughout the world and

ILO Conventions (Ratification)
[HON. H. PARTAP]

Friday, January 15, 1999

has maintained that all its member states should ratify these conventions. They are Convention No. 29, Forced Labour (1930); Convention No. 87, Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize (1948); Convention No. 98, Right To Organize and Collective Bargaining (1949); Convention No. 100, Equal Remuneration to Men And Women Workers; Convention No. 138, Minimum Age for Employment (1973); Convention No. 111, Discrimination (Employment and Occupational) Convention 1958.

By ratification of Convention No. 138—Minimum Age of Admission to Employment—Trinidad and Tobago would have ratified all the core conventions and would be, as at present, the only Caricom state in this position.

Mr. Speaker, at present, Trinidad and Tobago has ratified 14 Conventions. These three now being put forward for ratification would make a total of 17. It must be noted that four of these 17 have been considered for ratification within the last three years. This should be particularly noted, having regard to the fact that some 10 of the total number ratified were handovers from the time of our independence.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall in June 1996 the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives laid on the table for the information of Parliament the instruments adopted by the ILO between 1987 and 1995. It must be noted that no such submissions were made by previous administrations prior to 1996 although it is a requirement under ILO rules. In fact, the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives had brought to the notice of this House, 14 Conventions and 11 recommendations adopted by the ILO between 1987 and 1995.

The Ministry of Labour and Co-operatives is continuing through the ILO, 144th Tripartite Consultative Committee to study aggressively the conventions which bear direct relevance to Trinidad and Tobago in an effort to upgrade and safeguard our standards. These conventions received detailed study by the ILO 144th Tripartite Committee especially set up by Cabinet in 1996 for the expressed purpose of recommending to the Ministry of Labour and Co-operatives those conventions which bear direct relevance to the circumstances of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the procedure for dealing with conventions and recommendations adopted by the ILO are as follows:

Article 19 of the ILO Convention states:

1. Within one year, or the latest, 18 months of the adoption, the instrument must be submitted to the competent authority, usually the Parliament, for information.

2. The competent authority may or may not decide on ratification.
3. At various subsequent intervals the ILO inquires about the position.
4. When the member state decides to ratify, the competent authority is accordingly advised, as in the present case.

Mr. Speaker, the ratification of Convention No. 138 implies that the member state undertakes to pursue a national policy designed to ensure the effective abolition of child labour and to raise progressively the minimum age for admission to employment or work to a level consistent with the fullest physical and mental development of young persons. Steps would therefore have to be taken to rationalize the existing legislations concerning the employment of children.

Convention No. 147 seeks to protect the rights of seafarers and ratification thereof automatically ensures compliance with the undermentioned ILO Conventions:

Food and Catering (Ships' Crews) Convention, 1946 (No. 68)

Medical Examination (Seafarers) Convention, 1946 (No. 73)

Accommodation of Crews Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 92).

Mr. Speaker, Convention No. 159 seeks to protect disabled persons by ensuring that they are not discriminated against and that provisions are put in place to allow them to function efficiently in the workplace. Already, the Ministry of Social and Community Development has put in place a national policy for the disabled which would enhance the facilities to make life comfortable for the physically challenged in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is the only country in the Caricom grouping to ratify Convention No. 159.

Thank you.

**SOLOMON HOCHOY HIGHWAY
(REPAIRS)**

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Sadiq Baksh): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that our recent releases to the Press on the on-going work done on the Solomon Hochoy Highway have been misinterpreted. This statement is designed to clarify our position.

Solomon Hochoy Highway (Repairs)
[HON. S. BAKSH]

Friday, January 15, 1999

The Ministry of Works and Transport seeks to put the record straight and to assure commuters that the present arrangements are temporary and intended to facilitate aspects of the construction and reduce inconvenience.

2.00 p.m.

On Sunday January 10, 1999, traffic was diverted along a one kilometre section of the partially reconstructed southern carriageway at the request of the contractor. The remaining 2.6 kilometers is still closed to traffic. Approval to divert traffic on the unfinished southbound carriageway was sought and granted so that construction of culverts under the northbound carriageway could be completed. These culverts are essential for adequate drainage of the highway and to prevent any flooding that could lead to erosion. This measure will help the contractor increase his rate of progress, as well as to eliminate the danger posed to commuters by large open construction trenches that are necessary to facilitate the replacement of culverts under both carriageways. The diversion is expected to be in place for a period of six weeks.

Specific comments have arisen concerning the roughness of the surface of the reconstructed pavement. Mr. Speaker, to enable the project to move forward as quickly as possible and to minimize inconvenience, the Ministry of Works and Transport has allowed traffic to use the carriageway despite the fact that the surface is temporary—I repeat—temporary. I would like the motoring public to be aware that additional layers of finishing asphalt are to be laid before the road surface is considered fully complete. Let me also emphasize that curbs, guard rails, traffic signs and pavement paint marking are still to be completed. Therefore, our present actions are designed to speed up the rate of progress substantially during the dry season. However, this means more diversions for motorists in the coming weeks as more culverts under the current 3.6 kilometre section of the northbound carriageway are reconstructed.

Mr. Speaker, having to travel this route daily, I know what it means for everyone who has to drive on the highway and all I can say is that the Ministry of Works and Transport thanks motorists for their understanding and tolerance. Quality of the construction works remains the highest priority of our ministry and every effort is being made to ensure that the contractor achieves the highest standards under the terms of the contract. We can readily understand the public's disappointment and dismay when compared to surfaces provided by the ministry on the North Coast Road from Maraval to Maracas; on the Eastern Main Road from Valencia to Manzanilla; and on the Western Main Road from Westmoorings to Macqueripe, in addition to other areas completed during this year.

Let me assure everyone that the Ministry of Works and Transport has not or ever will reduce its standards. We are committed to a programme of quality restoration of all our roads at the current improvement rate of 30 per cent over a three-year period and continuing to increase. Everyone at the Ministry of Works and Transport continues to work hard to complete our target of 636 kilometres over a five-year period.

Mr. Speaker, quality in construction works remains the paramount priority of the Ministry of Works and Transport and we will ensure adherence to specifications so that the objective of a 20-year design life span for the Solomon Hochoy Highway will be achieved.

I thank you very much.

**SUGARCANE CROP
(NEWSPAPER REPORTS)**

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Dr. The Hon. Reeza Mohammed): Mr. Speaker, over the past few days there have been several articles in the daily newspapers, especially the *Daily Express*, alluding to statements I made with respect to the 1999 sugarcane crop. Of course, as has been their style, certain sections of the media continue to misrepresent the facts, and on these occasions they have been consistent in their misrepresentation.

As the Minister responsible for Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, and by extension Caroni (1975) Limited and the sugar industry, it is my duty and responsibility to correct the misrepresentations which have been fed to the national community by the *Daily Express* on the issue of the 1999 sugarcane crop. On Monday, January 11, 1999 on page 3 of the *Daily Express*, it was reported:

“The 1999 sugarcane crop officially starts today under a threat from Agriculture Minister Reeza Mohammed that if Caroni (1975) Limited did not reach this year's target of 180,000 tonnes of cane, the board will be fired.”

What I did say was that the production target for 1999 was 130,000 tonnes of sugar—I repeat, 130,000 tonnes of sugar—and not 180,000 tonnes of cane.

The Leader of the Opposition is reported in the *Daily Express* of Tuesday, January 12, 1999 on page 7 as saying, and I quote:

“Opposition Leader Patrick Manning said yesterday that Agriculture Minister Reeza Mohammed was trying to “scapegoat” the Caroni board because of “the foolishness” he (Mohammed) did which resulted in the froghopper crisis of

Sugarcane Crop (Newspaper Reports)
[DR. THE HON. R. MOHAMMED]

Friday, January 15, 1999

This statement is a mischief on the part of the honourable Leader of the Opposition since it is not foolishness to implement the policy as articulated in the tripartite agreement of 1992 which was approved by Mr. Manning's PNM government.

Mr. Speaker, the implementation of the policy which required the use of a bio-pesticide was affected by the severe drought conditions experienced during 1997—1998. I wish, therefore, to disabuse the perception that Mohammed did foolishness in implementing a policy collectively agreed to in the tripartite agreement and which is a conditionality under the agricultural sector loan and which, according to Mr. Manning, caused the froghopper crisis of 1997.

Yet another newspaper report I wish to correct refers to an article entitled, "Innecob gets 80 acres for \$2.5 million" which appeared in the *Trinidad Guardian* on Wednesday, January 13, 1999 on page 4. The Headline entitled, "Innecob gets 80 acres for \$2.5 million" is inaccurate, as well as the prices quoted on lease arrangements. The *Trinidad Guardian* reported:

"The leased price to Innecob is \$2.5 million or US \$1.14 per square metre, which includes the premium of lease rental cost."

Mr. Speaker, I said in my oral answer to question No. 2 during this term of Parliament in the Senate that, and I quote:

"The lease is for 60 years with an option to renew for another 30 years. There were 32.4 hectares, or approximately 80 acres of land, which were leased. The price paid by Innecob is TT \$2,587,186 or US \$1.40 per square metre in the first year, which includes a premium and lease rental cost."

Similarly, with respect to lands leased to Norsk Hydro, the *Trinidad Guardian* reported that:

"The land being made available for the aluminium project is to be leased on a lease premium of US \$1.10 per square metre with an annual lease rental of US \$126 per square metre."

This statement is absolutely incorrect, Mr. Speaker. What I said was:

"The land being made available for the Norsk Hydro aluminium project is to be leased on a lease premium of US \$1.10 per square metre and an annual lease rental of US \$1.26 per square metre."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Finance (1998) Bill

Friday, January 15, 1999

FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) (1998) BILL

Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 1998, brought from the House of Representatives [*The Minister of Finance*] read the first time.

Motion made, That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings.
[*Hon. B. Kuei Tung*]

Question put and agreed to.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT (SECOND) (1998—1999)

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion which is standing in my name:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the Second Report 1998—1999 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the expenditure from the Public Revenue which were not included in the annual estimates, January 1, 1998 to September 30, 1998.

As one will recall, last Wednesday, January 13, 1999, the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met and agreed to a number of proposals which relate to 1998 accounts. The proposals include, firstly, the write-off of losses under the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Social Development which totalled the sum of \$6,358.74. Secondly, and more importantly, the proposals included the variation of the 1998 appropriation in the sum of \$287,993,220 under three Heads of expenditure. Mr. Speaker, the Finance Committee approved the variation in the sum of \$287,993,220 to bring to account the value of various non-cash mechanisms utilized by public sector employees in order to give effect to arrears owed to them by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

The provisional value of mechanisms access to 1998 and outstanding adjustments in respect of previous years which are to be brought to account in 1998 total a sum of \$439,593,220. Given the very nature of this transaction, funds were not provided in the 1998 estimates to bring to account the value of these mechanisms, but savings in the sum of \$151,600,000 were identified under the various sub-Heads; under Head 18, the Ministry of Finance, as a result of the change in the financial year. However, of this sum, an amount of \$26 million has been identified under Personal Expenditure and would be vired to the appropriate sub-item and the sum of \$125,600,000 represents transfers between subheads under the Ministry of Finance.

Finance Committee Report
[HON. B. KUEI TUNG]

Friday, January 15, 1999

Finance Committee approved the transfer of the difference, which is \$287,993,220 as follows: under the Head of Expenditure 18, the Ministry of Finance, this Head was increased by the sum of \$287,993,220. The two Heads: 20, Pensions and Gratuities and Head 26, the Ministry of Education, were decreased. In the case of Head 20, Pension and Gratuities, a decrease in the sum of \$91 million, and in the case of Head 26, the Ministry of Education, a decrease of \$196,993,220. The total of these two decreases gives the sum of \$287,993,220 which corresponds to the increase given to Head 18, the Ministry of Finance.

Savings were realized under Head 20, Pensions and Gratuities, and Head 26, the Ministry of Education, as a result of the financial year having ended on September 30, 1998 instead of December 31, 1998. One will recall that the sum appropriated for fiscal 1998 was \$11,322,298,076. I wish to point out that this variation will not increase the sum appropriated and, therefore, there is no need for approval for supplementary appropriation.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in addition, there was a transfer of funds between subheads under the same Head of Expenditure approved by Finance Committee on Wednesday last. The committee noted the transfers which had been approved by me as Minister of Finance. Mr. Speaker, you will recall that with effect from August 1, 1998 Cabinet delegated its authority to approve of transfers between subheads to the Minister of Finance when it agreed *inter alia* as follows: "Under the category 'Transfer of Funds', requests for transfer of funds between separate subheads under the same Head of Expenditure should no longer be submitted to the Cabinet, but can be decided by the Ministry of Finance on the advice of the Budget Division". Based on this authority, I, as Minister of Finance, approved the transfer of funds in the sum of \$256,329,701 million between subheads under the same Heads of Expenditure.

It should be noted that transfers are approved by me as Minister of Finance based on notes sent to me from the respective ministers requesting transfers between subheads. These transfers are requested to reflect change in circumstances in ministries and departments and a consequential reordering of priorities. Explanations as to the reasons for the transfers have been provided to Members of this honourable House.

In concluding, I wish to re-emphasize that the variations in the allocations of the three Heads of Expenditure would not increase in 1998 appropriation which is already approved by Parliament. So Mr. Speaker, having approached this

honourable House to seek the support of hon. Members in the hope they that will support the report in which I request an increase of some \$287 million which, substantially, is to meet the mechanisms, cash and non-cash, which came up as a result of the bonds which are due as a result of a liability by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to public sector employees.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Kenneth Valley (*Member for Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Speaker, I start really on taking issue with the point on which the Minister of Finance ended. Because the Minister of Finance would have us believe that given that he did not exceed the \$11 billion which was approved for the 12-month period for 1998—that is, January 1, 1998 to December 31, 1998—that there is no need for a supplemental.

I have difficulty with that concept. Because in December, 1997, when this House approved the budget, it did so for a 12-month period or a year. As a fact, one knows that in September last the Minister of Finance came to the House to shorten that financial year to September 30. Now, I have real difficulty in accepting that given there was approval to spend \$11 billion over a 12-month period, that the Minister had approval to spend \$11 billion over a nine-month period. Because, it appears to me, quite simply, that if one were adjusting the financial year to a nine-month period, then it followed that, at least, on the recurrent budget, we are then talking about three-quarters of the appropriation approved by the Parliament. I think it follows naturally.

I make that point because as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, I am asking, and I would write formally to the Auditor General for a ruling on that. It is the first time we are having this situation. Because, this has implications. Obviously, it is what the Minister of Finance has been doing since 1996. The Constitution provides quite clearly that:

“No money should be withdrawn from any public fund other than the Consolidated Fund unless the issue of the money has been authorized by an Act.”

More importantly,

“That no moneys shall be withdrawn from the Consolidated Fund except to meet expenditure that is charged upon the Fund by the Constitution or an

Finance Committee Report
[MR. VALLEY]

Friday, January 15, 1999

Act or where the issue of those moneys has been authorized by an Appropriation Act”.

So that, in fact, if there is need for a supplementary appropriation, rather than this talk about simply varying expenditure, I am saying that the Minister would be in breach of the Constitution. My first argument is that, in fact, there is need for a supplementary appropriation because the Minister of Finance has exceeded his nine-month budget. [*Desk thumping*] I cannot understand.

Mr. Speaker, given that we approved that budget in December, let us assume that rather than come in September, the Minister had come in March, 1998, to say, “Listen, I want to change to a new financial year from April 1, 1998 to March 31, 1999”. Would it have meant that he would have had authority to spend \$11 billion in the three-month period, January—March. It cannot be! It is not logical! I am spending some time on that point because we have seen that type of behaviour by this clever Minister of Finance from his first budget, the sleight-of-hand. [*Desk thumping*]

In his budget for 1996 we made the point, after looking at his estimates, that in fact, he is looking at a deficit of some \$750 million because in that year, one will remember that he simply refused to say no to the Ministers as they came with all their grandiose plans and so forth. More than that, in that year, so as to boost his revenues for 1996, he deferred the recognition of income. Government budget is on a cash basis, so that rather than ensuring that funds came in in December, he told them to hold it and they came in in January—National Lotteries Board is one example—so that he had a bit more revenues and put expenditure into the 1995 year, trying sleight-of-hand with the VAT issue and so forth.

To an extent, for 1996, he was lucky. Because one would recall that oil prices were increased, having nothing to do with the Minister of Finance, and even so, one would note that he ended with a budget deficit. The sleight-of-hand continued in 1997.

I have just gotten a document here from the Minister’s officials, telling me all types of interesting things. What I find rather important is the definition. The *Manual of Government Finance Statistics* published by the International Monetary Fund states as follows:

“A surplus is equal to total revenue which includes tax revenue, non-tax revenue and capital receipts less total expenditure which includes recurrent expenditure, net lending and capital expenditure.”

Note, Mr. Speaker, that borrowing is not considered part of revenues.

“The surplus or deficit in turn is then financed.”

The point that we have been making here.

“Financing is equal to borrowings plus drawdowns on cash balances less repayment of principal and sinking fund contributions.”

They should have gone a bit further, because financing would also include divestment proceeds under the International Monetary Fund guidelines.

Having said that, on Wednesday we asked certain questions, and I asked the Minister of Finance if he could comment on the deficits reported by the Auditor General for the year 1997? The response he has given to that question is very interesting, and it says that the 1997 Auditor General's report indicated that Government's expenditure exceeded its revenue by \$271.4 million. It should be noted that revenue as recorded in this report included tax revenue, non-tax revenue, capital receipts, financing, including borrowings. So that, although the Minister of Finance recognizes that financing/borrowing is not part of revenues, he is telling me that expenditure exceeded revenue by \$271.4 million.

When, in fact, we deduct the borrowing by the Minister for 1997 we see that, in fact, in 1997 the deficit was some \$925.4 million. He recognizes. He is saying that the International Monetary Fund guidelines is saying that, “Listen, borrowing as a financing item is not part of your revenues”, but he comes quite nicely to tell me that the 1997 Auditor General's report indicated that Government expenditure—I asked him, specifically, on the deficit reported by the Auditor General; deficit is a defined term, it is revenues minus expenditure. If you know that financing is not part of your revenues, well then you should tell me quite categorically that, in fact, your deficit was \$925.4 million for 1997:

But you see, for some reason, the Minister of Finance avoids the truth with respect to the finances of the country. It is critical that we understand the implications of it because, in the Government, there seems to be few persons who cannot be bothered with the finances of the country, they leave it to the Minister of Finance. I think well, I can identify just two—

Miss Nicholson: Very devious!

Mr. K. Valley: Extremely! And he does it every time, he continues to fool them and they will not learn! They sat in the Cabinet and they approved the WINSURE transaction and, in spite of the information coming out there, they still

Finance Committee Report
[MR. VALLEY]

Friday, January 15, 1999

allowed the Minister of Finance to do his thing, to pick figures out of the air and to twiddle. You think he did not know at the beginning of 1998 that he was going to change the financial year? But that was his way to get \$11 billion approved and then to come at the end of the period and say, "Friend, I have \$11 billion to spend." It does not matter whether the financial year ends in March, September or even the end of January, he still would have thought that he had approval to spend \$11 billion. Coming here this afternoon to tell me that because we approved a budget in 1998 for \$11 billion, there is no increase.

2.30 p.m.

We never expected him to spend \$11 billion, given that he had a shortened financial year. At best, we expected him to spend three quarters of that. But even looking at his figures here—and I am just talking about recurrent, because one can always argue that capital expenditure is lumpy so that one cannot simply take three quarter of one's capital expenditure programme—in the recurrent, if we say that we are approving \$100 for salaries for 12 months, then obviously, for nine months we are expected to pay a bill for \$75. When you take that other \$25 for the period October to December and transfer it to cover something else, when we still have to pay these people from October in any case, then you have an increase my friend.

If you transfer that to cover the bonds now and we still have to pay them, it is really \$50 you are spending and not \$25. But you had no authority to transfer that \$25, because by cutting your financial year you are no longer entitled, unless you come back to the Parliament and seek approval for the spending of that \$25. That is clear.

I have been asking the Minister over the years to just level with us, because I maintain that there is nothing wrong, in theory, with running a deficit as long as you know what you are doing. If you have a deficit budget in year one or year two, as long as you have a clear plan, there is nothing inherently wrong with that. But when you keep telling the national community that you are having these surpluses and so forth, when, in fact, you are running deficits year after year, you are not only fooling your Cabinet colleagues but you are raising expectations in the national community that you will not be able to fulfil. That is a simple thing.

People are saying all over town that he does not know what he is doing and that he is trying to fool people. As I have said in this Parliament before, under different circumstances, that "you could run but you cannot hide," that is the reality. [*Laughter*]

I do not know whether your Prime Minister knows it. In 1996 the Minister did his thing and got away. In 1997, he did his thing and got away partly, but he is running out of time. Mr. Speaker, Psalm 37:10 says:

"For yet for a little while, and the wicked *shall not be*: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it *shall not be*." [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: Are you a born again Christian?

Mr. K. Valley: Because papa God has a way of watching and laughing while you are doing his thing, and he is waiting. In 1998/1999, I do not know what he is going to do. What new sleight-of-hand is he coming with? I know him and I am sure he feels that he has something else in the bag. [*Interruption*] That is my old friend, and I have been trying with him for a number of years. What is he coming with in 1998/1999? When he feels that he can push forward, defer the problem, and fool his colleagues every year, do you know what happens? Oil prices have fallen!

Mr. Sudama: He was in your Cabinet and he fool you.

Mr. K. Valley: But did you notice what we did when we found out? Mr. Speaker, do you see what is happening with commodities prices? Therefore, while he is deferring things and saying that things would get better later on, "the ting collapse on him", and I do not know if his Prime Minister knows, but "is gone yuh gone". [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

I would be the most surprised individual if the Minister of Finance is around to deliver the 2000 budget. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: "Is gone he gone. Put on skates and he gone."

Mr. K. Valley: His deeds are catching up with him. I have not been saying that for a few years, I am saying that now. We are seeing it. [*Interruption*] Anytime he delivers the next budget I will say but, "Yes, I was wrong." [*Laughter*]

Mr. Sudama: You should resign. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, the first point I would make is that we have a Minister of Finance who is very creative in accounting for Government funds, and he is undermining confidence and the economy in the process.

Let us consider, for example, the major issue with respect to what the Minister calls the variation of appropriation. He tells us that he has to vary some \$288 million to satisfy the bonds and so forth by the public service. The total amount is

Finance Committee Report
[MR. VALLEY]

Friday, January 15, 1999

about \$439 million. Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look at the estimates—
[*Interruption*] What did I say? My sincere apologies. Mr. Speaker, it was a terrible error for which I most sincerely apologize.

In the *Draft Estimates, Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for The Financial Year 1998/1999*, at page 67, one notes that in 1997 under the expenditure item, “Settlement of Arrears to Public Officers”, the actual amount spent was some \$384.6 million. Thus, the Minister should have been aware, when he came to present his 1998 budget that was the expenditure in 1997. The Minister made no provisions in the estimates in 1998 for settlement of arrears to public officers, in spite of the fact that there was an agreement with them to issue these bonds. Was it over a five-year period commencing 1995? He was aware that these bonds had to be issued every year. In spite of that, having an expenditure of \$384 million, he made no provision, not even the nominal \$1.00.

The only reason this was done was obviously to show that he was going to have a little surplus, knowing full well he would have to come back here. He knew that he was going to shorten the financial year, and given that he was going to do so, he considered that they gave him authority to spend \$11 billion, therefore, he could always vire within that. He made no provision! Now he comes and tells us that he wants to vire from different heads, finding moneys from different places that were not available to him in the first place.

Let us look at some of the areas from which he would be taking these funds. From the public officers' pensions, \$65 million. Mr. Speaker, are we not paying those public officers' pensions between October and December? Did we not pay them between October and December of 1998? Of course we paid them, so that money is not available to him; what pie in the sky. From public officers' gratuity, again the same thing applies. There is one here that I find rather interesting, the item "Vacant Posts, Salaries and COLA" under the Ministry of Education, some \$113.9 million. I find that rather interesting because, on the face of this, what it says is that the Ministry of Education had available to it some \$113.9 million. I had to call TTUTA this morning to get some information.

We are aware that there are a number of our schools which are under-staffed. We are hearing about no music or math teachers and the number of teachers to be upgraded; that is not happening. But the Minister of Finance, as he told us on Wednesday, gave a directive to the Ministry of Education, "Do not spend that money, I want it to vire for this purpose." Here we have our schoolchildren unable to get—

Dr. Mohammed: That is called management.

Mr. K. Valley: That is called management? That is called putting our children to great risks. We hear about that Chaguanas school, the security problem there, and the same situation in Mucurapo. Even if the money was available one wonders why could it not be used to improve the security for schools. Why could it not be used to ensure the repairs of our schools?

Most importantly, I was informed by the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association that there are 193 teachers to be upgraded. These are teachers who are, in fact, performing at a higher level but are being paid at a lower level. But we have \$113.9 million being taken from the Ministry of Education. *[Interruption]* I am also told—I have a letter here from a teacher—they are training teachers and there is a whole backlog. They are telling them that they have to go through on-the-job-training for a period of time, and when they come out they are not placed. There has been a backlog for a number of years. Young teachers sitting home. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Sudama: They are all placed.

Mr. K. Valley: Who said so? I am telling you. I have communication here from a person who is in the programme at present. This person was registered since 1991, she is currently in the programme. She has been calling me to try to ensure that she gets an appointment at the end of the programme in July, because there is a backlog and the Minister is aware of that. I understand that there is quite a lot of corruption, because the Minister has names, this one has names and that one has names, to put on the list. There is backlog as from 1995/1996 of persons.

Miss Nicholson: What is the role of the Teaching Service Commission?

Mr. K. Valley: With respect to this? I do not know. They have to be registered. I think it is outside of this. The Teaching Service Commission sees about registration and so forth, but as long as a teacher is registered he or she has to wait for an appointment.

Mr. Sudama: Who appoints teachers? *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. K. Valley: The funds must be available. *[Interruption]* The funds are there but then the Minister told him that he cannot spend it. So before the Teaching Service Commission can make an appointment it has to know that the Ministry of Finance would release the funds. The Minister told him not to release the funds, "you have it but you cannot touch it." Do you know how many times some of us get into that situation, we watch it but we cannot touch it. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Sudama: The story of your life.

Mr. K. Valley: That is what the Minister of Finance has done to my friend, the Member for Tabaquite. I do not know why he is picking on him. [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*] So that we have that difficulty.

2.45 p.m.

But let us look at some of the other items here. Money is vired from judges' pensions including widows—\$500,000. I ask simply, again, have we not paid these people over the period October to December? The point I am making is that this is a whole fictitious virement. In fact, the whole thing is a supplementary appropriation and that is what the Minister should have come here with. I will write the Auditor General to ask for a ruling on that, because I am submitting that this is, in fact, a supplementary appropriation that is simply the sleight of hand that the Minister is attempting; trying to say that he has the authority to spend \$11 billion although he has a nine-month financial year rather than 12 months. I think that unless we get serious about the finances of this country we will see a continuation of the downturn.

I think it was in August of last year at Marabella—and I seem to be getting a lot of company since that time—I signalled that when I looked at the figures, I saw this economy heading for a downturn within 18 months. When I looked at what is happening with our trade situation and, while the Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs and Minister of Tourism earlier used to be arguing about it having to do with the downstream industries and what is happening with the importation of plant and equipment and so forth, I think he has stopped saying that, because even though the building of the plant and equipment is not coming to an end, we see a continuation, or perhaps a worsening of the deterioration in the current balance of trade.

We look at what is happening on the stock market and I signalled that and I made the point—this has nothing to do with the Asian crisis. We are still to feel the full effects of the Asian crisis. This has to do with the mismanagement of the economy that has been taking place since 1996. I made the point on a number of occasions that when they came into Government, there were quite a number of initiatives on the drawing board perhaps in the conceptual early stage of development which have been ignored.

For example, while I think that the Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs and Minister of Tourism is trying to do a few things, I have to ask: What really have we accomplished in trade and industry over the period?

You would remember, Mr. Speaker, this is not boasting, but I remember in a two-year period when I went to the Ministry of Trade and Industry in early 1994,

we were able to sign the bilateral investment treaty with the US; the bilateral investment treaty with the United Kingdom; we made very good headway with respect to the World Market initiative. I do not know what has been happening with trade and industry. When we left there, we had gotten the Caricom people to agree—[*Mr. Assam attempts to stand*] Let me just finish this point. We had gotten Caricom to agree that we will take the initiative with respect to the exceptions agreement; we were supposed to have Colombia and Venezuela. What has happened? That was in 1995. What are we hearing?

We were well on our way to the Investment Act; we were well on our way to structuring Piarco as an alternative hub to South America, an alternative to Miami. What has happened with that? What has happened with the Orinoco/Apure project? What has happened? Where is the initiative that was going to take this country to the next level of growth? I keep saying that. [*Mr. Assam attempts to stand*] One more point.

The Minister spoke in the budget debate about 5 per cent growth. What is he saying now? We look at the September Quarterly and at best we will get 3.5 per cent growth. Please go.

Mr. Assam: Thank you for giving way, Member for Diego Martin Central. I thought the Member was in this honourable House when I made my budget contribution after the Minister of Finance—

Mr. Manning: Make your point.

Mr. Assam:—made his budget speech in 1998 and I spent 75 minutes giving an account of my stewardship. I dealt with every single point that the Member for Diego Martin Central raised. I will get him a copy of the *Hansard* to ensure that he understands what the Ministry of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs and Minister of Tourism has been doing since he demitted office, or since he was forced to demit.

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, it is not so much me; it is the national community. What is happening with the Piarco Airport hub? Could the Member tell me this afternoon? What is happening with the Orinoco/Apure project? What is happening with the trade agreement with Colombia? Do we have a free trade agreement with Colombia?

Mr. Assam: Yes.

Mr. K. Valley: Since when?

Mr. Assam: Since last year June.

Mr. K. Valley: Well, I do not know it. Does the national community know of it? What happened with the trade agreement with Venezuela? I am not talking about the one-way trade agreement, I am talking about the one built on the exceptions agreement.

Mr. Assam: There is a full agreement with Colombia.

Mr. K. Valley: What is happening with Orinoco/Apure? What is happening?

Mr. Assam: Since last year—

Mr. K. Valley: No, no. The Member is the agent.

Mr. Manning: There is no exceptions agreement.

Mr. K. Valley: His job is to communicate and if he is not communicating, he cannot blame me. I do not know of it. I do not know that we have an exceptions agreement with Colombia.

Mr. Manning: And it does not exist. The exceptions agreement with Colombia does not exist.

Mr. K. Valley: So that, Mr. Speaker, I maintain that even before taking into consideration the effects of the Asian crisis, we are heading for trouble because we have a Minister of Finance who believes it is all good and fine to live in a fool's paradise, that all's well. "I am okay, Jack. I am up there. I am floating. Do not

On some programme, somebody asked him, "What happened with that money you promised the single mothers", and his response was—

Hon. Member: All of them got married. [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Valley: No. He said, "That is like a husband who is expecting backpay and promised the wife a TV for Christmas, but he ain't get the backpay, so no [*Laughter*]

I mean, let us be serious. We are talking about the country; we are talking about 1.3 million people; we are talking about attracting investors to locate here to the markets around us and what I am saying is, "Let us get our act together", Mr. Speaker.

In this document, also, you will note that, again, under the Ministry of Education, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Do you know something I do not know?

Mr. K. Valley: I do not know why I am doing that, Mr. Speaker. I do not understand that.

Under education, one sees a transfer sum of \$400, 000 which was supposed to be used for the purchase of textbooks for needy students. Okay. The Minister came in 1998, provided some \$400,000 to the Ministry of Education for the purchase of textbooks for needy students. Nothing has happened with it. There is an explanation given here that there is some committee looking at it. When was this committee appointed? Nobody knows. The Deosaran committee is looking at it and it will buy textbooks for the children when they are finished with the report.

So, I want to know what are the textbooks being used in school if there is \$400,000 to buy textbooks for children and if there are other kids using some books, the simple question is: Why was the \$400,000 not used for buying the books that the other children are using? Why is there the need for this committee to consider textbooks before these children are provided for? What are the other children using? Whatever books they are using, why could those books not have been bought for the benefit of these needy children?

Because, Mr. Speaker, we have a government that is like fluff. It came with a budget and increased pension by \$100 and you would believe that they bought a house and a car for pensioners. They attempted to get so much mileage. They attempted to milk that \$100 so much. One wonders what has happened.

Hon. Member: You all ignored them!

Mr. K. Valley: Similarly, when they came with this \$25 million for single parents. But, when it does not happen, they go very quiet. They attempt to get public relations to put it there. Just as the money provided to the Minister of Education, \$113.9 million, but do not touch. So, make a big thing that I am providing \$400,000 for textbooks for needy children but take it now and send it to WASA. The funds are transferred to the Water and Sewerage Authority. That is where it was meant to go in the first place.

I am making the simple point that we need to be serious about the finances of the country, that over the period 1991—1995, we were able to put the economy back on a proper footing, that a government coming in at that time simply had to manage and look for new initiatives to take us to the next level of growth, while concentrating on the core functions of government, education being a critical one of those core functions.

When I see that these funds are being transferred out of education for whatever purpose, I am concerned because I see what is happening with our little people. I

Finance Committee Report
[MR. VALLEY]

Friday, January 15, 1999

have said time and time again, I think my constituency is perhaps the only one so far, that has a programme that attempts to cater for those children who are not placed in a secondary school even after their second attempt at Common Entrance.

I maintain that the post primary system, in my opinion, cannot do the job; that if these young people have shown that perhaps they are not academically gifted, we are fooling ourselves that putting them back into that system will help. We need a school with a difference for those children who are not successful after their second attempt at Common Entrance. There is a gap between the 12-plus and age 15-plus when one may be able to get into a trade school and, if we have that type of funding available, if we have nothing else to do with it, let us put some 12-plus schools throughout Trinidad and Tobago so that our young people will have some schools to go to rather than be on the street. The schools must be schools with a difference, geared to the identification of the talents of those young people. They may not be academically gifted, but they may be gifted with their voice, with their hands and what have you. Our job is to attempt to identify where they have the talents and assist them in identifying those talents. They are going to benefit, but our country would benefit much more.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3.00 p.m.

The Minister of Tobago Affairs (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job): Mr. Speaker, once again I have to remind this country that this Parliament in the hands of the PNM is an instrument for misinformation, planting the seeds of doubt concerning the stability and the strength of the economy. It is an instrument for spreading propaganda which can be used, has been used, and is being used by enemies of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, any time Members of the Opposition speak, their words get on to the Internet and go all over the world to sow doubt in the minds of well wishers and investors, to create circumstances that are subversive to our best interest. I am hearing the Member for Diego Martin Central making statements which seem to me, to impugn the dignity of this Government and, indeed, all the good people in the country who believe that seeing about single parent mothers is a noble cause, is something that has been delayed by the PNM. The PNM for generations has nourished and nurtured a kind of abandonment and neglect of these single parent mothers. This Government has come into authority and saw it fit to hearken to the cries and yearnings of these people by starting a process of national debate and dialogue as to how to deal with this problem and allocated \$25 million for the

purpose, and all the Member for Diego Martin Central can come to this House to do is to ridicule.

Mr. Speaker, I want to spend some time on that because if I do not, he would not do it. We have to understand that the prospects of this country and this economy have to do with understanding the importance of nurturing children. He is talking about "this economy is going to collapse 18 months from now. The Asian problem has not fed itself into our economy as yet. What has happened is the mismanagement since 1996". Nothing could be further from the truth. It is indeed the case that the problems which the Malaysians, Japanese, Koreans, and the Indonesians have is because of the globalization of the world economy which would inevitably affect us, but it is not true to say that, notwithstanding these problems, all that we are observing in terms of our present situation and our prospects have to do with the mismanagement of this country.

Mr. Speaker, there is indeed substance in what the Member for Diego Martin Central is saying and it has to do with what people in Mathematics and Economics have called the exponential dependence of social outcomes and initial conditions. What I want to advise, is that the Member for San Fernando East, as a geologist ought to appreciate the importance of that because sometime in his life he must have done differential equation and must have understood what initial conditions are. So in the context of what the Member for Diego Martin Central is saying, he is ignoring the important effects of the neglect and the abandonment of these single parent mothers to generations and what it is doing to the employability of certain constituencies and communities in Trinidad and Tobago today. That is the important insight he is not recognizing, and blaming Government, having been in power for three years. So all that he is seeing is unemployment and social decay, he is seeing all that as the enemy.

A Member moves a Motion to say that rape and ill treatment and mistreatment of women is caused by the Government. All these things are ignoring that the 15-year-olds who are hired killers today were born 15 years ago. They had parents, they had homes, they went to school, they were nourished and nurtured so we are seeing the effects of all that, and in the same sense they are not understanding how these non-linear systems work.

For example, the Member for Diego Martin Central is saying that if the Minister of Finance had a budget to spend \$12 billion in 12 months, at the end of 10 months, he should have spent \$12 billion.

Mr. Manning: He did not say that.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin Central is telling the nation and inciting the people of the country to believe that proportionality and linearity are in fact a manifestation of the way the real world works. Nothing could be further from the truth, in fact, the real world is non-linear. There is no way any Minister of Finance or any Government would decide to spend \$12 billion and at the end of 11 months spend \$11 billion. This is like if you lost your keys you look for it under the lamp rather than in the darkness where you lost them because the real world is not about looking in the light for what you have lost in the dark. That is what the world is like.

So after 11 months, you will almost without exception, not spend 11 out of 12 as a proportion of the money you spend, because there are variations in revenue flows, inflows and expenditure flows. There is risk, there is uncertainty and all kinds of non legalities, and eventualities which are going to mean that you do not have a proportionality or a linear relationship between your revenues and expenditure, between what you plan and what you would do. Therefore, there is a misunderstanding about the economy and about the real world. There is a misunderstanding about the economy that is informing the kind of statements that are coming into this House to mislead people.

Mr. Manning: I thank the hon. Member for Tobago East for giving way. I wonder if he is saying that on the recurrent account there is a non-linear relationship between the amount of money appropriated and the amount of money expended in a shorter period of time. Is that the point you are making?

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Mr. Speaker, I am saying the reason we are here with this Bill today is as a consequence of the fact that in the real world what you plan to do as managing an economy you would never have one to one correspondence from day to day, week to week, month to month, with what happens in the real world so you always have to make adjustments. That is the real world in which we live.

Mr. Speaker, it is good that the Member raised the point. One of the problems we have had in this country and we still do have is the PNM's tradition of misleading people into believing that the Government has total control, that they can determine every step, every event, every outcome in the economy. That cannot be done. That was a mistake the PNM had made when they gave people a backpay every Christmas. The only country in the world in the history of mankind as I know which used to give a backpay was under the PNM. They did that and embedded into the expenditure stream a kind of hurray carry for the country so that

when revenues were not consistent with that pattern of expenditure, the country literally committed suicide because the expectation of the people had become so solidified, so embedded that people believed what the PNM told them, that that was the real world.

What we are about to do for the rest of the afternoon and for the future is to change these ideas, expectations and understanding so if in fact, the Minister of Finance says that in retrospect, things did not go the way they had expected and he wants to take money from this Head and this subhead and spend it for bonds or something else, I do not understand why that should be the occasion to come here and tell foreigners and everybody that the economy is going to implode and the Minister of Finance is a disaster and a conman. He creatively accounts for everything. What the Member for San Fernando East is doing, without wishing or willing it, is undermining the very edifice that he wants to recapture and reconquer.

The Member asked about the Orinoco/Apure Project. Orinoco has to do with a river in a country next door called Venezuela. The Member for Diego Martin Central does not understand how important the events in next door Venezuela are instructive to our country. The didactic purposes we can glean from the events in Venezuela. I want to advise them that instead of talking about the Orinoco/Apure Project, they should be educating themselves why the established parties come to grief. They have come to grief because they are doing exactly what the PNM is doing, they are not living in the real world. So a fella who tried to overthrow the Government and killed many people and nearly killed one of his Presidents is now the President of Venezuela. That country is bankrupt beyond belief. If we have a pitch lake here, there is one in Venezuela a thousand times bigger; if we have an oil well they have a thousand times the oil well in Venezuela, but Venezuela is a disgrace. *[Interruption]*

I am not saying something that would impugn the relationship between our country, Mr. Speaker. The statement I just made is not one to create a war between Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela. I was going on to say that I read a book called *A Beggar Sitting on a Pot of Gold* many years ago and they were referring to Venezuela. While I am saying that Venezuela is a disgrace, I am not saying that the people of Venezuela or the country of Venezuela is a disgrace, I am saying that the way Venezuela has been looted and mismanaged by the traditional parties which explains why President Chavez is the President, that is why it is a disgrace. And the mischief on the other side is going to create a situation to say that the Government and the people on this side are impugning the dignity of the country of Venezuela. Nothing could be further from the truth. I want to repeat

that for the benefit of the media. What I am saying is that there is a President Chavez in Venezuela because of the character and behaviour in the past 40 years of the traditional parties in Venezuela which have caused disgrace to that country. That is what I am saying. I am speaking English and many people over there and in the media keep on mischievously misusing every statement I make to their particular purposes.

Mr. Speaker, let us get back to some of the things about which the Member for Diego Martin Central was talking. He said the Ministry of Education should not allow the Minister of Finance to transfer \$400,000 for textbooks for the needy students.

Mr. Speaker, without focusing on the fact that the Government of this country found it necessary to focus on needy students who cannot buy text books and focus on a process which would allow those who are in need—a targeted process—which is another problem this country has to overcome. In the days gone by when PNM was in charge, they said they care about poor people and they then set up institutions, allocated hundreds of millions of dollars which went into the hands of people who did not need it.

I want to repeat what I am saying. The process that is in train why you have a committee looking at how to manage this \$400,000 is that this Government is in the business of allocating resources targeting it to the needy, not saying that we care and when the money is allocated, people who have the skills to mobilize the resources and use the institution of the society to carnalize money to themselves end up taking up the thing and the poor people get nothing.

3.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in that vein, I want to raise something to you to emphasize why it is important that the leader of the PNM, the Member for San Fernando East, and the Member for Diego Martin Central should understand why this Government must target its aid to those who need, because over all the years of PNM when they did not do that, when they told people “We care”, they left the people very often worse off than they were.

In 1965, Derek Walcott wrote a poem. I will read an excerpt from it. We are dealing with this question of the Member for Diego Martin Central coming here to laugh at the Government and to impugn the dignity of the motive of the Government and to say that we do not need to set up any committee to look at how we must target \$400,000 of expenditure for textbooks for needy students. I

want to make it clear that the country must understand why we have to do that. It is because the PNM has wasted billions of dollars telling people they care and left them often worse off than they were.

Derek Walcott wrote in 1965 a poem about Laventille:

*It huddled there...
tempered in violence...
hovels like a complex feud...
where the inheritors of the middle passage stewed,
five to a room, still clamped below their hatch,
breeding like felonies,
whose lives revolve round prison, graveyard, church.
This is the height of poverty
for the desperate and black;
born...from habitual wombs,
from lives fixed in the unalterable groove
of grinding poverty.”*

They met them like this in 1965. In 1999, one Christopher Grant wrote a calypso that is sung in one of the tents:

*“Most lives with sad tales are crowded,
Their days in dark clouds are shrouded..
Empty promises is all dat dey hear,
No running water from year to year,
Cupboard always bare and scanty,
Ten people in a one-bedroom shanty...
No employment;
Cyar tell firecracker from gunshot,
Blood does flow when things get hot,
Ah big pusher eyeing she daughter,
Son in jail for manslaughter,
She little girl child belly start to swell,
Dey say, “Llife is a cycle”...
Police buss a raid very often,
Simpson measuring ah coffin.
One night is sleep you sleeping,*

Finance Committee Report
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Friday, January 15, 1999

*Next night is wake dat you keeping...
Revolutions bait, politicians pawn,
And often their tragic story
Does bring ah journalist glory.
Almost every young girl expecting,
Social amenities lord, heaven knows
Opportunities, well dem always closed.
Children through life keep on drifting,
Is something they smoking or sniffing
Or maybe they trying to forget
This life of misery and regret;"*

Mr. Speaker, this is the problem with which this Government is trying to deal. We do not want another Calypsonian next five years to be singing the same thing that Walcott wrote about in 1965 that they came and met and did nothing about. They told the people, "We care", spent billions of dollars and "tief" it all over the place. One of them said, "All ah we tief, so what they complaining about?"

We want to be able to help the poor and the needy. This is why instead of laughing at the \$25 million that was allocated, they should join with this Government to find targeted solutions that would help those people who were badly led and promised things that were never delivered. That is the purpose of this Government. Not for them to come over there and every single project and programme that this Government raises to target its assistance to the poor and the needy, laugh about it. In laughing about it, they impugn the welfare of this country and send messages abroad that must necessarily feedback to our discredit. For example, the people who made us 43rd in terms of our competitiveness in the world league, then they append to that position they gave us that there is a growing understanding that corruption is a problem in Trinidad and Tobago. The Member for Diego Martin Central is saying it again today. Every Friday they are coming here to talk about corruption.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to repeat again that this debate is about the Variation of Appropriation, 1999 Bill, and the Member for Diego Martin Central is dragging in again this issue of corruption. I want to say for the benefit of the country that one cannot come into the Parliament and talk about corruption and

solve it. “Ole” talk is not the means to deal with corruption. I did quote from a book by Chinua Achebe, *What’s the Matter with Nigeria*. He writes:

To stop Nigerian politicians from stealing money is like preventing a goat from eating yam”

And Dilip Hero in a book about India today wrote that India is one of the most corrupt countries in the world.

I did say that whether it was India or Nigeria, it is culture and institutions; not genetics. It is not the innate evil of people that makes them corrupt. In the context of the statements about corruption about Trinidad and Tobago, what we need to appreciate is that we do not have institutions in this country that are nearly equal to the task of dealing with corruption. In fact, we have a culture that has nourished a sort of lackadaisical, laissez-faire attitude toward the issue.

What we should have been doing over all of these years was to be building institutions. Napoleon said:

“It is not men that determine the faith of nations. It is institutions that

So, we have to build. Men are powerless to secure the future. Institutions alone fix the destinies of nations. We never built the institutions. The PNM had 35 years of rule in this country and in those years, they failed to build the institutions and develop the kind of structure, the kind of legal environment. They failed to evolve the kind of culture that would leave us better able to deal with corruption. This is what this Government has to do. I am concerned about corruption as much as anybody on that side. Everybody in this country that is of right mind and has a sense of decency must be concerned about corruption, but one does not deal with it by talking about it. One deals with it by building institutions, passing laws, and by paying public servants.

Mr. Speaker, he is talking about corruption and to this day I have not heard from that side a sufficiency of understanding that if one does not pay public servants properly, the qualified, competent and morally guided managers would look for a job elsewhere. So, there is in one of the most important institutions of the state, decrepit of appropriate leadership, decrepit of an appropriate kind of culture, management and guidance, just because they would not pay them. That has to do with corruption.

Fighting corruption in Trinidad and Tobago has to do with paying the Permanent Secretary, the director, the lawyer, the judge and the diplomat. I did not

hear them talk about that. And the boys and the girls of Trinidad and Tobago listened and are still listening to hear these understandings coming from the Opposition, from the Member for Diego Martin Central. They came to talk about virement, and all they spoke about was the Minister of Education allowing the Minister of Finance to steal \$400,000 which they should have used to pay teachers.

On that point, I will say something else. On the question of education, paying teachers and dealing with post primary classes, this country needs to understand the great disaster that the PNM had prepared for them with respect to education. In 1960, Singapore was not better off than Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, people need to know that in 1854 Trinidad and Tobago was the first country that did the Cambridge overseas examination in the British empire at the time, and from 1854 until the time the PNM came, Trinidad students—whether they were named Eric Williams, Naipaul or Ellis Clarke—were at the top of the league. They did best. Our education system had respect until these people came and damaged and destroyed it, and that legacy is what we are seeing manifesting itself as rape and crime, and they still do not understand.

The question is not just that of taking \$400,000 and saying that the Minister of Finance should leave it for the Minister of Education. Reforming education and dealing with education has much more to do than that. It has to do with parenting. If we want the educational outcomes of Trinidad and Tobago to be better than they are today, we have to undo all the damage that the PNM had done with respect to using the education system not to promote excellence and meritocracy, but to politicize it and to thereby capture a vote bank.

Mr. Manning: Deal with appropriation!

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: I am talking about what he said! The Member does not understand. He is missing the point that one cannot reform the education system by preventing a virement of \$400,000 from the Ministry of Education.

Mr. Assam: We have to excuse him. He is a geologist.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am making a necessary and logical linkage that he is misleading the public to believe that this virement of a couple hundreds of thousands of dollars is going to cause so much mischief to our educational purposes and our future. Nothing could be further from the truth. What he should be focusing on is how to undo the delinquency, damage and the Mephistophilean stupidity that has worked through this country to our great disadvantage over these past years. That is what he should be doing.

It is my purpose to advise them that they are quibbling and twiddling their thumbs about trivia when the substantial and fundamental issues have to do with the delinquency of the PNM and the manifest evil of the decisions and policies with which the PNM has burdened this country. They would not deal with it.

Mr. Assam: That is right. I agree with that one million per cent. They have mismanaged and destroyed everything. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: I am on a committee where the Prime Minister has mandated the Minister of Education, Dr. Griffith, myself and others to deal with the primary education curriculum to make sure that we start from the foundations and go back to those benefits and verities, do those things we used to do in the colonial days and have stopped doing now, so that the future generations of children will benefit from what this Government is doing.

Mr. Speaker, he talks about the item “Vacant Posts”, \$65 million from public officers' pensions. Again, the Member for Diego Martin Central has lost a fantastic opportunity to take the moral high ground, to lead the debate on pension reform. They have left a problem for this country; I do not know how the Minister of Finance does not have sleepless nights sometimes when he thinks about it. They do not come here and talk about the fact that the present allocation and deployment of revenues to pension is a disaster that is incomprehensible to the mass of people, but which is a disaster that faces this country like the sword of Damocles. Instead of coming to talk about that, he is quibbling about \$65 million from public officers' pensions.

Does he understand that the issue is not the virement, but the issue he should have gone to town with is to talk about the Opposition's ambition, intention and programmes to deal with pension reform so we would not worry about viring \$65 million from pension, but pensioners, as they earn their livelihood from month to month, would be paying sums of money that will earn their pension later. That is what he should be talking about.

Mr. Assam: So they would not be a burden on the state.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Exactly! They are so bereft of understanding of the necessities and imperatives of the modern world that their politics are just like—and the same thing that happened to *Copei and Acción Democrática* in Venezuela will happen to them. They will go the way of the dinosaur. The only reason they have not yet gone there is that there is a distinctive tribal reflex that allowed them to sustain a community of needy people, mendicants believing like some cargo cult

that the very existence of the PNM must mean a promise of hope of a ten days. That is the problem!

They do not come here to talk about substantial issues. We must not vire money from judges' pensions. That is something wrong and evil, even if it means managing the country properly and assisting in getting us through a difficult time. "This is, in fact, a supplementary appropriation. It is not a virement". This is what he is saying. "We will see a continuing downturn in the finances of the country. We are not taking our functions seriously. Another 18 months from now and we are going to see the economy come to a crashing halt". Why say these things? To quote a former president, why is he being a prophet of doom and gloom? Why is he forcing the country only to focus on the worsening of our balance of trade?

3.30 p.m.

Why are you forcing the country not to understand that the modern understanding of economies and economic systems says that what a Government and a society should do is to try to prepare all the different agents and actors in the economy to adjust to change. One cannot plan! I wrote some time ago, about 15 years, advising my colleagues that Cantalovich, who won a Nobel Prize in 1985, I think it was, for his work in developing linear programming—there is another Russian, I cannot remember his name now, who also was a pioneer in that and I used them as examples. At the same time that they were winning Nobel Prizes, people were saying that Moscow is the mathematics capital of the world. I said that if indeed, planning an economy—and doing it well—was so efficacious, with their knowledge of mathematics and econometrics, the Russian economy should have been the best in the world.

There is a lesson in that which these people are not understanding. They are not understanding that what one needs to do at a time like this is to encourage the Government and the society to start to go at their wits end to understand what we have to do with school leavers, with people on the job now, to equip them to adjust to changing circumstances. That is the focus! That is the most profitable attitude to adopt to the changing scenario in the environment outside there, not to plan it better. Because one cannot plan it better. The information requirements, the probabilities, the random nature of the institutions and the business activities that go on there, all of these together mean that one has systems in Trinidad and Tobago and in the world at large that are beyond the capability of any Government to plan. So what one does is to prepare the country as a country and to prepare the people who live in the country to adjust to changing circumstances.

Instead of that, he comes here like a prophet of gloom and doom predicting disaster for Trinidad and Tobago 15 months from now. Only sending negative propaganda that must necessarily be used to our disadvantage. I want to warn the Member for Diego Martin Central and I want to advise the country that that is not the way a responsible Opposition should behave. A responsible Opposition should, at the same time that they are criticizing the Government's virement plans—as we have it in the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) 1998—use the opportunity to tell the country that because it understands how the Government should prepare this country to adjust to changing circumstances, it has a better moral authority to be the Government than Mr. Panday and his Cabinet. That is what they should be doing!

Instead of doing that, they are coming here to do everything possible to undermine the prospects of this country and to pretend that they have the understanding and the knowledge to control all the variables and to manage the situation that has to do with Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, Wall Street, and the Brazilian Stock Market, that they know how to control it so that one does not have any feedback effects in Trinidad. Nothing could be further from the truth! These people are just mischievous, mephistophelean and malicious. Mephistopheles is the character in Goethe's *Faust* that Faust made a bargain with. Faust wanted a moment where he would understand everything, he would understand the vision of the future, and he would make a bargain with Mephistopheles, "Just let me do that and I would do anything you want". Mephistopheles is, in fact, the devil, he made a mephistophelean bargain.

What I am saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by not using the opportunities that we have in this Parliament to deal with the downturn and the fact that in Japan, Korea, Singapore, Brazil, Malaya, Russian, there were stock markets that, while, the economy of the world was opening up and they were talking about globalizing, there were a set of archaic business practices that did not conform in terms of the information requirements and the way information flowed through the system, it was not adequate. So that, these short-term flows of capital, in a scenario where one had these Chinese cabals of criminals, the Xibatsu, the Chaibal and all kinds of criminal conspiracies, using banks to benefit themselves, the people who were investing in these short term funds did not know these things. So when information eventually had come out, it created a panic all over the place and people lost millions and billions.

What the Member from Diego Martin Central should be doing is coming into the Parliament and explaining how the PNM understands these things so well that

Finance Committee Report
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Friday, January 15, 1999

they would put the control mechanisms in place, they will create the institutions, facilitate the legal structure, so that we do not have to do that. Instead of that, they come in here and all they are doing is terrorizing people that 18 months from now we are going to have a recession, massive unemployment and the economy is going to crash.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would have thought that when I stood up here this afternoon I would have had an opportunity to deal with the matters of substance with respect to the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) Bill, 1999. Instead of that, the Member for Diego Martin Central got up here and used the opportunity purely to play politics, purely to deal with the issue of the Minister of Finance, to say that—[*Words Expunged*] [*Laughter*] To say that the Minister of Finance is pulling the wool—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, order. A statement such as that, Member for Tobago East, although said in the third person, should not be repeated here like that. So I will have that part expunged from the record.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I cannot remember the identical words—[*Uproarious laughter*]—but he did say, and I am sure the *Hansard* has it, that the Minister of Finance is always—[*Words Expunged*]

Mr. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, all I said is that the Minister of Finance is very clever.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Once again, things should not be reported in the third person. One should not report those types of negative expressions in the third person. Expunge that part from the record.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sure that I sat here and heard statements made, when he was referring to the fact that the Minister will never read the next budget. I remember him saying all that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Tobago East, this is for the House. I think you should look at Standing Order 36(10) when you get a chance. You should not refer to Ministers, Members of Government, House of Representatives, Senate, *et cetera* in different mannerisms and expressions such as you have been using. So I would advise the Member for Tobago East to just continue with his contribution.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance is a Member of the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago and there are ways that one can deal with malfeasance of any member of the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago. Of course, the Prime Minister's pleasure explains who should be Minister of Finance

and for how long. I feel that I must take umbrage at anybody presuming that I am so silly, that I would sit in Cabinet and let them pull wool over my eyes.
[Interruption]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, the PNM is using, and they are provoking me to remind them—I do not want to get into that. But they are provoking me to remind this country of the way they have used the media and Parliament to mislead this country about statements that I have made. Mr. Speaker, for the record, and for the benefit of the Member for San Fernando East, I was responding to a reporter's question when I said that, "In the Cabinet, I can controvert the Prime Minister, I can argue with him, I can say I do not think there is any substance to what you are saying in the Cabinet room. When I walk out the door of the Cabinet room, I have as much freedom as the Prime Minister's puppy dog to controvert anything that he lawfully says or does." Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is what I said. Shall we go on.

Members of the Opposition: You did not say that.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is what I said. The Member for San Fernando East and his friends in the media keep on saying that I have said that I am the Prime Minister's puppy dog. I never said anything like that.
[Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members of the Opposition, was any Member there when he was saying that? I am asking. Because the Member for Tobago East is saying what he said, but you all are saying he was not there. Please let the Member for Tobago East say what he is saying, and if you all have verified facts or were there at the time, you all can mention it and one can stand and say that.

Mr. Valley: If the Member would give way. I do not know whether he said that or not, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to ask him: Why was he not at the Human Resource Seminar? *[Laughter]* Could he tell us why he was absent from the Human Resource Seminar at which he was mandated to be?

Mr. Manning: As a good puppy dog, he should have been there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Diego Martin Central, while a Member is on his feet, you could rise on a point of order or a point of clarification and the Member will give way. On a point of clarification—*[Crosstalk]* Order! This is for the benefit of all the Members of the House. *[Crosstalk]* Order! The sitting is suspended for 10 minutes.

3.42 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

3.55 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, while a Member is on his feet you can stand on a point of order or a point of clarification. A point of clarification means, as the Member for Diego Martin Central was saying, that you are asking the Member on his feet to clarify something he has just said, and no new matter should be introduced.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. After many distractions that have led me astray, I come back to my substantial theme.

This Bill has to do with re-allocation of moneys from heads and subheads, to enable the more efficient management and running of the economy. For example, the Judiciary was allocated another increase of some \$1.15 million. We did not hear much discussion about the particulars, except when they wanted to laugh at it and when the Member talked about the \$113 million taken from the Ministry of Education.

Indeed, a responsible Opposition ought to enquire if a sufficiency of funds were allocated to the Judiciary to enable it to maintain a climate of law and order, without which we cannot have any security of person or property, accumulation of wealth or have economic development. It is not true to say that this Government in the three years that it has been here—even if I was not here for all of that time—has not made great strides in securing the confidence of the population with respect to certain kinds of criminal activities. In order to manage them properly for the public benefit, these need the kind of personnel and quality human resources equal to the task of dealing with internationally competent criminals.

I am talking about people who have billions of dollars available to them. They control economies in terms of their asset base. One criminal conspiracy might be owning and controlling assets that are many times the budget that we are discussing here today. The fact that we re-allocated some funds for this particular purpose and the Member for Diego Martin Central said that we are fudging and engaging in creative accounting to manufacture certain things, we have to get more serious than that. We have to understand that we have a responsible purpose in this Parliament which is to lead the minds of those who are not as endowed as we are, by circumstance, our history or past very often our good fortune. We have to help them and lead them to understanding, rather than prejudice and that kind of emotive Bantustan from where they can only snarl, fight and mash up and break down, because they think that they have nothing to lose.

All that is what we are talking about today. When the Member for Diego Martin Central was regaling the House about \$113.9 million that he is alleging should have been available to fill vacant posts and to increase the staff, he said that we needed to upgrade teachers and that so much money, \$113.9 million, have been commandeered by the Minister of Finance, thus putting the children at great risk. He asked, "Why not use that \$113.9 million to improve the school security?"

Just a moment ago I forced the mind onto the question of the importance of quality people, human capital, the management of an economy and society. That principle applies to the education system, and I have absolutely no doubt that the Cabinet of which I have the honour to be a member, is cognizant of the fact that it is their purpose to ensure that we have quality teachers, and that the teachers are well rewarded, so that, indeed, the country gets the kind of training, moral foundation and ideas it did not get in the past from the PNM administration, which is manifesting itself in all kinds of decadence, deviant behaviour and what I like to call social entropy. *[Interruption]* That means an increase in disorder. You are a geologist, you must have done some physics to understand that. *[Laughter]*

With respect to this \$113.9 million, I am putting it to this honourable House that the Member for Diego Martin Central missed his focus. He missed the point completely, and used this virement and this sum of money to focus the mind on what I think is an insubstantial issue, and the more fundamental issue, he missed completely. I want to link that to his question, when he asked, "What about the Orinoco/Apure Project, Piarco Airport Project and all those initiatives which we had started to carry this country into the next century?" "We" meaning the PNM administration.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of this country and this honourable House, I would say for the umpteenth time: it is ideas that are important. It is not buildings, it is not an airport or a road that is important in the history of our affairs. It is the ideas that we bring to bear on the ordering and management of the society. What this Government is trying to do is continue—

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

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Mr. Speaker, I have a funny suspicion, based on the statements made by the Member for Diego Martin Central, that he has an exaggerated faith in the building of projects and things, to develop a country. This is why he is forcing his mind onto this airport project, this Orinoco/Apure project, these kinds of initiatives. This country has to unburden itself from many shibboleths and insubstantial ideas that have caused us to be at this sorry path.

We have had billions of dollars during the oil boom years, and we constructed buildings, the Hall of Justice and the Twin Tower. We built many places. We built housing estates with no toilet facilities, now what are they doing? They are making a mess of the Gulf and giving people cholera and all kinds of enteric diseases. We did all that because we did not understand that it is ideas, culture and institutions that explain the Roman Empire, that it lasted for 1,000 years, the centurion age.

It is ideas that explain Athens in the 15th Century, and how a set of people from an island called England left a resourceful island and went all over the world. When I was at school all over the map was red. The sun never set on the British Empire. It is ideas that explain Japan today. It is ideas that explain why Germany after losing two world wars has come back after all that, and is now dominating European continental economy and policy.

It is not buildings. It is not the airport project that would save Trinidad and Tobago or the Orinoco/Apure project. The Member for Diego Martin Central is off target. He needs to be focusing on the culture, the set of ideas that allowed us to get into a kind of dependency syndrome, a cargo-cult mentality, where, when in 1986 the government tried to tell people that they needed to tighten their belts and that it needed to cut salaries, they almost unanimously wanted Abu Bakr to kill him; right in this Parliament. We have the consequence of that kind of attitude and set of ideas.

There was a woman who went on television and told the nation that her son had to kill a cousin of mine, Michael Hercules, because she did not get a ten days; that kind of idea and culture. That woman did not speak for herself, she spoke for thousands who believed like her that if they did not get a ten days their children should kill and rob people. There are people in this country who have been given a kind of legitimacy to behave deviantly and evil because they had the idea that the culture—what they used to tell them: poverty caused crime.

Poverty never caused any crime in this world, 10,000 years ago not now. If it was so all the people in Haiti would be criminals and most of the 200 million in sub-Saharan Africa would have been criminals or I would have been a criminal,

because I grew up poor. Thus, we need to understand, that it is ideas, not the Orinoco/Apure project, the Piarco project, buildings, spending money on URP or on DEWD.

Errol Mahabir who was a Cabinet member of the PNM did a report in 1979 on the PNM special works. He said:

"The programme resulted in the proliferation of corrupt practices, abuse and waste of public funds. In 1985, the PNM set up a committee—"

That was the year before they demitted office in 1986.

"The committee said that DEWD is a breeding ground for illegal activities."

The *Express* of May 19, 1995 states:

"Some PNM Unemployment Relief Programme recruiters were known to have murdered several persons and were now free only because the witnesses were dead, killed."

That is the problem we have with these PNM people. They do not understand the importance of ideas and culture in development, so they focus on these buildings, projects and big things; spend the money, and a lot of the money is siphoned off in corruption. That is the culture.

As I said, not a single PNM member was ever disgraced for corruption. They come here Friday after Friday, Wednesday too, to talk about corruption. They never did one single thing, built one institution or passed one law to deal with it.

When the Member for Diego Martin Central comes into this House and talks about these projects, Orinoco/Apure, we have a Bill here. We are talking virements and variations of appropriation, and he talks about the Orinoco/Apure project, and the airport project, not understanding that development is about culture and ideas. I need to speak to him for his benefit.

The kind of outcomes and difficulties we have in this country, any Prime Minister—Mr. Panday, Mr. Manning or whatever the name is—must deal with the consequences of the past in terms of what I like to call ethnic specialization, intergenerational transfer of ideas of skills. Wherever you go in the world, it is not true now, or was it ever true, at any point in time, that in any society that was heterogeneous in terms of its ethnic composition, that there was an equality of distribution of skills, whether you were in the Roman Empire or Athens in Sixth Century BC, Nigeria today or the United States of America.

This is why Achiba in writing—I read all his books—spoke about the Ebu and Yoruba people, different groups, and they had different types of skills. They call the Ebus the black Jews of Africa. What do you do? Arthur Lewis mentioned it. I mentioned it in my book, I lived in Africa for five years. I used to be in Kenya. The Pikus in Kenya compete with the Asians and the Indian immigrants from Kenya in business. But the Uras, the Kalenges and all these people behave just like some of these people who play mas here that some say they have a carnival mentality.

He has to deal with all that. He does not deal with that in the context of Trinidad and Tobago. A responsible Government has to respond with deftness and subtlety to all these kinds of needs. You do not have general solutions to apply to everybody, you deal with the particularities, and you go sensitively to understand that you have to change that set of ideas, attitude, culture and ethnic specificity that sometimes is subversive of your competitive ability in a modernized economy.

They spent 40 years in Parliament and never dealt with it. They gave people money at the end of 40 years, the same people on the pavement now with not a better idea, and they cannot learn. They do not understand that the problem is not building buildings, but it is how you deal with the idea and with culture, how a sensitive and responsible government must change attitudes, that dependency syndrome, the culture of the cargo cult where you believe that you must put somebody from the other side to become prime minister, so that we would get DEWD again. We are going to get a gravy train again. It would not and cannot work.

One of the most dangerous things that could happen to this country now is for the PNM to come back into power, because what they would do is to satisfy those vain, vapid and insubstantial yearnings that must lead to a greater disaster in time to come. They are not about focusing the people's minds on ideas and responsible behaviour, but about telling them about Orinoco/Apure project, Piarco, and that they are going to take \$113.9 million and instead of viring it, we could hire some more teachers.

4.10 p.m.

In hiring those teachers, they have not dealt with the problem of the primary school level. They have not dealt with the problem that in County St. Patrick, every child can get a secondary school place. As I speak here now, Mr. Speaker, for every child who is 11-plus in St. Patrick, there is a secondary school place. Is that not so, Minister of Education? But what is the reality? If one goes to County St. Patrick, after one year, about 15 or 20 per cent of the children who went in for

the first year have dropped out because they were not ready to go there. After two years, another 20 per cent have dropped out because they should never have been in Standard 5. That is the PNM programme. They take people from ABC to Form V and they do not know how to read their names and they write it as big as the Twin Towers. That is what they should talk about, not about \$113 million which they say the Minister of Finance is taking with which he could have hired more teachers, but he is taking it to give to somebody else. They are not dealing with substance.

That is the business of an Opposition, to explain to the people why their ideas leave them morally capable; leave them with a greater sense of responsibility and respect in the minds of the voters; so that next time around they will get their votes. The way they are behaving, as long as I am here, I will keep telling people every Wednesday and every Friday, that they are missing the point and they will be just as the *Copei Acción Democrática* in Venezuela, people who have embarrassed their country.

I hope the press understands what I am saying and that they do not put a big broad headline in red that Morgan Job says Venezuelans are disastrous and horrible people. I never said that.

Hon. Member: But you said it already. [*Laughter*]

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: I never said that. As a matter of fact, I have lived in Venezuela; I know Venezuela pretty well. I have lived in Latin America for more than a year of my life; in different countries—Peru, Colombia, Brazil, Venezuela; I have worked in some of these areas and I speak from a matter of knowledge that in explication Nigeria, Venezuela and many of these countries that have been the inheritance of billions of dollars in oilwells, the leadership—the traditional

They are a scandal. That is the point I am making. The reason why Chavez is now President is that the voter, the small man, the illiterates, the fellow who lives in the favelas and the shanties—*los banos bajos*, they call them—those people have lost faith in the traditional political parties because they are a scandal, they have embarrassed the country.

Mr. Assam: Like the PNM.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Exactly. This is why I speak about their attitude in this House where we are talking about variation, but they spend the entire time saying the Minister of Finance is a creative accountant, he is fudging, or whatever word he used, carrying on like that. This thing about \$113 million and that more teachers

Finance Committee Report
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Friday, January 15, 1999

should be paid; they are not dealing with the substantial reasons why the outcomes we observed in this country are what they are, not a word about that.

My business is to go through the statement of the Member for Diego Martin Central to explain that he missed the point. He was not dealing with the Bill and, in fact, he used the opportunity to reinforce negative ideas, to reinforce ignorance, to reinforce a kind of culture. That is the reason why we have so many problems in this country. I have to go over these things with diligence, with anger and with a bit of impatience, because the people over there try to distract me; they try to say all kinds of things to say that Job said what Job never did say.

I want to remind this honourable House that it is the purpose of the PNM to misrepresent my statements deliberately in order to better lead the minds of the people whom I am trying to emancipate from ignorance, in order to better imprison them in that emotive world, in order to fetter them like Walcott said. What did Walcott say? Let us hear just what Walcott said, again, because he has a nice phrase.

*“It huddled there...
tempered in violence...
hovels like a complex feud...
where the inheritors of the middle passage stewed,
five to a room, still clamped below their hatch,
breeding like felonies,
whose lives revolve round prison, graveyard, church.
This is the height of poverty
for the desperate and black;
born...from habitual wombs,
from lives fixed in the unalterable groove
of grinding poverty.”*

That is the vote bank that the PNM has captured since 1956 and manufactured, used, abused, nourished, nurtured and fertilized to create that kind of Hutu hubris, that kind of false pride thing that gobbles. Like I said, the truth is that the PNM has been using Morgan Job to fool the people of Laventille. Now, they are using this Parliament to blind the so-called black people from the most destructive abuse of cultivated ignorance and weakness. The poor has been cynically exploited by a clique of fascist conmen hiding behind the banner of PNM.

Every time the Member for Diego Martin East speaks, I am reminded of Geobbels, Adolph Hitler's Minister of Propaganda; every time the Member for San Fernando East, the PNM leader, speaks, I am reminded of Adolph Hitler; I am reminded of Stalin's statist governance every time I hear the PNM say, "We care"; Papa Doc, Idi Amin, Stanley Abacha. They come to mind every time the PNM seeks to manipulate the ignorance, the illiteracy and the weakness of the so-called black people. That is why Walcott said, "are still cramped below their hatch". That is the problem. They are not leading people to understand that the policies of this Government have nothing to do with creating dependency; they have to do with modernizing the ideas and modernizing the economy and getting people to adjust to the new world in which we must all live.

It is not my fault, or the fault of the Minister of Finance, or the Prime Minister's fault that we have a world of open markets; we have a world of growing stock markets; we have a world of short-term cash flows; we have a world, where overnight, people are using billions of dollars. That is the world we have to get people to adjust to live in; not the world of DEWD, not the world of 10-days. That is the world we have to live in and we have to come here and talk about that, not about paying \$113 million to hire more teachers when they have not been talking about the primary school system and the fact that many children, when they leave primary school to go to secondary school, should not have left primary school at all.

In my days, when the white man was here, when the Governor was here under the colonial period, no one left ABC—First Year—until he or she was ready. The law said we could have stayed in school until 14 years old and there is where children stayed—they stayed in the First Year class. These people came and changed all that and they sent people through like a toilet, from First Year right up and flushed them out at the end of it. I saw somewhere where somebody—B. C. Pires or somebody—mentioned that whole classes graduate; every year they graduate with big long gowns, big fete and things. They cannot write and if they do write, it is as big as the Twin Towers. That is their programme.

We have to change all that. That is what we are coming here to talk about, not the foolishness about using \$113 million to increase teachers' salaries. That is a very myopic, very narrow-minded, very chauvinistic, particularistic and emotive way to deal with an important issue—very trivial. They have to be more responsible. They are coming here to do the people's business. *[Interruption]* They must say it is crap because nobody beside me will tell them what I am saying

Finance Committee Report
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Friday, January 15, 1999

now. They never heard it here before; they will hear it as long as I am here. We will deal with matters of substance as long as Morgan Job is here.

Mr. Valley: Your job is to get you out of here as quickly as possible.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Listen. What I am trying to do is to emancipate the public from the prison of emotion in which they have been trapped for 40 years by the PNM. We have to get people to a different level of cognition; we have to deal with ideas. That is the problem. They have succeeded, with the help of the media, to say that I do not like black people and I do not like this one and that one, because they do not want anybody to reach that level of cognition where they can dispassionately deal with a proposition. This is the proposition; deal with it. They do not want that, so they want to come here and talk of substantial things like the Orinoco/Apure project. Who knows where is Apure? Do they know where is Apure? Where is Apure? Orinoco/Apure project—what is it? Some thing, some fantastic thing. Orinoco—it is a big river so the project has to be a big project. Where is Apure? [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: I took him there in 1994.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: No, Mr. Speaker. We have to deal with the substantial matters here. We are viring money; we are moving it from one subhead to another. They must come here and say, “Look, the Attorney General is getting \$1.5 million. How is that making his department more efficient? How is it making it more effective? How is it doing the public business?” Talk about that. If he needs \$2 million, they must say as responsible Opposition Members, “Mr. Speaker, I really believe the Attorney General should get \$3 million instead of \$1.5 million because what he has to do demands that.” They do not come here and mention that; they do not talk about it; they are just there trivializing important issues.

Mr. Speaker, this question of \$25 million for unemployed single mothers. That is one of the most important issues ever to have been raised in this Parliament if we understand fully what is going on in this country. Instead, what has he done? He comes and grins, skins and laughs and says, “You promised \$25 million”. Now, to do something like that, it takes a great deal of diligence and careful thought to make sure it does not end up in another scandal, to make sure that it is targeted to all those little teenaged girls who, through no fault of their own—sometimes they have been impressed and forcibly coerced into pregnancy and motherhood against their will. This thing is going on all over the country. It is the duty of a responsible Government to deal with that. This is what we are trying to do. Do not come here

and trivially dismiss it. “You promised them \$25 million and you did not give them \$25 million.” Things are not just done like that.

Any responsible ruling government has to come to the people and say, “Look, I hurt with you; I see your wounds; I feel your pain; I understand your need”, but in order to be responsible in spending the taxpayers’ money, we have to go through this thing carefully. So, we have made a step; we have made a start; we have allocated \$25 million, but we have to put the Minister of Social Development and we have to put the Minister of Women’s Affairs.

I have written the Tobago House of Assembly to develop projects. I just spoke with them two days ago—I was in Tobago—about what they are doing about this very project. To now come here to hear this kind of litany of irrelevance from the Member because I want the Assembly to send to me their proposals so I can take them to Cabinet to allocate some of that money so that we can do some of those things in Tobago. It is one of the most profound and revolutionary ideas, Mr. Speaker, if you understand the consequence to this country in terms of social deviance, in terms of what I call social entity, that kind of decay of institutions of the family that seeps back into crime, into schools and into business.

Because, nobody on the PNM side has seen it fit over the years to do what this Government is attempting to do. What do they come here to do? They come to trivialize and to laugh. That is their kind of leadership. Make a big joke when Lee Kuan Yew said, “You all have Carnival mentality”; they cuss Lee Kuan Yew. Lee Kuan Yew is running a country now—I think the per capita in Singapore is about in the top five in the world or something like that. Everybody in Singapore has a computer. In 1960, Singapore was a place with—I used a word that I would not use again, but they call these people the “C” word.

Mr. Assam: Over 90 per cent have their own house.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: You understand. They are not like that now because they had a kind of responsible leadership that was the antithesis of what these people represent and what they have represented for 40 years, a mischievous cabal of neo-fascists conmen, deceitfully leading people by manufacturing their wounds and their grievances, their pain and their illiteracy, so that they would stay in power. That is what it is all about—the fossils we now have. Do you understand what I mean, Mr. Speaker?

Abacha, Idi Amin, Papa Doc—all of them; symptomatic, symbolic, representative. That is the kind of culture they have. They are not about liberating people. They are not about educating people. Can you imagine if there were

50,000 Morgan Jobs in Trinidad and Tobago; they would not get a vote. [Laughter] Nobody would vote for them. They would not dare campaign anywhere in this country if there were 50,000 Morgan Jobs here. They can survive because there is this widespread illiteracy, dependence, ignorance, grievance, hurt and weakness. That is what they depend on; that is why they never wanted me to come in here.

Mr. Assam: And the Member for Diego Martin East features in it.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Every day, I say: He is Goebbels. Do you know who Goebbels was? Goebbels was the Minister of Propaganda of Adolph Hitler; he was the fellow who said if you tell a lie often enough, people would believe it was true.

Mr. Assam: The big lie.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: So every day they come here and say the Minister of Finance has—what is it? The painter?

Mr. Assam: Cazabon.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Yes. The Minister of Finance has a Cazabon; next week, they come again, “The Minister of Finance has a Cazabon”; the next week, they say it twice in their speech. That is Goebbels. Every week come and say that—Goebbels—that is it all the time. Nothing substantial—corruption, corruption, corruption.

Mr. D. Singh: Nothing! Nothing!

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Nothing. Just to lead people by emotion. There is nothing substantial in the statement on which we can have a discussion because all the issues inside here which should have been dealt with, were not dealt with. The real seam of his presentation was to say that we really need a new bill and this is not about virement; this was a new supplementary appropriation bill; that he was going to write somebody to ask questions about that because this was not about virement, it was about appropriation.

So that we have a Bill here; we have the majority; we are asking that they consider this Bill so that when we reach the point of voting, they would have made contributions, edified the public, made a contribution to the understanding of what is really going on. That was not done and they make my life so difficult because I want to know what they spoke about that made sense. [Laughter]

Mr. Valley: Even I know what you mean.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: No. There is nothing on which to have a discussion. Nothing. No idea which is germane to the issues here.

4.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in summarizing I want to go back to some of the main themes which I feel the Member for Diego Martin Central ought to have dealt with. I want to go to education. One of the issues in this country and indeed Tobago—particularly the Government, of which I have the honour to be a part, two Cabinet meetings ago, made a decision to set up a training facility in Tobago so that you can rapidly train some of these people who are now out of high school so that they can learn how to be carpenters, masons, electricians. We need to be doing that, but much more importantly—and I hope the Member for Diego Martin Central is listening—one of the cultural problems that we have which is a legacy of the PNM, is that people do not understand what the word “work” means.

They do not understand they must go to work at 8.00 a.m. and have a lunch break or a coffee break at 10.00 a.m. or 11.00 a.m. for 10 minutes and in 10 minutes, finish and go back to work. People do not understand these things. These people took 40 years to train this country into laziness, a culture of subversion of productivity. They do not understand it. So we are not only talking about thesis here, but about dealing with the whole educational process from cradle. That is where it starts. You cannot go to school and expect that a child comes from home with a burden and a baggage, which the PNM has inculcated, to function properly.

Mr. Speaker, you would not believe this. A lady came into my office this morning to say that she is going to develop a project and she wants me to give it my blessing, and hear what her project is. She said that for most of the day schools in this country, a significant proportion of the teachers are not at school so the children are left alone and her project is to assist children to manage themselves when the teachers are not there. I was scandalized because this is a teacher who is not understanding that the real problem is how to fire the teachers and get them in the school which is paying them. That is the PNM culture. I am almost sure that woman is a voter of the PNM because that is their attitude, they do not deal with the problem. So her project to solve the problem of those children who are left unattended, to make something for them to read when the teacher is not there. Do you understand what we have to deal with?

I am saying that the Member for Diego Martin Central’s contribution has been defective because he tries to deal with ideas, he tries to deal with issues but he deals with them in a very tangential, insufficient and shallow way. He does not deal

Finance Committee Report
[DR. THE HON. M. JOB]

Friday, January 15, 1999

with the substance of the problem. He is talking about education, but he misses the whole substance of what education is all about. Education is about what your mother told you. Education is about what your father told you before you went to school so that helped to guide you in terms of how you respond in the classroom.

Anybody who is a success, Eric Williams, Ellis Clarke, Morgan Job, the Speaker, whoever. *[Laughter]* Whoever are successes are the beneficiaries of that educational process that started from home. Whether you live with a parent, a guardian, uncle or aunt. Whoever you interacted with before you went to school helps to explain all these people like Job, Ellis Clarke, Eric Williams, all of us and he must deal with that. He wants to use the \$113 million to pay some particular set and would not understand. That is not the issue about education here, that is a minor part of the entire problem.

Mr. Speaker, I see that I have run out of time and I want to substantially say that the Member for Diego Martin Central failed to address the substance of this Bill and I think that his contribution was very insubstantial in terms of dealing with the ideas and issues that we attempted because of his lack of understanding to deal with it.

I support the Bill and thank you for the opportunity given to me.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5. 03 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin East*): Mr. Speaker, listening to the tedious diatribe of the Member for Tobago East has confirmed my opinion that mediocrity is rampant on the other side. *[Desk thumping]* How else would the Member for Tobago East be considered as an important speaker to respond to the serious matters raised by the Member for Diego Martin Central? This is one of the tragedies of the UNC Administration: the celebration of mediocrity that this Government has brought to Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me spend a little time looking at some of the statements made by that particular Member before I go into the substance of the matter. I have heard the view before that Members of the Opposition should not criticize the Government. Members of the Opposition should be loyal to the Government. We should not make any noise about anything. If corruption is rampant in the country, we should not talk about it, criticize or say anything.

As a matter of fact, the specific comment made by the Member for Tobago East is that PNM Members keep talking about corruption, but corruption will not

be stopped by Members of Parliament speaking in this House, so we should just stop speaking. He used as an example: “Trying to stop Nigerian politicians from engaging in corruption is like trying to stop a goat from eating yam”. Imagine that!

Sometime before, the Member for Tobago East told this honourable House that one of the most corrupt countries in the world is India, and he even produced a textbook in defence of this theory and quoted to prove to this Parliament his thesis that the two most corrupt countries in the world—political systems, governments and so forth—are the countries and Governments of India and Nigeria.

Mr. Assam: He never said so!

Mr. C. Imbert: Of course he did. It was only when he was waving this book to prove his point that India is the most corrupt country in the world that his Members told him to shut up and he came off that track. Today we heard that Venezuela is a disgrace, and it was only when it was pointed out to him the foolishness of what was very definitive. He said, “Venezuela is a disgrace. India is one of the most corrupt countries in the world”. He said, “Trying to stop Nigerian politicians from engaging in corruption is like trying to stop a goat from eating yam”. This was all in the context of accountability for the public purse, because we on this side, according to that hon. Member for Tobago East, if we see corruption staring us in the face, must say nothing.

I have induced that what he is trying to say is, “Trying to stop a UNC supporter from engaging in corruption is like trying to stop a goat from eating rice”. [*Desk thumping*] It cannot be done. By politicians coming into this House and highlighting corrupt activities of the Government, what he was implying was that we were just talking, they would ignore us, and the corruption would continue in Trinidad and Tobago.

The particular Minister has a problem with his mouth. He said that most Hindus in this country—he did not say some, he said most—are ignorant, illiterate and “dotish”. Then he went on to say that most members of the Cabinet are illiterate and cannot speak English. As a matter of fact, he said only the Prime Minister and the Member for Siparia have a command of the English language, and maybe one or two others—he does not know who they are—but the rest of them are illiterate and cannot speak English. He is in their Cabinet, Mr. Speaker!

This particular Member was trying to make an argument that when we speak in this Parliament or elsewhere, we send messages abroad that come back to our discredit. Is it to the credit of Trinidad and Tobago for a Member of the Cabinet of

Finance Committee Report
[MR. IMBERT]

Friday, January 15, 1999

Trinidad and Tobago to say that the majority of Cabinet members are illiterate and cannot speak English, and that most Hindus and Indian people in this country are illiterate and ignorant, Venezuela is a disgrace; India is one of the most corrupt countries in the world, the other one being Nigeria.

We are already seeing e-mail published in the daily newspapers coming back to the discredit of the Government condemning the Member for Tobago East for his ridiculous, racist and violent statements against groups in this country. So, if there is any person who is guilty of making statements that go abroad and come back to our discredit, it is the Member for Tobago East. [*Desk thumping*]

We are not going to stop talking about corruption. That is what they want us to do. They want us to stop so the corruption will flourish. That is what they want. The Member for St. Augustine wants us to stop talking about corruption. That is what he wants. The Member for Tobago East wants that too. When old people—65 years old—hear this "commesse" that they will get \$100 extra for their old-age pension, we are in January and they have not got it yet. We are in the second quarter of the financial year and they cannot pay poor, old people \$100 per month, but they could spend \$35 million on Whitehall.

Mr. Speaker, we have come here to talk about closing the accounts for 1998 and we are seeing how they moved \$113 million allocated for employing teachers and put it somewhere. They moved it out but they could not move the money to pay the pensioners \$100 for Christmas. They could take \$113 million and put in some funny place, they give \$120 million to their friends and supporters, but they cannot give pensioners \$100 per month.

I am hearing the Member for St. Joseph bleating. I have never seen anything like this in my life. Imagine they are taking \$82 million of old people's pension money; money for the school feeding programme; cutting legitimate contractors' school feeding contracts all over the country and giving it to their friends. That is happening in my constituency. As a matter of fact, a lady came to see me yesterday. She has been involved in the School Nutrition Company that runs that programme, she spent \$100,000 expanding her kitchen. In 1995, she was supplying 1,000 meals, but in 1998, she supplied 400 meals. That is what is going on in this country, and some UNC supporter is now supplying the other 600 meals.

Instead of taking money to feed the children in our schools, to give old age pensioners the money they are supposed to get since last year, to deal with the shortage of medication in the hospitals, the Member for St. Joseph is presiding

over the squandermania that will take place later this year—\$82 million for the Miss Universe pageant. Over US \$13 million!

Mr. D. Singh: What about the economic return?

Mr. C. Imbert: Economic return? It is a slush fund when one goes there and sees what is going on. They are spending \$11 million in advertising and public relations. Anyway, we will talk about that another day.

5.15 p.m.

I cannot believe it. The Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago approved that! An \$82 million budget for the Miss Universe pageant. I hear the Member saying he will respond. Respond and say what? Respond and say that you are paying somebody \$100,000 a month! That is what you will respond and say? Out of taxpayers' money!

Mr. Valley: I thought it was supposed to be the private sector doing that?

Mr. C. Imbert: No, the Cabinet has approved an allocation of US \$13 million. You think it is easy with them? Mr. Speaker, I have to raise these issues. I must raise these issues.

One of the matters that we are being asked to approve today is the closing of the accounts for the police station contract that was won by friends of the Minister of Finance. We are being asked to approve the closing of the accounts for that police headquarters project and the construction of police stations, \$120, 965,000. You know, it is amazing how people can just go from administration to administration, through government after government and get away with their racketeering.

I remember distinctly, in 1995, we were asked as a Cabinet to approve the construction of two police stations as part of this police administration contract. When we analyzed the bids, the company involved was asking for a construction cost per square foot in excess of \$500. In the same week that this company came to us and asked us to approve the construction of two police stations at a cost of more than \$500 a square foot, we received bids on the Ministry of Works headquarters building. The winning tender was \$248 a square foot.

So, we are looking at this thing, an eight-storey building with air conditioning, \$248—250 a square foot; a single or two-storey structure with no air conditioning, louvre windows and terrazzo on the floor, \$550 a square foot. So we pointed out to the contractor that he was ripping off the country, that he was charging almost three times what he should be charging. But of course you get these ridiculous

Finance Committee Report
[MR. IMBERT]

Friday, January 15, 1999

responses that our figures are incorrect and that one should pay this money and so forth, but the Cabinet stood firm and we deleted those two projects from the contract.

It is very interesting to see with the airport fiasco that some of the same persons are coming through again and governments do not know what happened. They get advice from technical advisors, but it is not just politicians who have the ability to be corrupt, they have to be assisted by others. And it is interesting to look at the personalities, the individuals who tried to rip off the country in 1995, and who advised the government to spend over \$500 a square foot on a little block building without air-conditioning and terrazzo floor. It is the same personalities who are advising this Government that the contract that has been awarded to Northern Construction at \$2,000 or \$3,000 a square foot or whatever it is, is in keeping with market rates and prices in Trinidad and Tobago. Interesting.

I have been looking at the names and the persons giving the advice, it is the same people who tried to hoodwink us, who tried to make us pay \$500 a square foot for a galvanized roof and louvre windows, who have hoodwinked this Administration, aided and abetted by hidden agents into agreeing to give a contract to Northern Construction at about twice the going rate. All it takes is some advisor to say the price is good and then someone else to submit a Cabinet Note and to say, look, it is based on the technical advice.

Mr. D. Singh: Like you know.

Mr. C. Imbert: Of course I know. Because people like the Minister of Finance used to bring Cabinet notes which we had to debunk because the information was bogus. I know that the Members on the other side cannot say anything, they are members of a Cabinet, they have collective responsibility, but I hope those who have a conscience are listening. Because what is happening in this country today is a web of intrigue, a tissue of interlocking interests and they corrupt the system from the bottom up.

So that when a Cabinet sits to make a decision on a matter, they do not understand that the information they are getting is corrupt. There were certain members of our Cabinet who left who used to do that kind of thing. So anyway, I am just telling you all be very careful. People manipulate the system and, as members of a Cabinet, you do not even know what is going on.

I remember when the claim came in on the maximum security prison, we got a claim with advice from technical advisors to increase the contract by \$75 million,

from \$200 to \$275 million, and the advisor said the price was good. Of course I smelled a rat, so I brought in experts and so forth. I said, "Check that out". They were able to detect that at least \$50 million out of the \$75 million was padding. But you know, this is the kind of thing that comes when one does not know what is going on. That is all these corrupters have to do, they corrupt the system from below, so that when it comes to one for a decision, one does not realize that the advice one is getting is corrupt.

Mr. Manning: And they trust the ministerial colleague, that is what is happening.

Mr. C. Imbert: Exactly. I am just warning all of you. When the Member for Tobago East says I must not speak, he does not know what he is talking about. I have seen it myself. I have seen fellows who try to get governments to pay millions of dollars for things that were not warranted. I have seen the elaborate schemes that people try to do. They are sitting on your side.

Let us deal with some of the issues at hand. I have to support my colleague from Diego Martin Central when he indicates that—*[Interruption]* No, no. I have choices. You all have no choices. It is either you agree or you are unemployed. Mr. Speaker, all the talk they talk, not one of them could get a job in the private sector. If they get fired as a Minister they are unemployed and unemployable. You could say what you want. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. C. Imbert: Let us look at the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69. Section 42 states:

“Unless special provision to the contrary is made in any Appropriation Act, every appropriation by Parliament of public moneys for the service of any financial year shall lapse and cease to have any effect at the close of that period, and, except as otherwise provided in this Act, the unexpended balance of any moneys withdrawn from the Exchequer Account shall be surrendered to the Exchequer Account.”

The point is that when the estimates of expenditure were approved in this Parliament for the year 1998, they were approved from January—December, 1998. If money has been appropriated to pay wages and salaries for the months October, November, December, it cannot be correct to take money that has been earmarked

Finance Committee Report
[MR. IMBERT]

Friday, January 15, 1999

to pay wages in another financial year and bring it into a preceding financial year, and that is what is going on here today.

If one says one has a capital project with an uneven distribution of expenditure where the expenditure is loaded up front and tails off to the end, then of course the argument is valid that in a nine-month period one might not have spent 75 per cent of the funds, one might have spent 80 or 90 per cent. But when one is dealing with wages, if one has 1,000 policemen and their wages are \$“X” per month, so that one knows for the year it is 12 by \$“X”, and nine months pass and one closes the financial year, the balance available for wages cannot be taken and used in this manner. I mean, the Minister of Finance can say what he wants, it does not matter to me. He has no credibility. He could talk about accountants, geologists and rocks. He could say what he wants.

The fact of the matter is that when one asked the Minister: Why did he not allow the filling of vacant posts in the Ministry of Education, he said that all ministries were asked to control expenditure. So he froze the expenditure on vacant posts. So that as far as the Minister of Finance was concerned, the engagement of teachers in our schools is low priority. The irony of this thing is that the University of the West Indies is producing graduates every year. A whole set of them are out on the street unemployed. There are vacancies in the schools and graduates coming out of the university who cannot get jobs, but this Government has decided that employment of teachers is low priority. Hundreds of unemployed university graduates! I heard of someone last night, again in my constituency office, with a master’s degree in Sociology from the University of the West Indies working in a fast food outlet up in the East somewhere. There are hundreds of graduates from the University of the West Indies in this position.

Mr. Sudama: They have the wrong skills.

Mr. C. Imbert: Nonsense. I hear the Member for Oropouche mumbling that they have the wrong skills. So all the physics, chemistry, mathematics and language graduates coming out of the university have the wrong skills, they should not be employed as teachers to teach our children in school?

Mr. Hinds: They should be dancers like him.

Mr. C. Imbert: That is the kind of warped, baseless logic that we hear from Members on that other side.

Mr. Hart: Drinking red wine and dancing whole night.

Mr. C. Imbert: For example, when we brought the issue of the price paid by InnCogen for land, we heard the absurdity from the Member for Oropouche that one pays for land for its current condition and one does not consider what it is to be used for. That does not apply anywhere in the world and certainly not in Trinidad and Tobago. That is a typical kind of lame, weak excuse from the Member for Oropouche to excuse the corruption that is evident in that InnCogen deal.

5.30 p.m.

Everything is a joke. Old people cannot get their pension money, the \$100 that this caring Government promised them, but we are spending \$900 million to fatten the pockets of UNC supporters up at the airport, \$35 million to fatten the pockets of UNC supporters at Whitehall and \$82 million to fatten the pockets of people for one day at the Miss Universe contest at Chaguaramas.

The Member for Tobago East spoke about looting and people in Venezuela becoming tired of traditional parties because they looted the country. Well, this is a new and improved model of looting. What a scam! They bid for the Miss Universe contest and when they got it, appropriate \$82 million to spend for one day.

Mr. Hart: Women in bath suits.

Mr. C. Imbert: Do you know how many schools could be built for \$82 million? Do you know how many meals you could give to poor children for \$82 million? Do you know how much medication could be available in the hospitals? Do you know how many houses could be built for poor people? Do you know how many roads in Mayaro could be fixed with \$82 million?

At least one Member of this Government, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, has the courage to get up say that they are inefficient and incompetent. At least one Member of this administration has the guts to indicate the massive incompetence of the UNC Administration.

Look at the scandal of the Solomon Hochoy Highway which we in this country have to pay for, which has to come out of the counterpart funds. Imagine three years after the contract went out for tender, the disgrace that we have to see in the North/South highway.

Imagine they took red sand from Claxton Bay and put it on the highway, Guaracara boulders, and now have to remove it. Take it out and put it back. The Minister was getting so much licks for his incompetence, he hustled and opened it.

Finance Committee Report
[MR. IMBERT]

Friday, January 15, 1999

Next thing there would be a death on that highway. Somebody is going to die. The surface is uneven.

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Mr. C. Imbert: The edges are incomplete, the banking is dangerous. It does not have proper lighting. Somebody is going to die on that highway, because of his incompetence and the fact that the Minister is public relations crazy. He cannot take criticism, so they are giving him pressure. He hustled and opened a defective piece of road to kill somebody; the Minister of Works and Transport. That is what is going on in this country, and we are being asked to approve disbursements and allocations. I have a serious difficulty.

When we asked the Minister of Education what is going on with the distribution of textbooks to poor children in schools—this is his fourth year as a Minister and he cannot distribute textbooks to poor children in schools, from an IADB loan negotiated by the former Minister of Education, three years later. There is money available to give poor children textbooks, he did not do it, and you are seeing the evidence in this Bill that we are debating.

They call one of the virements a savings. Whenever they are incompetent, they call it savings. Whenever they have a project, like \$25 million for single mothers, they did not even spend 25 cents, they call it savings. The celebration of mediocrity, that is what I am talking about. Instead of castigating the Minister responsible, for not having the competence to disburse that \$25 million to single mothers, or allowing the Minister of Education to get away with not having disbursed those funds and distributing textbooks to poor children, they say it is savings. And the Member for Tobago East said that we must praise them for that fiscal prudence. They just do not give people anything, they saved money. That is what is going on in this country here today.

I am expected to stay here and keep quiet. Absolutely not! I most certainly will not. [*Interruption*] When you look at some of the explanations—when we asked, what is the status of the courts, for example, the Magistrates' court, why have they not been completed, they do not answer. Look at the answer:

"(a) The Chaguaramas Magistrate Court is still to be established as a full time court."

What does that really mean? It really means that they are incompetent. They have not been able to complete the project. The St. Vincent Street POS District

Court is still incomplete. That means they are incompetent. That is what they mean.

Even the Attorney General does not know what is going on. We asked him on Wednesday. He does not even know what is going on in his ministry. We asked him about a virement of \$1.1 million to pay judicial officers and he gave us one long song and dance. He does not know if it is magistrate or state counsel. He does not know anything. *[Interruption]* No, he did not tell us that it was privileged information. That is the trend now, you ask them an embarrassing question and they tell you that it is privileged information.

Even the Attorney General does not know what is going on in his ministry. When you ask him, to what does this refer or to what category of employee this refers, what is the extent of the allowance, what is the reason for this? He cannot say. Big confusion! "He feel is magistrate, he 'ent' sure." Is legal officer, they do not know? They talk all sorts of nonsense about it coming into the Salaries Review Commission's report, they might be outside, is Public Service Association (PSA). That is what the Government is telling us.

Again I must say, celebration of mediocrity. At least the Member for Tabaquite could tell us what it is all about. When we say, what is that allocation of \$400,000 or whatever it is for textbooks, at least he could tell us. He did not spend it because of incompetence, he could tell us that. But the Member for Couva South does not even know what the virement is all about.

We have a big noise about the Salaries Review Commission. Look at it.

"At the time of payment of the interim allowance, the Salaries Review Commission was in the process of reviewing all offices under its purview,..."

I guess. They cannot even write English now. I wonder if one of the Members of Cabinet was involved in the drafting of this paragraph, because instead of saying "under its purview", they said under its "preview". But when you are illiterate you mix up words that sound similar. Perhaps it is one of those illiterate ministers over there being spoken about, that the Member for Tobago East has told us about.

Listen to this:

"At the time of payment of the interim allowance the Salaries Review Commission was in the process of revising all offices under its purview, the completion of which exercise could not have been exactly determined. The timing of the implementation of the recommendations of the Salaries Review

Finance Committee Report
[MR. IMBERT]

Friday, January 15, 1999

Commission also could not have been anticipated. Further, the interim allowance was given on the basis that it would be absorbed into whatever was recommended by the Salaries Review Commission.

This is a very interesting point, Mr. Speaker. Why has the Government given a particular category of person an interim allowance and the other 600-odd have received no interim allowance? What is so special about this particular category of worker that the Member for Princes Town cannot get an interim allowance. These Members could cry! They want that increase badly.

The poor Member for Princes Town cannot get his interim allowance to buy something. The Members for Tabaquite or Nariva cannot get their interim allowance, but this particular category of staff could get it. They must tell us why. Well, give everybody an interim allowance. This point is the one that we have been making: if it is within the power of Government as evidenced by this transaction—this is evidence that the Government can go outside of the acceptance of the Salaries Review Commission report and grant and disburse payments, salary increases and allowances to any person within the purview of the Salaries Review Commission.

Thus, the nonsense that we heard here over the last seven days or so that public servants would be denied their increases unless the Opposition agrees is now demonstrated as utter rubbish. [*Desk thumping*] The Cabinet has, in fact, exercised its executive authority given to it under the Constitution and has paid a certain category of persons under the Salaries Review Commission, an interim allowance. I do not know what it is.

They have varied the terms and conditions of employment of workers without reference to the Salaries Review Commission, the collective bargaining process, the PSA or whatever. They have made a decision and have paid this thing.

Therefore, this nonsense that the Opposition is responsible for public servants not getting an increase is so much trash. [*Desk thumping*] While I am on that, we heard a weak attempt by the Member for Couva North to ridicule the Members on this side on Wednesday about the Member for San Fernando East being the highest paid Leader of the Opposition. Utter nonsense!

When the Member for Couva North was Leader of the Opposition, he was in receipt of a salary as Leader of the Opposition which, by the way, when he opposed the Salaries Review Commission Report that we brought in 1992 and it was passed, he very happily took his increase. He was getting \$8,000 a month, or

whatever, from that; at least \$12,000 a month from the All Trinidad Sugar Workers' Union, that is \$20,000; plus he was legal advisor to a number of other bodies in the sugar sector; plus his private law practice.

Mr. Manning: Plus the money Ramesh gave him.

Mr. C. Imbert: That too. [*Laughter*] One of the biggest problems I have is crocodile tears and political hypocrisy. So we have the Member for Couva North who goes down in history as the highest paid Leader of the Opposition ever, getting about \$50,000 a month from his various salaries and so forth. [*Cross talk*]. Yet he came in this Parliament crying crocodile tears and complaining because the Member for San Fernando East is in receipt of a pension having served as Prime Minister of this country. As everyone knows, once you serve as Prime Minister of this country you get a pension.

I want somebody to tell me, why the Government has given this interim allowance pending—[*Interruption*]—I am not saying that they do not deserve it, I agree with that, so let us not debate whether they should get the money or not, give them the money. So that is not a point of contention. Why did they give them and then come into this Parliament saying that they did not have authority to pass salary increases for people subject to the Salaries Reviews Commission? That has been their argument right through. [*Crosstalk*] It is the same thing. How could you give one group of workers a salary increase, although they are subject to the Salaries Review Commission, but they are not giving anybody else? They are not giving the same permanent secretaries to whom these people have to report. The Solicitor General, I do not know if that person is getting an interim allowance, perhaps. Is the Budget Director getting an interim monthly allowance?

Mr. Manning: He sucking salt, none for him.

Mr. C. Imbert: Somebody has to tell me why has this Government engaged in sleight-of-hand, giving one group an increase and not others. We heard the Member for Couva North in a weak attempt to ridicule people on this side, disseminating bogus information, when he has been less than honest. After the Member for Couva North was appointed Prime Minister, he was in receipt of an income from the All Trinidad Sugar Workers Trade Union.

Mr. Sudama: That is a lie! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. C. Imbert: It is true! The Prime Minister has been in receipt of income from All Trinidad Sugar Workers Trade Union while he was Prime Minister.

5.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Order please! Order please!

Mr. Sudama: Where is the evidence of that?

Mr. C. Imbert: They can deny it if they want. It is amazing. This is a man who is the highest paid Prime Minister ever in Trinidad and Tobago—[*Desk thumping*]*—*getting his prime ministerial salary and getting money from the sugar union while he is Prime Minister and coming here with his political hypocrisy trying to throw stones on this side. But he is living in a glass house.

Mr. Narine: And still using the union's car.

Mr. C. Imbert: Is he still using the union's car? Yes. He still has access to the union's automobile. He comes here, living in a glass house, pelting stones on this side and feels that this is not public knowledge, feeling that people do not know that in some months he received as much as \$12,000 a month from the sugar union while he was Prime Minister. He feels people do not know that. He is living in a glass house and throwing stones.

Mr. Hinds: Where? In Trinidad or London?

Mr. C. Imbert: Well, the one in Kensington is not a glass house. That is a very well appointed edifice. Perhaps the Member for Tobago East could explain to his Members what "edifice" means—a well appointed edifice or building.

Mr. Manning: Otherwise they would not understand.

Dr. Mohammed: What about Teak house?

Mr. Narine: What about InnCogen house in Washington?

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, what passes for financial accounting in Trinidad and Tobago today is again the celebration of mediocrity. That is what it is. Do you know that every year from 1996, 1997, 1998, the budget figures have been wrong; the estimates have been wrong; the surplus and deficit have been, not only wrong, but improperly described; and, what we are seeing here is another attempt—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, let me deal with the Member for St. Joseph, hon. Mervyn Assam, at the same time. Do they believe we have secrets in Trinidad

and Tobago? “It is with pleasure I enclose a copy of the business plan. Lastly, for reference to the Cabinet Note of July 9, 1998, the upper limit of the pageant budget has been set at US \$15 million. Current estimates are US \$13.3 million.” TT \$80 million. Here we have the Cabinet Note.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: They said it would have been private funding.

Mr. C. Imbert: Government contribution. Tell me how much is the Government’s contribution?

Mr. Assam: It is there in the Cabinet Note.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes. I have the Cabinet Note here.

Mr. Assam: Well, read it.

Mr. C. Imbert: No. No. That is for later. I will read something else into the record, Mr. Speaker. Listen to this.

Mr. Speaker: Would the hon. Member please identify the document from which he is quoting.

Mr. C. Imbert: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. Trinidad and Tobago Pageant Company Business Plan 1999—Miss Universe Pageant—December 10, 1998. [*Desk thumping*]

I go on now. It is amazing. Management—Chief Executive Officer and senior management, seven-month contract, US \$25,000 a month, US \$175,000; over \$1 million in salaries. That is all right. That is what is going on in this country. I must not talk about this! Listen to this. Public relations—US \$200,000; TT \$1.3 million for public relations; media and investors—US \$200,000; agency resources—US \$200,000. You think it easy. TT \$11 million on advertising, Mr. Speaker. When one looks at some of these documents—listen to this one. Prepare evening gown session; use perhaps Stollmeyer’s Castle, renovate—well, we know they are famous for that—US \$500,000; over TT \$3 million.

Mr. Hinds: Is that true?

Mr. C. Imbert: We will deal with that at another time, Mr. Speaker. I must not talk about this.

Mr. Assam: Talk about it.

Mr. C. Imbert: Well, the Member for Tobago East says I must not talk about it.

Mr. Assam: No. I invite you to talk about it.

Finance Committee Report
[MR. IMBERT]

Friday, January 15, 1999

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: All going to the evening gown session, put up your hands.

Mr. C. Imbert: No. I am not calling for that.

Mr. Speaker, it is a question of priorities. The reason why I raised the issue of old age pensioners not getting their \$100 increase was because a large majority of old age pensioners were led to believe that they would get their money in 1998.

Mr. Assam: Every first.

Mr. C. Imbert: That is what you say, but what the pensioners believed is that they will get their increase in 1998.

Mr. Assam: The Parliament said so.

Mr. C. Imbert: No. That is what you say. But, what the pensioners believed was that they would get their increase in 1998 but they did not get it and they have not gotten it in 1999.

When these pensioners see the UNC Government sending someone to a quarry in Italy to find a special marble tile to match the same marble tile that is on the floor of the Prime Minister's office, because he does not want any ordinary marble tile from Italy; it must come from the same quarry that the original marble tile came; when the little, sick 70-year old man goes for his \$100 that he deserves, he is not getting it, but he is seeing they are spending more than his increase on marble tiles—one tile alone could feed about 100 pensioners. Then, when he sees

that there are no proper tendering procedures, that expensive chandeliers have been purchased with gold filigree work on the ceiling, greenheart and purpleheart on the floor and he sees the things cost \$35 million and he cannot get his \$100. Now, he is hearing they are spending \$82 million on the Miss Universe Pageant and he cannot get his \$100.

It is a question of priorities. When the Minister of Finance said effectively that employing teachers was low priority, that is one of the key issues in this thing. A sum of \$113.9 million for vacant posts gone from the Ministry of Education and the Minister of Education, in another weak attempt to deal with it, claimed that it was for administration. Poor fellow; he does not even know. He is not only illiterate; he is enumerate. Member for Tobago East, explain to him what that means. Being illiterate, he will not understand what enumerate means, but it means one cannot count and one has no knowledge of numbers. Okay. But, poor fellow, he does not realize that \$113 million is a lot of money and it is impossible to spend \$113 million in salaries and wages for general administration in the Ministry of Education. Clearly, it was for teachers.

It is the sign of a weak Minister when he allows a non-elected Minister of Finance to prevent him from hiring teachers, to spend \$900 million on the airport and prevent him from employing teachers for the same children about whom the Member for Tobago East speaks. He spoke about the education system and has the audacity to compare himself to some of our most distinguished sons. One thing that the Member for Tobago East said, with which I agree, was something to the effect that the education system in this country has failed. Well, when one looks at the Member for Tobago East, I agree—[*Desk thumping*]—because while he picked up a smattering of learning here and there; a few little words; a paragraph from Shakespeare; a chapter from the Ramayan or something; he learned a poem from Walcott; while he was capable of doing that, it shows that he can remember.

He does not understand that when he talks, he does not have that ingredient called “comprehension”. He has the words but he has no comprehension. They teach children comprehension in schools; they show them a word, then show it to them in a sentence and they have to understand the meaning, how it fits into the sentence and what it means—comprehension.

So that, I have a difficulty in approving the movement of \$113.9 million out of education to somewhere else. I have a problem with that. I do not agree with that. That is corrupt; not corrupt from a money point of view, but corrupt from a

Finance Committee Report
[MR. IMBERT]

Friday, January 15, 1999

societal, moral point of view. It is corrupt. That is my opinion. I call it corrupt when persons in a government are so cavalier with the taxpayers' funds and so callous, so contemptuous, as the Prime Minister indicated. The Prime Minister indicated that the Members of the Cabinet are contemptuous and disrespectful.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: He said so.

Mr. C. Imbert: They should not be there.

Mr. Manning: I would never do that.

Mr. C. Imbert: It is amazing. In the morning, the Member for Couva North is criticizing the Members of the Cabinet saying they are disrespectful, contemptuous and they are not worth the salary, and in the afternoon, he comes begging us to increase Ministers' salaries. Is that a sign of dementia? I do not know. Or, is it that he cannot remember? Power gets one drunk, so in the morning they are worth nothing, but in the afternoon, they are worth \$30,000 a month. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

But, the Minister of Finance will do nothing because he is controlling the Prime Minister and he boasts about it to people, that he has him in grip; not just the Minister of Finance. Mr. Speaker, you see how he is watching me; it is true. He is controlling the Prime Minister; he has him in grip; and his other two friends, Ish and Steve, also have the Prime Minister in grip. I do not know what hold they have over the Prime Minister; I do not know if the Prime Minister is being compromised; but they boast about it, that they have him in grip.

So that we would conclude this debate. He will contemptuously dismiss the relevant points brought by the Member for Diego Martin Central about his gerrymandering of the fiscal accounts and he will just proceed and manipulate and we will see more and more \$82 million spent on one-night stands and so forth; \$35 million on marble tiles; \$900 million on airport and all kinds of things. That is what will happen because he has the Prime Minister in grip.

I say to the Prime Minister that if it is a fact that Brian, Steve and Ish have him in grip, get out of that grip if he can, because it will strangle him.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

6.00 p.m.

The Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs and Minister of Tourism (Hon. Mervyn Assam): Mr. Speaker, I wish to join in this debate of the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) 1998/1999 Bill. It was not my intention to

speak this afternoon, but it became necessary because of the inaccuracies bordering on malice that were introduced into this honourable House a continuation of the vituperation to which I referred in a previous contribution at the beginning of the session in 1999.

Mr. Valley: I wish to inform the hon. Minister that we are not debating the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) Bill, but the Report of the Finance Committee.

Hon. M. Assam: Thank you very much for allowing the Member for Diego Martin Central to clarify to me what we are actually debating and indeed, he is correct. We are debating the Report of The Finance Committee. I agree. It is all right. If we want to split hairs and to engage in any kind of semantics I have no difficulty. As I said, because of certain inaccuracies, bordering on malice, I rise. I shall deal with the Member for Diego Martin East first because his remarks are so fresh on the minds of all the Members of this House.

One of the first things I want to deal with is on a previous occasion he said that telephone bills of the Cabinet Members are \$1,000. I want to tell him that my bill in December 1998 which I received yesterday was \$161.76. In fact, I can invite him—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I appeal to you to allow Members who are making contribution to be heard by me, the reporter and those people in this honourable Chamber who want to hear. Insofar as anybody has difficulty with what is being said, there are several options open, but one of them would not be speaking and making it difficult for others to hear.

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, the Member said that our telephone bills are \$1,000 per month. I want to tell this honourable House that my telephone bill for December 1998 was \$161.76, a fact that could be verified by the Ministry of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs and Ministry of Tourism, the Permanent Secretary or the accountant, whoever they are could be contacted to verify the fact that my telephone bill is \$161.76.

The second matter he raised is cellular. I wonder if there is anybody in this House or in this country who has ever seen me with a cellular.

Mr. Valley: On a point of order. Clause 36(3).

Mr. Speaker: Clause 36(3) says:

“It shall be out of order to attempt to revive in any debate a matter or reconsider any specific question (other than a matter or question relating to a

Finance Committee Report
[MR. SPEAKER]

Friday, January 15, 1999

Bill returned with any amendment by the other Chamber) upon which the House has come to a conclusion during the current Session, except upon a substantive motion for rescission which motion shall not be brought sooner than six months after the date on which the House reached its decision.”

I do not think that point of order could be sustained. Please continue.

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Speaker, I was about to say that nobody in this honourable Chamber or in the country has ever seen me with a cellular phone. I may have borrowed a phone from one of my colleagues, but no one has ever seen me carrying a cellular phone in my pocket. So all these accusations and allegations are spurious and very characteristic of what the Member for Diego Martin East has been peddling in this House for more than three years.

I refer to the point where the Member spoke about Government’s \$82 million contribution to the Miss Universe Pageant 1999. Pageants are specialty events and there is a book which I have in my possession which has all the elements that are necessary for staging a pageant of an international nature and it is done by an accounting firm. There is a pageant company which is a subsidiary of TIDCO, the Pageant Company of Trinidad and Tobago and they commissioned an independent firm of accountants—Price Waterhouse, Coopers—to develop a business plan for them so that it could be objective and contain all the elements that are necessary for staging an event of this magnitude and of an international dimension.

Mr. Speaker, obviously when you are doing a business plan you have to take into account every contingency, every eventuality, every possible expense, every area. So what Price Waterhouse Cooper did was a thorough professional job and present this business plan to the pageant company.

As Minister under whose portfolio this particular event falls, I have the responsibility to take this and a Cabinet Note to the Cabinet in order to seek funds for the staging of this pageant. If the Member for Diego Martin East had read his 1998/1999 budget documents carefully, he would have noticed—and this was nothing that was hidden, it was not clandestine, it was for everyone to see including the national community because budget documents are public documents—that TT \$15.5 million was allocated under the Ministry of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs and Ministry of Tourism under an extraordinary item for this particular event. That was in October. The particular document to which the Member referred, came out in December and we had a previous note to the Cabinet, the original saying: “When the business plan is completed, we would be coming back to the Cabinet for additional funding”, so the initial TT \$15.5

million in the 1998 budget estimates the expenditure under the Ministry of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs and Ministry of Tourism were not sufficient and the Cabinet approved US \$5.8 million plus the TT \$15.5 million. So US \$5.8 million multiplied by 6 and \$15.5 million is about TT \$53 million.

Mr. Speaker, I want the Members of this House and the national community to know that about 30 to 35 per cent of the \$53 million would be used in improving the infrastructure in a number of areas, and if the Member for Diego Martin West were present, he would tell you that he was part of it because his constituency is going to be a very important beneficiary of a lot of the infrastructure that would be improved in that area because the pageant is taking place in Chaguaramas.

We would be having events all over the country and if it is said that half a million dollars would be spent on the improvement of the Stollmeyers Castle, that would be an improvement that would be permanent and would redound to the entire nation of Trinidad and Tobago because all these houses around the savannah that are called the "Magnificent Seven" are in need of improvement. Mille Fleur is in need, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is in need, the Prime Minister's Whitehall office has just been completed and so forth. If TT half a million dollars were to be expended as a result of the Miss Universe Pageant on Stollmeyer's Castle, the entire nation would benefit. There would be improvements to electricity, water, roads, sidewalks, the sewerage system in different areas and therefore Trinidad and Tobago—there would also be activities in Tobago when the girls arrive in the first half of May—so the entire country would benefit from permanent, lasting infrastructural improvement which is part of the \$53 million.

In addition to which short-term employment would be created in all the areas where activities are going to be taking place, and the Member for Diego Martin West would benefit most, because the event is taking place in his constituency.

Mr. Boynes: I thank the hon. Member for giving way. Could the Member indicate whether or not the pageant company has negotiated merchandising rights on behalf of the pageant company so that we could recoup some of the expenses which we are putting out in terms of \$53 million? The Minister would obviously know that merchandizing rights could bring in a tidy sum of money in these types of events.

Hon. M. Assam: I have no difficulty with the concern of the Member for Toco/Manzanilla, even though the Member for Diego Martin East was so bold to assert that none of us could be absorbed into the private sector after we demit office. I am from the private sector and I understand all of these matters.

Hon. Member: That does not answer the question.

Hon. M. Assam: Be patient, I would explain to you as I go along, so be patient to the last.

As I was saying, in addition to all of that, he says we are going to be spending \$3 million on hiring chief executive officers and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, there is an office of the pageant company in the ALGICO building, 5th floor, and ALGICO gave us a rental of 50 per cent discount of what we would have normally paid for rental space in that building. *[Interruption]* I am trying to tell you the abundant good will that is taking place outside there as opposed to the ill will that we heard here this afternoon through the mouth of the Member for Diego Martin East.

Every piece of furniture in that office has been loaned by Courts, from BEWIL we got fax machines on loan, fridges on loan, microwave ovens. Every single bit of equipment, furniture, filing cabinet is on loan so we are not paying a penny.

6.15 p.m.

Why do they not keep quiet? They make so much noise all the time. I am trying to explain to them and the national community. Why do they not listen to truth and facts. They cannot take facts and truth. Everything in the office has been loaned. That can be verified. Cars have been loaned free. Out of a staff of approximately 15, there are only three paid, functionaries in the third class of that hierarchy.

The chief operating officer, all the members of the board, the events manager, the public relations officer, the communications officer, the accountant, all of them have been seconded from organizations either in the private sector or, in some cases, the public sector. So, the pageant company pays no salaries, notwithstanding the provision which Price Waterhouse/Cooper was very careful to include in the budget. They must include it in a budget. It is afterwards we realized that we got all of these things free. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Member for St. Ann's, please. I appeal to you. This is not the way we do it.

Hon. M. Assam: I hope that the media will print what I am saying because everything is factual and verifiable and I can provide anybody with any document, including the Cabinet Note which they say they have. I can ask the Prime Minister to give them the Cabinet Note with the approved US \$5.8 million.

I already have my speech for Monday morning where we are going to be assembling all of the private sector who are going to be sponsors to this pageant because all of them are anxious and eager to benefit from it and they would be handsomely supporting the pageant as local sponsors. They are going to be involved in television from two or three weeks before, and on the night, local sponsors out of a 3-hour show will have half hour on CBS where they will be beamed to 86 countries of the world and seen by 2.8 billion people. That will convert into advertising of US \$800 million for Trinidad and Tobago to sell our brand, Trinidad Brands Incorporated, free.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, we will be fortunate to have in our midst celebrities, investors, and people who will be very much involved in providing Trinidad and Tobago with lasting benefits. In addition to that, our tourism thrust will get a fillip, and already, what we are seeing is that Carnival is going to begin to manifest the benefits of Miss Universe 1999 because it is going to be a bumper Carnival season. The hoteliers are incapable of filling people's accommodations, and we are hoping to have people and to have that feel and touch—what the Germans *gemutlik*—that warm, cozy feeling. A lot of people will be bringing visitors into their homes for this purpose. *[Interruption]*

Hon. M. Assam: I really feel sorry for all of you. I really feel a deep sense of sorrow and I think that the Member for Tobago East is right: the education system has destroyed all of you. I feel so sorry for them. I am trying to indicate to the national community through this honourable House what benefits will be derived and to give the unvarnished truth and fact which they could verify, and the Member is making some kind of a cynical statement.

Mr. Manning: That sounds like so much *demoklik*!

Hon. Assam: The Member for Toco/Manzanilla asked about merchandizing. We will have ready before Carnival a lot of products which have been approved by Miss Universe Inc. with the logo of the pageant company which derives part of that logo from the Miss Universe Inc. logo, and we will be selling T-shirts, cups, mugs, glasses, a lot of wooden products, teak, a lot of copper products, jewellery, all sorts of products will be on sale long before Carnival so that our manufacturers will be able to take advantage of this.

We have already started to contract firms, merchandizing firms in London, New York, Toronto and Miami to take hundreds of thousands of pieces of these items for sale abroad that will form part of the memorabilia of this most important and outstanding event for Trinidad and Tobago. All of these things will be recoverables to off-set the \$53 million that the Government is investing as seed

money with which to start. All of the sponsors and the various things will add up and we will try to off-set as much as possible all of the revenue against the \$53 million the Government is investing.

Mrs. Robingson-Regis: Seed money!

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Speaker, they cannot calculate. It is an invaluable contribution to the country. We will be getting close to US \$800 million equivalent in advertising. We are talking about the short-term benefit, but what about the medium and long-term benefits that we will derive from all of this activity? When they come here and try to incite the population against this Government because we are putting in seed money to hold such an important event that would redound to the benefit of the entire population, I think it is most unfortunate.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of The Bahamas spends annually, US \$120 million to promote its country abroad and if this country spends, US \$10 million to promote this country abroad to get all of the benefits that I have described—this is one of the most productive investments—the rate of return is almost incalculable. I will leave that there.

He spoke about linking this particular virement that we have not paid to the old-age pensioners. How could somebody who says he is responsible and worthy to be a Member of Parliament come to this House and again try to mislead, when in the budget of 1998/1999 it was explicit that the pension increase will come into effect on February 1, 1999? How could someone be so mischievous, so irresponsible? I find it difficult to find words in my vocabulary to describe that kind of malicious activity. I find it so irresponsible and there must be some punishment. We ought to introduce punishment in the Standing Orders, and you are Chairman of the Standing Orders Committee. We should introduce appropriate punishment when someone comes here and misleads the Parliament and the community so that the newspaper writes misleading, inaccurate things coming out of the mouth of the Member for Diego Martin East. We must introduce appropriate sanctions and penalties for that kind of reprehensible conduct.

I come now to my friend, the Member for Diego Martin Central. I find it so unfortunate that the Member for Diego Martin Central could say that since he demitted office as the Minister of Trade nothing has happened in the Ministry of Trade and Industry. I invited him to take a look at the *Hansard* of my 1998/1999 Budget contribution which is 75 minutes long and it is quite a document.
[Laughter]

I outlined in this contribution a comprehensive account of my stewardship. In fact, I said that in 1998, domestic trade policy continued to be determined by the ongoing process of globalization and liberalization of the world economy. The non-oil sector from 1994—1998 increased 40 per cent! He said, “What has the Minister of Trade and Industry been doing?” It has increased 40 per cent through the activities of the Minister of Trade and Industry, through TIDCO, through the various Export Processing Zones (EPZ), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; all of us combined grew the non-oil sector by over 40 per cent from the time he left office until 1998, yet he is asking what I have done. The *Bible* is right. “There is none so blind who will not see; none so deaf who will not hear.” He is a born again Christian? He knows he is a charlatan! He will not know the *Bible*.

Trinidad and Tobago has adopted an aggressive negotiating strategy, concluding bi-lateral investment treaties with a number of countries: the United Kingdom, United States, Germany, Venezuela, Argentina, and they are in the process of doing with Cuba. These agreements seek to facilitate the inflow of investment and to enhance the level of trade between Trinidad and Tobago and other countries. Trinidad and Tobago is also in the process of negotiating free trade agreements in conjunction with its Caricom partners with a number of countries. We have completed Colombia, we are almost finished with the Dominican Republic, and we are going to be doing Venezuela, the Andean Community, Central America, Panama, Costa Rica and we have initiated some dialogue with Mercosur.

The Member says he was in the Parliament but he has not listened because he is so deaf, or is it because—the word that the Member for Diego Martin East said just now—he did not learn in school? They did not teach him comprehension because of the bad educational system they have imposed on this country.

I can go on and on because this document is available for anyone. I can show that in 1997, we have had 13 applications related to hotel projects involving over \$347 million, and as of June 1998, six projects in the non-oil sector, estimating \$465 million in capital investment, and they will see this coming on stream. He is asking what the Ministry of Trade and Industry is doing. The Member for Diego Martin Central has disappointed me. He does not listen, or is it because he is always jumping out of his seat and going to do some deal in one of the committee rooms from time to time? I do not know. Please remain in your seat and listen to what Ministers have to say or read the relevant *Hansard* record. [*Interruption*]

Finance Committee Report
[HON. M. ASSAM]

Friday, January 15, 1999

A deal is not an ugly word. If the Member for San Fernando East was in investment banking—in which he was never—he would see that there is a great book called *Doing Deals* by one of the greatest investment bankers in the world, and maybe the Member for Diego Martin Central has read it. I am dealing with the English language and the jargon of investment banking. Keep quiet! You do not know! Be silent!

I am also bringing to the Parliament very shortly the Tourism Development Bill. The Attorney General is holding a meeting of the Legislation Review Committee on Monday with us, and very shortly it will be in Parliament. The Investment Promotion Bill is having a few improvements here and there and soon it will be in this Parliament, so both Bills will have the effect of improving Trinidad and Tobago as an investment destination and improving the investment climate and facilitation of this country. Yet, he is asking what the Minister of Trade and Industry is doing.

6.30 p.m.

In terms of small business we are lifting small business as it has never been lifted before. So I do not understand what the Member for Diego Martin Central was doing when I was speaking for 75 minutes. Was he twiddling his thumbs or did he have a plug in his ear? One must not come here and accuse the Minister of Trade and Industry after he gave such an outstanding record of his achievement and stewardship.

The Member also talks about the Orinoco/Apure Project. I gave an explanation. When he was forced to demit office, the entire economy of Venezuela went into a tailspin, not only the economy, but they had some political turmoil in Venezuela. All of the people who were involved in that investment opportunity pulled back, both on the Venezuelan side and on the Trinidad and Tobago side, because Plipdeco and the Southern Chamber were pursuing it on this side. They pulled back. The climate did not change very much because the then President, the one who is outgoing now, brought in a whole regime of fiscal strictures: no foreign exchange, devaluation of the currency, all kinds of things in that climate. People do not invest in that kind of climate: people do not pursue projects of such magnitude. As a consequence, we had to pull back.

We are hoping with the new president—I do not know what line he is going to take when he is inaugurated on February 1,—we would like to establish great continuing relations with the Republic of Venezuela. We will do everything in our power to ensure that the economic relationship, not only continues as it is, but is

deepened, broadened and improved. Therefore, we will reopen the whole question of the Orinoco/Apure Project, which we know is going to benefit both countries because it is an important waterway for industrial activity for tourism, investment and so forth. We understand that and we are going to revisit the thing very shortly. So do not come and say we are doing nothing.

In addition to which, I do not like to blow my own trumpet, but I came and laid on the table of this honourable House, in less than two years, a trade policy, an industrial policy which was pooh-poohed by that very Member for Diego Martin Central, a former Minister of Trade. He said an industrial policy is a waste of time. As a matter of fact, I had the honour to represent this country very recently in August when I reviewed, with a team of distinguished public servants and diplomats, the trade policy of this country before a panel of the World Trade Organization, where I was grilled for four days before them and we passed with flying colours. One of the essential ingredients in that particular review was an industrial policy and the Member for Diego Martin Central says it is a totally wasteful policy. That is the man saying so, and the people at the World Trade Organization are saying it is one of the most useful and important guides in terms of the fulfillment of the trade policy, but he says it is a waste of time.

Not only did I do that, I brought a micro, small and medium enterprise policy, a blueprint for the development of an entrepreneurial culture. In less than three years I did all of that. [*Interruption*] The Member for Diego Martin Central was in this House. Everybody got a copy, and he asks: What is the Minister of Trade and Industry doing?

With the recent deficit in our trade balance—and I am not knocking any sector—it was the non-oil sector that has been rallying to have that deficit less and less. In fact, in the last quarter it was the non-oil sector which contributed an increase in 8 per cent in the balance of payments, which contributed to a lessening of the balance of payments deficit. He is asking: What is the Ministry or the Minister of Trade and Industry doing? So when my dear friend comes here, he may criticize me if I need to be criticized; criticize the Government if it needs it, but on the basis of facts, truth. Do not do it, please, if it is not necessary. I do not mind being criticized, but the facts speak for themselves. As I said, anything I say in this House, the newspapers, the Opposition, anybody could verify all of these things. I give you free access to verify what I am saying, including the record of *Hansard*.

What are we really debating here this evening? I am sorry I have had to enter into this debate in order to clarify some of the mischief that has been perpetrated here this evening and to set the record straight. What are we trying to do? It is a

Finance Committee Report
[HON. M. ASSAM]

Friday, January 15, 1999

very simple measure we are trying to achieve. We had the finance committee meeting. You were given the figures that we wish to vire from education and pensions into the Ministry of Finance. You were given the details why we had to vire the \$287,993,220; \$91 million from pensions and gratuities; \$196,993,200 from the Ministry of Education; making a grand total of \$287,993,220.

The principal reason is to satisfy a liability. That liability is the payment of bonds to public servants for arrears of salary. Where else could one get money to satisfy that liability if the Ministry of Finance, in its own budget or vote, did not have it? It had to look around and see where it could effect savings without interfering fundamentally with the programmes of the various agencies or ministries from where it is coming. If there are savings under pensions and gratuities of \$91 million, it was one of the easiest decisions to take it from there and put it in the Ministry of Finance to satisfy the liability of bonds which must be issued to public servants to deal with the arrears situation, which we did not create.

I am not blaming anybody, because when public servants' salaries were cut and COLA was suspended, there were economic imperatives at the time. I am not blaming any government for using economic measures to deal with serious economic problems. That is history, so we have to deal with it now as a responsible Government. If the Minister of Finance looks around and he cannot find money in any other area, but could find it in the Ministry of Education because that Ministry can put on hold, for the time being, without damaging the policy, the programme, the development of the Ministry of Education and what it has to do, and it can source it from there: What is wrong with that? Where is the corruption? Where is the fraud? Where is the defalcation that you are accusing this Government of through the Minister of Finance? What is all that about? I do not understand it.

Yet still, you get up in the Parliament and make all kinds of accusations and allegations so that you can see, in tomorrow's newspapers, emblazoned on the front pages in red banner headlines, all kinds of mischievous, misleading, wicked assertions about this Government, which is trying to govern in such a way as to provide quality goods and services and to move the country forward in an era of serious competition so that we can have sustainable development for all. That is all we are trying to do.

If you have a better approach, a different solution, other economic tools, other financial mechanisms, tell us, but in three years in this honourable House, I have missed a few sessions because I have been on Government business, but once I am

in the country I come to Parliament. But in three years, every session that I have attended I have not heard a single contribution from any Member opposite that suggests that they have an appreciation of the economic imperatives of the society and what kind of mechanism, policies and programmes they will put forward in order to have sustainable growth and development and a better quality of life.

One listens to the Member for San Fernando East as Leader of the Opposition, leading off the debate every year and he comes every year with the same stuck record. Every year, “you could put your pot on the fire”, as they say in the colloquial way, and know exactly what the Leader of the Opposition is coming with to respond to the budget. Not an idea, not an improvement, not a suggestion, nothing at all! All they do is come and regurgitate the same old things which do not improve or tend to improve the quality of life of the people they should be serving. That is what happens all the time.

I really am disappointed in their performance in the Parliament. I am honest with that. I say that with a heavy heart, but I am honest about it. I am disappointed. I have not heard any stimulating contribution from any one of them in three years and that is very sad for me, simply because I enjoy a good contribution. I like cut and thrust too, I love it, but when you are doing your cut and thrust, come clean like a rapier sword, you must not do it like a butcher and a savage! It reminds me of *The Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes. You are still in the world of the jungle and you are a savage beast in the way you verbalize some of your comments in this distinguished Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, they talk about our squandering, overspending and misleading the public that we are spending \$82 million on a pageant, which is not true, as I have tried to explain all the various components and elements. It reminds me of Oliver Goldsmith, he wrote many years ago and I quote two lines. He was speaking about what was taking place in England at the time and he was lamenting the state of society and he said:

“Ill fares the land, to hast’ning ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay;”

Mr. Sudama: *The Deserted Village.*

Hon. M. Assam: Yes, *The Deserted Village.* That characterized the regime of the PNM for 34 years. [*Desk thumping*] They claim they had a lot of wealth, billions of petrodollars, wealth accumulated, but under that wealth accumulation, not even like the wealth in Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, you know; it was almost like what somebody told me recently of a society, whose name I would not call. It started in barbarism and they never moved to civilization; they moved from

barbarism to decadence. That is precisely what happened to the PNM, from barbarism to decadence, and there was no intermediate period of civilizing the society and this community. That is the sad legacy that the Member for Tobago East spoke of this afternoon in such eloquent terms and they are trying to deride him for the way he puts over, but listen to the idea. Forget about the actual words he may use; think about the ideas.

So Mr. Speaker, all I am saying is that we have made a great song and dance of a very simple matter before this House this evening. If any Member opposite has any difficulty, he asks questions. This was done in finance committee, many questions were asked and all the questions have been answered, and those that were not answered were provided today and nobody asked any additional or supplemental questions. Therefore, why are you on this path, not only of self-destruction, but national destruction? I do not understand it. Do you have a self-fulfilling prophecy that this country will be destroyed because the UNC is in office and you are not in office? Is that sour grapes? What is it?

You had 34 years to govern this country. You were Prime Minister for almost four years and you gave it up. You took your chances. You engaged in risks and you lost it. You gambled and you also gambolled while you were the Prime Minister. *[Laughter]* But you know, because the UNC is in office today, all hell breaks loose and we are incompetent, to the extent that the Member for Diego Martin East has the audacity to say that when UNC ministers demit office they cannot get a job: they are unemployable. You know, I hate to call names, but one has to speak the truth. A former Minister of Labour in that administration of 1991—1995, after leaving as Minister of Labour, is now competing for a URP job in the San Juan/Laventille Corporation with people who need a job. Could you imagine that? Is that not sad?

6.45 p.m.

I am sorry to say that I really feel very sad that a man who served in the highest policy-formulating body of a country could be reduced to penury. That is the kind of policy they have, they reduce people to penury and perdition, that is the PNM!

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. M. Assam: I could well understand that the Member for San Fernando East does not wish my time to be extended, but I would still say thanks to all those who have voted to extend my time.

I was saying that it is highly regrettable that when a man or woman demits office as a minister of government he or she should have to hustle for a URP job, to compete with people who are deserving. That is what the Unemployment Relief Programme is for—people who do not have a skill or are out of employment and need to put food on the table for their wife/husband and children. That is what a former Minister of Labour in that administration is competing for in the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation. Are you not ashamed and embarrassed? Do you not feel hurt about it?

He is talking about us not being able to find a job, as I mentioned earlier, look at how many professionals there are on this side. Look at how many lawyers, doctors, dentists, engineers, economists, architects, professional teachers there are on this side; a plethora, a super abundance of talent and professionalism on this side. But he said that we would not get a job when we demit office.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what is the history of that side? With very few exceptions—and I say this, not because I am gloating but because I am sad, because if they had paid them well, taken care of their pension and a health plan, many of them would not be like vagrants on the streets. They should have taken care of their Members of Parliament, their lawmakers, a decent pension, a proper health plan and a decent salary so they could have had a little nest-egg when they retire, to take care of themselves and their families; indignity! They do not know that, *indignitate!* These fellows do not understand what is dignity. They only know about muck-raking, the denizen world, decadence, and the netherworld. *[Interruption]* Thank you for reminding me.

It is sad really! It does not give me any joy to get up in Parliament and speak like this. I should be home reading good books, listening to good music, sipping a nice glass of wine. I have to listen to all this and respond to it. I feel very sad really. I have been a sad man for three years. *[Crosstalk]* That is what we should be doing, but here we are being treated to the most decadent kind of thinking and language. It is very sad!

As I was saying, that is the side where people cannot be employed after they leave office. Some of them have to run away, some of them cannot find a job, we have to give them. The Minister of Housing and Settlements has been so kind. He reminds me of the Latin *miser cordia*, because he has to deal with them all the time. These people come with their misery to him and he is such a kind-hearted

Finance Committee Report
[HON. M. ASSAM]

Friday, January 15, 1999

fellow, he is helping all these ex-PNM members. I do not know where he finds the room for them, poor fellow!

That is what happens, this administration has been helping out ex-Cabinet ministers left, right and centre. I do not want to call names, but it is true. He is saying that we cannot find jobs, but could they find jobs? "Is a good thing the Member could pound some nail and mix some concrete; otherwise he would be in trouble."

The Member for San Fernando East said that he has been professional Leader of the Opposition. Why does he think that is so? Because every time he is in Opposition he cannot find a job. *[Laughter]* He talked about the Prime Minister; he could find a job, he is a lawyer, a trade unionist, a this and that. The Member should be happy that he is getting four and five salaries. But this fellow said that he is scrunting, he is living in a townhouse. Poor fellow, singing the blues. The Member for San Fernando East is singing the blues, he is living in a town house. *[Interruption]*

I have the greatest respect for his wife. Why does he want to bring her into this? Such a lovely woman, I really mean that. I do not say anything that I do not mean. He has a lovely wife. Why does he want to bring her into the politics? He said that she is scrunting, she cannot get a work, and that she got fired from Project Pride and all of that. He should not do that. He should take his blows! He should not bring in his wife and children! *[Laughter]*

I am constrained to make these remarks, simply because of the mischief on the other side. I am hoping that when the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) Bill comes before us later on, that we would have little difficulty and we would waste no more time in having this Bill passed with great dispatch.

With these few comments, I support the proceedings of the finance meeting and commend it to all of us in this honourable House.

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I would not be very long, but there have been some issues raised which for the record, must be put straight.

I think the impression which has been given with respect to legal officers that the interim payment was something new under this administration, is totally wrong. As a matter fact, as I would show, during the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) administration in 1989, the Cabinet decided that the legal officers under the Legal and Judicial Service Act which was passed in 1977, were supposed to be treated on a separate basis for the assessment of their terms and conditions. But this was not

happening. The PNM administration had neglected it and refused to do that. The Legal and Judicial Service Act was passed in 1977 for the specific purpose of making them independent and treating them in a different category.

In 1989, the NAR administration, apart from referring the terms and conditions of the legal officers to the Salaries Review Commission for consideration, by a Cabinet decision and the President making the request to the commission, decided that they would be given an interim payment.

Mr. Speaker, when the PNM administration took office in 1991, the then Attorney General, Mr. Keith Sobion, went to the Cabinet, which had the opportunity of stopping, revoking or even extending it. The matter was referred to the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting, and in typical PNM style when they do not want to decide anything, or cannot make a decision, it remained in Finance and General Purposes until this administration took office. This administration acted upon it.

Mr. Speaker, the then Attorney General also recognized that in 1989 the Salaries Review Commission had recommended to the chief legal officers who are the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Chief Parliamentary Counsel and the Solicitor General, a duty allowance of \$1,500 per month. The NAR administration had recommended and decided that should be given to them, but the PNM administration rescinded that decision. When this administration took office this was all part and parcel of giving the chief legal officers their \$1,500 as from 1989.

I do not understand why the PNM administration is against these legal officers. As a matter of fact, it was recognized under that administration that these legal officers could not be part and parcel of a trade union. They cannot be in a union to bargain for them or under the collective bargaining process of the Industrial Court. They are prohibited from doing that by law. They are under the purview of the Salaries Review Commission and have been making representation through the Attorney General in order to have this situation redressed.

What happened under this administration is that the Salaries Review Commission did a general review and the Cabinet decided that it would give the interim allowance—"interim" says what it is—until the matter was resolved by the Salaries Review Commission. It is recognized by the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago that legal officers, because of their training and professionalism, would not be on the same basis as teachers, police officers, or anybody else. That is the law. If the PNM wanted to, they could have changed it.

It is not right for politicking and cheap politics to be used to ask, "Why are you doing it for the legal officers, but you could not do it for other persons?" It is also this administration that extended the interim allowances to judicial officers. Thus, it was in recognition of the fact that the judicial officers were in that special category as recognized by law, therefore, the interim allowances were given.

Under the PNM administration, the average salary of a legal officer was between \$5,122—\$9,700. It ranged from a State Counsel I to a Deputy Chief Legal Officer. Although legal officers were getting that sum, the PNM administration was employing lawyers in the state corporations and paying a Junior Legal Officer \$9,000. Therefore, a legal officer employed in the Director of Public Prosecutions' office, the Chief Parliamentary Counsel's department and the Solicitor General, was getting \$5,122; whereas a junior legal officer at the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission was getting \$9,000 plus duty, housing, travelling and subsistence allowances, and contribution for holiday pay.

A junior legal officer in the Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago (TSTT) was getting \$10,613, plus a travelling allowance and an overseas telephone allowance of \$300 a month. Senior legal officers were getting \$12,000, whereas, a senior legal officer was getting under \$12,000 as a Chief Parliamentary Counsel draftsman or in the Solicitor General's office.

It was also brought home to the PNM administration that these officers, because of the low terms and conditions, were not staying in the state department. There were young lawyers coming, getting the training, and leaving. The PNM administration could not care less whether there were lawyers working in the Director of Public Prosecutions office or in the Chief State Solicitor's department.

As a matter of fact, under the PNM administration there was over 40 per cent in vacancies and it seems to me that the PNM administration wanted the legal department to collapse. I would not go, today, into why it wanted it to collapse, but it seemed as though it wanted it to collapse.

7.00 p.m.

This has nothing to do with discrimination or treating anybody more favourably. Again, it is cheap politics. Again, the hon. Member for Diego Martin East said today we do not know what is happening in our ministries. When this matter was raised at the committee meeting, it was under the Judiciary and questions arose about the legal officers and we said we would find out all the facts and bring them to the Parliament.

The Judiciary does not fall under the Ministry of the Attorney General and it was well known that judicial and legal officers got interim allowances. The question arose as to whether that sum under Head 3 related to legal officers or judicial officers. I really do not see any merit, but I think that I had to respond to make the record clear.

The other matter that I want to deal with is that there seems to be a feeling that because the Cabinet decided that there can be interim allowances, that is inconsistent with the view we adopted in respect of the Salaries Review Commission debate. Mr. Speaker, our position has been that the Cabinet has executive authority and, in respect of a report from the Salaries Review Commission, it can accept part, reject part, but it cannot rewrite the report.

Hon. Members: Ooh!

Mr. Imbert: Oh! You changed it now.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, they could say what they want. That was the position we adopted. That is the position but I am not surprised. They do not understand these matters. What we said was that the Salaries Review Commission gives a report and the Cabinet cannot rewrite the report and cannot give it to a Chief Personnel Officer for a Chief Personnel Officer to rewrite the report. What happened under the PNM administration, why the duty allowance was not given to the Chief Legal Officer also—they also sent it to the Chief Personnel Officer and the Chief Personnel Officer recommended that and they accepted the recommendation. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to refer to the Cabinet records here but that is the record of the matter and it is an act of hypocrisy for the PNM to try to give the impression that it was not part and parcel of it. They recognized that they had to do it. Here it is they know that the Cabinet had the power; they got into office and interim allowances were being given to legal officers. So, what? They continued it but they want to say they knew nothing about it. They could not stop it. They allowed it to continue and they waited for the Salaries Review Commission Report and that report accepted part of it, they adopted it and they continued it. So, what?

Those are the matters which I wanted to clarify. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Education (Dr. The Hon. Adesh Nanan): Mr. Speaker, I enter this debate to clear up some misconceptions put forward by the Member for

Diego Martin East and the Member for Diego Martin Central. I make reference to the situation of vacant posts in the Ministry of Education.

Reference was made in the Parliament to \$113.9 million and the Members for Diego Martin East and Diego Martin Central spoke about the shortage of teachers and the filling of vacant positions with respect to the shortage. But, we have to examine the \$113.9 million and its breakdown.

Of the \$113.9 million, upgrading of primary school teachers with respect to the two teachers' training colleges at Corinth and Valsayn, 368 primary school teachers were supposed to be upgraded based on the exams at both colleges. A sum of \$4.346 million was the costing for this particular upgrade. The payment of acting allowances to officers who hold temporary or acting positions—\$103.454 million. So, the filling of vacant posts in the Ministry of Education, civil service positions, \$1.175 million and teaching positions, \$4.9 million. Total mischief by the Member for Diego Martin East and the Member for Diego Martin Central.

But the Member for Diego Martin Central went even further speaking on the report. He went further to talk about corruption on a Minister's list with respect to the pre-service teacher training programme. It was unfortunate that the Member would go to those lengths with respect to the pre-service teacher training programme and I want to know if it was the experience under their administration of a Minister's list. We have to ask about that question of interference.

Mr. Valley: Information coming from your own ministry.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: I want to put on the record that I intervened and I will say why I intervened. I intervened so that there would be no jumping of the queue that used to take place under their administration. [*Desk thumping*]

He also spoke of the non-placement of teachers. Apparently, he is not aware of the situation in the country as exists now. The various education districts—for example, the Member of Parliament for St. Joseph wrote to me for a particular placement of a teacher in the St. Joseph area and my reply to the Member was they were working on backlogs for 1991. In Caroni, it is 1992; in St. Patrick, it is 1993. So, when the distribution is looked at, we are talking about seven, eight and nine year backlogs. That shows, in terms of primary school teachers, that there are no shortages.

But I want to get secondary schools to show what we have done because the Member for Diego Martin East tried to mislead the Parliament. There are certain shortages with respect to the availability of graduates. He spoke about sociology. There are so many sociology graduates but there are no sociology vacancies. Let

me tell you where the vacancies lie, Mr. Speaker. Information technology. That is where the vacancies lie. And why is there this shortage? Because all those computer science graduates are going to the private sector. But what does this Government do, because it recognized that there is a shortage? The Cabinet accepted a proposal.

Mr. Speaker, 136 secondary school teachers are to be trained at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine over the period 1998/1999—1999/2000 to deliver the information technology curriculum. It is common knowledge that we have provided computers to over 60 secondary schools and we intend to provide to all secondary schools. Training commenced for 68 secondary school teachers in information technology at the university and another batch of 68 will be provided for.

Those are the areas of shortages. We also have shortages in music, drama, art and geography and we are making provision to fill these vacancies by providing scholarships for geography teachers, scholarships at the university for arts, drama and music. So that is the situation in the country with respect to shortages and with respect to filling of positions.

Mr. Boynes: Would the Minister give way?

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: I would not be long.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk about the reference made by the Member for Diego Martin Central to post primary centres. Apparently, he is not following the trend in the country. There is a revolution in education taking place and he should wake up and realize that.

Mr. Manning: What revolution?

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Because he spoke about post primary centres as the way to go. We are moving away from post primary centres. We are removing the Common Entrance Examination; the last Common Entrance Examination will be held in the year 2000.

Mr. Manning: But they have 32 schools to build.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Do not worry, Member for San Fernando East. This is the UNC Government, not the PNM administration. We will get it done.

Mr. Speaker, I refer now to the virement of \$400,000 between the subheads at the Ministry of Education with respect to textbooks. But, before I talk, I just

Finance Committee Report
[DR. THE HON. A.NANAN]

Friday, January 15, 1999

wanted to inform Members on the other side what this \$400, 000 was actually to be used for when the money was vired between subheads.

We have set up a unit called SEMP, which is the Secondary Education Modernization Programme. What is SEMP? SEMP is the unit for facilitating—

Mr. Imbert: Semp is a bird that dies with its feet up in the air.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: No. No. It is an abbreviation—

Mr. Assam: He will die like a semp. [*Laughter*]

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, I ask Members to listen, even the Member for Diego Martin East because it will benefit my young friends, the students from his constituency.

Mr. Manning: Tell us about SEMP.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, SEMP is a revolutionary programme that will facilitate 6,000 secondary school places and also the removal of the shift system from our junior secondary schools. It is also going to enhance the curriculum. There is going to be training; there is going to be much upliftment of the secondary school environment for education.

[*Mr. Manning attempts to stand*]

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: No. No.

That unit was set up and had to be provided with a building, with stationery, equipment and a vehicle and this \$400,000 was vired from one vote to that particular unit.

Mr. Manning: Would the hon. Minister be kind enough to give way?

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: No, Mr. Speaker, I want to finish quickly. I want to get back to the original provision of the \$400,000 for the textbooks for needy students. This Government took the initiative. While the previous administration just had a report and never acted on it, this Government took the initiative to standardize textbooks.

Mr. Sudama: They had it on the drawing board. It was either on the drawing board or in the pipeline.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: There were certain teething problems. We have set up a new committee. It is clearly stated. The chairman is Prof. Kenneth Ramchand and we are working towards the textbooks which will be acceptable in primary schools. The Member for Diego Martin East spoke about: If we had the money,

why we did not buy the textbooks for the primary school students. He knows fully well that there were certain problems with the particular textbooks, so once this thing has been regularized with respect to the new committee, we will provide the facilities.

7.15 p.m.

If you look under the Development Programme of the World Bank, you would see there was a provision for library and textbooks and I informed the House that over \$1.2 million was spent with respect to library books which were supplied to the various primary schools.

Mr. Speaker, I just intervened to clear up those areas with respect to the \$113.9 million transfer from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Finance and with respect to the Minister's list.

Thank you.

Mr. Manning: I thank the hon. Minister for giving way. Does this department have as part of its responsibility, the review of the curriculum of the Junior Secondary and Senior Comprehensive schools? Secondly, does it also have as part of its responsibility the construction of schools; if so, how many schools?

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, I will answer very briefly. The answer is yes to the question and also, it is done on a phased basis.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Trevor Sudama): Mr. Speaker, I myself had no real intention to participate and intervene in this debate, but already because of issues which were raised by the Members opposite I think it is important that I clarify them and set the record straight.

Before I begin, I welcome the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West back to Trinidad and Tobago. He is not here, I do not know if he has gone on one of his jaunts again, but he did make a brief appearance today and I want to welcome him and ask what was the weather like in South Africa and how was his sojourn in South Africa when he is supposed to be representing the people of Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West in Trinidad and Tobago. But when one looks at what is happening on the other side, any number can play. They are here, there and everywhere, the Leader, the Member for San Fernando East is a Leader only in name, he has a nomenclature of Leader and that is where it stands. I just wanted to welcome him back to our fold and say that his constituents would have been very happy to see him after this long absence from Trinidad and Tobago and indeed, in this House.

Mr. Speaker, there was one issue raised by the Member for Diego Martin Central with which we have to deal because it involves the outlook for the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. Every time they open their mouths, whether it is in this House or outside this House, they seek to undermine, not only the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, but to put the economy of this country in jeopardy. Every time they speak, whether inside or outside, they paint a picture of doom and gloom and they do not understand what they are doing. And if I may be charitable today I would say as Christ said on the cross: "Lord, forgive them for they know not what they do." He spoke about the deficits and said that they are so unbridgeable and would lead to the undermining of the economy and negative economic growth, and it would put the exchange rate in jeopardy and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, what is happening with the trade deficit is a current deficit and it is brought about by the fact—if he were reading the newspapers, he would understand—that there were unusually heavy imports of machinery and equipment into the Energy and Energy Based Industry into the construction sector which support the development that is taking place there. Side by side with that occurrence, there has been a slide in the price of oil and petrochemical products. When both are added together, yes, there is a trade deficit. What they do not understand is that that trade deficit is financed by the direct foreign exchange so that the bottom line is that the reserve position is healthier than it ever was, and the foreign investors look at that picture and, therefore, they continue to have confidence in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago despite all the doom they are saying on the other side.

They do not understand the nature of confidence. We have economies all over the world going through a very difficult period, whether it is in East Asia, Russia, Latin America or Brazil. Do you know what has happened in Brazil? I am going to give them a little warning here today to be careful of what they say. One state Governor in Brazil merely said that he is going to put a moratorium on debt payment for that state in Brazil and as a result of that one statement, investors became very cautious, the money flows into Brazil stopped, in fact, there was a haemorrhage of almost a billion dollars within a matter of days from Brazil because one irresponsible state Governor made a statement and this is, despite the fact that the IMF, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the US Treasuries and other Treasury in the world put together a US \$41 billion package to support the economy of Brazil, and because of one irresponsible statement there is that situation occurring in Brazil. This is the kind of irresponsibility we associate with the other side.

Mr. Speaker, that kind of irresponsibility can have consequences for the whole economy because if the Trinidad and Tobago economy goes into any decline, not only the Government suffers, but the people suffer including the Opposition Members. We all suffer and, therefore, the kind of irresponsibility coming from the other side and the Member for Diego Martin East in particular, I want to put that on record that what is happening in the country today, the investment flows are continuing. There is a difficulty with the prices in the oil and petrochemical sectors, but it is not only Trinidad and Tobago which has difficulties with the export prices; other countries have difficulties, but despite those difficulties, we have been able to manage and there is a prediction of growth for 1999. We have predicted on the basis of the information last year, a growth rate of 5 per cent.

Mr. Manning: How much is that?

Hon. T. Sudama: The year has not come to an end, but the fundamentals are there and we have been given the support and the blessings of the International Monetary Institution that we are on the right path. We are on the path of fiscal prudence. Despite what you all say here today, we are on the path of fiscal prudence, the economy is sound, we may have a little up and down, but the economy is fundamentally sound and we are diversifying away from dependence on oil into other sectors and that would enable us to have sustainable growth.

Mr. Manning: Would the Member be kind enough to tell us how many new investments were made that were not in the pipeline?

Hon. T. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, this question of pipeline. What was in the pipeline and what was on the drawing board. All we have heard for the last three years was whatever this Government has accomplished were either on the drawing board when they left, or it was in the pipeline, but I can tell you that that drawing board has a lot of blank sheets and that is what we inherited. And that pipeline was choked, it had a constipated pipeline when we got into office and, therefore, this Government had to open this country up to investment whether local or foreign and we are moving steadily in that direction to make Trinidad and Tobago more and more investor-friendly.

As the Member for St. Joseph said, we are bringing to this House, the Investment Promotion Bill which would encapsulate our policy and what we have been doing over the last three years to make Trinidad and Tobago one of the outstanding places for investment in this whole hemisphere. That is what we are doing. We have the highest per capita investment in Trinidad and Tobago except

for Canada and I want the country to understand what this Government has done in terms of attracting foreign direct investment.

Mr. Speaker, when they were there and this country was flowing with money, we had at one time a foreign reserve of US \$7 billion; we had the oil boom and they were borrowing money despite all these reserves, to say they must maintain the credit rating of Trinidad and Tobago and that is the kind of finance in which they were involved. When they left office in 1986, they had this country indebted up to its neck. This country was so heavily indebted in terms of foreign debt there was the highest ever level of foreign indebtedness in this country when the PNM demitted office in 1986. We have taken a different route, we are saying that we would take loan funding but with moderation and put the emphasis on equity funding, and foreign direct investment to finance development of Trinidad and Tobago, that is the approach this Government is taking.

Hon. Member: That was in the pipeline.

Hon. T. Sudama: That was in the pipeline? As I said, that was a choked pipeline. I want to deal with this question to inform the House that if they accept what is coming from the other side in terms of development in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, they do so at their own peril. They would be well advised to ignore the mouthings coming from the Members for Diego Martin Central, Diego Martin East, San Fernando East and all the others who proclaim to know what is happening with the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and the true development taking place.

7.30 p.m.

We have had the confidence of the multilateral institutions, we have had the confidence of foreign investors and we are moving ahead, Mr. Speaker. While they choose certain aspects to dilate and digress on, and we talk about the deficit, it is my duty to explain what is going on and to allay the fears of the population which they are trying to incite.

It is not only what they say on economic matters. When this Government came into office in November 1995, they went all over the country, all over the region and all over the world saying that this Government would only last three months. They tried to create anxiety, fear and apprehension in the country and among investors overseas. This Government, unstable, would only last three months. When we lasted three months, they said we would only last six months; again trying to undermine the Government, but moreso, undermine the economy of Trinidad and Tobago by their statements.

When we lasted six months, they said a year. After a year they said, well, we will see now; it might last two years. We are here three years, we will be here for five years, and be here for another 15 years. So all their attempts at sabotage will fail, because the population out there knows better. The time is coming to test it.

Mr. Manning: I will not talk too soon if I were you.

Hon. T. Sudama: I speak when I want to speak. I just want to say something about education about which so much was made here this evening. They had so much concern for teachers and how we were not raising teachers' salaries, not filling posts in the teaching profession and how we were so derelict in our duty towards teaching and the upliftment of standards in the schools. How we are so quick to attempt to raise salaries of Ministers but we are not thinking of teachers and we are depriving the Ministry of Education of much needed resources by transferring money out of the ministry to other areas. There were all sorts of criticisms.

My colleague from Tabaquite has dealt with the need for the transfers, but I want to come back to their record in education. Today, what is happening in the education system? The gross indiscipline and violence in schools today is a daily occurrence reported in the media almost on a daily basis. When did this happen? In the last three years? The seeds of that were sown by the PNM government. We are now reaping the whirlwind. They destroyed the education in this country, and by destroying education, they created a young generation—I do not have the facility to use the strong language as the Member for Tobago East, but they destroyed the future, they undermined the future of this country.

Everywhere teachers cannot teach. They are under assault from students and parents because a PNM government decided that they were going to give free reign to indiscipline in schools. They were not going to concern themselves about what happened in the schools. They built some buildings, employed some teachers, put the students there and that was the end of their responsibility for the teaching profession and education in this country. Today, what is happening is that a large and significant percentage of the graduates of the secondary school system is functionally illiterate and ennumerate—the legacy of the PNM. A large percentage of this is because of the policies adopted by the PNM government for 34 long years. Today we are reaping the benefits. Violence, indiscipline and rape, and then they come here to talk about we are not providing security in the schools. If they had the right policy, there would have never been any need for security in the first place, but they have condoned a system that has created denizens of violence, and now they are saying we are not providing security.

This Government will provide security as its resources can afford. We are committed to that. We are committed to the security of children, but I want this country to understand the enormity of the problem we face, the legacy of the PNM that we now have to deal with. The Member for San Fernando East was there for 22 years in Government.

Mr. Manning: That is not true.

Hon. T. Sudama: He was there for 27 years in this House and Prime Minister for four years. He was part of the PNM regime from day immemorial. He came in 1971 on a no-vote campaign. Just as an aside, in this Parliament for 27 years, in Government for 22, Prime Minister for four years and he does not know the distinction between Parliament and Government. He does not know that distinction. He goes and says outside that the Red House has traditionally been the seat of Government. The Red House has not been the seat of Government. The Red House has been the seat of Parliament. He does not understand the distinction between the Executive and Legislature.

Mr. Manning: What wrong with this man? It is the seat of Government. It was built as that.

Hon. T. Sudama: He does not know the distinction between Legislature and Executive, but he wants to bring his office here in this Chamber. Such ignorance and dotishness. It is amazing coming from a man who has been in this House for so long and a leader at that; a so-called leader. I am amazed. Anywhere else one can have the seat of Government, but not in this House associated with the Parliament Chamber, the Legislature. One goes elsewhere to set up government offices.

Mr. Imbert: Whitehall.

Hon. T. Sudama: Still, he does not know that distinction. That is why, Mr. Speaker, that party has nowhere to go, when it has a leader who is incapable of learning the simple principle of the Constitution and the division of powers, very little or no appreciation of that and he wants to come back to be in Government, to be Prime Minister. The people of this country cannot be so stupid to give him the opportunity to get back into Government. They do not deserve it. They have learned nothing over the years. If I were the Member for Tobago East, I would say he was incapable of learning.

Mr. Speaker, I was on the question of the educational standards that we have current in this country and who is responsible for that—34 years of PNM rule. There was a question I was trying to address today when I made a statement. Today in Trinidad and Tobago, of the 17 to 25 year age cohort in this country,

those at tertiary level are only 7 per cent. This is one of the lowest percentages in the world. There are other developing countries with 15 per cent of the age cohort at tertiary level. Barbados, 21 per cent, Latin American countries, 19 per cent, Jamaica is ahead of us, but over the years the PNM is responsible for neglect in tertiary education in this country. Today we have 7 per cent and they are talking about graduates who cannot find jobs. Soon they will not be able to find work and jobs. *[Laughter]*

When they understand where we are and what is required of the development thrust, it is today well known that growth and development rest on the quality and quantity of one's human resource base, and most important at the tertiary level. When one looks at all the countries which are advancing today, look at their tertiary level component in the population, one will see the correlation between tertiary level education and development, but not them there in the PNM. They had no concern over that.

We are now trying today to correct that situation. One of the means we are using to correct it is to set up a community college that will rationalize.

Mr. Imbert: Three years late.

Hon. T. Sudama: You had 34 years! What did you do in that time?

Mr. Valley: The University of the West Indies.

Hon. T. Sudama: You set up the University of the West Indies? What nonsense am I hearing? They set up the University of the West Indies? When we came into office, Mr. Speaker, we had discussions with the university. They came up with a strategic plan which had as a component of it expansion of access to tertiary education at the university, and to change the composition, the output of graduate students where today we are aiming to get 20 per cent of student enrollment in the graduate faculty. We are trying to change the composition of the courses and curriculum so that 60 per cent of people who attend the university will be engaged in science and technology courses as against the previous emphasis on arts and liberal studies which was 75 per cent. We are correcting that and changing that imbalance.

We are increasing access so that the percentage at tertiary level will be higher. Not only are we doing that at the university level. At the non-university tertiary level we are expanding, first of all, through the establishment of the National Community College where we are expanding the range, rationalizing the programmes and doing certification. We are changing the course contents and

Finance Committee Report
[HON. T. SUDAMA]

Friday, January 15, 1999

doing things which this PNM, for their 34 long years, had failed to address. Today I hear talk about education. They should be ashamed to talk about education and the level to which they have brought it. The last thing they should talk about is the educational attainment and the opportunity for education for the young people of this country.

7.45 p.m.

The Member for San Fernando East talked about the Secondary Education Modernization Project (SEMP), of which you all would never have conceived, at all. We are right now negotiating a loan and the component. Let me just read for you the components of that loan to see how we are updating, upgrading and bringing the secondary education system into the modern age, when you all had left it in the dark ages.

These are the components. I want to put it on record. The first component, and they are interrelated, four components. *[Interruption]* The Member for Diego Martin Central does not want to hear that. What he wants to hear is stupidity about figures. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order, please.

Hon. T. Sudama: You should go home. Remember when the last Speaker sent you home, what your remarks were. I just want to enlighten the Member for San Fernando East, through you, Mr. Speaker.

The programme consists of the following components: Improve educational equity and quality—and this comprises curriculum development in five core subject areas in each of Forms I to V; improving learning strategies and learning resources; professional development—that is for teachers—assessment testing and evaluation; and the big component, the one dealing with physical facilities which will address the question of deshifting, rehabilitation and upgrading of school infrastructure. Under this component we are going to provide 9,500 new secondary school places through the construction, furnishing and equipping of approximately, in total, 17 new general five-year schools. That is the vision.

In addition, we are going to purchase 1,000 additional places in private secondary schools, Forms I to V. We are encouraging the private sector to get into the picture in provision of school places. Then, we are going to construct two new—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Assam: You see innovation.

Mr. Manning: That started with us. We did that.

Hon. T. Sudama: Member for San Fernando East, do not be distracted by those fellows, listen to me. I am enlightening you.

Mr. Manning: They are not worth it.

Hon. T. Sudama: That is my mission in this life, to enlighten people, especially on the other side.

The construction of two new replacement schools at Palo Seco, Vessigny and Rio Claro—two out of those three will be replaced. Now, hear this. The installation and upgrading of libraries, science laboratories and computer labs in all existing 100 secondary schools. [*Desk thumping*] Next, limited rehabilitation of converted junior and secondary schools. Then we are dealing with school maintenance under the physical component and incentives for the participation of denominational school boards in the expansion of the system; that is the physical component.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Oropouche for giving way. I beg to move that this House do continue sitting until the completion of the Motion and the completion of debate on the Bill which is accompanying the Motion.

Question put and agreed to.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT (SECOND) (1998—1999)

Hon. T. Sudama: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So I was going through, for the edification of Members on the other side the components of this very significant programme in which we are engaged and for which negotiations will come to an end very shortly. I spoke about a component dealing with improved equity and quality and the component dealing with the expansion of the physical facilities.

Therefore, I want to talk about the other aspect of it, which is very important. Because while one may have the physical facilities and one may deal with curriculum development and teachers' development and so forth, the institutional strengthening of the ministry and the school system are so critically important. Under that component of the loan, we are doing a development of critical mass of

management and operational capacity at all levels within the ministry and the proposed regional education districts and the schools. Under that component, we are also engaged in new management information and administrative systems and processes applied at all levels. We are going to separate the strategic and operational functions and responsibilities at the central regional and school levels; initiate overall planning and management of the change process; internal and external communication flows; incentives for teachers and students co-ordinating the proposed actions with all relevant external organizations and critical stakeholders.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

So the comprehensive nature of this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to put before the House, because the Member for Diego Martin Central really does not matter in all this. He is—*[Words expunged]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Standing Order 36(4). I would advise the Member for Oropouche to withdraw those defamatory words about the Member for Diego Martin Central and have it expunged from the record now.

Hon. T. Sudama: I withdraw, Sir.

So, the institutional strengthening component is a very critical element of this loan. Therefore, if we do not strengthen the Ministry of Education, we do not strengthen the school system, we do not strengthen the regional education boards that we want to establish, we are not going to get the output from this very critical initiative.

Then, there is a section in which we deal with studies and measures for the improved sector performance and the renewal of the system . As we carry on with this programme, we have to assess the programme as we go along with it, so there is a component for assessment of the programme, and the effectiveness of the programme. Unlike what you all did, you just went and built schools, you did not assess anything. You are incapable of doing anything that is of value to the country.

Now, I just thought I would put that on the record to show that what we have had to do is to take all the deficiencies of the system inherited and passed on from the previous PNM regimes and try to correct, make good and improve that system, so that we will give our population, especially our young people, a chance in this very global, competitive environment in which we are placed. Under the PNM they never had a chance. You know what was our slogan in 1995, “Give yourself a

chance". We are now giving the young people of Trinidad and Tobago a real chance at the secondary school, we are also doing that at the tertiary level. That is the mission of this Government.

So, I have dealt with the mischief that they are trying to create in the minds of people, saying that we are against teachers and against dealing with the education system, strengthening it and so forth. That sort of mischief, I trust my comments here will be reported and what they are trying to do will be dealt with.

I want to say something about salary increases which came into the picture and how we want salary increases on this side, they do not want any salary increases on that side. The question I asked, and we have to ask it again. The number involved at the parliamentary ministerial level is a small portion of the total number involved in this salary recommendation of the Salaries Review Commission. Are you against salary increases for the senior public servants in this country? Are you against that? If you are against that, well say so, because it is all part of the same package. Because there are so many public servants out there wanting to hear what will be the decision of the Parliament on salaries review and we have to put it on record that this PNM regime is opposed to giving civil servants a deserved salary increase.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, a point of order. Standing Order 36(3).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Oropouche, Standing Order 36(3) says that:

"It shall be out of order to attempt to revive in any debate a matter or reconsider any specific question...upon which the House has come to a conclusion during the current session..."

The Member for Diego Martin Central has asked that I rule on this point of order based on what you were just saying about the Salaries Review Commission. The Member for Oropouche is speaking about the Salaries Review Commission on the basis of referring to a package on this. If the Member for Oropouche could define what part of the Motion he is referring to, I will rule afterwards.

8.00 p.m.

Hon. T. Sudama: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was responding to statements made by the Member for Diego Martin East with respect to our desire to have salary increases which we do not deserve. He said so today, during the course of the debate. That is what I am responding to. That increase which he talked about is part of a package presented and recommended by the Salaries Review

Finance Committee Report
[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER]

Friday, January 15, 1999

Commission. Are they only against increases for ministers and parliamentarians, or against increases for the whole package? I am asking one question.

The other question is, should this House approve the recommendations of the Salaries Review Commission (SRC), and the Members on the other side are also entitled to the increase, would they refund these increases to the Treasury? It was a question asked in an editorial yesterday in the *Guardian*. If this House does decide on the salary increases and it is applicable across the board to all Parliamentarians, would they, because of their position on this issue, refund those salary increases to the Parliament and the Treasury?

If they are so adamant and principled that this is the position they would adopt, let them refund the increase.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am going to call for the *Hansard* for the Member for Diego Martin East, to see whether he said anything about salary increases. Just carry on to the other point while I send for the *Hansard*.

Hon. T. Sudama: Okay, I have finished with that point. I made it in response to the Member for Diego Martin East when he said that Members on this side cannot get employment otherwise and that is why we want salary increases. [Crosstalk] He said so!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I would determine that. [Crosstalk]

Hon. T. Sudama: I want to come to the Member for Diego Martin East.

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. G. Singh]

Question put and agreed to. [Crosstalk]

Hon. T. Sudama: When you cannot take blows, it is a hell of a thing. That is very significant, but let me come to the Member for Diego Martin East.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we come here sitting after sitting to listen to the other side, but particularly the Member for Diego Martin East making all kinds of accusations and allegations against Members of the Government. From the time he opens his mouth in this Parliament, he talks about corruption. It is corruption in everything that this Government does. He has even suggested that the figures presented here were of a corrupt nature because they were not giving the truth of

what the real situation is. It is an accusation of corruption. Therefore, he is implying that the public servants who produced those figures were, in some way or the other, corruptly advised to produce those figures. This is what we have to come here to listen to day after day, from that Member.

He goes on even further today. Do you know what he said? That while Mr. Panday is Prime Minister of this country, he is also receiving other emoluments from the sugar union. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know that when a person takes ministerial office he cannot have another source of income. That is the law, that is the rule. Thus, he is accusing the Prime Minister of breaking the laws of Trinidad and Tobago as pertaining to ministerial office. He has done that with impunity in this Chamber!

He has gone even further and said that the Prime Minister has a house in Kensington, London, alleging and implying that he got it by irregular means. He said so here in this debate, and that was permitted. That was permitted in this House. So a Member could get up and make any kind of scurrilous allegations in this House, and it is permitted. [*Crosstalk*]

If I may dilate a bit and give an idea what "scurrilous" denotes; it comes from the word "scurry", and there are certain animals that scurry. Sewer rats scurry, and it is from that word that the adjective "scurrilous" is derived. When I look at the Member for Diego Martin East, I cannot find a better description than associating him with the word "scurry" and "scurrilous", and that is the English Language.

My good friend from St. Joseph likes to quote from *Leviathan* of Thomas Hobbes, which made mention of the "nasty, brutish and short". When I look at the Member for Diego Martin East, I think that maybe Thomas Hobbes had him in mind when he spoke about being "nasty, brutish and short". [*Laughter*]

When we listen to his whole contribution here today, little minds. There is a Latin phrase which says "*parva parvos delectant*" which means "little minds delight in little things", and that is the Member for Diego Martin East. My English may not be up to standard, but my Latin is impeccable. [*Laughter*]

We have been told that in this House for this new year we should set standards and adhere to new levels of debate. But we come back here and when you hear the Member for Diego Martin East, you would understand that the man is incapable of elevating himself from anywhere. We wanted to talk about financial matters. When I listened to the other side, I sat here and wondered, what this debate was all about, whether it was a debate on a Bill to vary the Finance Act of Trinidad and

Finance Committee Report
[HON. T. SUDAMA]

Friday, January 15, 1999

Tobago. Was that the debate? Because the Member for Diego Martin East spoke about everything under the sun and was permitted to do so, although in this House we are committed to elevating, uplifting standards in the year 1999.

Therefore, I merely spoke to put on record my own dismay and disappointment with the Member for Diego Martin East and the levels to which he is capable of taking debates in this House. I expressed my concern for him and the leadership of the other side which cannot control him and has no way of indicating to him, "Look here, standards have to be lifted, we are in a new era, lift yourself!" For a born again Christian, maybe he should try to induce him into the Christian ethos of self-elevation and salvation. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] My soul is already saved. I am saved. [*Interruption*] I have gone through the processes of achieving salvation.

Tonight, I will get up at every opportunity when they distort and create mischief and propagate misinformation in this House: it is my duty on behalf of the Government to correct and put the record straight. That is why I have made my contribution today in this House, because I am determined, by the hook or otherwise, to get the PNM to lift their standard and vision for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, so that they would better be able to contribute to development of this country. I want to do that. I feel that is a mission I have here, and I would get up and speak as often as is necessary in this House in order to save the souls on the other side, to convert the Sauls into Pauls.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Patrick Manning (*San Fernando East*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise to make a relatively brief intervention in this debate, in the light of the misinformation read into the public record by the hon. Member for Oropouche. I am absolutely amazed that a Minister of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and one who has been a Member of Parliament from 1976 to today, can seek to convince hon. Members present and through this Parliament, the national community, that the Red House was not built as the seat of Government in Trinidad and Tobago.

To make a comment like that suggests, either the Minister is ignorant of the facts or that he sought to deny the country's history insofar as he has his own agenda that is inconsistent with a public recognition of the main purpose for which the Red House was built. I want to be sure that years to come when schoolchildren and researchers peruse the records of this Parliament—recognizing that the hon. Member who has been a Member of Parliament for a long time—they do not make the mistake of accepting what he has said as law.

While I was on my feet I heard, *sotto voce* the hon. Member for St. Augustine, on the whole question of the separation of powers. In 1971 when I became a Member of this Parliament for the first time, [*Interruption*] several of the courts of Trinidad and Tobago were housed in this building, and at no time was the whole question of the separation of powers, which became relevant from 1962—if I am to be guided by another *sotto voce* comment of the Member—used to prevent the courts of Trinidad and Tobago from occupying space in the same building, as the national Parliament. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I take it one step further, that we moved the courts out of the Red House, not so much because of the separation of powers, but that the workload of the Judiciary in Trinidad and Tobago had increased to the point where it became necessary to provide it with new and improved facilities. Initially, on an interim basis, that building on Cipriani Boulevard on Tragarete Road, which is the NIB building, was used as a temporary court. Then the Hall of Justice was built and was occupied in about 1977. That is when the courts moved out of here.

8.15 p.m.

In other words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the fact that there is the principle of the separation of powers, in no way prevents different arms of the state from occupying space in the same building. What it means is, none must interfere with the other. That is the reality of it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to inform my hon. friend from Oropouche that the office of the Colonial Secretary—

Mr. Sudama: Oh! That is what he is coming back to.

Mr. P. Manning:—was housed right where the Members' dining room is today. That was the office of the Colonial Secretary and, while the Colonial Secretary occupied that office, there was still the Legislative Council which occupied this Chamber. In other words, as the constructors of this building saw it and as the administration of that time saw it, even though we were not independent and still in a colonial system, there was no problem with different arms of the state being housed in one building but, more than that, the building was constructed for precisely that purpose as the seat of Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we designed a city centre for Port of Spain, the capital city, we did so on the basis of the country's history.

Mr. Sudama: What about the people who are starving in the city centre?

Mr. P. Manning: If I may just refresh your memory very briefly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Our plan, which was approved by the Cabinet, envisaged the Red House being separated into two parts, this side being used by the Parliament, the other side being used by the Office of the Prime Minister and, just for the record, the Rotunda area of the Red House, to be used as a museum for the legislative history of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Sudama: That was in the pipeline, too.

Mr. P. Manning: Just for the record, it was designed by persons competent to do so, that any excess space that the Office of the Prime Minister would have needed would have been provided in the top floors of the National Library which is now being constructed; that Woodford Square would have been upgraded.

Mr. Sudama: At the expense of poor people, the pensioners and so forth.

Mr. P. Manning: That the building vacated by the library would be amalgamated with City Hall; that the old police headquarters building, the quadrangle would be completed and it would have been made into an art gallery—it was a comprehensive plan—that we would build on Knox Street, just over the road from the Red House, a new building on that block to house the departments that operate in close propinquity with the Hall of Justice—the legislative departments and so forth. All of that formed part of a comprehensive plan.

More than that, we also indicated that we would pedestrianize the city centre, bounded as it would be by Frederick Street on the East, by Queen Street on the South, by Edward Street on the West and by Duke Street on the North. It would be pedestrianized; it would be upgraded in quality and that it would form part of the tourist attraction that would be part of the life of Trinidad and Tobago, especially Port of Spain.

Mr. Sudama: What about Whitehall?

Mr. P. Manning: In respect of Whitehall, it was our intention to use Whitehall as a building for Government entertainment.

Mr. Sudama: Oh! So, party and so forth.

Mr. P. Manning: The hon. Member for Oropouche, of course, will see it as a place to party—his mind will see it as that—but we saw much more than that.

Mr. Sudama: Tell us what you saw. You have a vision.

Mr. P. Manning: Stollmeyer's Castle would be used as a museum, but as a museum that was also the key to a number of other museums which would be set

up all over the country and that it would have been a live museum. That was the plan and it was approved by the Cabinet. I would like to suggest to hon. Members—

Mr. G. Singh: Would the hon. Member for San Fernando East indicate what kind of time period there was for implementation of this plan?

Mr. P. Manning: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Cabinet decision was that the city centre should be in place by September of 1999. That was the Cabinet decision.

Mr. Sudama: I see. So you miscalculated how long you would be in office.

Mr. P. Manning: I just wanted to make it absolutely clear that the plan was one based on the country's history; the plan was very workable and, to the extent that the plan is not prejudiced, it is the PNM's intention to implement that plan as and when it returns to the seat of governance.

Mr. Sudama: On the 10th of never.

Mr. P. Manning: Secondly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could not sit here as a Member of previous PNM administrations and listen to the Member for Oropouche give the impression that the PNM did nothing in education. May I remind him that in 1957 when I wrote the Government Exhibition Examination, I came number 331. In that year, government initially gave the same number of scholarships as it gave in the previous year, which was 250; and that two weeks later, the new government announced an increase in the number of scholarships to 400 and that is how I went to secondary school.

When we demitted office in 1995, there were 20,000 students attending secondary schools free. I would like to ask the Member for Oropouche a question, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is that the record of a government that has done nothing for education?

When the PNM came into office in 1956, there was no St. Augustine campus of the University of the West Indies. It did not exist. Whatever hon. Members may say, it just did not exist. It exists today. In fact, the JFK Lecture Theatre was constructed as part of the negotiations that took place between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the United States authorities as they negotiated US withdrawal from Chaguaramas. It was part of the settlement. Hon. Members opposite do not know it and they are not interested in knowing that.

So, if it is that we say in this Parliament that we are subscribing to truth, then the truth must be told and that is that there is no political party in Trinidad and Tobago that has done as much in the field of education for the people of this country as the People's National Movement. That is fact. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sudama: Would the hon. Member give way? I think the Member missed my point. He is talking about volumes and quantities. The point I was making was about the quality of education at the tertiary and secondary school levels and, at the tertiary level, also the volume that we are producing. Now, if they had planned properly, those volumes would have been: For tertiary level, 20/25 per cent and at the secondary level, we would have been producing skilled people to take the opportunities that are being afforded by the expanding economy which they did not do. That is the point I am making.

Mr. P. Manning: What the hon. Member is saying is that volume is important at the tertiary level but not at the secondary level, not understanding that it is out of the secondary school system that those who go to tertiary institutions come and, therefore, as access is expanded to secondary institutions, so too, the country is put in a much better position to send a larger number of people to tertiary institutions whether they be in Trinidad and Tobago, or whether they be elsewhere. That is the reality.

Mr. Sudama: They have to be adequately qualified to go.

Mr. P. Manning: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to remind the hon. Member for Oropouche, because I was around in those years, when the very first junior secondary schools were built; there were eight of them. On the morning in 1972 when those schools were opened for the first time, I was sent by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago to open the school in Penal. My colleague, the Member for San Fernando West, opened the school in Pleasantville—there were eight of them. I was Minister of Maintenance in 1978 when the first set of senior comprehensive schools were opened in Trinidad and Tobago ensuring that those students graduating from the junior secondary school system would have at least two years of secondary education at the level of the senior comprehensive school.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was present in 1975 after the debate had raged for a long time as to whether technical education should be conducted under the same roof as academic education. It was a debate that went on for a long time because we were not sure about what we should do and, initially, the idea was that we would have built a number of technical schools all over the country, but in 1975, it was the Prime Minister's proposals to the Cabinet and education that changed that policy. The policy which was then enunciated was a policy of having technical education and traditional academic type education conducted under the same roof and that is how we got the technical/vocational wing in the junior secondary and senior comprehensive schools. So that it is difficult for someone like me to sit here

and hear the hon. Member for Oropouche make the statement that the PNM did nothing for education.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the education system is not something with which one tinkers. In other words, when that system is put in place, that system has to be given enough time so that we can see the effects of curriculum and other approaches being taken in the education system and secondary school system. One of the biggest problems that school system has today is: How are we to properly impart religious education to secondary schools in the government sector? That is a problem in the school system.

Mr. Sudama: We are addressing that.

Mr. P. Manning: What are you addressing? Could you address that? Do you understand the point I am making, Mr. Deputy Speaker? That is one of the biggest problems we have.

Mr. Sudama: With values system in education.

Mr. P. Manning: I have not heard that from the Minister of Education.

[Mr. Sudama stands]

Mr. Sudama: Values based education—

Mr. P. Manning: Mr. Deputy Speaker, your protection, please.

[Mr. Manning sits]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I thought the Member had given way.

Mr. P. Manning: No. No. Your protection, please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Oropouche, please have your seat. Apparently, he is looking for protection. The Member for Oropouche has been speaking for a little more than 70 minutes and the Member for San Fernando East is being disturbed.

Mr. Sudama: No. I thought he gave way in order for me to correct him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No. No.

Mr. P. Manning: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As I was saying before the rude interruption, one of the biggest problems in the education system today is the impartation of religious education to schools. The question is: How do we do it? Because the system we sought to use to do that has not worked.

I also remind hon. Members that one of the first things that the new government in 1992 did, was to put together a task force on education; that this task force met—it comprised about 20 to 25 people, experts in education from all walks of life—it did a draft and used that as a basis for consultation right across the country. How in the face of all that could the hon. Member for Oropouche conclude that the PNM has done nothing in education? The 10-year plan. Incidentally, that 10-year plan has been adopted by the current Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the Education Plan 1994—2003. That 10-year plan was the result of those consultations and, if subsequently, as indeed it has been the case, the current Government established a team of experts to look at the removal of the Common Entrance Examination, it did so in furtherance of the Education Plan 1994—2003, which had as one of its central objectives, the removal of the Common Entrance Examination.

If one reads that report of the Clive Pantin Committee, one would see, however veiled one may want to make it, that the mandate they were given was a mandate which they were certain was rooted in short-term political gains and it was made clear in that report that they were not playing that game. It was a serious issue. It was nothing that could be done on a fly-by-night basis and it is a credit to that committee—I spent some time in Cuba reading that report—headed by Mr. Clive Pantin, of the work it did and the recommendations it made.

When the hon. Member for Tabaquite, the Minister of Education, talks about removing the Common Entrance Examination by the year 2000, if you realize, according to the Clive Pantin Report, there are 22 schools to build while the Minister of Planning and Development tells us that they are now negotiating it. Are they able to build 22 schools on time to remove the Common Entrance Examination by the year 2004?

8.30 p.m.

Mr. Sudama: You do not know the terms of the loan.

Mr. P. Manning: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I raise the question because a school could be built in a year. It is easy for a Minister to say this, but in time we would see what, in fact, emerges. If today the education system in Trinidad and Tobago continues to evolve, it is evolving on the basis of a foundation made by the People's National Movement. It was Dr. Eric Williams who set the vision for us of universal secondary education, and it is a credit to the PNM that at this time we

reached a figure of 83 per cent. Now, due to the shifting of junior secondary schools, they are moving towards 100 per cent of universal secondary education.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am very pleased not only to have been a Member of the political party which has set Trinidad and Tobago on that course, but to have been a part of those decisions myself.

Mr. Roger Boynes (*Toco/Manzanilla*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you for recognizing me. It is indeed a privilege and a profound pleasure to address the House today on this matter before us. I tried to get the hon. Member for Tabaquite to give way earlier to get some information on behalf of my constituency, so he has forced me to participate in this very important debate.

First of all, I remind the Member for Tabaquite that approximately one year ago in this august Chamber, on behalf of the constituents of Toco /Manzanilla, I had filed a motion on the adjournment with respect to the shortage of teachers at the Toco Composite School and was given the assurance that the situation would have been dealt with. The hon. Member even went on to explain that some of the reasons for the vacancy and the lack of satisfying the vacancy of teachers at that school were due to the fact of the distance and the shortage of teachers in general. Suffice it to say, that almost a year has come and gone and we find that the situation practically still obtains and the Member said in his contribution that \$4.9 million was, in fact, allocated for the purpose of filling vacancies. My heart is a bit sad and I would ask the hon. Member if he could use his office to deal with that particular situation as soon as possible.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Dr. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, I want to inform the Member for Toco/Manzanilla that it is the responsibility of the Teaching Service Commission to appoint teachers and not the Minister of Education, or the Ministry of Education.

Mr. R. Boynes: I understand the clever nature of the hon. Minister. However, he is in charge of his Ministry and the wheels could be oiled in the direction of ensuring that the vacancies would be satisfied and he knows, as well as I do, that he has a part to play in ensuring that the vacancies in Toco Composite are filled. He has, in fact, mentioned that \$4.9 million was allocated to deal with the vacancies, probably sourcing new teachers and so forth. I am shocked and surprised that after approximately one year, Toco Composite School is still in the same position.

Mr. Speaker, I had a telephone conversation with the principal of the Toco Composite School a short while ago and he even expressed the view that they have

begged, and written to the ministry asking for a music teacher and the Member for Tabaquite knows this problem. It is not foreign to him and up to today, that situation has not been corrected and it is really a matter of grave concern.

Another thing that obtains at that school is that they rotate the teachers too often. After six months to a year, the students have to face another teacher and that affects them tremendously, so I am asking the Member for Tabaquite to see what he can do to afford the students some sort of stability. Today, as I was on the North/East Coast Road, I noticed students from Toco Composite School walking to school. It is a very sad state of affairs and I ask him to look at the arrangement with respect to the maxi-taxis. I think there is need for two big maxi-taxis. I do not know if the hon. Member understands the distance from Rampanalgas or Matura to Toco?

Hon. G. Singh: The hon. Member would be pleased to learn that the PTSC, apart from the maxi-taxi programme, is going to provide dedicated school buses to the rural communities this year.

Mr. R. Boynes: Thank you very much. I was aware of the pilot project which was on stream, and the lobbyist that I am, or have to be on behalf of the constituency, I would be pleased to let my constituents know that the transportation situation for which I am lobbying would be resolved. I am glad to say that I can get a commitment on the resolution of the transportation for the students of the North/East Coast of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to draw the attention of this honourable Chamber to the sum of \$1.115 million for the Judiciary which is the transfer of funds necessary to complete the payment of an interim monthly allowance to judicial officers. This interim payment was put in place by the hon. Member for Couva South and was made payable to the magistrates of our twin island state. After consultation with the magistrates and the association, the hon. Member wanted names on the last occasion we spoke. I am prepared to indicate to him that he can consult with the President of the Association and what I mention here, he can confirm with the President.

The magistrates find they do not have a voice and are under tremendous pressure and this was referred to in this debate. I wish to mention a few of the problems which they have been experiencing, in particular, the interim payment which is referred to in Head 3. The magistrates were of the opinion that this interim payment—after discussing with the hon. Member for Couva South—would in fact be made a personal allowance and that the Salaries Review Commission would give an increase. They did not contemplate that this interim payment would

be merged or absorbed as part of their salaries. They have indicated that they need to be treated as well as the judges in our country.

At present, the magistrates do not get a personal allowance and they have been promised this by the Member for Couva South so we need to indicate this to the Parliament and we also need to have the Member for Couva South correct this as soon as possible.

It is also important to understand and appreciate that the magistrates do about 90 per cent of the cases in Trinidad and Tobago and it is very difficult for us to appreciate the treatment meted out to them. We should understand that the same magistrates who were experiencing the interim payment have now been misled to believe that they would have been entitled to a personal allowance but are now not so entitled.

They would not now have the free use of the medical facilities at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, they would not have the free rental of the telephones; so one would understand Mr. Speaker, that for persons who work so hard—most of them have ten years' experience as lawyers which is the same quality and criteria that are required for that of a judge. Yet, when you look at what they are entitled to, they get approximately one third of what a judge gets. As a matter of fact, you are looking at a magistrate who does 90—95 per cent of all the criminal matters in the court, you are asking a magistrate after he jails an accused person, to go in the hospital to sit and wait on a doctor next to the relatives of a person he has just jailed.

8.45 p.m.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that is the height of unfairness to our judicial officers. I am saying this today because I know that they are very much dissatisfied, and already we have four of them who have made applications outside and have been accepted and are making movements to leave. As a matter of fact, we can laugh and jest at it, but it is a serious situation that obtains.

The magistrates are of the view that it is better for them to resign and to work part-time because they will get the same benefits as those who are full-time. They are of the view that they should all resign and apply to work part-time so they could practise as attorneys. Do not take my word for it. They can consult with the President of the Association. It is a serious problem and the administration of justice would be severely hurt.

Mr. Sudama: I merely wanted to ask the Member if he is in favour of an increase in emoluments for magistrates.

Mr. R. Boynes: The issue is that the magistrates are very concerned about the fact that they have been promised by the Member for Couva South a personal allowance and he has totally ignored their request.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, that is totally wrong. For the record, the magistrates have got an interim allowance on a recommendation of the Chief Justice. The President of the Magistrates' Association made representations to the Chief Justice and the interim allowance is enforced for all judicial officers, including magistrates. Therefore, there can be no basis of any promise by the Attorney General. The Attorney General had no discussions with magistrates or the President of the Magistrates' Association.

Mr. Boynes: Mr. Speaker, I was glad that I was able to get that on the record because as a matter of fact, at the end of these proceedings, the *Hansard* report will be forwarded to the President of the Association so they could hear for themselves what the Member for Couva South has told this Parliament.

Mr. Maharaj: They could read it.

Mr. R. Boynes: Yes. They could read the *Hansard*. We have to understand that this is a very serious matter and it is not as though we spoke with about one or two. We have had numerous consultations with most of the magistrates in Trinidad and Tobago and they have asked that we express their views. In the best interest of the administration of justice—because I am an officer of the court and a minister of justice just as much as the Member for Couva South—we have a responsibility to ensure that the administration of justice works very well in the best interest of Trinidad and Tobago.

If we on this side see a problem that may be coming shortly, it is our duty as a responsible Opposition to point it out immediately to the Members on the other side, through you, Mr. Speaker, so that they could deal with it as soon as possible. I can only hope that these few remarks have not fallen on deaf ears and I am asking the hon. Attorney General to deal with this situation as soon as possible.

In closing, I just wish to reiterate that we on this side are here to ensure that we put the other view, because there are certain groups in the country which feel that they may not have a voice in the Parliament, so they have approached us because they recognize that we are a responsible Opposition, we can get the

message across to them and, hopefully, what we have mentioned here today will not fall on deaf ears and will be acted on accordingly. Thank you.

Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Mr. Speaker, in large part, the trend of this debate has gone the way of the business of our nation's education. The reason for that is quite clear. From the committee stage of this debate—if I may say so—it became very clear to us that no Government that has claimed to put such high stakes or priority on the business of the nation's education could so simply and so callously remove such a major chunk of the budget for that particular function and claim to be pursuing that purpose.

Mr. Speaker, when one listens to the responses that have come from Members on the other side, one really has to wonder, as I do, whether the UNC appreciates the seriousness of its role as a Government, as the leaders, as the directing minds of Trinidad and Tobago. It is well-known to every parent who oversees their children in schools in this country—primary and secondary—that there is on a daily basis a serious shortage of some of the most basic necessities for the proper operation in schools. It is well-known that basic items like chalk, dusters, pencils and paper are always in short supply.

Hon. Member: Which school?

Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to compromise any school principal. I can call names. There was a time in the history of this country when one would have done that and it would have been okay, but this Government has come to be known for its capacity to victimize people and, as such, even the honour of this House is no longer observed. If we were to call names and identify people, one can be assured that those persons are likely to be targeted by this Government.

Mr. Speaker, did you hear the uproar, the chorus-like demand that I call a name? I hate to describe it as such, but it reminds me of a bit of a blood lust, because all they want to know is which school and the teachers and principal will be victimized by this Government. On that basis I refuse to call, but I can tell them that my daughter attended a school up to recently and when the time came for the term test, every parent had to send paper to that school so that the exam sheets could be printed.

I read a report written by a former Chief Justice of this country, Sir Isaac Hyatali—I can identify him—and he made the point when he was dealing with the question of the independence of the Judiciary, that when a Government wants to interfere with the operations of the Judiciary, it does not have to fire judges; all it

[Laughter] could stand here today and tell us categorically that the Motion for the implementation—in fact, it does not even require a motion—all that the Constitution demands is the laying of that report.

So, they have politicized the issue, but that is not the issue for us today. We are dealing with the business of the reduction in the budgetary allocation of the function of education in this country. I want to take us, Mr. Speaker, to some years past and to another place. I have a quotation in hand which I want to put on the record. I am quoting from a speech delivered by His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Selassie of Ethiopia. Mr. Speaker, on the business of education, this is what he had to say, and I find it so pertinent and relevant to this society in today's world and perhaps, indeed, to my society. He said:

“Education is the main-spring of a nation's life and the guardian of its future. Education is the means whereby the potential contained in the nation's ultimate resources, its people, is realised and brought to full flower for the good of all. It demands a priority second to none and is entitled to the first demand on man's energies. Without the benefits of learning, the wisdom of the past and the knowledge of the present are denied us. Without education, the freedom and equality which men seek so assiduously can be no more than half realised and the material fruits of the modern world never more than partially achieved.

“The task of ensuring that all men enjoy the gifts of education is the task of us all; it knows no boundaries and transcends all barriers.

Until ignorance has been eradicated, understanding and sympathy cannot truly exist among men. Without tolerance and comprehension, oppression will continue to exist, and peace will not be assured. To love and to seek learning is thus to love and to seek peace.”

9.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, you must agree with me that this very potent and all-embracing concern and expression for education is as applicable today as it was when he spoke, and is as applicable to Trinidad and Tobago as it was to the society that was Ethiopia at the time. If one accepts the terms of his definition or his understanding of education, one will appreciate why this Government is short on ideas in respect of education and moreso, why the Minister of Finance is short on cash in respect of education.

Mr. Assam: Ethiopia is a backward, feudal country.

Mr. F. Hinds: You see, this is what surprises me. It is bad enough when the Member for Tobago East, who is known for his verbal meanderings, has landed himself and his Government into great embarrassment and trouble, but apparently sitting so close to the Member for St. Joseph, that disease is becoming contagious.

Finance Committee Report
[MR. HINDS]

Friday, January 15, 1999

Now the Member for St. Joseph is shouting that Ethiopia is a backward and feudal society.

Mr. Assam: It is! In 1999, it is! I was there!

Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, many persons around the world who are involved in the business of education and who would recognize that the Government will withdraw from its education almost \$1.3 million may very well say the same about Trinidad and Tobago.

Recently, the Minister of Education found himself in some hot water, if I may say so, with the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association (TTUTA). The president of that association, Mr. Oliver, had to upbraid our Minister of Education. This is another thing. I have found that over the three years that the UNC has been the Government of this country, far too often the way they have conducted their affairs as government ministers, they have allowed themselves to have to be upbraided and to be decried by various people in the community, such that, we are confident that the task of lifting the standard of ministerial office will fall on us and it will be a burdensome task indeed. They have so demeaned ministerial office, if I may use a colloquialism, they have set themselves up as a bit of a low fence, every Tom, Dick and Harry is jumping all over and all around them.

The Member for Tabaquite, the Minister of Education, is knocking his head from pillar to post trying to implement the Continuous Assessment Programme that we had put in train before we demitted office. He is having no end of difficulty in doing that. There is a process for the appraisal of the teachers in terms of their work, capacity and efficiency that is to be put in place. He is now trying to see how best he can get that going and organized. He offended the teachers' body, because he found himself saying recently that apparently the teachers are shy of getting involved in that because they may be afraid to be scrutinized, if you like. How insensitive! But what do you expect from a Minister of Education when his Prime Minister, the Member for Couva North, found himself saying about two years ago—and they will say that you misquote them—that teachers are criminals? What do you expect of the Minister of Education, as one calypsonian put it, “no top, no bottom”? The trouble with this is as follows:

Mr. D. Singh: You are—[*Words expunged*]

Mr. F. Hinds: I know. Mr. Speaker, did you hear that?

Mr. Speaker: That very clearly offends the Standing Orders, and to say in the House to a Member who is on his legs that he is doing something which is contrary to the criminal laws of the country is not very right. That should not be repeated and it should be expunged from the record.

Mr. D. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I apologize.

Mr. F. Hinds: That is to be expected, Mr. Speaker. I cannot resist saying that they are just downright classless.

As I was indicating in this debate, I think it is criminal, if one might use that word, in light of the circumstances, because as I indicated earlier, this Government has claimed that it is about an education revolution. During my contribution to the Budget debate for 1998/1999 I made the point, rather simply, that it appears as though the revolution is to take us back right where we started and not to propel us into the new millennium.

The Member for Tobago East, every time he gets up in this Parliament, he has a lot to say about Eric Williams and the PNM. Well, it was said earlier by one of my colleagues, in our humble view, he represents the worst excesses of what the education system that he seeks to tell us about manifested in this country. Because it is all well and good to be able to read this book and that book and he often boasts that he is the most widely read Parliamentarian ever to sit in this Chamber. He may indeed be correct. He has gone as far as to say—No, I shall not give way. He has said so and he could not deny it. He has set himself up in a place not too far from here as some sort of—I have said before, Mr. Speaker, and I propose to deal with the Member for Tobago East, because he could not even tie the shoelaces of Dr. Eric Williams, a man renowned across this country, the Caribbean and the world. I am told and I verily believe that his deepest and most burning concern is that he wants to align himself with that General in the business of education and he never could.

So that, every one of us has benefited from the education function as has been laid by the People's National Movement in this country. We have all benefited from it. Our children continue to benefit today. The real question is: Since 1995 when this Government came into office, what did this Government do to advance the business of education in this country? There is precious little it could claim to have done. That is the reality.

I merely wish to say that sometime ago one would recall that the Prime Minister appointed a task force to look at the business of education in a general sense. The remit of the task force, I want to remind the Minister of Education, and

Finance Committee Report
[MR. HINDS]

Friday, January 15, 1999

I want him to be strong, I want him to be the guardian of the education function in this country, and when the Minister of Finance or when anyone in Cabinet approaches him with already a budget that cannot meet all of the needs of the education system in the country from hiring more teachers, he must be strong and he must defend his position. One cannot let them take away money from the Ministry of Education just like that. I have to advise him because the Member for San Fernando East pointed out—notwithstanding what the Attorney General has said—that it appears as though this Government is run on the basis of personalities. Because here it is, as he explained, teachers have been clamouring up and down the country for months that it is a long time they are due increases in salary and just cannot have them.

As deserving as legal officers are, because I can tell you how deserving they are. As a practitioner in the courts of law in this country, everyday I come across legal officers who represent the state. When a private practitioner receives his fee for the various matters he would have taken on, one is up against members of the state or those representing the state, and one has an idea from discussions with them and what we know here as parliamentarians, that their incomes are not as healthy as they perhaps ought to be. They work very, very hard. They are often overburdened and we understand that. So we are not saying, and we are being misrepresented if anyone suggests that we are wanting to deny legal officers, or indeed, any other person affected by the Salaries Review Commission Report, their just deserts, or their deserts, even if it is not just, as in the cases of those on the other side.

That is not what we are saying. What we are saying is that they may be deserving, but here it is the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, led by the Prime Minister, allows the Attorney General to use his obvious power in the Cabinet to demand, notwithstanding the fact that it was perhaps even expected in the Salaries Review Commission Report, but they all sat there, and they were given priority treatment. They were able to get an interim allowance which was concretized or hardened in the Salaries Review Commission Report when it finally came. So while we are here and the Government is playing political football with the implementation of the terms as outlined in that report, some officers have already been in receipt of that.

The question is, as my learned friend from Diego Martin Central is indicating: Why not everyone else? It is simply because the Minister of Education does not have the relative power of the Attorney General in the Cabinet. So, it is a

Government that is run by who has the biggest mouth or, perhaps, who has two mouths in the Cabinet.

The Minister of Education knows that his teachers are complaining all along, but they cannot get it. On top of that, to add insult to injury, he is offended in the first place by the Member for Couva South who comes over his head and demands an increase for his officers to make sure that the legal function goes smoothly. He told us in committee stage that, had he not done that, they may have gone on strike and one would have had industrial problems, almost, in those departments. He insulted the entire Cabinet using his relative power to get what he wanted, as he always gets, except of course when he told them that the contract to the airport was illegal and improper, they went ahead notwithstanding. That is the only thing he did not get so far.

9.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, worse still, when the Member for Diego Martin East raised it legitimately as a question, he dodged the issue by saying it was privileged. He is losing his mettle it appears. To add insult to injury, the Minister of Finance now looks at the poor and humble Minister of Education, the Member for Tabaquite, and tells him that he is not worthy of \$1.2 million and that he must take it away from his function to do something else. [*Interruption*] I am sorry, over \$100 million. My apologies, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Assam: You never read the Bill, you are not sorry.

Mr. F. Hinds: The Member for St. Joseph has this brawling and brutish style. I am not prepared to engage him with that. I would leave that for him and the Member for Tobago East. They could go to Woodford Square—where the Member for Tobago East is accustomed going—and he could behave like that, but this is the Parliament. I am not going to be drawn into that. [*Desk thumping*]

I would remind the Member for Tabaquite that the remit of the Task Force included—in fact, the Task Force reported:

- "1) there must be an acceleration of the secondary school buildings to accommodate all the students;
- 2) revision of primary school and secondary school curriculum;
- 3) staff increases and re-training;"

I must stop there before I continue, because it is precisely for the business of staff recruiting and staff increases that the money was lost too.

The Prime Minister put in place a task force, it reported, he came here and made heavy weather of it, but he sits in Cabinet as chairman, so that all the money and time that was put into the Task Force comes to nought because they have other things to do with the budgetary allocation designed to be directed at staff increases and re-training.

If the teachers are not trained and well equipped, how could they teach our nation's children. How could they propel the education revolution of which they speak so falsely? I was deeply saddened to learn that the Prime Minister in his wisdom or the lack of it—in fact, I understand there is a subcommittee of Cabinet to look at the future of primary school education and demonstrate the paucity of talent on the other side. The members include the Members for Tobago East—imagine that—Tabaquite and Arima!

Mr. Maharaj: What have you got against Tobago people?

Mr. F. Hinds: Did you hear the Attorney General? What I have against Tobago people! A typical UNC shot, whenever you are dealing with the issues that are real which pain and hurt them, they try to swing the ball. To accuse you of something, they put you on the defensive. Similar to the strategy of the Member for Oropouche. If you only say today, as is a fact, that they have been very bias in their distribution of state resources or the evidence is clear that in Fyzabad the streets are smooth as you could ever have them, from corner to corner of that constituency, and in Ortoire/Mayaro they are as rough and unkempt as you could ever imagine, the Member for Oropouche may very well accuse you of being racist or some such thing.

I am making the point about Tobago's representative, the Member for Tobago East, and the Attorney General accuses me of being against Tobago. I will tell you something—

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Mr. F. Hinds: The remit of the Task Force Ministry of Education also included:

"iv) the provision of physical facilities and equipment;"

I alluded to this at the top of my short contribution.

"v) development of 'Secondary Entrance Examination'."

I merely said this because we are forgetting, that the Minister of Education is becoming somewhat of a dictator in the Ministry of Education. [*Crosstalk*] Mr.

Speaker, I repeat myself rather correctly, that the Minister of Education, while he is a lamb in Cabinet, is a bit of a tiger in the Ministry of Education. [*Desk thumping*]

While the Government applauds him, they did not wait for me to say what I was about to in completion; not a tiger, but tiger balm. [*Laughter*] The point here is, from the time the Minister of Education went into the Ministry of Education—the Member for Tobago East said one thing correct this afternoon: much of education does not have to do with the formal teaching in the institution, it has to do with the culture, and what one learns at home, particularly in one's earlier, tender years. [*Interruption*] He manages to say a true thing or two from time to time.

The Minister of Education on the impetus and encouragement of his other colleagues, who do not have an understanding of what governance really is, went in the Ministry of Education with a bit of a hatchet. He cut permanent secretaries like they were going out of style. Since then, he has set up bad interpersonal relationships with the entire ministry and is having no end of difficulties having government policies pursued through them.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting is suspended until 10.05 p.m.

9.22 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

10.07 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

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

Mr. Sudama: Short.

Mr. Maraj: You promised.

Mr. F. Hinds: Before we took the break, I was about tying up my short contribution in this debate. Of course, certain thoughts came to me during the break and I wish to elucidate upon them, but in light of current circumstances, I will continue but will keep my remarks closing and short.

Altogether, we have seen that this Government is not really and cannot really be said to be serious about the revolution in education about which they speak. We are satisfied about that. It is self-evident that this Government is not really serious about anything. This country is really, in short, adrift. The Government does not give the nation's teachers, it does not give the students of this nation, it does not give other citizens of this country, the confidence that Trinidad and Tobago is being well managed, well run and well governed. All the signs that come from that Government is a government that is incapable, a government that is in shambles.

Mr. Speaker, you will note that I say this and I do not say it lightly, I feel very sad for Trinidad and Tobago when I consider what we are going through. When I consider that only this week, as the Member for Diego Martin East mentioned, the Prime Minister of this country saw the wisdom of going to the national community and saying that his Government Ministers are incompetent and irresponsible.

Hon. Member: He never said that!

Mr. F. Hinds: I am paraphrasing him. I do not have the speech before me.

Hon. Member: Well, paraphrase correctly. You are wrong.

Mr. F. Hinds: He said that they are not providing the kind of leadership they ought to as we approach the year 2000. It was a human resource seminar at which he spoke. He was castigating his Cabinet. That was hitherto unforeseen in this country, perhaps in any country.

Shortly following that, my good friend from Ortoire/Mayaro found it necessary to tell the nation that his Minister of Works and Transport and, of course, the Parliamentary Secretary in that ministry, were victimizing him, biased against him and looking after their own. He criticized, in passing, the Member for Naparima and the Member for Princes Town, both of whose constituencies are adjacent to his; he criticized the Member for Caroni East, the Minister of Public Utilities, for being uncaring and/or incompetent. These are statements coming from Government Ministers to the national community about and on each other.

It is only recently as well the Member for Tobago East, in one of his wilder moments, told this nation that with the exception of two Members of the Cabinet, the entire bunch of them are illiterate, backward and all the other comments that he made.

When we seek to motivate the nation's children and to propel this country into the new millennium, as the Minister of Education and the Prime Minister told us, those kinds of signals are having only a debilitating effect on the nation and, more particularly, on the teachers and students. Trinidad and Tobago, it is obvious, is not and cannot be in safe hands of the UNC and, as I conclude, I can only pray that they will take the business of governing this country more seriously.

I remember the Member for St. Joseph—and he mentioned the Member for Laventille East/Morvant and it appeared in a daily newspaper—saying of course, that we are hustlers and we come late and leave early and what have you. I ask him today: Where is the Member for Couva North? Where is the Member for Siparia?

Sen. Kuei Tung: Port of Spain North?

Mr. F. Hinds: I ask him how could he say such a thing? Only recently in the same daily newspaper we saw a fairly beautiful photograph of some Members of the Cabinet as they departed from the building they occupied on Queen's Park West—Whitehall. The Member for St. Joseph was not present. The Prime Minister of the country and the Chairman of the Cabinet pointed out, again, in a very base manner to the nation, that he was testing a certain room in that building and he was to make history by being the first of his Government to do it. I find that very debasing. It is not the way to conduct Government. He was late—he talks about late—but he could not be in the photograph because he was somewhere else, according to his Prime Minister, testing a certain room and certain apparatus in that room.

Mr. D. Singh: The Member does not do that. He does not use toilets.

Mr. F. Hinds: As I conclude, I say that I hope that the Minister of Finance and my colleague from Diego Martin Central made what I consider to be the salient point in this debate. The salient point was that this Government botched the figures yet again and we would hope, at least for the business of education, that at the earliest opportunity and when more money—because someone else here made the point. They say we are going to allocate X amount of money for this—\$25 million for unwed mothers; \$400,000 for book grants to necessitous students according to the Schedule, and they do not do it. So what they do is to announce it; they know Trinidad and Tobago is a society where much talk and excitement take place; they get some political mileage and then they do not do it. So, we suffer twice. The insult of having been promised and not gotten it and the reality of not getting it. The reality in this case is that many of the nation's children cannot get the books that their parents, perhaps, could not afford to give them personally in the schools for their use, and that the staffing arrangements for teachers remain the same as they were before this Government came. Nothing much has been done and I urge this Government to take this education seriously if it ever wants to come to this House to mention the concept of education or revolution in education again. Until and unless they do that, anytime they come to this House to talk about education revolution, I shall remind them that what they are doing is taking us right back into a revolution to where we started some 30 or 35 years ago.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung) Mr. Speaker, as I rise let me thank Members on both sides very much for what turned out to be a very lively debate. I would wish in winding up, to remind Members that this

Finance Committee Report
[HON. B. KUEI TUNG]

Friday, January 15, 1999

Motion before us was really to consider the report of the Finance Committee, at which three basic proposals had been submitted. Instead, it seemed to have evolved into a debate on education. I have to assume that the next time there is a bill on education here, I might be entertained with a debate on finance. I only have to make that assumption on the fact that the entire debate seemed to have centred on one item which happened to have been transferred during the course of the year and which was reported as one of the proposals that was before the Finance Committee.

The proposals in my view, in terms of importance, certainly should have been in the 1998 Variation of Appropriation in the sum of \$287, 993,220. Maybe the next important matter should have been the transfers that were done for which reasons were given why many were done. And thirdly, was the write-off of losses under the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Social Development which totalled a mere \$6,358.74.

Mr. Speaker, one would recall that during the Finance Committee, as Minister of Finance I attempted to provide as much detail as I possibly could, for the purposes of deliberations during the Finance Committee. As a matter of fact, I was quite surprised at the turn of events because instead of the Finance Committee lasting, as traditionally, a mere half an hour, it turned out to be about two hours during which time Members of the Opposition asked a series of questions to which we answered as many as we could have. Those for which we could not provide an answer, I had undertaken that we would do two things: firstly, that we would provide a written explanation for all those which we could not answer at the time, and secondly, that Members on this side would supplement that written answer with contributions.

So I am quite pleased, Mr. Speaker, that Members on this side have had an opportunity to join this debate, which has been very lively at times. I still hear echoing in my ears, a dissertation on education policy—maybe the failure of an education policy over the last 40 years—and I hear a debate about whether 7 per cent tertiary education for our nation is acceptable or not when compared to 21 per cent in Barbados and 18 per cent in Jamaica and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, it means that whilst a lot has been done by this Administration over the last three years, we certainly think we have a lot more to do with respect to education. I think a number of Members on the opposite side seem to have misunderstood what we attempted to do when we said we had not used the \$196,993,220 in the Ministry of Education nor did we use the \$91 million under

pensions and gratuities, and that we really asked the honourable House for its approval to be able to use that sum by decreasing the appropriation that had been approved by this honourable House during the budget presentation for the year 1998 and to increase the Ministry of Finance's vote by \$287,993,000.

Maybe it will be useful for me, therefore, to go straight into the one item brought up by the Member for Diego Martin Central. At the time when the Member brought it up in the Finance Committee, he indicated that it was his view that having got an approval from Parliament for 12 months, if we have changed the year from 12 months to 9 months, then the amount of the appropriation should have been reduced proportionately. I heard my colleague from Tobago East say—and I am particularly amazed by the fact that the Member for Tobago East, who as far as I know, has not really got a penchant for business, accounting or finance, seems to be able to realize how practical it is that money is not spent based on proportions, or linear proportions for that matter, merely because it had been budgeted along those lines.

For argument sake, we may have a contract which may require a lumpsum payment. It is not accrued nor is it expended over a monthly basis and, therefore, it comes and hits the accounting period once and it happens during the time of disbursement.

Whether it is paid on September 30, or in February, it does not mean that you have actually incurred expenditure on a monthly basis and, therefore, any such payment would obviously distort the attempt to apportion the budget in months as opposed to a year.

10.20 p.m.

I have accepted that his view is one way to look at it, but my own view is that I came for an approval to spend money under several Heads that totalled \$11 billion. It is quite true it was supposed to last for the year, but I do have the approval for \$11 billion. If one of those Heads which happens to be the Ministry of Finance is the one Head from which I needed to spend more money, it seems odd to me that I cannot spend \$11 billion because the year has now been shortened, but I come for a supplemental. In my view, it is not only odd, but awkward to ask Parliament for a supplemental when I have not spent all the money which Parliament has given me and, therefore, it is my view that I should ask for a variation by saying if I have not spent all this money, maybe top up one Head and reduce another by a corresponding amount so that Parliament can refuse to give me the approval to this Bill. That is why I said there are several ways you can look at it.

Whilst I have said you could look at it that way, I am not necessarily agreeing that is the way it should be looked at. So I hope that we can put to bed this argument as to whether you are right or wrong. I am here to say that the Ministry of Finance appropriation for the year 1998 was inadequate even though it was only for nine months, and I need more money because I have to pay for the bonds and other non-cash mechanisms that arose out of the liability that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has towards its public sector employees, and I want to pay it because I want to close the accounts and I cannot close the accounts and pay these bonds unless I have parliamentary approval. That is basically what I am about.

Yes, there has been the question of the transfers which had been made which were approved by me and I think everyone in this honourable House is aware as to how these transfers are made. Requests are made by the respective Ministers and the approvals were given by me under a Cabinet decision which, incidentally, was not made by us, it was made as far back as August, 1988 and it continues to be the practice. It was the practice which was adopted by the previous administration and one which we have adopted since we are here, because it was recognized that this practice allowed the ease for financial expenditure for transactions to take place without cluttering the bureaucratic process which, as we all know, is already fairly lengthy.

Mr. Speaker, not having been able to contribute towards this very lively debate on education myself, I did hear the Member for San Fernando East say that he won an exhibition in 1957 and he came 331st. In view of the fact that he is my age, and in view of the fact that he wanted to write that into *Hansard*, I want to put my own track record into *Hansard*. I won an exhibition the year before in 1956 and I came 274th. [*Desk thumping*] So anyhow you take it, I am better qualified than the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, with these few words, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this House adopt the Second Report 1998/1999 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the expenditure from the Public Revenue which were not included in the annual estimates, January 1, 1998 to September 30, 1998.

FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) (1998) BILL

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Variation of Appropriation Bill, I beg to move,

That a Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum, the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act 1998, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, this Bill is in substance very much the same matter which we debated under the Report of the Finance Committee and in the interest of time, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Kenneth Valley (Diego Martin Central): Mr. Speaker, I rise simply to point out once more, the sleight-of-hand, and the sleight of talk we get from the hon. Minister.

When the Member for San Fernando East spoke, I remember him making the point that in the year in question, they had 200 exhibitions and they had to be increased in that particular year and that was the only way you would be able to go to the secondary schools.

Mr. Speaker, it is unlikely therefore, that the year before there would have been more than 200 exhibitioners. So I do not know how my hon. Minister—because he said quite clearly that in that year they increased it to 400—coming 274th when they had 200 scholarships had been able to get an exhibition in that year.

Thank you.

The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung): Mr. Speaker, I wish to clear the record again. The Member for Diego Martin Central is quick in the defence of his Opposition Leader. There is a reason for this which I wish to clarify.

The year in which I took exhibition in 1956, and I want to explain to you, I am talking about personal experience, I am not talking about trying to defend someone. The year before I sat, it was 250, not 200 and having come 274th, I recalled that my family was wondering how, because I was the best hope for my family to go to St. Mary's College. It happened that it was the year 1956 in which it was increased to 400, not 1957. In 1957 it was also 400.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that the record would clarify precisely what happened and the memory of the Opposition Leader would be jolted if he had led you to believe otherwise.

Finance Bill
[MR. VALLEY]

Friday, January 15, 1999

With these few words, I thank Members and I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House .

House in committee.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be read a third time and passed.

Bill reported, read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh L. Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move, that this House do now adjourn to Friday, January 22, 1999 at 1.30 p.m. Friday is Private Members' day and I assume the Opposition is going to continue its debate on Motion No. 1.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 10.32 p.m.