

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, June 25, 1999*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**OMBUDSMAN'S REPORT**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, Section 96(5) of the Constitution provides that the Ombudsman shall make annual reports on the performance of his functions to Parliament, which shall include statistics in such form and in such detail as may be prescribed of complaints received by him on the results of his investigations.

I wish to advise that I have, today, received from the Ombudsman a report with a covering letter dated June 24, 1999 which reads as follows:

“Dear Mr. Speaker,

I submit my Annual Report for the period January 01, 1998 to December 31, 1998 as required by Section 96(5) of the Constitution.

The Report has been sent to the printers and I will send you in due course the necessary copies for members of Parliament.”

I therefore wish to advise that this copy that I have received will be lodged in the library and copies will follow.

MENTAL HEALTH (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend certain provisions of the Mental Health Act, so as to allow the next-of-kin of a non-institutionalised mentally ill patient to apply to the Court for an Order allowing him to manage the patient's affairs and property. [*The Minister of Health*]; read the first time.

HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO (INC'N) BILL

Bill to provide for the incorporation of the Horticultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago and for matters incidental thereto, brought from the Senate. [*The Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs and Minister of Tourism*]; read the first time.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BILL

Bill to provide greater protection for victims of domestic violence. [*The Attorney General*] ; read the first time.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Sport and Culture Fund for years ended December 31, 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998. [*The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Trinidad and Tobago Blind Welfare Association for the year ended December 31, 1985. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
3. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Trinidad and Tobago Blind Welfare Association for the year ended December 31, 1986. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
4. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Trinidad and Tobago Unit Trust Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1998. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
5. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Board of Industrial Training for the years ended December 31, 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
6. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund Committee for the year ended December 31, 1991. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
Papers 1 to 6 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
7. Financial Statements of the Trinidad Nitrogen Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 1998. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee
8. Annual Report of the Law Commission for 1997—1998. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
9. Rules and Procedures for the invitation and consideration of Tenders for the Award of Contracts for articles, works, services and disposal of assets for the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation. [*The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Ganga Singh)*]

1.40 p.m.

PROJECT EXCEL (INC'N) BILL
Special Select Committee Report
Presentation

Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the following report:

Report of the Special Select Committee appointed to consider and report on a Private Bill for the incorporation of PROJECT EXCEL and for matters incidental thereto.

**PRESCRIBED TEXTBOOKS
(ACADEMIC YEAR 1999/2000)**

The Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Mr. Speaker, I have been instructed by Cabinet to make this statement on behalf of the Minister of Education, who is at present out of the country, on the list of textbooks prescribed by the Ministry of Education for use in our primary schools for the academic year 1999/2000.

The Panday Government, Mr. Speaker, is of the firm view that education is the key to the success of each child in Trinidad and Tobago and that education is the key to Trinidad and Tobago's success. We must not fail our children for our children are the hope of Trinidad and Tobago. We firmly believe that a strategic resource for the 21st Century is knowledge and that means that the strategic skill is learning, so we need to revolutionize the school system in order to compete in the 21st Century. We must teach our children the basics—reading, writing and maths—but we must also give them the tools they will need to succeed in the 21st Century. We want every child to have the best opportunities in life and we know that the road to those opportunities starts at the schoolhouse door.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, in 1995 at page 18 of the UNC Manifesto we promised and I quote:

“A UNC Government will take steps to ensure that no child is denied access to primary and secondary education because of the economic position of their parents. For example it will take steps to ensure as far as possible that textbooks for our schools are standardised. The strategy for achieving the above will include:

A programme on the part of the State to expand existing facilities in terms of the number of schools through the provision of new schools and refurbished/upgraded schools”

That is why, Mr. Speaker, Government has started a revolution in education. That is why Government has initiated and will continue its programme of radical educational reform at both the primary and secondary education levels while simultaneously modernizing, restructuring and decentralizing the organization and management of the education system.

That is why the hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Basdeo Panday, has mandated that the Common Entrance be abolished and be replaced with the continuous

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assessment programme. That is why under the fourth basic education programme Government is constructing schools, rebuilding schools and refurbishing others. That is why many new early childhood care and education centres are being established. [*Desk thumping*] That is why, at the secondary level, the secondary education modernization programme is designed to transform the system providing for universal secondary education, greater access to quality education by all citizens.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the Government and the Ministry of Education are committed to ensuring there is universal secondary education for all children by the year 2001, and that is why we will construct, renovate and refurbish about 70 schools. This will include the construction of about 34 primary schools, refurbishment and renovation of about 16 primary schools. This will also include construction of 20 new secondary schools.

Curriculum reform, Mr. Speaker, modernized management statements, education and technology in schools, teacher training and training of principals in management are some of the other activities that are being undertaken under the secondary education programme. We are of the firm view that if our schools are to improve, then we need to free them from central control giving them the flexibility and the tools to succeed and that is why the hon. Minister of Education has started establishing local school boards to oversee the operations of our schools.

However, that is not all that is happening in education. Revision and development of the curriculum of the nation's schools are being undertaken. We live in the information age and our children must be equipped for the 21st Century with information technology skills. That is why the hon. Minister of Education has been revising the primary school curriculum to include, for the first time, information technology as one of the subjects of our primary schools. We are convinced that we must put the world's knowledge at the fingertips of every child and we can do that by carrying out the mandate and the commitment of Prime Minister Panday to place a computer in every school. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, Government is equally committed to enabling its citizens to take advantage of this revolution that is taking place in our education system. Today, as on every other day in this nation of ours, a child is born. For the next 18 years from now it will cost the family of that child to nurture and educate that child as it will cost every other family everywhere to nurture and educate every single one of

their children. Government is of the view that no child should fail just because of lack of money. We want every parent and every child in Trinidad and Tobago, whether rich or poor, whether from the north, the south, the east or the west, regardless of their origin, whether of African origin, Indian origin, Chinese origin, European or otherwise to have the same hope and expectation that that child would be able to afford to attend school.

We know the financial burdens that are borne by parents each new school year as they seek to outfit their children with uniforms, to purchase books, to send them to school and that something must be done about it. That is why, Mr. Speaker, we have enhanced the school transport system to assist those in need. [*Desk thumping*] That is why we have expanded the School Feeding Programme, [*Desk thumping*] and that is why Government has now taken the necessary and appropriate action to make textbooks available and affordable for all parents.

We have kept that promise that we made on page 18 of our manifesto when we said that we would move to standardize textbooks. Now, Mr. Speaker, based on the decision of Cabinet, every primary school child in Trinidad and Tobago in standards 1 to 5 will have to get only one textbook for science, [*Desk thumping*] one textbook for maths, one reading book and one grammar book. [*Desk thumping*] This means a total of four books in that book bag for the students for standards 1 to standard 5. What about the infants, Mr. Speaker? Infants in year one would use three reading books, infants in year two would use two readers.

Mr. Speaker, we had not prescribed any texts for social studies because no books were recommended in this area as suitable by the Textbook Evaluation Committee. Instead, the Ministry of Education will be producing different instructional material in the area of social studies and these will be distributed to the schools. So, come September 1999, this measure will be in effect for the next three years. What this means is that the full price of a bag of books to send your child to school has been reduced from \$900.00 and \$1,200.00 right down to \$200.00. [*Desk thumping*].

You may remember, Mr. Speaker, in September 1997 the hon. Prime Minister appointed a task force following revelations in the press and outcries from the public that there were so many textbooks with errors being used in our schools. The most sensational claim was that one textbook in use in schools contained over a thousand errors. These and other texts were used in schools over a number of years. [*Interruption*]

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I hear the others speaking about racket but they did nothing. The previous government made no efforts to intervene and to correct that situation. It was a free-for-all situation in which there was a free and unsupervised hand in deciding which books would be used in the schools. Unscrupulous publishers took advantage of that lack of supervision and that resulted in poor quality, not to mention inaccurate textbooks that were being sold to students. The hon. Prime Minister appointed the task force to determine the nature and scope of the highly publicized problem of primary school textbooks that were used in the 1997/1998 academic year by the Ministry of Education, and they were alleged to contain extensive and/or significant errors and mistakes.

On Tuesday, September 30, 1997 the task force presented its initial report to the hon. Prime Minister. In that report the task force outlined the nature and scope of the errors contained in primary school books which were seriously flawed. On October 15, 1997 the hon. Prime Minister requested the task force to supervise and co-ordinate all immediate measures in this lamentable state of affairs. The task force was chaired by Mr. Clive Pantin.

It came to the attention of the task force that \$200 million was spent on primary school textbooks alone and that it was dealing with a multimillion dollar industry with all attendant temptations for exploitation and dishonesty on the part of some writers, publishers and procurers of recommending texts. In one case the task force discovered that one publisher/bookseller/author was operating three publishing companies, two of which were not registered. This person employed authors and ghost writers who could not be located by the task force. Publishers and printers were ignorant of or did not care about legal provisions in existence relating to book production.

In April 1998 the Minister of Education saw it fit to appoint a new textbook evaluation committee to make recommendations for the selection of books for the period beginning this September 1999. The chairman of that committee was Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand of the University of the West Indies. That committee was given the mandate to evaluate and recommend books as to suitability for use in schools as textbooks. The committee was appointed for a period of three years with effect from the letter's date of appointment. That committee came up with recommendations for two textbooks in each of the following areas: language arts, science and maths. As I said before, no book was found suitable for social studies. So the committee recommended two books for science, two for maths, two for language arts.

Mr. Speaker, bearing in mind our desire for transparency, fairness and competition in selection of approved textbooks, Cabinet then decided the school principals should be circulated and early in May 1999 principals were so circulated and asked to make a choice between the two titles per subject. That circular was sent to 486 principals of primary schools and they were asked to select one textbook per subject from the list recommended by the textbook committee. We are happy to report that, out of that total, 428 of them responded indicating their choice of textbooks for maths, 429 indicated their choice for science and 443 indicated their choice for language arts.

The Minister of Education, based on these responses, then recommended to Cabinet, and it was agreed on June 24, 1999 that the prescribed texts for primary schools would be those that had been selected by the majority of principals. So the books actually selected were first chosen by the Textbook Evaluation Committee, brought down to two per subject and from there the principals chose one out of those per subject. In addition, it was agreed that these texts for the primary schools would be used for the next three years beginning from the 1999/2000 academic year.

The benefits of this decision of the Cabinet and of the Government is tremendous. The effect of this change to the recommended one textbook per subject will obviously reduce the price of school books. As I have said before, from \$1,200.00 we are now down to \$200.00. Mr. Speaker, I remember my own child and we could all remember our own children bent over with hunched backs, physically straining their backs with a book bag that was so heavy and filled with books that they never used. The physical burden on the child—that too will be eradicated.

1.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, it is estimated that by persuading booksellers to quote prices for a three-year period and because of economies of scale—because they will now be mass producing these particular books—the total price, again, for the full package of books will be reduced. In addition, we can see the tremendous advantage that will happen in a family where there are several brothers and sisters going to primary school. All the parent has to do now is buy the books for her first child, send that child to school, and thereafter, when that child goes up to the second standard, the books can then be passed to the younger brother and sister down the line.

Miss Nicholson: For how long?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: In the first instance, for three years. It can go from child to child within a family. Can one imagine the savings in terms of the cost of

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buying books? Remember, every year parents with two and three children have to buy three and four different sets of books, but now with this system, they can buy for the first child and hand down to the others. The cost there is tremendously reduced.

There is a great advantage, too. Because we are using the same textbooks across the board in all the primary schools in the country, it means that if a child has to change schools, he will be able to use the same books. He may be living at Siparia but his family may relocate to live in Arima and he will have to change schools. He will not have to buy a new set of books; he could take the same books. So, that change from school to school will also see a reduction in the cost, as they go from class to class and from brother to sister to brother.

Even more than that, it is because of this that the second-hand trade in these books that are passed on—because the books will have a life for three years after—can develop. If I have no younger brothers and sisters in my family to pass those books on to, I can sell those books at a reduced price to another family.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear that the quality of the texts prescribed has been certified by the Textbook Evaluation Committee which has been chaired by the distinguished Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand. The particular text we have chosen, which has now been prescribed by the Ministry, has been certified by the Textbook Evaluation Committee first and then selected in a democratic way by the consensus of opinion from the majority of the principals of the schools.

The teaching and quality of the material in those books will, in no way, be compromised or negatively impacted upon. We will be able to deliver the curriculum through these textbooks. In other words, this Government's promise in its 1995 Election Manifesto said:

“A UNC Government will take steps to ensure that no child is denied access to primary and secondary education because of the economic position of their parents. For example it will take steps to ensure as far as possible that text books for schools are standardised.” *[Desk thumping]*

We have kept our promise, Mr. Speaker, so that textbooks are now affordable, they will be available and we are making sure that they will not change frequently and there will not be so many of them that the parents cannot afford to buy as it was before. Their children can now have the benefit of those books.

Mr. Speaker, before I close, I want to record on behalf of the Ministry of Education, and all of us in the Government, our gratitude and thanks to Prof.

Ramchand and the other members of the Textbook Evaluation Committee who, through their diligent, scrupulous and meticulous efforts, have ensured that we now have quality textbooks from which we can prescribe common texts.

Last of all, with your leave, I thank all of those school principals who responded to the circular to give us their choice of the final textbooks to be used in the schools. Once again I say, we are in the information age, we are committed to ensuring that our children gain an education that is fitting for them to compete in the 21st Century, but we are also committed to ensuring that no child should be prevented from gaining an education because of lack of money. We have kept our promise, we have standardized the textbooks and that would bring the cost down.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**GOVERNMENT EFFORTS
(YEAR 2000 COMPLIANCE)**

The Minister of Information, Communications Training and Distance Learning (Dr. The Hon. Rupert Griffith): Mr. Speaker, I have been instructed by Cabinet to make a statement on the year 2000 compliance problem and update of Government's effort towards compliancy. The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is mindful of its role in addressing the year 2000 compliance problem, both in the public and the country as a whole. Government is fully aware that citizens and corporate customers are concerned about whether they can continue to do business with the public service without encountering problems. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Dr. The Hon. R. Griffith: In addition, Mr. Speaker, Government is deeply concerned about whether Trinidad and Tobago would be able to continue doing business with their foreign partners. In fact, foreign governments are equally concerned about the state of preparedness of Trinidad and Tobago as we enter the 21st Century. To date, inquiries concerning the state of preparedness of Trinidad and Tobago have been made by a number of foreign embassies and consulates, including those from Great Britain, France, United States of America, Canada and Japan, and from agencies such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

The following gives a brief outline of the actions of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to date. Regionally, and moreso at the Caricom level,

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Cabinet agreed, among other things, that Trinidad and Tobago chair the Regional Co-Ordinating Committee established at a meeting of Caricom heads to examine the relevant issues for treating with the year 2000 challenges and make recommendations for ensuring that the region becomes year 2000 compliant.

This regional committee chaired by Trinidad and Tobago's Dr. Finbar Fletcher met on two occasions and sourced assistance and conducted training for members of Caricom. At the national level, Mr. Speaker, Cabinet appointed a year 2000 steering committee in the Ministry of Trade, & Industry and Consumer Affairs. This committee was chaired by Mr. Richard Young and comprised in the main, persons from the various sectors of the business community:

- to provide an assessment of the nature and scope of the challenge in the key sectors of the economy and the state of industry preparedness to deal with issues related to the Year 2000 computer risks.
- to provide leadership advice on how these risks could be reduced.
- to foster industry ownership of the issue and action to ensure business preparedness and public confidence.

Mr. Speaker, Cabinet considered the findings and recommendations of this committee and has been implementing those recommendations.

In turning its attention to the public service, Cabinet agreed to:

- (1) The establishment of a Year 2000 Compliance Committee headed by the Executive Director of NISC.
- (2) Ensure all future computer hardware and software acquisitions are Y2K compliant.
- (3) Adopt the ISO 8601 standard date format for use in the public service—that is the year, month and date, Mr. Speaker.
- (4) Replacement of all micro-computers with 286s, 386s and 486s microprocessors.
- (5) The determination of appropriate office automation software and other software tools for use throughout the public service.
- (6) The employment of staff dedicated to addressing the year 2000 compliance problem in the public service.

- (7) The provision of funds for:
 - (a) replacement of non-compliant computer hardware;
 - (b) acquisition of enterprise-wide licences for commonly used office automation software; and
 - (c) other software tools for the public service.
- (8) Re-engineering of critical application software.
- (9) Conversion of data files, databases; and
- (10) Employment of dedicated Y2K staff.

Mr. Speaker, the following outlines the activities and achievements to date: Firstly, in ensuring that key stakeholders are aware of the Y2K issues, the National Information Systems Centre conducted year 2000 problem seminars for Permanent Secretaries, heads of departments and divisions, and senior information technology personnel in the public service. Secondly, Government, through the National Information Systems Centre, has made presentations to Chambers of Commerce, insurance company clients and other interest groups. Thirdly, in addition, in its efforts to provide information to the general public, the NISC has made releases to several media houses—both printed and electronic—and is currently engaged in a series of television programmes with a view to providing information about the state of preparedness of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, programmes already aired were for TSTT, WASA, the National Library and T&TEC. As far as accomplishments we have completed an inventory of computer and related equipment, operating network software, application of software and databases and data files. An analysis of data gathered has been completed; the inventory data are being verified; year 2000 compliance checks are being done on computer equipment; year 2000 compliance hardware and software solutions have been identified and sourced.

Critical systems have been identified and remedial work has commenced; programme modification has commenced; some systems testing has commenced; some of the financial requirements have been identified; staff dedicated to the year 2000 compliance problem has been engaged to address the problem in the public service; standardized office automation and other software tools have been identified; and enterprise-wide licence for use of Microsoft desktop products will be produced within the next month. Non-compliant mini mid-range and

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mainframe computers have been replaced and non-compliant application software acquired from local and foreign vendors is being replaced by Y2K-compliant versions.

A public service action plan is being developed and contingency planning has commenced. A contract for the supply and delivery of 800 micro-computers to replace non-compliant computers has been awarded. Consultancy services are being procured to review previous reports and to propose necessary remedial actions at the Central Statistical Office, the Ministry of Health, the Tobago House of Assembly, the Transport Division and several other ministries and departments throughout the public service.

Mr. Speaker, I shall now make mention of the status of some of the efforts of individual public service ministries and departments in addressing the year 2000 problem. In the Inland Revenue Division—the tax administration—application software programmes have been modified; programmes and systems testing has commenced; operating software and database management software are compliant and a Y2K compliant computer system was acquired earlier this year. The application of software is also compliant. Operating software and database management software are also compliant. The Y2K compliant computer system acquired by the Inland Revenue Division will be used to process Value Added Tax (VAT) data.

Mr. Speaker, in the Police Service, the Y2K compliant version of the application software has been installed and testing had commenced. The operating software is compliant. The Y2K compliant version of the database management software has been installed. The Y2K compliant computer system was acquired in 1997.

2.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in the Supreme Court, the case management software used is Y2K compliant. The Y2K version management software is being used. The Y2K compliant computer system has been acquired. The current version of the imaging software is being replaced by the Y2K compliant version.

In the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, Y2K compliant hardware was acquired in 1997. The non-Y2K versions of the software used are being replaced by the Y2K compliant versions.

In the Customs and Excise Division, the Y2K compliant version of the ASYCUDA software has been acquired. The computer hardware used will be replaced by the end of July, 1999.

In the Transport Division, action has been initiated to replace all non-Y2K compliant computer hardware and software.

In the Budget's Division, the computer system is Y2K compliant.

In the Election and Boundaries Commission, the computer hardware and operating software acquired in 1997 are Y2K compliant. A portion of the application software is Year 2000 compliant. The Elections and Boundaries Commission is currently addressing these problems in-house.

In my own Ministry, the Ministry of Information, Communications, Training and Distance Learning, at the National Information Systems Centre (NISC), the hardware acquired in 1997 is Year 2000 compliant. The hardware used previously is not, and is being phased out. This task is expected to be completed in a matter of days, by the end of June, 1999. The application software developed by the NISC is being modified. The target completion date of this exercise is June 30, 1999.

In the National Library and Information System, (NALIS), all hardware and software used are fully Y2K compliant.

Mr. Speaker, Government is cognizant of its responsibilities to the nation and of its role in monitoring the progress made by all sectors of the economy in addressing the Y2K compliant problem. Cabinet has agreed to the establishment of a parable Y2K task force comprising the following: a national steering committee; a national Y2K co-ordinating committee; a sectoral working group; and a national Y2K compliant secretariat.

Mr. Speaker, the sectoral working group comprises the following:

1. The public service.
2. Small business.
3. Energy.
4. Utilities, transport and communication.
5. Financial banking, insurance and credit unions.
6. Legal.
7. Manufacturing.
8. Trade services and information technology.
9. Health.

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10. National contingency planning group (which includes NEMA, defence force, coast guards, *et cetera*); and
11. The Tobago work group.

The National Y2K Task Force will, among other things:

1. Provide overall policy direction and provide Cabinet with information of progress made in addressing the Y2K compliance problem in all sectors in Trinidad and Tobago.
2. Monitor the work done by the various sectoral groups.
3. Direct the activities of the national Y2K secretariat.
4. Monitor and provide assistance to companies and organizations in Trinidad and Tobago; and
5. Prepare and implement a national Y2K action plan for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. The national Y2K action plan will be completed on June 30, 1999.

Mr. Speaker, in monitoring the state preparedness of the country, the Government has agreed to the institutional structure and mechanisms for managing the year 2000 initiative. The Government, through the efforts of the Ministry of Information, Communication, Training and Distance Learning and the Ministry of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs has begun to examine the efforts of the rest of the national community.

To date, the following utilities and private sector organizations have stated that they would be in a state of readiness and that their operations should not be, I repeat, should not be affected by the year 2000 compliance problem. These organizations are: TSTT; WASA; T&TEC and PowerGen; banking institutions; Unit Trust and companies in the energy sector. Government will be accelerating its countrywide monitoring activities and will continue to inform the public and the rest of the world of the progress it is making towards becoming year 2000 compliant.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

**EXECUTIVE BOARD OF UNICEF
(TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO'S ELECTION TO)**

The Minister of Social and Community Development and Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Manohar Ramsaran): Mr. Speaker, I wish to address the House today on the matter of Trinidad and Tobago's election to the executive board of UNICEF.

Mr. Speaker, as you no doubt are aware, UNICEF has been providing invaluable assistance to this country in terms of funding and technical expertise. This relationship took root several years ago and this new era of collaboration was marked by two significant actions on the part of Trinidad and Tobago.

Firstly, in 1990 this country participated in the World Summit for Children and became signatory to the Declaration for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children which emanated from this meeting. This action obligated Trinidad and Tobago to meeting the goals of the World Summit which were later embodied in a National Plan of Action which was formulated in 1993. The NPA, as this action plan is now popularly known, has been, and still is being implemented and monitored by an Inter-ministerial Committee which is chaired under the aegis of the Ministry of Social and Community Development.

The second decisive action taken by this country with respect to the well-being of children was the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991. The Convention, for all intents and purposes, is a companion document to the World Summit Declaration as its articles speak to actions which should be taken by state parties for ensuring the survival, protection and development of children.

During this decade, UNICEF, via its Caribbean Area Office in Barbados, has been facilitating Trinidad and Tobago in monitoring and implementation of the NPA and dissemination of information on the CRC.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to itemize some examples of these actions. In the sphere of research, UNICEF has funded two studies, the purpose of which has been to inform on programming for the benefit of children, especially those at risk. The first study entitled “A situation analysis of children in especially difficult circumstances”, was conducted in 1993. The recommendations of this study have served to guide the NPA committee in developing programmes and policies to alleviate the plight of children placed at risk of the various social evils such as abuse and neglect which unfortunately pervade our society.

The second study, “The 1997 situation analysis of children and their families in Trinidad and Tobago”, was conducted with the specific purpose of informing on policy formulation and programming for a planning cycle spanning the period 1998—2002. This study’s structure was based on the issues linked to the NPA with regard to health, education, gender equity and child rights.

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Mr. Speaker, UNICEF has also funded a number of projects which have all been geared toward children and their families. In recognition of the breakdown in family life and the fact that there is no adequate alternative to parental care, focus has been placed on parenting issues. A school for parents was launched and continued until 1996. This project took the form of a radio talk show and call-in programme.

In 1997, the community-based Parent Outreach Programme was implemented and was exemplary of this administration's policy of partnership with the NGO sector; it being a collaborative effort with Servol. This project sought to train parenting facilitators from pre-selected target communities to work with the residents of their communities in effectively disseminating information on positive parenting practices. This project was conducted on a pilot basis and although it is still in progress, the outreach component has confirmed the dire need for continuing parent education. In this regard, my Ministry is seeking to expand the project and eventually provide a mainstream service to its clientele.

The Ministry is also currently completing a project entitled, "the Promotion of Child Rights in Communities", which was also conducted with partial utilization of UNICEF funds. The main objective of this project was to bring awareness of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to the residents of outlying communities, in keeping with the Article of the Convention which states that this information should be disseminated to adults and children alike.

In 1997, the Ministry celebrated the first ever Child Rights Week, again with invaluable support from UNICEF. The exercise was repeated in 1998 and the staff of my Ministry have already begun preparations for the 1999 event in November.

Mr. Speaker, UNICEF has also rendered guidance to resource persons in Trinidad and Tobago by conducting conferences and seminars, throughout the English-speaking Caribbean, on child-oriented issues such as child rights and early childhood care and education. Mr. Speaker, as you may be aware, a conference on Early Childhood Care and Education is being conducted this week at the St. Augustine campus of the University of the West Indies in conjunction with UNICEF. Such conferences serve as a forum for the very important processes of networking and information sharing.

I am assured of on-going assistance from UNICEF as the organization has already pledged both financial and technical assistance for the establishment of two databases which will serve to inform on the status and needs of children.

These projects are namely: the Child Indicators Monitoring System and the Central Registry for Children in need of Special Protection.

Now that I have adequately described Trinidad and Tobago's harmonious relationship with such a devoted international counterpart working to achieve the well-being and safety of all children, one will understand the significance of the opportunity presented to this country to serve on the Executive Board of UNICEF.

The Board serves to provide inter-governmental support to, and supervision of the activities of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. The Board comprises 36 members and five seats are allotted to the Latin American and Caribbean region, in keeping with the principle of equitable geographical representation. Candidates to the Executive Board normally serve a three-year term, but due to the unique set of circumstances, Trinidad and Tobago will serve on the Board for only two years of the term 2000—2002. For the period in question, candidates were submitted from the region by Bolivia and Cuba. To avoid a competitive situation for two vacant seats in the region, the ambassadors of the relevant permanent missions, by mutual agreement, devised a rotation mechanism by which means each country would serve a two-year term. In this regard, Trinidad and Tobago will serve on the Board during January to December, 2000 and January to December, 2002.

Mr. Speaker, you will agree with me that Trinidad and Tobago's membership on the Executive Board of UNICEF will allow this nation the opportunity to directly communicate the problems which negatively impact on our child population. It will also serve to further enhance the country's international image.

With Cabinet's approval, as Minister of Social and Community Development, I will be the designated holder of the allocated seat on the Board and the hon. Minister of Culture and Gender Affairs will serve as the country's alternate representative. Service to the Board entails attendance at three regular sessions and an annual session during each year.

Mr. Speaker, as Minister responsible for the well-being of all children, not only those at risk, I look forward to serving on the Executive Board of UNICEF and to the continuation of a cordial and productive relationship with the funding agency with respect to future programming to achieve the survival, protection and development of our future leaders.

I thank you.

Limitation (Amdt.) Bill, 1999

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LIMITATION OF CERTAIN ACTIONS (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend the Limitation of Certain Actions Act, 1997 [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

**STATE AGENCIES
(UNSATISFACTORY AWARD OF CONTRACTS)**

[SECOND DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [May 28, 1999]:

Be it Resolved, that the House condemn this Government and the State Agencies for the unsatisfactory manner in which they have awarded contracts and engaged personnel within the last three years. [*Mr. C. Imbert*]

Question again proposed.

2.25 p.m.

The Minister of Housing and Settlements (Hon. John Humphrey): Mr. Speaker, what I would do is concentrate on the substantive part of this Motion, which deals with the manner in which Government and state agencies have awarded contracts. I will not re-vegetate what the presenter of this Motion put on the record of this Parliament about cronyism, nepotism, corruption and favouritism. I said on the last occasion he seems to be an expert in those matters.

Mr. Speaker, I had promised on the last occasion, after having read liberally from a Cabinet Minute, when the Member for San Fernando East was prime minister, and most of the Front Benchers on that side were ministers of that government, indicating that they too were dissatisfied with the historical process of procurement, and in fact, they had taken certain decisions which they never carried out. So I am not going to go over that material.

When I concluded my contribution before the adjournment on the last occasion, I had promised to share with Members of this honourable House, the American fast-tracking method of procuring goods and services, in the delivery of construction projects.

Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that the Opposition kept hammering at, is the issue of the airport's new terminal development project and I have with me an overview of that project produced by the architects, Birk Hillman. I want to share with this House part of this document that in fact deals specifically with the

principles of fast-tracking. Mr. Speaker, with your leave, there are a few pages that I would like to quote as this makes it absolutely clear.

I believe if any Member on that side will understand what I am going to put on the record, it would be the Member for Diego Martin East, because he is in the developing business, and on a day-to-day basis has to face the difficulties of procuring goods and services, approvals and dealing with the whole bureaucratic problems that this country has inherited from colonialism, which we have not been able to reform since we became independent in 1962. Let me quote:

“Fasttrack Philosophy

The traditional way in which major developments are constructed is to first complete the design and construction documents which describe the project, and then proceed to tender the project, review the tenders, award, and have a general contractor construct the facility. This approach requires all design to be complete before the tendering is undertaken. For a complex terminal project such as the New Terminal Development Project, the preparation of the construction documents would normally require a minimum of 12 to 15 months. The tendering and award would then require another 2-3 months and construction 18-24 months. Thus, the new facility would not be commissioned for 32-42 months from the start of the design.

However, it is possible to reduce the delivery time by utilizing the Fasttrack approach. Under this concept the project is broken down into distinct segments or construction packages which are then released for construction to pre-qualified contractors. The project scope is clearly defined during the preliminary design phase and in most cases the initial site development construction packages are developed concurrently. This allows the construction to begin within 2-3 months of the start of design and project beneficial occupancy can be obtained within 18-24 months of the start of construction, depending on whether single or multiple shift work is authorized.”

Mr. Speaker, one is talking of a range between 32-42 months as compared to 18-24 months.

“In undertaking this type of construction technique, it is imperative that:

- The design firm thoroughly understands the project and be knowledgeable in the type of airport facility being planned;

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- The construction manager be versed in the Fasttrack approach, the type of facility being constructed and the unique requirements of an airport;
- The owner provide clear direction and assign a project co-ordination team with the authority to make decisions and to obtain approvals in a timely manner...”

“Fasttrack Benefits:

When properly executed by a firm familiar with the concept, the Fasttrack approach can provide a number of benefits. They include:

- Delivery of the facility in a reduced time period, therefore establishing its revenue generating potential sooner, requiring less capitalized interest during construction and reducing the overall financing cost;
- Allowing greater participation by local contractors since the size of the construction packages will be smaller and more numerous;
- The transfer of the technology and experience to the local construction community of this technique;

These benefits will have a significant favourable impact on the Government, the international aviation interests and the local community.”

Mr. Speaker, let me describe this particular project in terms of that philosophy.

“The project is a development comprised of seventeen (17) key elements...”

I will read the 17 elements:

- “1. Clearing & Grubbing
2. Earthwork/Master Drainage
3. Site Utilities
4. Hydrant Fuel Lines & Pits
5. Building Foundations
6. Building Superstructure
7. General Building
8. Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing (MEP)
9. Baggage Handling System

10. Loading Bridges
11. Long Lead Items
12. Airfield Improvements
13. Roadways & Parking Lots
14. Furniture/Fixtures/Equipment
15. Building Graphics
16. Tenant Lease Space
17. Landscaping

These seventeen elements have been organized into a series of Design Packages, Construction Packages, and Phases within each Construction Package to promote:

- a logical progression of construction
- the ability to plan and forecast funding requirements within a fiscal year
- compliance with environmental permits,
- minimum disruptions to aircraft operations,
- the ability to control the construction process; and
- to be able to evaluate, schedule and estimate costs impacts due to funding constraints.”

The Construction Packages and Construction Schedules have been defined and they are also presented in this report.

Mr. Speaker, Package No. 1 clearing & grubbing and Package No. 2 earthwork and drainage, those two packages had been completed prior to the controversy that was brought about through the involvement of the Opposition, some of their cronies and favourites in the construction industry and with an alliance with certain media houses. So having been completed, they could not have been the subject of any controversy or investigation. Package No. 3 underground utilities, Package No. 4 paving (airside), Package No. 5 paving (landside) and Package No. 6 general building—

Mr. Speaker, it was Package No. 6 that the opponents to this Government are holding to, because they felt that the person to whom that contract was awarded

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was a friend and supporter of the UNC party, which was the party in Government, and they said that particular contractor is the Achilles' heel of this Government. So a massive campaign was mounted and this individual was vilified nationally and internationally. There was no justification whatever for that vilification. It goes on to spell out all the other packages.

2.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, for someone who in a past dispensation, in fact, delivered projects and I remember as Minister of Works and Transport, a particular project was delivered and it was delivered in a timely basis, and I must say in those days it may have been very difficult to do that under the constraints and procurement of donations. I am talking about the Bus Route. The conversion of a disused railway track into the Priority Bus Route delivered in record time by a particular Minister who was criticized and condemned, and I am pretty sure that in order for that Bus Route to have been delivered, the conventional approach could not have been used, or quite frankly, it could not have been delivered in the timely manner in which it was.

There was another one which came to mind which was an expansion of the very Piarco terminal which that particular Minister, whom you know very well, Mr. Speaker. There was tremendous pressure brought on that Minister, he was criticized for delivering in an efficient, cost effective way because perhaps, he used methods that were not those which the colonial masters had passed down to us. For his revolutionary approach, he was made to pay.

What happened in this case was the critics of this project have made the local construction sector cut off its nose to spoil its own face and I warned them, that the Joint Consultative Council which is being featured in this Motion is something with which I am very familiar, because when I was Minister of Works, Settlements and Infrastructure, in the NAR government, I was the one who was instrumental in pulling all the professionals together into forming themselves into a federal organization representing every single professional group in the construction industry, I was the architect of that going back to those days. I am very familiar with it, so I advise them, especially the cronies of the Member who brought this Motion, because they were the most vocal, the ones that the PNM favoured in the award of contracts when they were in office. I advised them they were cutting off their nose to spoil their own face.

Mr. Speaker, 17 contractors could have been awarded the various packages for delivery of that project. In the course of two years we could have had a completed airport terminal building, but the critics shut it down and in fact, because of all that confusion, we have not reaped the benefit of what has developed as the most efficient, most cost-effective method of delivering contracts so far invented by human beings—the fast-track method. Even today, while we have had to respond to all the critics, and while the whole project went into suspension while it was investigated, even today we are in difficulty understanding the process because I had been mandated by the Prime Minister to be involved with some of my colleagues in micro-managing that project which I am doing.

I go every week, and we meet every fortnight to ensure that by the end of next year that project would be completed and opened and I can see for myself where those who are involved do not understand principle, because although NIPDEC was put by the Government to manage the contract, it is being made absolutely clear from every meeting that the engineers, quantity surveyors, and the architects at NIPDEC had never used this method before. It is very strange to them. They have redesigned packages and put in certain packages things that should have been in other packages, because what happened is that there was conflict and contradiction in the delivery process where one contract has to wait for another contractor to complete something before he can commence or continue his work. We missed a golden opportunity then of understanding this method.

What is the real benefit of this method? The real benefit is that you can deliver projects on a timely basis. That airport—40 years ago we were talking about building a new terminal at Piarco and we have seen effort after effort by government after government trying to get it going. The last time that government was in office, they tried with something called Project Pride and they awarded a contract to one man behind a desk with one telephone and a \$2.00 company. That was the contract which they awarded for that terminal building and my colleague who sits next to me in Parliament, anytime this issue is raised he keeps reminding me of a certain event. [*Words Expunged*]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker on a point of order, Standing Order 36(5), the Member is imputing improper motives. I did absolutely no such thing at no time.

Mr. Speaker: That would be expunged from the record. That type of thing could be repeated outside and dealt with outside, but here in this Chamber, the Standing Orders do not permit that. Please continue.

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you, in fact, for taking that position because for a long time, I was extremely annoyed by the functioning of this House because so much of what came from that side was allowed to go on the record and reproduced in the media.

Mr. Speaker: With the greatest deference, Mr. Minister, that borders on an attack on the Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] I will not have it. I have ruled on the issue and can we please proceed.

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, it is not that, I just complimented the Chair. That is not an attack.

Mr. Speaker, the feature of that approach is that any contractor who is shortlisted to be considered, before that contractor can be awarded a contract, has got to prove capability to deliver, but also, has got to guarantee delivery both in terms of cost and in terms of time. If he does not deliver, there is a bond that ensures performance that is of a high percentage of the total cost of the component of that contract and the penalties are extreme. It, therefore, means that you cannot get the cost overruns of 500 per cent increase of cost in the projects they are boasting that the PNM delivered like the Hall of Justice, Eric Williams Financial Complex, and Mount Hope.

In the days the Mount Hope Medical Sciences Complex was built, it cost over a billion dollars and it is the first time in the history of any government in any part of the world where they had a fete to open the building, and during the course of that evening they closed it permanently. So the French company handed it over to them and they could not use it for anything, so they closed it permanently and they drank champagne to do that.

Mr. Speaker, that is the kind of thing we had from that government, and the Member for Diego Martin East should be the last person to criticize this Government for the way it is awarding contracts. As I said on the previous occasion, his knowledge has obviously been obtained from personal experience and instead of just throwing mud, throwing mud, throwing mud, he needs to examine himself and his past record and recognize, in fact, that this Government has done more in three years than the PNM did in 30 years. [*Desk thumping*] And the money has been better managed.

Mr. Speaker, I personally hounded two former PNM Ministers by the name of John O' Halloran and Francis Prevatt, two senior Ministers of that PNM regime. I

went after those men like a bulldog goes after a thief and I nibbled at their ankles until they fell, and both of them were run out of this country as a result of that. It is estimated that John O' Halloran sauntered away \$300 million during his tenure. The confusion at the National Flour Mills and the importation of the rice which they have described as dog rice goes back to those days when O' Halloran was chairman and when he had the power he set up companies and every transaction that occurred at the National Flour Mills was through one of John O' Halloran's companies.

Hon. Member: Full moon.

Hon. J. Humphrey: So all the purchasing of rice, wheat and flour was on O'Halloran's company. All the shipping arrangements were on O' Halloran's company. When he left and he lost control, what do you think happened to all that corruption? Do you think it just disappeared, dissipated? No. There was a vacuum that was filled by their colleagues. They know who filled the vacuum. They are big funders of the PNM even today.

Mr. Speaker, they make a big issue of another project. The Prime Minister visited India as a very honoured guest of the Government of India and he sought on that occasion to find a way to reduce the cost of one of the staples which affect the lives of most of the people in this country and I would explain what happened.

Mr. Speaker, National Flour Mills ordered rice from India, the Indian Government offered National Flour Mills the facility of shipping the entire order of rice which was a total of 12,000 tonnes and National Flour Mills said they did not have the capacity in their silos, but the rice requirement was critical because we were running short and, therefore, could not accept a large shipment and asked for it to be delivered in two shipments. I found that the capacity of the silos at National Flour Mills was 60,000 tonnes and yet National Flour Mills is telling the supplier do not send 12,000 tonnes in one shipment because they cannot handle it, send it in two shipments.

2.50 p.m.

Something is wrong with the logic and somebody, I agree, should be handed over to the hon. Attorney General for that.

Hon. Member: The DPP did not say so.

Hon. J. Humphrey: The DPP. I was thinking about something a little worse, because what happened was, the whole problem emerged with the two little ships that were lined up to ship the rice.

Dr. Rowley: By whom?

Hon. J. Humphrey: By you all, by people on that side and their friends. *[Laughter]* By their connections with a big international supplier who has enjoyed a monopoly with this country for years, set up by O'Halloran. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, that is how it was sabotaged. In fact, I have not gotten the information yet, but it would not surprise me at all if some of their cronies, some of their favourites, some of their friends, purchased the ship and deliberately sabotaged it, to maintain the monopoly of supply, and not to allow a middle man, to whom they are very deeply connected, to continue to rip off the people of this country.

Do not put me on the corruption lane because what that would do is stimulate my adrenalin, and even though I have just come out of my sick bed, it will get me healthy immediately and I will go for their jugular. It will bring back a little of the memory of those days when I was a real fighter against corruption, because corruption is something that I cannot tolerate. I will not tolerate it in my life, and I will not tolerate it amongst my colleagues. If I know that any colleague of mine is corrupt, I would expose him to the Prime Minister and I know that the Prime Minister has zero tolerance for corruption. *[Laughter]* That is a big joke for them because corruption is a way of life for some people on that side.

So, Mr. Speaker, one of the ships has not yet reached Trinidad. One ship arrived on a timely basis.

Mr. Imbert: A PNM ship.

Hon. J. Humphrey: And it was kept out there in the Gulf for three months. By whom?

Dr. Rowley: PNM!

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, we are in the Government and they are still in control of many very senior people. The chairman of the National Flour Mills, at the time, was associated with them. There is no question whatever about that and, in fact, the Chairman could tell you about O'Halloran and that history, how that vacuum was filled and by whom. He could tell you, because he knows.

Dr. Rowley: This is the most blasphemous piece of foolishness!

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, that deals with two of them, the Airports Authority and the new terminal building, and I invite Members of this House to take the time and drive up to Piarco, knock on the gate and ask if they can get permission to tour the construction site to see for themselves the scale of that project.

That project is being built for just over US \$100 million. The Hong Kong Airport that was recently completed was built for US \$2,000 million; the Malaysia Airport, Kuala Lumpur, US \$1.6 billion; and we are making a big fuss about spending a little over US \$100 million to satisfy the increasing numbers of flights that are passing through Trinidad and Tobago, where Trinidad and Tobago is rapidly becoming a hub for the whole region.

In fact, the PNM, in those days, advocated that we develop Trinidad and Tobago as a hub for banking and insurance, for shipping and for air transport. So, why are they now condemning it? We are doing what they could not do. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for St. Augustine 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. J. Humphrey: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I walked with a document which I always have at the ready.

Mr. Hart: Make sure it is the right one. You read somebody else's piece the other day.

Hon. J. Humphrey: It does not seem as though I have it here today. Anyway, what this document revealed was that when BWIA ordered four Lockheed L1011 aircraft for its services from Lockheed Corporation of the United States, three were delivered on the basis of the agreed terms and the last one was withheld, for which new terms were arrived at.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the new terms that were arrived at were to pay a lease for the aircraft of US \$15 million a year for 10 years, if my memory serves me correctly. It might be the other way around—US \$10 million for 15 years—but the round figure was US \$150 million that would have been paid for that aircraft on lease.

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When the friend of the Member for Diego Martin Central, Mr. Edward Acker—because he was the Minister at the time who negotiated the whole sale of BWIA to the Ed Acker group. When they negotiated that sale, they threw in a gift of an aircraft. There have been forensic analyses done and what I was looking for was the copy that I have, but I must have put it in a file for safe-keeping. The forensic experts in the United States have not been able to find who are the owners of that aircraft and, therefore, who leased the aircraft to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago that, in turn, gave it to the airline, because BWIA has never paid a penny for the use of that L1011-500 aircraft and we have not been able to find who owns it because the paper trail was so carefully done—

Mr. Imbert: A plane flying in the air.

Dr. Rowley: “Dotishness”!

Hon. J. Humphrey:—that we cannot find which of their cronies, friends and favourites, in fact, own the aeroplane. What we have been able to find is that BWIA flies this aeroplane—

Dr. Rowley: That nobody owns!

Hon. J. Humphrey:—and does not pay a cent for it!

Mr. Imbert: So who pays for it?

Hon. J. Humphrey: The Government of Trinidad and Tobago pays for it. Now, how could such a deal be justified as that where an aeroplane, for which the Government pays, is given to Ed Acker in the deal when he purchased the airline from the Government. How could that be justified?

Dr. Mohammed: He said that was the best deal that he had ever made.

Hon. J. Humphrey: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, they know about it.

Dr. Griffith: Mr. Valley could tell you.

Hon. J. Humphrey: The Member for Diego Martin West knows; the Member for Diego Martin East knows; the Member for Diego Martin Central knows more than anybody else; so take this opportunity while you are all on the corruption line and explain that to the national community and satisfy this Member of Parliament

that, in fact, there was no corruption in the deal made by the Member for Diego Martin Central and Ed Acker, his partner, his buddy, his crony, his favourite.

Dr. Rowley: You are mad!

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I claim 36(5). Ed Acker is not my partner. I have no deal with Ed Acker. I would say, again, that I am willing at any time to have a commission of inquiry with respect to that BWIA transaction, as long as they put the National Flour Mills, InnCogen and all of them there—any time. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, I would love, personally, if I had the power to do it, to appoint a commission of inquiry. I would love to do it.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, that is the Government. [*Mr. Speaker rises*] Let them do it tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker: I am on my legs. Hon. Members, the business of this House cannot be conducted in the manner in which many hon. Members of this House are trying to conduct it. I have tried very gently for the past 15 minutes to get Members to understand that. I ask that we proceed in a disciplined fashion.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order, Standing Order 36(5), when the Member indicated about some—

Mr. Speaker: The Member for Diego Martin Central got up and, indeed, I did not deal with the point of order simply because the Member who was on his legs sat and gave way. He made a statement and we have now passed that stage. He made a statement indicating his preparedness to have a commission of inquiry, provided there were certain others. I listened to that and I listened to it simply because, as I understood it, he had gotten up, the Member had given way and we proceeded. Could we now proceed with the Member for St. Augustine? Please continue.

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, I think all Members will remember that in presenting this Motion, the Member for Diego Martin East highlighted four things. “Cronyism”—he brought a *Webster’s Dictionary*, a big, thick book and opened the book at “cronyism” and went on to explain what that was—nepotism, corruption and favouritism.

Dr. Rowley: And crook!

Hon. J. Humphrey: Those were the issues that the Member for Diego Martin East put on the parliamentary record when he presented this Motion. I am just

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giving certain examples of “cronyism”, nepotism, corruption and favouritism. I give another example.

Mr. Speaker, anybody who has sought to negotiate with the Inter-American Development Bank to get any kind of development loan would know how difficult it is to meet their conditions, but that Member, when he was Minister of Works and Transport, did not seem to have any difficulty at all negotiating to build a road in the mountain on the North Coast, which I have personally visited. It is built and engineered in concrete.

Dr. Mohammed: Six miles.

Hon. J. Humphrey: I am advised by the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources that it is a very long road. I do not know what it actually cost and what this country is paying the Inter-American Development Bank for that loan. I am advised about TT \$1 million.

I drove up there and went right to the end of the road and, quite frankly, I could only find one tomato tree with a dried up tomato right at the end. That is all I could find in terms of agriculture, so it could not have been an agricultural access road. But what I did find was development in that area of upscale resort housing and I found that the road gives access to many private properties, and I have been hearing murmurings as to who owns all that land and what I am told is that Members of that front row are the owners of the adjacent land and, therefore, the beneficiaries of the \$6 million investment. This Government is not able to negotiate that kind of loan from the Inter-American Development Bank.

Mr. Imbert: Rubbish!

Hon. J. Humphrey: No. But let him say it is rubbish. Let him respond. He was and still is the Member for that area.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, if the Member would give way. This ridiculous story started in the 1995 election. It went from one acre of land before the election to 5,000 acres of land after election, and the Members on the other side keep repeating that nonsense. It is totally untrue, falsehood, lies.

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, I invite anyone in the national community who has a vehicle to drive up the North Coast road as if the person were going to Maracas Bay. They will see a road on the left-hand side; take a drive to see for themselves, and question how it is the Inter-American Development Bank approved that project.

Personally, I have taken someone up there to see it, who is going to talk to the President of the Bank about the scandal because that is a scandal. But nothing has been done about it. So I am hoping that when they get the opportunity, we will hear from the Member for Diego Martin Central about his Acker connection, and I am hoping that he will explain the component of the deal.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, again, on a point of order.

3.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: On a point of order? What is the point of order?

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I am saying again—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: One second please; if you have risen on a point of order could you please indicate which one of the Standing Orders?

Mr. Valley: Standing Order No. 36(5).

Mr. Speaker: I rule that in this instance with what has been said, Standing Order 36(5) has not been infringed. Please continue. *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, I am only going on what the Member has said publicly and, in fact, in this House. He was Minister with responsibility for the divestment process and he has described that as the best deal that was ever made, so we know with whom the deal was made. It was made with a man named Ed Acker who was a famous creditor. All over the United States he purchased failing airline companies, then wound them up, sold the equipment, the capital of the companies, and filled his pockets. He had come here to do exactly the same thing with our national airline. I want to hear them explain—when they are responding to all their allegations and charges—how that aeroplane was included in the deal, an aeroplane for which the Government of Trinidad and Tobago pays, that the aeroplane does not have to pay for, but Ed Acker inherits the benefits and use of the aeroplane. I want an explanation! *[Crosstalk]*

I would also like the Member For Diego Martin East to explain that deal with the Inter-American Development Bank. He does not have to repay the loan, it is the people of Trinidad and Tobago who have to repay it. In fact, that falls on us. It is a burden that is unnecessary, that is placed on our Government: a road that does not bring any benefit or return to the national community. So I want the national

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community to see for themselves, and then do a little research into who owns what land up there. Find out who owns the land in that area. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Griffith: What about the \$3 million Blanchisseuse Road?

Hon. J. Humphrey: One of the other issues that they keep hammering at is the issue of a contract with a firm called InnCogen, as a co-generator of electricity in a programme of four important investment projects. They keep saying we will never see any of the others, that the deal was made by this Government strictly for InnCogen and that some short pants person shared some \$30 million with people on this side. That is what they keep saying! They say it publicly and, of course, the media runs with it.

Mr. Speaker, I was a Member of this Cabinet that took the decision to go the route, and we were satisfied on many meetings with the experts, all the top people at T&TEC and with the investors that, in fact, that was the sensible route to take. We were advised that by a certain date we had to increase the amount of electricity we had or we would be short of electricity, and would go back to the days of outages. How many Members on this side can remember the days when, from day to day, we did not know if we were going to have a consistent supply of electricity? They used to call it outages, but in the night there was a total blackout because there was no electricity in major areas of the country. The decision that this Cabinet took, of which I was a part—and I would stand or fall by that—is, in fact, to prevent that from happening in the future. We judged on the basis of the deal they had made with PowerGen. We compared the terms of the contract and found the terms much more favourable with InnCogen than those they had established with PowerGen.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing is, that this Government is opposed to monopolies. Capitalism only works if there is competition and if there is a level playing field. We wanted to break the monopoly in that very important utility, which we have, in fact, put in place to so do. So what are the allegations? What are the condemnations? What is the evidence, that we ever hear when they come at us and say we are corrupt? All I can say is that they are looking at a mirror and seeing themselves. All they can see are those things that the Member for Diego Martin East described: cronyism, favouritism, nepotism and corruption. That is all he could see with those eyes of his. He is looking at himself and his colleagues, not looking at Members on this side.

What is the other issue? There were four issues—[*Interruption*—National Petroleum Marketing Company and the aim of a particular individual who is employed to do a particular job. Mr. Speaker, what is that job? That job was to prepare National Petroleum for the future when the whole petroleum distribution trade was being opened up for competition and when the people who were here before, marketing petroleum products—like Esso, Texaco, Shell and BP—would be invited to return if they so desired, so that the national company would be in a state of competition with those companies. That was what was behind it.

We had promised in our election manifesto to do exactly that. We would divest state corporations, open up for competition and, in fact, enable companies that were owned by the state, that were monopolies, to go into the marketplace and compete. Out of that competition is what comes efficiency in capitalism. If you do not have competition and freedom of enterprise you are not going to get reduction of price, increase of quality, or efficiency of production; and we all know that. So that is what we set about to do, but they are opposed to that, and they have got to explain why. Why are they opposed to opening up this country for competition and for free enterprise? They must stand and explain.

Those are the four main things that we have heard from them. Quite frankly, I see no merit in the arguments, but unfortunately the media seem to think that there is some merit, so we get editorial writers writing about it, and reporters reporting all the nonsense they say in this House and on the public platform, hoping no doubt that if they throw enough mud some would stick on the target. Well, Mr. Speaker, I suggest that they keep throwing the mud, because this individual, this Member of Parliament who has been in Parliament since 1978 consistently, none of that mud would stick. I dare them all to get together and see where they can find mud that could stick on the Member for St. Augustine. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Where the \$300,000 yuh collect?

Hon. J. Humphrey: He has a bit of mud to throw. I am inviting him that when he is ready to make his contribution, to throw it and I would interrupt him the way he is interrupting me.

Hon. Members: National Fisheries, the gas stations!

Hon. J. Humphrey: National Fisheries? If Members would throw them as I deal with one—I have been in this thing long enough and I am familiar with most of these transactions, especially those that were corrupt. I spent my time on

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corruption and to a large extent that is why they are not in Government today. [Crosstalk] On corruption, tracing it down and finding the villains at the very highest level of their government. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker, it seems that my colleagues have no more issues for me to explain, so maybe I could invite Members opposite. What issue would you like to be explained? [Crosstalk] There are no more, so I think at this stage I could happily take my seat having made my contribution in this debate.

Thank you.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Member for St. Augustine whom I happen to represent in this Parliament. I thank him most sincerely for the clarification which he has provided on the matter before us, which has to do with the Motion calling on this House to voice its objection to the way this Government has gone about handling the public moneys, whether it has to do with the award of contracts or the hiring of personnel.

Let me put this whole thing in perspective. One has to understand what is this Government's job, or any government for that matter. Some people assume that the Government's job is to set the moral tone for its Members, to be exemplars to the national community and so forth. That might be true, that is a spin-off, but the most important function for which people elect members of a government, is largely to manage money.

Mr. Speaker, just in case you have not been following the figures, this Government, to date, by the time the current budget expires in October of this year, would have managed \$48,000,000, 000, and if they last five years in office to stay to the end of the next budget for next year they would have managed \$60 billion! That is the assignment. Mr. Speaker, it is impossible for any group of persons in this country—no matter how terrible your character or how bad your intention—to spend that kind of money and not do something positive somewhere along the line. But if you are allowed to hold up the one or two things you are doing good or right, to cloud your own misconduct then we could end up in situation where fairness, justice and efficiency go through the window.

When I hear from the Member of long-standing this afternoon that the problem which arose at National Flour Mills with the purchase of rice from India had to do with O'Halloran who died so long ago, God rest his soul, it tells me that this Government has now given up the ghost in providing any credible defence for its own misconduct.

Assuming without accepting that O'Halloran was doing something wrong at NFM, how long ago did he die? He died ten years ago, the PNM lost the election in 1986, there were five years of National Alliance for Reconstruction government, there was a further four years of PNM Government, and then another two years of the UNC Government before Gangadas Shah, Bharath and the rice deal came into being. We are being told or insulted today that the loss of money has something to do with the PNM and O'Halloran! That is insulting!

3.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the rice deal is an initiative of this Government, they appointed the Board. We are now hearing that the Chairman is a PNM. They also appointed the Chief Executive Officer. The Chief Executive Officer and the Board placed the order. They dealt with the Government of India. We never knew about the ships, we are now hearing that the PNM built and sailed the ships. I mean, Mr. Speaker, do not insult the country's intelligence. "If dey tief, dey tief", but do not tell us that!

I am not going to lose sight of what I want to put on the parliamentary record. What I want to put on the parliamentary record is that the problem with management of the moneys in Trinidad and Tobago is a problem that has its root in the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the point I want to put on the record this afternoon. I am not going to get involved in O'Halloran and Prevatt and whatever. This country has adjudicated on their tenure, their stewardship and their lives a long time. I want this country to adjudicate on the tenure of the living that is "tiefing" out the Treasury. [*Desk Thumping*]

For that, I thank the Member for St. Augustine for going to the Airports project. I want to put on record how it is done. Mr. Speaker, when the Member for St. Augustine was talking about the Airports project, he was at pains to point out that the Government takes a certain route. The only problem that any of us has—the Joint Consultative Council, the Opposition or John Public—is not that we should not have an airport or that we should not award contracts, not that it should not be done expeditiously, but that in doing it, it must be done in such a way that Government gets value for money. The Member for St. Augustine wound up by saying—when he was talking about the airport—"that competition gives you the best value for money, it gives you efficiency and all the attributes". So why then has the Cabinet sullied its own reputation by refusing to have competition for the award of the airport contract. [*Desk thumping*]. How?

Mr. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, there is competition in the fast-tracking method. If the Member was listening carefully he would have heard there were 17 packages which were competed for. So, there is competition in each package. But there is the possibility of 17 contractors being awarded separate packages. It is the essence of competition, but he does not understand it, poor fellow!

Dr. K. Rowley: He does not understand what competition means. If I give out 17 different contracts: I give you A, I give him B and I give her C, there is no competition. It is when there are 6, or 8 or 10 people offering a bid for A, that is competition.

Mr. Humphrey: That is exactly what happened!

Dr. K. Rowley: I am not going to waste time with that, Mr. Speaker. Let me tell you what happened: the Airports Authority went about awarding a contract to a group called NYC. In this House the matter was raised. In part it was initiated and a judge looked at how it was done and concluded for this House, that there was collusion and impropriety in the award of the contract. That was the first problem. Nothing to do with no airport or should we have an airport. It had to do with the manner in which this Government was spending the public's money.

On the day the report was made in this House, the Prime Minister pretended to agree to accept the report and went as far as to invite the Opposition Leader to join with him to implement the recommendations of the Deyalsingh Commission. Lo and behold, what we always knew was the reason the Government had gone that way in the first instance, was that they were hell-bent on offering that job above market price to friends of the Government. Even when the problems arose, the Government resolutely refused to back away to get the same basis of competition that the Member for St. Augustine described. I will show you how.

I heard the Prime Minister publicly, during this week, dismissing the same way he tried to do this afternoon. He said: "the Opposition raised the matter of corruption on the Airport and my government dealt with it. We appointed the Deyalsingh Commission and we gave NIPDEC the authority and NIPDEC dealt with it." Mr. Speaker, that is a lie. I will show you.

I have in my possession a copy of the contract between NIPDEC and the Airports Authority. Insofar as they used NIPDEC as a cover screen to achieve the same objective that caused the problem in the beginning, which was: to award the contract to NYC without allowing any other contractor to bid, because they were

sure that other contractors would bid lower, because they knew that the NYC bid was grossly inflated. So, the Government moved heaven and earth to prevent the tendering process. When they made arrangements with NIPDEC and outlined NIPDEC's obligation, the Cabinet gave this directive to NIPDEC: that they must settle and award the contract and they must settle any claims, provided however that NIPDEC shall not settle any claims or matters negotiated by it including any negotiations with a person for the completion of any unfinished work pursuant to this clause without the prior approval of the client. The client there being the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, equals the Cabinet. Even if they gave—in the public's eye, as they gave NIPDEC the authority to award the contract, the Cabinet held control of the project. I go further. I have in my possession the minutes of a meeting, I quote:

“Notes of Meeting held at the Ministry of the Attorney General”

The country's chief law enforcement officer.

“Notes of Meeting held at the Ministry of the Attorney General with AATT, NIPDEC and the Ministry of Works and Transport.

Present were:

Ramesh L. Maharaj	-	Attorney General
Lynette Stephenson	-	Solicitor General
Edward Bailey	-	Chairman, NIPDEC
Noel Garcia	-	General Manager, NIPDEC
Tyrone Gopee	-	Chairman, Airports Authority
Alison Williams	-	Member, Airports Authority
Justin Paul	-	Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Works & Transport

1. Matters discussed”

This is the Prime Minister who said: “NIPDEC is handling everything, so what are you worrying about.” I quote:

“(b) Since the Ministry of the Attorney General had advised that the Northern York Coosal Consortium (NYC) contract is *ultra vires*, the meeting agreed that it was necessary to determine how NIPDEC should treat with Package 6 which had been awarded to (NYC).”

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Mr. Speaker, this is NYC construction project that he made a big song and dance trying to lead us off track. These are the minutes of a meeting that took place in the Office of the Attorney General of this country.

When the Prime Minister got up in Parliament and pretended to accept the findings of Justice Deyalsingh, what he did not tell the country is that in the end it was not Deyalsingh's position which prevailed, hear what prevailed: Item 1(d) of the Minutes from the Office of the Attorney General. I quote:

“In addition, Mr. Gopee...”

Chairman of the Airports Authority—I will come back to him.

“was of the opinion that since NYC had been on site and would have incurred mobilization expenses...it seemed more cost-effective to let NYC continue the work on Package 6 rather than to effect settlement... Any new contractor who came on to the site would have to incur the same expenses and the Government would find that it would have to pay twice for the same work. This opinion was endorsed by NIPDEC's Chairman.”

Mr. Bailey, who I will come back to. It was the opinion of the Airports Authority Chairman and NIPDEC that eventually prevailed and not the findings of Justice Deyalsingh. They proceeded not to follow the findings of Justice Deyalsingh but to follow this opinion.

Mr. Speaker, in the same Minutes listen to paragraph 2(d) ending with this sentence:

“It was made clear that there was nothing to prevent NYC from entering the re-tendering process.”

In the presence of the Attorney General on that date namely: November 27, 1997 the Government was proceeding towards a re-tendering, having accepted the Attorney General's advice that the original contract was *ultra vires*. What we do know, the Attorney General went further.

I want to quote him.

“The Attorney General reminded all present of the urgent need to bring the project to fruition and, he hoped, that since it seemed it was now clear what was required,”

that is retendering:

“the relevant parties should initiate action in accordance with Cabinet's directive and in accordance with the law.”

3.30 p.m.

That was the Attorney General covering his tracks very well but the operatives in the Government would supersede that and what we do know is that no such thing happened. There was no retendering and the same company got the same contract with no tendering. He gets up here this afternoon and tries to bramble us. This is because he brambled the PNM government into thinking he was an architect and they put him in charge of the renovation of the Chaguaramas Convention Centre.

Hon. Member: Do not make joke.

Dr. K. Rowley: That was the first big fee he ever got. So he believes he can come to the Parliament and bramble a Parliament full of people who have some modicum of sense. Now he tells us this afternoon that the rice scandal was a PNM/O'Halloran doing and that the airport contract was well done when the Minutes of a meeting chaired by the Attorney General of this country go counter to all that we are seeing this afternoon. [*Desk thumping*]

So they award the contract without tender. They repeated it and now he comes here and we see them hiring my former colleague, the former Attorney General, paying him a big brief to put his name and his office on some negotiation, some arbitration. He will receive a big fee. The same company that got the contract *ultra vires* and the same contract again without tender will receive a big fee for claims and all of that is public moneys which will go to all of them. And I must accept him?

Then he makes a big song and dance about Acker, Acker, Acker as though— Mr. Speaker, just for your benefit let me tell you what the shareholding of the BWIA transaction is. When BWIA was privatized, as it still is today, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago retained 33.5 per cent, the union has 15.5 per cent, local private shareholders, banks and other people, have 18 per cent and foreign shareholding is 34 per cent. The said Edward Acker he is making a big song and dance about has 1.5 per cent of the shareholding. That is BWIA's configuration. So if there is some mystery plane that nobody owns that BWIA is flying, I do not know how in God's name you can get a plane licenced and be certified to fly anywhere in the world without an owner. If that is the case, Acker only owns 1.5 per cent of this ownerless plane.

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However, let us put aside that stupidity for a moment because I cannot even tell that to my dog. Mr. Speaker, what they are trying to do is not face up to their own misconduct, shame and misbehaviour in office. They cannot get up and say, "We did not do it". They are trying to justify it and it has gone from the ridiculous to the sublime. So when he comes here this afternoon and tries to give us that "ole" talk, we have to understand something. Cabinet Note No. 1727 of July 1998 says the Airport Development Project:

"authorized the Ministry of Works and Transport, through the Client Representative...to evaluate the claims, if any, from the NYC Consortium in respect of the above-mentioned Construction Package No. 6."

So the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Cabinet, is running the show, while the Prime Minister is going on platforms and telling the country, "Do not worry with their position. Is NIPDEC that do it so the Cabinet is at arm's length and we are not involved". Here is the Cabinet note. He is saying that the Ministry of Works and Transport is doing it. That is where Seeraram is coming in, to work for the Ministry of Works and Transport.

Miss Nicholson: What date? Give us the date.

Dr. K. Rowley: July 2, 1998.

Miss Nicholson: What is the heading?

Dr. K. Rowley: Heading, "Piarco International Airport Development Project". So why is this Government trying to fool people? We have too many schools in the country and we all do not work by the moon, you know. We function every day of the month. So do not come here and tell us nonsense about there being no problem with the airport. What has happened here, Mr. Speaker, is that this violation of the regulations results in us awarding a contract. It has nothing to do with the justification or the viability of a new airport. We are paying more than we should, and I want to show you something.

Hon. Member: We are building the airport.

Dr. K. Rowley: Yes, you will build the airport but as long as that airport remains there it will be a symbol of shame in this country. [*Desk thumping*]. So build it. It is a monument to your corruption and your "t'iefing".

Hon. Member: Twice the price.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I made this point publicly the other day about how other countries lost their funds to people in office. From the Abacha

government, one member of the Abacha family was caught with 34 suitcases of cash stolen from Nigeria. The family of Suharto has \$118 billion worth of assets and in Mexico the Salinas brother has over \$100 million frozen in Switzerland while he is in jail on other charges. Now these are all oil economies where the government of the day consisted of people who found ways and means of siphoning the state's resources into their private pockets. This is what the UNC Government is doing today [*Desk thumping*] and I am showing you how you do it.

Mr. Speaker, when they came up with the ruse to use NIPDEC as the front to award the contract, they did not realize that there was a stumbling block in NIPDEC. I raised this point in this House already and I will raise it again. When NIPDEC was given the authority to do the contract, managers in NIPDEC would then have had to follow NIPDEC's tender rules. These are NIPDEC's tender rules. Let me show you what the tender rules say.

Mr. Valley: Ramesh, boy, you tried to put them on the right track.

Dr. K. Rowley: On page 2 there are limits on how much they could award without tender, \$1 million, right.

Hon. Member Quite right, Ramesh, quite right.

Dr. K. Rowley: On page 7 there are further details but on page 9 under the heading "Invitation to Tender"—and this is for guidance and this is the regulation to be followed by the board if they are to comply with the law. Invitation to Tender, item 13(1):

"Whenever goods or services are required to be supplied to, or works are required to be undertaken on behalf of the Company, the Company shall make written request to the Committee to invite on its behalf offers for the supply of those goods or services..."

So under NIPDEC's tender rules they are obligated to invite bids. But you must remember, this Cabinet does not want any bids invited for the NYC contract, package six. They will move heaven and earth. So when they gave it to NIPDEC this clause became a problem, you see, because it says, "to invite offers". So what did they do?

If I go further in the tender rules, on page 15 item 21.3 says:

"Where the quality of goods differ between tenders/offers, the Committee in selecting which tender/offer shall be accepted by the Company shall take account of:-"

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and there are items “a.” to “h.” Item “a.” is “price quoted”. The number one consideration is “price” and there are other considerations and so forth, but price—but they do not want any competition on the price quoted by the Galbaransingh consortium.

Item 30 provides for the board—it says “Amendment of Rules”:

“These rules may be adopted, rescinded or amended by resolution...”

So the board is given the power to change tender rules. Instead of inviting bids, that was too difficult, do you know what they did, Mr. Speaker? They amended the tender rules. Do you know what the amendment is?

Hon. Members: Thuggery, thuggery.

Dr. K. Rowley: Hear the amendment.

“The following amendment was approved on the 27th of February...”

signed by the said Edward Bailey, Chairman. Remember the same Bailey who was advising to disregard Deyalsingh? Hear the amendment.

“words in the singular shall include the plural; words in the plural shall include the singular; words in the male gender shall include the female gender and, words in the female gender shall include the male gender.”

So man equals woman, X equals Y and all that shenanigan was to get around the tender rules which say that offers have to be invited. So you are limited to \$1 million, you are going to award a \$200 million contract and you change the English language to allow one bid. And when we ask in the Parliament, “Did you comply with the tender rules?”, they said yes, but you have to pull out from them that they changed plural to singular. That is how the UNC Government, guided by the Cabinet, awarded the contract to Galbaransingh.

Mr. Speaker, when I tell you that the Prime Minister is leading a bunch of thugs in and out of government, that they are raiding the Treasury and removing the protection of the people to facilitate corruption, these are the facts as recorded in the documents of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] This is not about lies, half-truths and innuendo, this is about the Parliament coming face to face with the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago facilitating corruption for the benefit of friends of the Government. Understand that.

Miss Nicholson: Thieves.

Dr. K. Rowley: Understand that. That is what is going on. So in the airport we had one reputable company in this country going public saying, “We can do that work for \$100 million”. The Government, using this ruse, has awarded the job to someone else for \$200 million. So we lost \$100 million there.

Mr. Speaker, understand something. How many nurses will \$100 million pay? The average annual budget for medicine in this country for all the hospitals is approximately \$50 million. If this was a singular event we could have said it was a full moon fantasy approved by my friend from St. Augustine. It is not. It is the permanent pattern of behaviour of the Government. Nobody is saying that the tendering process is perfect but it is the protection against wanton corruption; it is the avenue by which we get the best price and value for government money, but the Member for St. Augustine, an influential figure in the Cabinet and acting Prime Minister, does not believe in those protections.

This goes back not to this Government but to the NAR government when he, as Minister of Works in the NAR government, sat there and broke the law and awarded contracts across the country for drainage clearing. We all represent people in this Parliament and would love to have all our drains cleaned but we also want our Minister not to facilitate corruption and not to break the law. He awarded contracts to a number of contractors without tender. It had to come to the House. I, as a member of the Opposition, had to vote to amend the Central Tenders Board regulation retroactively to allow them to be paid. He comes back in this Government and they are doing the same thing, facilitating corruption by violation of the tender rules. [*Desk thumping*].

So, Mr. Speaker, when they did the InnCogen deal and we asked—nobody is saying—in fact, some people are saying and I am saying it too, I am not buying this argument about this urgency for power because we will find out, you know. He just told us that they had Cabinet meetings and they had to do it urgently. In October when the InnCogen power comes on stream we will see how urgent it is because we will see who is paying for the excess power. I have told you all in this country, as of October you are going to have to eat electricity because you are paying for it and you do not need it. But, Mr. Speaker, here again he loves—he says for capitalism to prosper you must have competition.

Miss Nicholson: He said so?

Dr. K. Rowley: He said so this afternoon. But when they wanted to bring in a competitor to PowerGen what did we end up with? There were no bids and the

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Minister of Public Utilities came here, when the pressure was put on them and had to show some semblance of bids, right. They said, “Yes, we had bids”. “From whom?” “From ALCOTT, the Aluminium Company of Trinidad and Tobago.” That does not exist.

I was going to bring this afternoon a clipping from the *Guardian* of November which showed that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries were meeting with the aluminium interests to discuss the possibility of an aluminium plant which has since gone by the wayside. But way before that, this Minister could tell us that a company that does not exist, a plant that never will be was the competitive bid that they got for the InnCogen deal. Shame.

Mr. Speaker, we all know what happened there. The cost of that will be another \$100 million a year to the taxpayer of Trinidad and Tobago because the profits will go to the InnCogen shareholders and the cost will be borne by the people of Trinidad and Tobago who would lose out through their company, PowerGen. If they were following decent procedures all they had to do was to make it available for open bids and there were persons and companies that wanted to come in and they would have put in bids.

3.45 p.m.

If they wanted to build a plant they did not require a Government guarantee and no take or pay contract. But this Government goes out of its way—this Cabinet goes out of its way—to instruct T&TEC to get off of its bidding process and give, on Cabinet's instruction, that plant to friends of the Prime Minister, house guests of the Prime Minister, and that is corruption! [*Desk thumping*]

The Government went further and provided a bond of US \$150 million to people who did not put up one cent! When they formed Innercob, it was a paper company which cost less than \$1000 to form. The Prime Minister's friend had a 5 per cent in that! The shares were worth nothing because they had nothing. Nothing plus nothing equals nothing! It became something only when the Cabinet used the people of Trinidad and Tobago's financial backing and gave them a bond for US \$150 million! [*Desk thumping*]

The same Cabinet then gave that company a take or pay contract for 30 years, and the friends of the Prime Minister could go to the bank now and say, “We have a contract for 30 years. The Government has a bond for US \$150 million,” and the bank funds it. Then the 5 per cent share for the short pants man is sold. So, 5 per

cent of US \$150 million is how much? He did not put up one red cent and he is now worth TT \$50 million! That is not madness. That is the thinking of the sane.

What is worse is that from top to bottom, that Minister—the one from Pointe-a-Pierre—where is he? His conduct in violating the norms and the acceptable standards and regulations, and the law, is what is being praised by the Prime Minister!

Mr. Partap: He is getting the job done!

Dr. K. Rowley: The Prime Minister is so happy with the scandalous behaviour of the Minister of Local Government that he is now stripping the Ministry of Works and Transport of its responsibility and giving it to the Ministry of Local Government. Do you know why? Because it is easier to facilitate corruption in the Ministry of Local Government than the Ministry of Works and Transport.

By Cabinet Note No. 1078 of May 6—the country has not been told this yet, but I will tell them—Cabinet took a decision to transfer to the Ministry of Local Government the responsibility for the implementation of physical works on 45 schools. So here we have a Government Ministry called the Ministry of Works and Transport that is set up with all the engineering skills, all the support skills and all the public servants to do this kind of work.

This Cabinet that did the InnCogen deal; this Cabinet that did nothing about the rice deal; this Cabinet that condoned the NP deals; this Cabinet that condoned the airport deal; has gone now into the public service and the Prime Minister is transferring from the Ministry of Works and Transport, physical works to be done by the Ministry of Works and Transport now to be done by the Ministry of Local Government knowing full well that the Ministry of Local Government is deficient in engineering skills. They do not have the technical expertise.

Mr. Speaker, you were a Minister of Works and Transport. You know what I am talking about. The expertise for physical works in the public service in this country resides in the Ministry of Works and Transport, but the Minister of Local Government is now being given that responsibility to do it under the Unemployment Relief Programme and other things. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Gentlemen, it is extremely difficult, regardless of how loudly the Member for Diego Martin West is speaking, if others continue conversations at the same time. I ask you please to desist. You will have an opportunity to speak,

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and if a Member feels that he must speak in tones other than a whisper to any other Member of House, I ask please that he goes behind the Chair or outside in the corridors to do so. That is not asking too much. It is becoming the practice now for Members on one side to be carrying on a conversation with a Member on the other side while someone is speaking. It is not done.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I was saying that the Cabinet is the facilitator of the corruption, because when the Prime Minister transfers from the Ministry of Works and Transport where the public service expertise resides to do these physical works on these 45 schools and puts them in the Ministry of Local Government—I would not take up much of my time to describe what is going on in the Ministry of Local Government—the only thing that comes out of this is a greater avenue for the Minister of Local Government to abuse his authority with public funds, not having the support mechanisms of the Ministry of Works and Transport.

Of the 45 schools to be dealt with, 24 of them are in Port of Spain and its environs—corporations controlled by the PNM—and we know, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Local Government has made it his business to emasculate the corporations that are controlled by parties other than his own Government. Here is the Prime Minister taking from the Ministry of Works and Transport and putting under the control of the Minister of Local Government, 24 schools to be repaired in Port of Spain and its environs. What I expect to happen is that the Minister will proceed to award contracts in the way they have been awarded without tender, breaking up contracts in little pieces, giving them to their friends, millions will be spent and the San Juan/Laventille corporations, which are PNM controlled, will have no say in the matter and the Minister will control them. Who gives him the authority? The Cabinet. That is how the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago is facilitating the processes.

Mr. Speaker, if these were minor aberrations, maybe we—

Mr. D. Singh: Mr. Speaker, through you, I thought Dr. Rowley was going to say something about corruption. I know of instances when the programme was transferred, we called in all the corporations and they were assigned to do the school repairs which were done on time. I know of a particular instance, also, where we were called upon two weeks before Common Entrance to repair some 80-something schools and we repaired the schools! [*Rowley on his feet*]

Dr. K. Rowley: I am not giving way!

Mr. D. Singh: If the Member is saying that I must call 70 different contractors to repair—

Mr. Speaker: Member for Tobago West, it is not necessary to tell me that.

Miss Nicholson: Sorry, Sir. I withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: I was simply rising to say to the Member for Diego Martin West that once you give way, you give way, and it is not possible having given way and someone starts to say something that you get up and say that you are not giving way for that. So, please, the Member may continue.

Mr. D. Singh: I will start all over. *[Laughter]* Mr. Speaker, the whole idea of transferring the school repair programme to the Ministry of Local Government was to get it done on time. We called in all the corporations and they have been working with us as regards to school repairs. I know of a particular instance when we were called in two weeks before Common Entrance to repair some 70—80 schools; I cannot recall the number now. Because of expediency, the Ministry had to handle that. Bills from the repairs to those 70 schools totalled \$299,000. We had to change two light bulbs here and something else there.

Is the member saying to this House that I should have called 70 different contractors to award this contract so that we would have had these schools repaired in time? The Ministry was given two weeks to repair all of these schools for Common Entrance. Is the Member aware of the time it takes to process tenders? The children would have been doing their Common Entrance in the dark!

Mr. Speaker, through you, Sir, we have been called upon to make decisions from time to time which necessitate certain actions. I was elected to deliver and I did just that. Thank you, Sir. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker: Your speaking time will be extended by the relevant time.

Dr. K. Rowley: I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I trust that if, in the future, I do not give way to my colleagues, you will understand?

Mr. Speaker, that is not the point I was making. The point I was making was that there is a Ministry of Works and Transport, and if what the Minister is trying to say is that the Minister of Works and Transport, where the expertise ought to reside, is incapable of doing it, then the Prime Minister has to get rid of the Minister of Works and Transport. What he is making here is a case for the abolishment of the Ministry of Works and Transport.

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My argument is that the public service has machinery, it has expertise, engineers and otherwise which reside in the Ministry of Works and Transport which are not going to be available, and what we do know is that the Ministry of Local Government is violating all the checks and balances with respect to the award of contracts. *[Desk thumping]* That is why the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation could have estimated for the repaving of Narine Trace \$27,000 and the Minister and his Ministry awarded a contract for \$100,000 of work on the same trace! *[Desk thumping]* That is why they want to go this route. The corporation had an estimate for cleaning the Tunapuna market.

Mr. Speaker: Order please! The sitting is suspended for five minutes and I ask please that the Leader of the House and the Opposition Chief Whip come with me.

3.57 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

4.11 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I pointed out earlier the stance of the Attorney General on one of the major project scandals in the country. While we may adjourn for a disturbance in the Parliament so that the emotions might simmer, what I cannot understand is how my colleague holding the office of Attorney General could give that kind of advice, take that kind of position and sit and hold his position silently, while the Member for St. Augustine got up and tried to present some erroneous diatribe, diametrically opposed to the facts and common sense. Therein lies the problem in this country.

You see, Mr. Speaker, the people of this country have to understand that when one elects people, their character is important. Because if they are impermeable to the sprinklings of morals, they will do anything as long as it serves their interest; because the system of governance that we have, whether something makes sense or not, whether it is cost effective or not, once the Cabinet approves it, it is well done, and therein lies the danger of an irresponsible or corrupt Cabinet.

I want to go on record—so when researchers come to look at the *Hansard* of this country—as pointing out something which was described here this afternoon, that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago—named by the Member for Siparia as the “Panday administration”—is using the authority of Cabinet to facilitate abuses of the public purse in the form of blatant corruption in a series of projects. *[Desk thumping]* The biggest defender of that action is the Prime Minister! He is

assisting the process. You do not need bright light to see that. A drunken man on a galloping horse could see what the Prime Minister is doing when he gets up and defends what has gone on at NP and takes on the personal charge to defend it! When he allows his Cabinet to hold on to the Airport project in that way, knowing what the Cabinet is doing, and he goes on a platform and holds up and says, "I have given that to NIPDEC so, therefore, Cabinet is not involved and do not look at us as being responsible". Even if that was so, the Cabinet has the ultimate responsibility for what NIPDEC would have done, but I have shown here this afternoon that it is not NIPDEC in any way. It is the actions, the directive of the Cabinet. Until this country understands that, they will not understand the depths of the problem that we are facilitating.

Mr. Speaker, I could list here from now until six o'clock tomorrow the number of instances that this Government has abused its authority in the management of the public purse.

We had a fiasco here the other day called the Miss Universe Pageant, a beauty show, at which some people had a birthday party, some got to pinch, some got to feel, some got to kiss; and we paid for all of that. The Government told the country that it was going to cost us \$80 million. In fact, when that was first mooted we were told that the private sector would be asked to support this thing and to bring off a Miss Universe in this country because there are great benefits to be had from a Miss Universe Pageant. It was supposed to be a private sector initiative. But when the Government struck the deal with Trump that had no relevance to economics and earnings, the private sector saw no role and the Government had to fund it. So we funded a good time for the boys and the girls.

But even in so doing, the Government has not been honest with the country. The Government talks about this costing \$80 million. I hope when the accounts come in they can justify the expenditure and show how it is. What I do know, the day after the event the company had been wound up. So I do not know who to talk to now. At the end of the day, the Cabinet is responsible to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Interruption]* I am sorry. Not this evening. Not after his conduct.

Mr. Speaker, what I do know, the Chaguaramas Development Authority (CDA), which is a government agency, has been allowed to borrow substantial sums of money to spend in the context of the Miss Universe beauty contest. The CDA is a struggling company that is having difficulty making ends meet at the end of the month. In fact, as I speak here, the board of the CDA expired weeks ago,

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there is no board in place. How many millions of dollars was the CDA instructed to borrow to spend in the context of Miss Universe? Because the Government did not want the full figure to come out, so they left a portion of the expenditure with the CDA. You know something, one of the things that the CDA did—.

Mr. Assam: Will you give way.

Dr. K. Rowley: You do not understand English? I am not giving way.

The CDA has spent substantial sums of money—

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. [*Mr. K. Valley*]

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank my colleagues for the extension.

What I was saying, I hope when the reporting is done—the Minister seems to be anxious to report. You will have your time—that we will be told how much money the CDA spent on its facilities in the context of the Miss Universe beauty contest.

What I do know is that they spent a lot of money renovating a hotel that has a kitchen in it, catering facilities. Before the paint is dry on the wall, and even as the Minister for Housing and Settlements talks about the benefits of competition for capitalism, unbeknownst to the rest of the country, the treasurer of the UNC ends up with a six month contract to run that facility. Interestingly enough, you now spend millions of dollars on a facility like that, and you enter into a six month arrangement with the treasurer of the ruling party. Inside that six months, in May month there was the Miss Universe fiasco—large numbers of people—and in September, there is the 600-delegate conference of the CPA down there, the contract is ending in October. So you have cornered the period when there is some activity and some earnings.

After that, I want to know who the CDA is serving down there and what revenue they expect to use to service that loan? I also want us to be told if, in accessing those loans, the CDA put up any collateral and what the collateral is. We want to know that. I have a sneaky feeling that they put up properties down there

which the CDA cannot service and when the bank goes to foreclose, the same way the treasurer got the kitchen, their friends will get the Convention Centre. I want to know the facts of that, so when the reports come in—*[Interruption]* “Yuh sitting down on picker?” When you get up tell us all of that, because the country must know what that beauty contest cost us. What it is going to cost us in the future and how the ruling party abused its authority and violated the basics of the tendering process.

Mr. Assam: Yes, bite the hand that fed your constituents.

Dr. K. Rowley: Just leave my constituents out of your nonsense. You understand?

Mr. Assam: I will tell the country you were part of it.

Dr. K. Rowley: I was a part of it? “Yuh looking for friends?” *[Laughter]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I would not even take that on.

I want to point out to the workers of this country that this issue of violation of the bidding process poses a threat to the jobs of many workers in this country and it poses a threat to the development of efficiency in this country. Because, if one is working for a company and the Government requires services or goods and your company is doing it better, your skills are applied better, but because of the way the Government goes about accessing those services, if your company is ruled out from either bidding, or when you bid you are treated unfairly, it means that opportunities for production and performance in your area will go to others who are getting it way above the cost and, in the end, because of a loss of opportunities and loss of work, you will have your company facing the bread line.

When I looked at the bidding process for the Malabar South School and I saw one contractor bidding at \$6.5 million, another one bidding at \$7 million, another one bidding at \$8 million, another one bidding at \$14 million; I understand the benefit of the bidding process. Incidentally, the one who was bidding at \$14 million did not know that it would have gone through a bidding process and bid \$14 million, in the same way he bid for the airport and got it without tender. The same contractor who got the airport without tender, bid \$14 million for the school that another contractor is bidding for \$6 million. So if they gave him that contract, then he could build two schools, but he would do it for one.

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We saw the same process with the gas stations for NP, where some of the contractors, in September, did not qualify for the contract because they allegedly did not fit the bill, but after they gave their friends the contract and fixed up the team in Arima, the same contractor who did not qualify in September to build two gas stations, can now build seven gas stations. He qualified after three months? The gas station for which they paid \$2 million, above market price, it should have been completed since February, we are now being told in three weeks time it is going to be finished, in July. The Parliament is told that the penalty clause of \$10,000 per day will apply and I will be monitoring that! Because from February to July at \$10,000 per day for all those days, my last calculations show that is \$3 million. I am waiting to hear the nonsense they will come with to excuse the contractor from the penalty clause. I am waiting to hear that! Because public moneys are being spent in that way.

Mr. Speaker, that was contracts. Personnel is a worse matter. I need not go over how they hire people in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. They hire them until they finish use them and then throw them out. They come sixth, give them the job, lie to the Parliament. That is now history.

But something happened in Caroni (1975) Ltd. recently, which I want to raise here. Because, when one looks at the board of Trinidad Cement Limited (TCL), some of the most outstanding people in this country are on that board. They have seen it fit to take action. The matter is in the court, I am not dealing with the details of the matter.

I want to ask the Government if it is a requirement to have a cloud over one to be hired by the Government. Because we have a situation where, out of the blue, without any sort of explanation, a man who has a lot of questions to answer—and he may very well be innocent, I do not know—finds himself being thrown out of TCL where the judgment of some of our most outstanding citizens is that this man is no longer fit to run this organization because we have lost confidence in him because of his behaviour.

I will not go into the details! Anybody who wants the details, go to the court house, look at the documents and see what the company has filed about the behaviour of the individual. Then ask yourself, if, even before that matter has been determined, if such a person should walk in without missing a step to run one of the largest corporations under the Government's control in Trinidad and Tobago.

4.25 p.m.

And the question one had to ask is: who is it that repeat the Soodhoo situation at Caroni? What if in the court it eventually turns out that he is guilty as charged at TCL? That is the individual who you put to run Caroni and he is making all the right noises about what has to go on there. What about the explanation that has not yet come?

The Government does not care about these matters and since the Government is saying to the country, we will do as we like and the Prime Minister had the gall to go out there and say, that he is only sorry that he did not allow the airport contract to continue uninterrupted, I think that that is something this country has to take note of.

There are people in this country today, who are calling on the President, a person who served this country for decades, and made his name campaigning against corruption, he now holds the highest office in the land, and when he was Prime Minister, the said Minister who stood up here this afternoon, trying to justify the scandalous behaviour of this Government, the same President who is now there, he was Prime Minister, and he told the country that this Minister, the Member for St. Augustine, tried to award the Scarborough Deep Water Harbour without tender in 1987, and he had to put his foot down then to stop it. [*Desk thumping*] So there was a Prime Minister—

Mr. Humprey: You are a liar.

Dr. K. Rowley: You are calling the President a liar?

Mr. Humprey: No, you are a liar.

Dr. K. Rowley: It is on the public record in this country in the Parliament on the *Hansard*, that Prime Minister Robinson told the country that the then minister tried to award the Scarborough Deep Water Harbour to his friend.

Hon. Member: Let Mr. Robinson come in here and say that.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, there was a Prime Minister who intervened to protect the public interest.

He spoke about O'Halloran but when George Chambers came into office, there was a problem with the racing complex, he intervened and stopped the project. The Sam P. Wallace investigation was done by the PNM government. One

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has to rely on the Prime Minister and the Government to defend the people. In this case, when the Government and the Cabinet are the culprits, who will one look to for protection? [*Desk thumping*]

And that is why today I am calling on the President of this country, to initiate public inquiries.

[*WORDS EXPUNGED*]

Mr. Speaker: It is also in the Standing Orders that you do not bring the Office of the President into these debates, so that we will please expunge that, and I ask you please, to deal with that elsewhere.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is that if the current system that we operate under does not provide for protection from the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, we are seeing that the framers of the Constitution did not envisage a bunch of people behaving in this way. We are seeing what could happen by Cabinet's misconduct and, therefore, our experiences are telling us that if the current system does not permit to have protection from this kind of behaviour, then we have to move with haste to adjust the system to put in place, checks and balances so that no Cabinet can behave in this way with the impunity that this Government is behaving now, to the detriment of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

When the rice scandal was up in the air, the Prime Minister promised an enquiry into NFM, to this day, nothing. He had an enquiry into the airport, it came to the Parliament—nothing, waste action. He went back and awarded the contract to the same person. He asked for an enquiry into how Soodhoo was hired, he got a report and still refused to let anybody see it. At the end of the day, one hears all kinds of rackets, round and around at NP—Soodhoo was thrown out in disgrace, and the Prime Minister is his protection. Who is going to protect the people of Trinidad and Tobago from the Panday Administration and the Panday gang? Who will do that? I do not want to bring the President into the debate, but we must have protection.

On July 12, 1999, the people of this country have to intervene as the first hurdle to check this gang of people who have been abusing their authority. Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Tobago Affairs (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job): Mr. Speaker, I feel a great deal of sadness and pathos listening to the abuse of Parliament for

partisan purposes and the issues which ought to be something of interest to every citizen of this country.

Mr. Speaker, if I were living at Pinto Road, what all this nonsense about the Prime Minister encouraging corruption, what it has to do with me? If I were living in Sea Lots, Roxborough in Tobago, Patience Hill, Bethel, Caledonia or Africa or—what is that place down in Diego Martin in his constituency—Dibe—what the people down there—

Hon. Members: Red Hill.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Red Hill—that is the key place I want to call—D’Abadie, Red Hill, down the train line. Mr. Speaker, the history of this country has shown that this Opposition has ignored the plight of the poor and they are coming into this Parliament to abuse the Parliament to talk about corruption when, in fact, the evident issue is how this Government and the people of this country must set up institutions—I have said it before. It is not to talk about corruption, it is to set up the means by which, if the Prime Minister is corrupt he will be locked up.

The fact that we are here wasting taxpayers’ time talking about corruption is manifest evidence that after 34 years the PNM did not do their work, and I heard a while ago the most absurd and abusive nonsense. Mr. Speaker, how on earth could anybody who has spent so long in Parliament, come in here to ask or to make a statement or to aver or to have said that you need a Prime Minister to protect the people from corruption? And he says, Chambers protected us from O’Halloran. Mr. Speaker, what could be more obscene? There can be no Prime Minister in this country who could be burdened with that responsibility. What protects the citizens of this country is the law. The fact that the PNM did not create the institutions and the arrangements of the laws is the reason we are probably making a lot of noise in here today, and they do not understand.

The press is one of the most mischievous agencies in this country, because nothing I am saying here now will be in the newspapers. Everything that he, the Member for Diego Martin West, says will be in the press everywhere. PNM comes here to say that we cannot rely on this Prime Minister to protect us. We can rely on no such person. If we could have done that, it would not have been Chambers to protect us from O’Halloran and his horses. It would have been Williams to save us from O’Halloran. The Prime Minister, Eric Williams should have done it but he

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could not do it. He admits that he is talking nonsense when he says that Chambers protected us from O'Halloran.

Dr. Rowley: I said no such thing.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Mr. Speaker, that was the implication, that Chambers protected us. That was the necessary implication that the Prime Minister at the time, who was George Chambers, was able to protect the citizens and the people from O'Halloran. That is such a gross misinterpretation of the facts of history and the needs of this country. We did not have the institutions, we never had them and that is the issue that we should be in this Parliament talking about.

Mr. Speaker, listen to this, he comes in here and says something—I wrote it down—about the symbol. He said that “the airport will be a symbol of shame forever, a monument to the corruption of this Government”. Where in this country is there a symbol of shame and monument to corruption that you cannot talk about—enough symbols about corruption are in this country, all over. If that statement has any sense in it—*[Interruption]* That is what he said, “the airport will be a symbol forever of shame and corruption.” Well then, what about all the previous corruption? We still have the monuments in Caroni there, the unfinished racing complex is still there. The manifest monuments of shame, scandal, turpitude and all kinds of disaster are there.

Mr. Speaker, I warn this country—I do not know what to do to plead with the press to be unbiased so that the public can judge the merits of the argument.
[Interruptions]

Mr. Speaker, he starts off talking about cronyism, nepotism and “crockery”. A couple nights ago I was looking at the TTT news—and he is talking about symbols—I think it is Bernard Shaw who says that we get from art, we get from life what you bring into it. We interpret a symbol with our limitations. The TV news was there because it seems to me that the press, over the past couple of weeks, were pushing an abolitionist head, so that long after certain events took place we are seeing on the TTT news—if this news item lasts about 10 minutes, seven minutes of the item is a coffin on the screen.

Mr. Speaker, that is an abuse of this country and an abuse of freedom of the press. I think death is a private matter for the bereaved family. You have these newspaper and press people only putting blood on the front page every day and when they go on TV in the night, it is only coffin they are showing people. Why!

What does that have to do with decency and dignity? The same press reports manifest the symbolism that this Government is confident to pass laws to create the institutions, so that certain matters of due process could come to a conclusion.

I am asking the question to everybody in this nation, I want to ask the question. When you see these coffins, what is the symbolism? Are they focusing on all that? No. They are focusing on all the foolishness that goes on here. So when we are talking about symbolism, and when we are talking about cronyism, I am asking what does it have to do with people in Beetham? What does it have to do with the people in Mango Rose? What does it have to do with people in Water Hole? How are they benefiting?

ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Tobago East for giving way. He has not completed his contribution but, by agreement, we have agreed to adjourn the House.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Friday, July 2, 1999 at 1.30 p.m. On that occasion we would continue, and hopefully, complete the debate on the Freedom of Information Bill and there is a motion on the adjournment which was on for today and, by agreement, would be done next week also.

[Members in Public Gallery get up to leave]

Mr. Speaker: Please sit down! Sometimes I do not think it is appreciated that the back gallery is part of the Parliament.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.37 p.m.