

*Leave of Absence**Friday, September 3, 1999***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Friday, September 03, 1999

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I wish to advise that I have received communication from the Member for Tabaquite who is quite ill and has asked to be excused from today's sitting. The leave of absence, which he seeks, has been granted.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT**

**The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the third report 1998/1999 session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the expenditure from the Public Revenue which were not included in the annual estimates 1998/1999.

**ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

**The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Speaker, as promised, we would answer question No. 77 that was deferred from the last day. I ask that questions No. 78 and 79 be deferred to the next sitting of the House of Representatives.

**Rural Transport Service**

**77. Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis** (*Arouca South*) on behalf of Mr. Roger Boynes (Toco/Manzanilla) asked the Minister of Works and Transport:

- (a) Could the Minister indicate the cost of purchasing the buses used in the Rural Transport Service?
- (b) Could the Minister also indicate:
  - (i) the cost of refurbishing these buses;
  - (ii) whether the refurbishing was done by contract and if so, who was the contractor and what system was used for determining the award of the contract?

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Sadiq Baksh):** Mr. Speaker, I wish, first of all, to thank the hon Member for Toco/Manzanilla for his

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interest in the rural transport service system. I am grateful to him for the opportunity provided to this honourable House for me to give information that is both accurate and relevant, about the considerable contribution the rural transport service system is making to the quality of life, comfort and communication of the people of the rural areas of our country. [*Desk thumping*].

I want to assure him, in his absence, that his constituents are among the primary users and beneficiaries of the system. We are a caring Government, representing all the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and unlike previous governments we do not discriminate against any section of our citizens.

The hon. Member for Toco/Manzanilla requested information about the cost of purchasing and refurbishing the buses which are used in the rural transport service system. Fifty-five buses were purchased from Midland Red, a British company. The total cost of acquiring these buses was \$1,915,000,224; cost, insurance, freight, and warehousing included, or a unit cost of only \$34,823.

Because of the price of these units, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago was able to acquire 55 buses to service 27 communities which before had been deprived of dedicated public transport, either by maxi taxis or PTSC for more than a decade now. The Public Service Transport Corporation refurbished these units utilizing in-house capabilities and manpower. The corporation has a pool of highly skilled technicians, including body repair personnel who are capable of restoring units almost to their original state.

This House will be pleased to know that no contractor was used on this project and none could have done a better job than the PTSC staff. On behalf of this House and the Ministry of Works and Transport, I thank and commend the PTSC management and staff.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, the total cost of a rural transport bus, which includes purchase price, shipping, warehousing and refurbishing, amounted to \$44,996. The cost for 55 units was \$2,474,724. The sum of \$559,500 was spent to refurbish these units. The cost of refurbishing one unit was \$10,173. These buses are now worth \$125,000 based on recent estimates. They have increased in value by almost 200 per cent. This is a phenomenon worthy both of recording and emulating. I take this opportunity to invite the hon. Member for Toco/Manzanilla, in his absence, to ride one of these buses and enjoy both the quality of service and the comfort of the unit. Thousands of his constituents have done and are doing so, on a daily basis, without any complaints and much to their satisfaction.

The Toco/Manzanilla constituency has been plagued with serious transportation problems which, unfortunately, were not addressed by previous

governments. For instance, Matelot is about 54 miles from Sangre Grande, and the fare by taxi is \$20 one way, when available. The residents of these communities, prior to the introduction of the rural transport services, were forced to walk long distances or, at best, beg for a ride in order to get to Toco or Sangre Grande to transact business or go to school.

A total of 11,873 passengers was recorded as having travelled on the Toco/Matelot route during the month of July when schools were closed for vacation. This figure would increase significantly in September when schools are re-opened. This is unqualified demonstration of public satisfaction of a service that touches the lives of rural citizens. The provision of dedicated transport to these communities has changed the lives of residents including the young people and school-children. Housewives can now easily access health services, and pensioners can travel to Sangre Grande to transact business. One of the other benefits of the rural transport service is the opportunity that is now available for residents to work out of their area and return to their homes every day. This is a positive social benefit.

The rural transport service has not only provided relief for the average day-to-day transport needs of residents, but has also opened up the communications between these communities and the rest of the country.

The PTSC and the Ministry of Works and Transport viewed the introduction of the rural transport service as only one of the many initiatives to be undertaken to organize the transport industry in Trinidad and Tobago. Unlike previous administrations, our Government is not about denying citizens of much needed services. From 1988—1984, bus services on more than 100 routes were withdrawn and citizens were, therefore, deprived of an organized means of transport. It is only now that our people in Blanchisseuse, Talparo, Mundo Nuevo, Moruga and Penal Rock Road, among others, can boast of an efficient bus transport system. We are here to serve and to unite, rather than to divide our country.

Bus passes were given to every old aged pensioner in the 1980s and early 1990s but, at the same time, bus services were being withdrawn from the very communities where the majority of our senior citizens, who required transport resided. It is an irony that only the colleagues of the hon. Member can explain but never justify.

We are changing all of this. Very shortly, the corporation will acquire 50 new buses to improve its capacity. [*Desk thumping*] In the process, we will introduce

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new routes and improve those which we now operate. From the year 2000 to the year 2005, 100 new buses will be acquired on a phased basis to sustain various transportation needs of the general public including corporate clients. These buses will be fuelled by compressed natural gas. The PTSC garages will be used as inspection sites by the Licensing Authority to facilitate its outside inspection programme of vehicles. The corporation also plans to retool its major garages in San Fernando and Port of Spain to engage in commercial engineering activities as a revenue stream. It must diversify its revenue base and earn income from its spare capacity and undoubted expertise.

Mr. Speaker, our Government intends to create a viable Public Transport Service Corporation, one that is relevant to the needs and expectations of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. The corporation has been mandated to proceed with the development of its property and land-based assets, so as to buy more buses and maintain fares at reasonable levels. The citizens of this country must benefit from our system of state enterprises. Organizations such as PTSC must focus on containing or reducing costs, maintaining a business orientation, and providing their clients with value for money and a high quality of service.

The corporation has the potential to become a dynamic and viable organization which can be self-supporting. Transport is a business. As Minister, my job is to facilitate the various business processes so that the lives of citizens can be enriched. What we have done with the rural transport service is to demonstrate how the public can benefit from the vision, dedication, commitment, and leadership of this Government.

The cost was minimal and we added value to both the vehicles and the lives of the people they carry. The commuters who used the service on the Toco/Matelot route in July would readily attest to this fact. I am sure they would have expressed their satisfaction to the hon. Member for Toco/Manzanilla. They have expressed their satisfaction to us.

In closing, let me again thank the hon. Member for providing me with this opportunity to give an account of the rural transport service network. It is an unqualified success. I thank the national community for its support.

**1.45 p.m.**

**Dr. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, could the hon. Minister tell this House whether, in fact, the Government went out to the marketplace in search of used buses or whether Midland Red approached the Government as a supplier of used buses? How did the Government choose used buses?

**Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh:** Mr. Speaker, my information from the PTSC is that the British Embassy in Trinidad and Tobago approached the PTSC with an offer to supply these buses.

**Dr. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, could the Minister tell us whether there is any local agent for Midland Red and whether any commission was paid to any local person in this transaction?

**Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh:** Mr. Speaker, no agent for Midland Red is based in Trinidad and Tobago and no commission was paid.

**Dr. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, could the Minister tell us—in view of the fact that he has told the House that the Government has been able to increase the value of these used buses by 200 per cent and has described it as an unqualified success—whether, in fact, the Government has considered using used buses as against the \$43 million it intends to spend for new buses, since the Government has demonstrated an ability to increase the worth of old vehicles by such value?

**Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh:** Mr. Speaker, no such decision has been taken but in the interim the decision has been taken to purchase new buses.

**Dr. Rowley:** And, Mr. Speaker, could the Minister tell us in the same way that the British High Commission introduced us to old buses for the rural system, did the British High Commission introduce us to any old buses for the national transit with respect to the \$43 million purchase?

**Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh:** Mr. Speaker, no they did not. In fact, the PTSC went out for international tender and I am advised that over eight international firms tendered for those buses.

**Dr. Rowley:** Finally from me, Mr. Speaker, considering all the benefits that the Minister attributed to the system and its great success, is the Minister telling this House that such service could not have been provided by new buses and, in fact, could the Minister also state whether the system is cost effective or is there an element of subsidy on those units and how much?

**Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh:** Mr. Speaker, it is an unqualified success. At this time we have not been able to compile all the figures in terms of all the data on every single route so as to say how beneficial, but I can tell you that no subsidies are attached to those vehicles.

**Mr. Imbert:** Supplemental, Mr. Speaker. Is the Minister aware that the windows for these second-hand buses are outfitted for temperate climates not suited to the tropics and, does he intend to change the windows to allow proper ventilation?

**Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh:** Mr. Speaker, that is quite so but those were already changed and that was part of the refurbishment that went on in that it was designed for a temperate climate. However, taking into consideration the tropical nature of ours, during the refurbishing we used windows from other buses.

*[Mr. Imbert and Dr. Rowley rose]*

**Mr. Speaker:** No, no, no, one second.

**Mr. Imbert:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can I just ask the Minister to clarify a further supplemental? Is he saying that the windows on the buses now are suited for tropical climates?

**Sen The Hon. S. Baksh:** Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, yes.

*[Dr. Rowley and Mrs. Robinson-Regis rose]*

**Mr. Speaker:** It is only that your colleague got up just before you and both of you could not ask a question at the same time.

**Dr. Rowley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I did not realize that. Thank you for your indulgence. In view of the fact that the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Works and Transport have regulations with respect to used vehicles on entering this country complying with an age limit, could the Minister tell us how these used buses relate to the regulations with respect to the age limit on used vehicles entering Trinidad and Tobago?

**Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh:** Mr. Speaker, the policy direction as to the age of the importation for used vehicles is still under consideration with the Ministry of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs as we move in the direction of importing fully assembled used vehicles. On the question of completely knocked down vehicles, the age at this time is five years. For fully assembled vehicles the policy directions have not yet been formulated. We do have a committee at present being set up to look at the entire question of the importation of fully assembled used vehicles.

**Mr. Imbert:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the Minister aware that at present his colleague, the Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs and Minister of Tourism, has set a five-year limit on fully assembled used vehicles and it is being enforced?

**Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh:** I answered that already, Mr. Speaker. It is the same question.

**Miss Nicholson:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a supplemental question. Can the Minister of Works and Transport state whether the Government's policy is to make Trinidad and Tobago a dump for used buses?

**Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh:** Mr. Speaker, the policy of this Government is not to make Trinidad and Tobago a dump but it is also not to deprive citizens from rural communities having bus passes and no buses. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, order!

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Minister, would you be able to give the age of the buses and, additionally, are you aware that on the La Horquetta and Maloney routes the buses have been continuously breaking down?

**Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh:** Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of the buses on those routes breaking down. I will, in fact, see if that is so, but I am not aware. My information is that all the buses continue to work efficiently and effectively. I am not sure of the age at this time. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please, order please! Please proceed.

**Dr. Khan:** A supplemental question. In your answer, just for my records, did you say that the rural area was severely neglected under the previous regime and we have now corrected its wrongs?

**Sen. The Hon. S. Baksh:** Yes, I did.

**Dr. Khan:** Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

*The following questions stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Martin Joseph (St. Ann's East):*

### **Piarco Airport Development Project**

- 78.** (a) Would the Minister of Finance identify the separate contracts that have been awarded to the firm Northern Construction Limited, in respect of the Piarco Airport Development Project, providing a brief description of the scope of works in each case?
- (b) In respect of each of the separate contracts identified at (a) above, would the Minister provide:
- i. the number of firms that pre-qualified;
  - ii. the number that tendered;
  - iii. the dates of the awards;
  - iv. the contract sums involved?

- (c) Would the Minister also provide, in respect of each of the contracts identified above, the cost estimate given for undertaking the project by the consultants for the Airport Development, Birk Hillman?

**National Insurance Property Development Company**

79. (a) Would the Minister of Finance detail fully the procedure used by NIPDEC in pre-qualifying contractors and in awarding contracts for the Piarco Airport Development Project?
- (b) Would the Minister name the Directors of the Board of NIPDEC who participated in its deliberations when the Board, acting as a tender committee, awarded the contracts referred to at (a)?

*Questions, by leave, deferred.*

**PRIMARY SCHOOL BOOKS  
(CONTRACTS AWARDED)**

**The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Trevor Sudama):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to bring this House and the country up-to-date on the latest position on the award of contracts and the schedule of delivery of textbooks to primary schools under the fourth education project funded by the World Bank.

The primary reason for the standardization exercise in the selection of primary school textbooks was to reduce the excessive financial burden on parents and families generally and particularly on the hard-pressed poor and low-income families. This was done after ascertaining from principals their recommended first choice textbooks for each subject. The Ministry of Education was guided by the majority view of principals in determining the choice of the text. Thus, for each subject area a democratic process was followed and the financial objective achieved of having affordable textbooks without compromising the substantive quality of education at the primary level.

It has been estimated that a full package of books per student per class has been reduced to approximately \$200 from \$900 to \$1200 as obtained previously. The obvious benefit of having one recommended textbook—[*Interruptions*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, order, order!

**Hon. T. Sudama:** The obvious benefit—[*Interruption*] For whom? The obvious benefit of having one recommended textbook per subject is the reduction in the present package of textbooks for primary school children. Quite apart from this, since books are recommended for a minimum of three years they can be



passed on to younger brothers and sisters further reducing the financial burden on parents. They can be used even if a child changes school or a brother or a sister attends a different school.

Mr. Speaker, the inordinate delays experienced in this exercise meant that the procurement process had to be expedited as much as possible if the textbooks offered by the Government to the approximately 54,000 most needy students in our system were to be delivered in reasonable time and in conformity with World Bank procurement procedures. On May 12, 1999 the Ministry of Education received the approval of the World Bank for the textbook procurement process that was adopted. From that date a number of actions had to be put in train in order to comply with the competitive bidding procedure.

Utilizing the standard bidding documents, invitations had to be issued to the publishers and distributors to present price proposals. Later, tenders were invited by the Central Tenders Board for the supply and delivery of textbooks on the final list of books for primary schools. The notice of invitation to tender was published in two daily newspapers in late July. The minimum period of three weeks was given for responses to the invitation and tenders closed on August 19, 1999. Bids were opened in the presence of all interested parties. Offers were evaluated over the weekend of August 20, 1999 and an evaluation report prepared by the evaluation committee of the Ministry of Education was submitted on August 23, 1999 simultaneously to the Central Tenders Board and to the World Bank to obtain a no objection. A no objection response was received from the World Bank on the same day, that is August 23, and this response was forwarded to the Central Tenders Board again on the same day.

Mr. Speaker, the Central Tenders Board conducted its final evaluation on August 24 and it was only on August 25, 1999 that the Central Tenders Board was in a position to award contracts for the supply and delivery of 221,303 textbooks for primary school students as follows:

Subject	No. of Titles	Quantity Required
Reading	10	76,362
English Language	5	39,958
Mathematics	6	52,093
Science	7	52,890
		221,303

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The contracts were awarded as follows:

Subject Area	Firms	Cost
Reading	Caribbean Children's Press Limited	\$1,761,126.02
English Language	Royard's Publishing Company	\$1,502,381.80
Mathematics	Charran's Educational Publishers Limited	\$2,544,503.33
Science	Ismael M. Khan & Sons Limited	\$2,250,504.90
		\$8,058,516.05

**2.00 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, the firms which were awarded contracts have submitted the following schedule for delivery to the schools through the District Education Offices. This is to be done in three rounds as follows: Science—delivery will commence on September 10, 1999 and completed on September 29, 1999; English Language—delivery will commence on September 10, 1999 and completed on September 30, 1999; Reading—delivery will commence on September 13, 1999 and completed on October 4, 1999; Mathematics—Delivery will commence in two batches on September 24, 1999 and September 30, 1999 and completed on October 15, 1999 and October 30, 1999.

Mr. Speaker, information supplied to the Ministry of Education by publishers indicated that of the 28 textbooks on the approved primary school book list, 24 are currently available from bookstores. It is expected that the four outstanding titles will also be available in bookstores by the end of the coming week.

Despite all the hurdles, the spurious protests and contrived opposition, we have been able to achieve our objective and keep our promise to significantly reduce the cost of primary school textbooks. We have therefore, brought relief to thousands and have ushered in a new dawn in primary school education in Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you.

*Procedural Motion*

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**PROCEDURAL MOTION**

**The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the next stage of the Finance Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation Bill 1998/1999 be taken later in the proceedings.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS**

**The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise this honourable House that the Government intends to proceed as follows: Senate Amendments to the Sawmills (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill; the Forests (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill; and the Freedom of Information (No. 2) Bill; the Land Acquisition motion and then the report of the Finance Committee and the Finance Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation 1998/1999. Depending on the time, we will do the private Bill on the Order Paper under "Bills Second Reading".

**SAWMILLS (AMDT.) (NO. 2) BILL**  
**Senate Amendments**

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Dr. The Hon. Reeza Mohammed):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That the Senate amendments to the Sawmills (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill listed in Appendix I be now considered.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 2.*

Senate amendments read as follows:

"2(b) Delete the word 'means' in the first line of the new definition of 'sawmill' and substitute the words 'includes every sawmill compound and';

2(c) Insert after the word 'sawmills' occurring in the fourth line of the new definition of 'sawmill compound' the words 'and in reference to which the terms and conditions referred to in section 4(4) are applicable; and';"

**Dr. Mohammed:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House of Representatives doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Proposed New clause 4*

Senate amendment read as follows:

Delete the word “products” wherever it occurs and substitute the word “furniture”.

**Dr. Mohammed:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

**FORESTS (AMDT.) (NO. 2) BILL**  
**Senate Amendments**

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Dr. The Hon. Reeza Mohammed):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That the Senate amendments to the Forests (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill listed in Appendix II be now considered.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 6.*

Senate amendment read as follows:

Delete the period at the end of paragraph (c) and add the words “by way of Order”.

**Dr. Mohammed:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Schedule.*

Senate amendment read as follows:

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 2     | Delete the botanical name Mastichodendron foetidissimum”and substitute “Sideroxylon quadriloculare”. |
| Acoma |  |
| 8     | Delete the Botanical name “Avicennia germinans”and substitute “Avicennia nitida”.                    |

Black Mangrove 9	I. Add “(a)” before the botanical name “pterocarpus rohrii”;
Bloodwood	II. Add a “(b)” to read “croton gossypi folius”.
12 Bois mulatre	In the botanical name substitute for the word “pentaclethra macroloba” the word “pentaclethra”.
13 Bosoo	Delete the Botanical name “fagara trinitensis” and substitute “zanthoxylum trinitense”.
16 Cedar	In the Botanical name substitute for the word “maxicana”, the word “odorata”.
19 Cypre	In the Botanical name substitute for the word “aalliodora” the word “alliodora”.
20	Substitute for the common name “faustic” the word “fustic”.
21	1. Delete both common name and botanical Fiddlewood names. 2. New common name should read “black fiddlewood” and the botanical name should read “vitex divaricata”.
22-43 New 22	I. Renumber items 22—43 as 23—44 II. Insert a new item 22 as follows:- Common name “white fiddlewood” Botanical name “vitex capitata”
Renumbered 23 Figuier	Delete the botanicla name “ficus sp” and substitute “ficus yoponensis”.
Renumbered 25 Gommier	Delete the botanical name “protium and Tapirira sp” and substitute the following: “(a) Protium insigne (b) Tapirira guianensis”
Renumbered 28 Mahogany	Delete the botanical name “swietenia sp”and substitute the following:-

	“(a) Swietenia macrophylla
	(b) Swietenia mahagani”
Renumbered 29 Immortelle	Delete the botanical name “erythrina sp” and substitute the following:- “(a) Erythrina poeppigiana (b) Erythrina glauca”
Renumbered 32 Juniper	Delete the botanical name “pisonia cuspidata” and substitute the following:- “Genipa americana”
Renumbered 33 Lagoon Cedar	Delete the botanical name “Licania sp” and substitute the following— “Licania sp.”
Renumbered 35 Laurier Cypre	Delete the botanical name “Nectandra martinicensis” and substitute the following:- “Ocotea oblonga”
Renumbered 38 L’epinet	Delete the botanical name “Zanrhoxylum sp.” and substitute the following:-“Zanthoxylum martinicense”
44 Olivier	Delete this item
46-65	Renumber as 47—66
New 46	Insert a new 46 as follows:
	Common Name            Botanical Name
	“Olivier White”        “Terminalia Obovata”
Renumbered 47 Pink Pouï	Delete the botanical name “Tabebuia pentaphylla” and substitute the following “Tabebuia rosea”
Renumbered 48 Pois doux	Delete the botanical name “Inga sp” and substitute the following: “(a) Inga Laurina (b) Inga venosa”

Renumbered 57 Sardine	Delete the botanical name "Laetia procera" and substitute:- “(a) Laetia procera (b) Zuelania Guidonia”
Renumbered 58 Serrette	Delete the word “spicata” in the botanical name and substitute the word “coriacea”
Renumbered 61 Tapanā	Delete the word “caribaea” in the botanical name and substitute the word “laxifolia”

**Dr. Mohammed:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House of Representatives doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (NO. 2) BILL**  
**Senate Amendments**

**The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That the Senate amendments to the Freedom of Information (No. 2) Bill listed in the Appendix III be now considered.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 3.*

*Senate amendment read as follows:*

In subclause (1)(a)

- i) In line 3, insert between the words “that” and “rules” the words “the authorisations, policies”.
- ii) In line 6, insert between the words “those” and “rules” the words “authorisations, policies”.

**Mr. Maharaj:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House of Representatives doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 4.*

*Senate amendment read as follows:*

In the definition of “public authority”, paragraph (k)(iii), delete the word “or” in line 3 and substitute the word “and”.

**Mr. Maharaj:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House of Representatives doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 5.*

*Senate amendment read as follows:*

In subclause (2)(b):

- i) Substitute for the words “the Court”, the words “Court Administration”.
- ii) Insert between the words “officer” and “in” the words “of Court Administration”.

**Mr. Maharaj:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House of Representatives doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 8.*

*Senate amendment read as follows:*

In subclause (3), line 5, delete the words “if practicable” and substitute the words “except impracticable”.

**Mr. Maharaj:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House of Representatives doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 10.*

*Senate amendment read as follows:*

Delete subclause (2)(a), and substitute the following:



“make a decision within twenty-one days of receiving a notice and publish the decision in relation to the document referred to in subsection (1) no later than seven days thereafter in the Gazette”

**Mr. Maharaj:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House of Representatives doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 21.*

*Senate amendment read as follows:*

In subclause (1) delete the period at the end of the subclause and add the following words:

“and if before refusing to provide information on these grounds the authority has taken reasonable steps to assist the applicant to reformulate the application so as to avoid causing such interference”.

**Mr. Maharaj:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House of Representatives doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 23.*

*Senate amendment read as follows:*

In paragraph (a) of subclause (2), delete the words “is not required to” and substitute the words “shall not be required to”.

**Mr. Maharaj:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House of Representatives doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 37.*

*Senate amendment read as follows:*

Line 3:

Substitute for the words “International Communications Network”, the words “National Broadcasting Network”.

**Mr. Maharaj:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House of Representatives doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 38.*

*Senate amendment read as follows:*

In subclause (1) delete the words “this Act” in line 4 and substitute the following—“this Act unless malice is proved”.

**Mr. Maharaj:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House of Representatives doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

#### LAND ACQUISITION

**The Minister of Housing and Settlements (Hon. John Humphrey):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That the House approve the decision of the President to acquire the lands described in Appendix IV for the public purpose specified.

Mr. Speaker, this is a long outstanding matter going back 10 years when the Minister of Planning and Development sought to have a recreation ground established in an area in the constituency of Oropouche and there are two small parcels of land totalling 2.02 hectares, more or less, situated at Spur Trace, Penal in the ward of Siparia in the county of St. Patrick and said to belong to Caroni (1975) Limited, and tenanted under long-term agricultural lease to Ramoudit Sirju Moonesar, Rooplal Ramnanan and Lackan Deopersad.

The Minister of Local Government has requested that the parcel of land be acquired for the public purpose of establishing a recreation ground. In accordance with the Land Acquisition Act, compensation will be paid to Caroni (1975) Limited which will in turn compensate its tenants for loss of the use of the land.

The Government is cognizant of the fact that sport play an integral part in the development of the country’s youth and has moved to acquire lands for arenas for sporting activities within communities. The establishment of a recreation ground at Spur Trace will serve the needs of a wide cross-section of persons, not only in its immediate vicinity, but further away, since there is a paucity of such structures

in the area. The nearest one is located at approximately two miles away from the proposed site.

Further, the Government sees an urgent need for the establishment of this type of facility within communities, and is accordingly moving in an expeditious manner to complete the acquisition.

**2.15 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, proceedings for the acquisition of the parcels of land were initiated in September 1997. Information on the parcels of land can be found on a survey plan filed in book 1243, folio 14 in the vault of the Lands and Surveys Division, Red House, Port of Spain.

The procedure for the acquisition of lands for public purposes is standard and we have brought these arrangements before this honourable House from time to time. On this occasion we are honoured to carry the process forward. I beg to move.

*Question proposed.*

**Mr. Barendra Sinanan** (*San Fernando West*): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. We on this side have no difficulty in supporting the Motion. Our difficulty really, is in the process. I have raised this issue on several occasions in this House. When the Government acquires land, there is a notice of intended acquisition, a notice of acquisition and the land is acquired. It comes to Parliament here and we pass a Motion to acquire the land.

This notice is published in the Trinidad and Tobago *Gazette* in a very small column and one would certainly need magnifying glasses to read its contents because the print is so small. It is also published in one of the local newspapers and, likewise, you have the same difficulty.

The difficulty experienced by legal practitioners in terms of land acquisition is the process by which notice to the public is given of these acquisitions. In terms of legal practitioners doing conveyancing matters—buying and selling of land—we do have a great difficulty with respect to these land acquisitions. The only official place this matter is recorded, would be in the *Gazette* and the Director of Surveys office; nowhere else. If one looks at the schedule, I can understand the difficulty in terms of establishing ownership, in terms of the parcel of land described in the first part of the schedule. This land is owned by Caroni (1975) Limited. I would imagine that Caroni (1975) Limited would have all there surveys up-to-date and titles in order.

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Look at the second parcel, the last couple words “now or formerly”. What that tells you is that the Government or the appropriate department is not certain who owns the land. For example, there are these words “now or formerly”, which connote the fact that nobody is sure of the owner of these lands. Unless you, as a legal practitioner, know particularly of the locality of this land, you would have a problem.

I saw recently in Finance Committee that a sum of approximately \$12 million was being provided for rationalizing the establishment of a Land Registry. Now, we do have a Land Registry. I think what was meant there is for a department dealing with land tenure rationalization.

The Minister of Legal Affairs is spending much money in attempting to computerize the Land Registry, all of which is good. I would like to suggest, a registry—not a registry really but a register of land acquisitions, so that you will have in the Red House downstairs, in the Land Registry, a register dealing with parcels of land that are acquired by the state.

I will give you a typical example. The last one we did in the House, was a parcel of land at San Fernando Hill. Now, I happened to know where that parcel of land is. It is very easy for somebody not knowing where that is, and you are dealing with a piece of land adjoining that parcel to do a conveyance or a mortgage on that parcel of land, not knowing that it is acquired. Because to know that it is acquired, you would have to read front to back of every single publication of the *Gazette*. There is nothing in the law that says that, other than publication in the *Gazette* or in the local press, you have to submit that to the Land Registry downstairs.

Mr. Speaker, what I am suggesting, in order to assist both the public and the legal fraternity, is a register of acquisitions, and it is very easy to accommodate that in terms of the process of computerization now being undertaken by the Ministry of Legal Affairs.

With respect to the hon. Minister, I am suggesting that he looks very carefully into this, because it has been the source of many problems. For example, people’s lands are acquired which they have sold, and not knowing, banks have taken mortgages and it is very complicated in terms of the process to get compensation as that takes time. Although the law talks about certain time limits, I think that is more observed in the breach.

So that what we need to do really, is to get to a position where we can avoid situations, where persons’ lands are acquired and they do not know about it. To

avoid a *bona fide* purchaser, purchasing lands that are acquired and then stick with having to wait for compensation, I think the solution to the problem is the establishment of a register of lands that are acquired at the registry.

Mr. Speaker, with these few words, I hope that the hon. Minister would look into my suggestion. I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*].

**Miss Pamela Nicholson** (*Tobago West*): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I just want to say a few words. Everytime that I recognized or see the acquisition of lands, I become very disturbed, Sir, because there are several people in Tobago whose lands have been acquired. Some of them over two decades and they have not been compensated.

We have a new situation where the people at Crown Point—which is in the heart of my constituency, Sir—have been told for over five years now, that their lands would be acquired and it was stepped up recently. I am now addressing a few cases with the Lands and Surveys Division.

The compensation that Government is giving those people cannot relocate them in the area where they have lived all the time. In the Canaan/Bon Accord/Crown Point area it is \$20 to \$25 per square foot for land and when they want to give the owner of half-acre of land with a home on it between \$90,000.00, and \$95,000.00, that could do nothing for the people. It is a very, very trying situation and there is need in the Crown Point area, where the lands will be acquired for the extension of the Crown Point Airport, for the Ministry of Housing and Settlements to address that question in another way, because there are several senior citizens living there. Those who I am referring to are old people, approximately 80 years old and would not be able to go through the trials of relocating themselves.

In addition, the money cannot buy lands in that area. So when the Government acquires their lands and removes them, they are just going to die. That is what you are going to do to the people who have been living comfortably there all the time.

I wish to suggest to the Minister, that that Crown Point situation be given some serious consideration and a relocation process be addressed for the people. That is the only thing that would make them comfortable: looking for a nice piece of land in an area such as where they are located, and putting roads, water, electricity and even come up with a system, where they can get some funds for starter houses and relocate the people. Those people are under tremendous stress, especially the senior citizens. They are asking me to do certain things—not only

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appealing to the Parliament but to the Minister who can make things happen; that is relocating the people.

I thank you very much, Sir.

**2.25 p.m.**

**Mr. Colm Imbert** (*Diego Martin East*): Mr. Speaker, on a number of occasions, we on this side have asked the Minister with responsibility for this matter to explain why they pick and choose land acquisitions. Are these their friends? Are these their supporters? We have continuously asked the Minister to give us a list of all outstanding land acquisition matters and persons, because we want to know why some people's files are put in the bottom drawer and others are leapfrogged. Depending on whether he is in a good mood or not his response is: "I will give you the information on the next occasion," and as he sits, that is the end of that.

He has returned again and would not tell us why he picks these land acquisitions when there are so many other matters. It is my opinion that he is dealing with party supporters, friends, family and so forth. I am asking the Minister, again, to give us all the particulars relating to outstanding land acquisition matters and explain why he keeps coming with one or two names, who on the face of it appear to be very favoured people. It is typical of the behaviour of this administration. It has no concept of the rule of law, tradition, or protocol. They feel they could do whatever they want and give whatever they want to whomever they want. Well, I cannot use unparliamentary language but "everybody else to ketch" and I am just disgusted that, once again, the Minister has done this. I urge him on the next occasion to tell us why he is giving these people special treatment and tell us who else is entitled to this sort of treatment, and why he is not giving them the same kind of treatment.

Thank you.

**Mr. Hedwige Bereaux** (*La Brea*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a very short contribution on this question of the acquisition of two parcels of land containing 2.0233 hectares, more or less, situated at Spur Trace, Penal in the ward of Siparia.

The hon. Minister in piloting this particular acquisition, indicated that the land was required for recreational purposes and, additionally, that previously the lands were tenanted on long-term tenancy. I think it was for planting canes. Since the land is more than one acre and less than 50 acres, it is covered by the Agricultural Small Holdings Tenure Act and a relevant portion of the Act in section 2(1) says:

“‘small holding’ means a parcel of agricultural land held under a contract of tenancy for agricultural purposes and that consists of not less than one acre nor more than fifty acres...”

Mr. Speaker, way back in 1966, it was thought important to do up a special protection for persons who had these agricultural small holdings and there are some statutory provisions which set out the statutory conditions, the rental payable under the contract and, in particular—those provisions are contained in section 6—they referred to the compensation payable to the particular tenants if they have to be ejected or removed and how it is supposed to be done.

I have heard the hon. Minister say that compensation would be payable to Caroni (1975) Limited and then the tenants would get their compensation. We know that it takes time to pay compensation under land acquisition. It would be a long time before Caroni (1975) Limited gets its money, or some time, and it follows that would possibly, at least, be a longer time before those tenants are compensated.

Mr. Speaker, this Government always boasts that it has the support of the agricultural areas and one would expect that it would have done something for agriculture, but it is common knowledge they have done nothing. Be that as it may—and we have just seen the performance of Caroni (1975) Limited—we would think that, having regard to the statutory protection that is set for agricultural small holdings, the hon. Minister and acting Prime Minister—I congratulate him for that, he would forever be an actor like my good friend, not as competent. But one would have thought that some type of arrangement would be immediately made and tabled in this honourable House as to what compensation would be paid to those persons and when it would be paid.

This is not merely a question of land, it is a question of cane farmers who cannot get their money for their canes normally; cane farmers who have had to suffer as a result of incompetence and mismanagement with respect to the froghopper disease and who have had three-quarters of their crops decimated.

Now this Government wants to acquire lands and has made no concrete and definite position in respect of the compensation and I know that the hon. Minister who handles this matter does not know about that. He does not pay much attention to his constituents whether they are cane farmers or not, but his heart is in the right place. If he is properly advised by the purporter, or should I say the incompetent Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, he is incompetent, I am not saying he is a bad person.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Standing Orders deal with insulting words and all that.

**Mr. H. Breaux:** Mr. Speaker, no insult is meant. I am concerned about his performance as Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. If you tell me take out the word “purporter” I would retract that.

**Mr. Speaker:** I did not tell you that. I simply say—and it seems that you are getting worked up—one has to be careful now about the choice of words.

**Mr. H. Breaux:** Mr. Speaker, I would retract the word “purporter”, he is the real Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, but he is incompetent. So I would say if the incompetent Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is properly advised either by the equally incompetent Minister of Legal Affairs who does not know that Mitra Ramkhelawan and Ramkhelawan is one and the same and if he is properly advised as to the provisions of the Agricultural Small Holdings Tenure Act, we would not be faced with this problem and he would not be as embarrassed as he is. That is what I am saying, Mr. Speaker.

I expect that in the process of what will happen that they would properly advise him and I cannot—as much as I would like—agree that we need to deal with recreational facilities. We cannot in the face of expressed statutory protection for agricultural small holdings come here today and just wish the compensation part of this particular exercise away, because over and above the compensation with respect to acquisition, we must deal particularly with the compensation as set down by statute.

Mr. Speaker, I have always said that with respect to the behaviour of this Government to poor people, they do not discriminate, they treat all badly, and I would explain. We are talking about recreational facilities and this particular provision is being brought by the Minister of Local Government and it is in order to provide a recreational facility in a particular area in the county of St. Patrick in the ward of Siparia.

Mr. Speaker, you know that the managing of all recreational facilities falls squarely under the portfolio of the Local Government Ministry and the regional corporations and there is where the ambivalence of this Government is patent. It is for all to see because on the one hand they come today saying they are so concerned about recreational facilities and they want to acquire lands to provide for that, and they are very anxious to do it. Sometimes I listen to the contribution of my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin East, and I say he is being too harsh on this Government, but I cannot help but support him this time. I ask why are you bringing this? It could not be that you think—



**Mr. Imbert:** I am too harsh on them?

**Mr. H. Breaux:** I used to say that, but today I must agree with you because I cannot help but believe that there has to be another and more sinister motive behind this than the question of just wanting to provide for recreational facilities.

Mr. Speaker, in a similar situation where 30 recreational facilities under the purview of the Siparia Regional Corporation cannot be dealt with because of procrastination and direct misbehaviour in office by the Minister of Legal Affairs and the Minister of Local Government, causing the Siparia Regional Corporation to be unable to sit, this Government then comes here and tells me that they are hurried and we must assist and vote and support this piece of acquisition purporting to deal with a recreational facility.

If I wanted to be very uncharitable, I would say they have something to gain, but I believe that they really do not care. It is not that they have so much to gain, it is because they do not care. They are unable to care about the young footballers, cricketers and so forth in the areas controlled by the Siparia Regional Corporation and what they have brought today has nothing to do with recreation, but maybe it has to do with the contractor who would get the work to grade the ground. It may have to do with that, I do not know, but maybe that is the reason and it could not be—Mr. Speaker, I am being disturbed by the Member for Nariva.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please! Order please!

**2.40 p.m.**

As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, you have a situation where there are more than 30 grounds that have a difficulty—even this morning I had cause to try to get people in the Siparia Regional Corporation to cut a playing field, and they have refused, they have no vote.

**Mr. Hart:** The same thing is happening up by me.

**Mr. H. Breaux:** Mr. Speaker, how could this Government now come and, in my view, waste parliamentary time when we should be dealing with the appropriations and tell me it is because they are concerned about recreation facilities for young people, when their own inaction and mis-action and what I say has caused a situation to exist where a number of playing fields are not being maintained.

I say, Mr. Speaker, we are faced here with two situations, two very important situations: one is a statutory situation where there is a statutory requirement to compensate the tenants. This was thought to be so important in 1966. Today it is

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also important, unless they tell me that agriculture is no longer important. There is a tribunal put in this Act to deal with compensation. We have no compensation; they are going about willy-nilly. They are not concerned about agriculture. They are not concerned about the environment. Are they? No! They are going about willy-nilly. We might hear that they are paving somewhere else just now.

The same way in which they do everything: they get up one morning and we hear the paving going on, the Minister does not know anything about it, but I understand. I am saying, first of all, we should be told about what kind of compensation is being paid and when it is being paid. That statement should precede any decision on the acquisition here in this Parliament.

Secondly, the Minister of Local Government and the Minister of Legal Affairs stand accused of not really being concerned. By extension, the entire Government stand being accused of not being concerned about recreational facilities for young people because of the gross criminal neglect—when I say criminal, I mean in terms of negligence I do not mean that they did any direct act—which they displayed and which the Minister of Legal Affairs displayed by being wilfully absent from Siparia yesterday because I told her on Wednesday that she was required to be there and she said she was not coming.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar):** Mr. Speaker, I really had no intention of entering what is a very simple debate, in my respectful view, but I want to give the fullest support to the Motion that is before this honourable House, for the acquisition of lands for purposes of a recreation ground.

I want to make it very clear that, far from the wild allegations that were flying from the Member on the other side, I am totally concerned about what is happening at the Siparia Regional Corporation. I want to make that very clear. Every Member on this side of the House, I am sure, as well as that side of the House, is concerned about what is happening at the Siparia Regional Corporation.  
[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. Speaker, I say further, not only are we concerned, I will do everything that I can to expedite a fair, legal and democratic decision taking place at that Siparia Regional Corporation. I will do what I can to expedite it, but I can only do that as a Member of the Parliament. There are

processes. I want to make it very clear, there is nothing wilful about the absence of the Minister of Legal Affairs from yesterday's meeting. There was nothing at all that was wilful. There was nothing that was mandatory for the Minister of Legal Affairs to be present at the corporation. I am a Member of Parliament just as every other Member sitting in this honourable Chamber.

In that sense, I attended the first meeting of the council. Certain issues arose. I had no hand in having the Chief Executive Officer rule or make a decision. *[Interruption]* I did not influence the Chief Executive Officer in making any decision yesterday, in terms of what took place or did not take place. I was not there. *[Interruption]* In addition, there were approximately four other persons, I understand, who were not present, who had also signed the said envelope, which contained the ballots. It is not to say, as the Member is saying that it was because of me that I wilfully *[Interruption]* Yes, there were so many persons. Therefore if the Chief Executive Officer made a ruling in his discretion, then that is a discretion that is questionable, either it is right or it is wrong. That was not my decision. It was not the decision of the Minister of Local Government. *[Interruption]* It was the decision of the Chief Executive Officer.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, any Member desirous of making a contribution and/or rebutting anything which has been said has that right to be recognized and to speak. There is absolutely no way in which we will allow this type of shouting down of a Member who is on his or her legs. Please!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for La Brea is totally inaccurate. I will not allow that to remain on the record: to say that the Minister of Legal Affairs has wilfully done anything, or omitted to do anything. Therefore, all those other persons—as the Member for Diego Martin Central just pointed out, there were so many other persons who had actually signed that envelope. To say that the Minister of Legal Affairs was not there, out of these other persons were they there? Were those persons present? I am advised that they were not present. But a decision was made by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). How can the Minister of Legal Affairs be responsible for a decision that was made yesterday in her absence?

Mr. Speaker, I am saying and I want to repeat this very clearly: there is a misconception and the Minister of Legal Affairs is being targetted not because she is the Minister of Legal Affairs, but because she is the Member of Parliament for Siparia and because the corporation is called the Siparia Regional Corporation.

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Therefore, it is a kind of mischief that is being perpetrated. Every time the name Siparia Regional Corporation is called, the Minister of Legal Affairs—that is to say the Member of Parliament for Siparia—is implicated in the matter.

I want to say very clearly, whilst it is that the Siparia Regional Corporation is called Siparia Regional Corporation, the constituency of Siparia comprises 29 polling divisions, that is my constituency and out of those 29 polling divisions only three or four fall within the Siparia Regional Corporation. In fact, therefore, the majority of my constituency does not fall in the Siparia Regional Corporation. It is not to say that as the Member of Parliament—this allegation that is being made, aspersion that is being cast—I am in some underhand way doing things because this is my constituency.

I want—[*Interruption*] No! the Member for La Brea did not say it was not me. He said: “the Minister of Legal Affairs is wilfully doing so.” Therefore, I am making it very clear; three or four polling divisions of my constituency fall there. Further, I am saying that I have won—we have won—in all the polling divisions that fell in my constituency for the corporation which is within my area: the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation. That is very clear.

Again, the allegation, the implication and so forth, is totally false. I support the Motion and, as a Member of Parliament for a particular area, I have expressed my concern there. Generally, I think all of us, as Members of Parliament, remain concerned about what is happening in Siparia. I want to make it very clear that I have no intention of, in any way, preventing the democratic process from being implemented or from taking place. We will seek together. The Attorney General again, I understand, is being asked for legal advice on the matter. I do not know what it is the Chief Executive Officer has requested advice on, further. These are not within the hands of the Minister of Legal Affairs. The Member for La Brea is totally inaccurate in his allegations.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**2.50 p.m.**

**The Minister of Local Government (Hon. Dhanraj Singh):** Mr. Speaker, on this simple matter of land acquisition, I am forced to make a contribution based on the one made by the Member for La Brea. The Member stood in this House and made many false statements, which I would like to clarify.

Firstly, let me say that as the Minister of Local Government, I am committed to seeing the process completed at the Siparia Corporation, that is, for the election

of an alderman and a chairman to manage the corporation. The Chief Executive Officer of the corporation has been requested to reconvene the meeting and complete this process next week.

The process that I refer to is one that concerns the elected councillors of that corporation. The election is theirs and the presiding officer is the Chief Executive Officer. The Chief Executive Officer of the corporation made a ruling and the Ministry is looking at what he has done. I wish to state that we in the Ministry are hoping to complete this matter. We give the undertaking that we will complete it by next week.

While I have referred to the fact that this election concerns the councillors, there is undue interference by senior Members on that side, who go there and try to intimidate or influence the process. While they are saying that it is we who are interfering, the truth of the matter is that on the first day that this process started I was not there. [*Crosstalk*] The other day when the process took place I was there, but I did not say anything; I did not interfere in the process. I want to make that completely clear to this House. I did not interfere in the process.

The Member for La Brea also spoke about the Member for Siparia being absent. Five other persons who signed that envelope were also absent, so it is unfair for the Member to pinpoint only one Member. Concerning that matter about the Members who were not there causing the process to stop, we will be writing all the Members to make sure that everybody will be there on the next day that this is called, to complete the process.

That was not the only reason this matter was adjourned. Several issues were raised by the councillors then, and as I have indicated to the House, this process concerns the councillors. It is their election and they are moving ahead to elect aldermen to manage the corporation.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Bereaux, the Member for La Brea, also spoke about the grounds not being cut and that the work of the corporation is being stalled. I want to tell the Member that you do not cut grounds when the rain is falling at 50 centimetres in 10 minutes. [*Crosstalk*] Secondly, the councillors do not do the work in any corporation; it is the administrative staff and the daily-paid cadre who carry out the work of the corporation. The work of the Siparia Corporation is not being hindered in any way; it continues. So he is trying to mislead the House. The work of the corporation continues because councillors do not do the work of the corporation.

**Mr. Kenneth Valley** (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Speaker, what I considered to be an innocuous piece of legislation, opened this whole matter with respect to

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Siparia. I have to join the debate at this time to refute some of the statements made by the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

I start with the Minister's last statement, because I found it rather interesting. The Minister made the point that the councillors do not do the work, and that the work of the Siparia Regional Corporation is continuing even though the council is not in operation. I think we need to note that statement, because what the Minister is really saying is that we do not need the council, that "I, as Minister, can run the council, especially when I have a CEO of my choosing". [*Desk thumping*]

In this matter with respect to Siparia, one has to remember that it is the same CEO who found himself in difficulty in the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, who was transferred on the morning of the election for the aldermen. That CEO was transferred to Siparia on that morning. [*Crosstalk*] He is the same person who lost a case and now has a \$200,000 bill and who does whatever that Minister says. So when the Minister comes here and claims like Pontius Pilate, "my hands are clean," he would not tell us that for the week before he was meeting with the Member for Fyzabad with the councillors in the Siparia Regional Corporation, the UNC councillors, planning; and that they came there yesterday morning with the whole purpose of aborting the meeting.

Mr. Speaker, understand what he is saying. As the Member said, some 20 persons signed an envelope with ballots. First of all one has to ask, what is the purpose of opening the envelopes with the ballots yesterday when, in fact, everybody there knew the results? On the last sitting the Clerk had already read the results. The results were 4/4/4/3/1. The whole issue—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Notwithstanding the latitude one has to respond to things which have been said, one is opening this debate a little too wide. One is now going into a lot of detail with respect to that matter. If it is a question of refuting something somebody has said, all well and good, but I do think, with the greatest deference, you are really going a little too far at this stage. I ask you to confine it just a bit.

**Mr. K. Valley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Anybody who was there yesterday morning would be convinced that that Minister and the Member for Fyzabad were in cohorts and that their whole intent was to abort that meeting yesterday. In so doing they have undermined our democracy severely. That is the only point I wanted to make. As I told them yesterday, and I have said before, friend, they can run, they can win the battle, but not the war. [*Crosstalk*] They can run but they cannot hide. Eventually, they must have the meeting.

The Member is telling us that he is calling the meeting this week, and that his Ministry would see that it goes to finality. The CEO there who is supposed to be an independent person, taking instruction from no one, suddenly, his Ministry would be able to direct that it must go to finality. Mr. Speaker, understand what is happening. [*Crosstalk*] But friend, you will have to do it, because we will ensure that you do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Works and Transport (Mr. Chandresh Sharma):** Mr. Speaker, I just want to clear the air, since I had no intention to get involved in this particular debate, but you would appreciate that the Member for Diego Martin Central, in his wisdom, I suspect, made some reference to my participation.

I happen to be the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad, and more than 90 per cent of the constituency is serviced by the Siparia Regional Corporation. Unfortunately, the Member for La Brea is not familiar with the work taking place, in that, the regional corporation continues to serve throughout. The Siparia Regional Corporation serves from Cedros coming right through to La Brea, all of Erin and parts of Point Fortin, Siparia, and up to parts of Syne Village in Penal. My understanding is that services continue to be made available to the persons living in that area.

More than that, Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of a meeting that took place yesterday with myself, the Minister of Local Government and the councillors. In fact, we were there, just like the Member for Diego Martin Central and the Member for La Brea, at the venue where this particular meeting was taking place. We spoke to all the people, to councillors on both sides, as would be the norm. I did not realize that saying hello to people serving in similar capacities made it an unwise move. The Member for Diego Martin Central was there.

In fact, as the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre correctly indicated, in the first meeting that took place, yesterday it was observed that there were minutes which were not formalized. There was recorded in those minutes interference by the Member for Diego Martin Central and the Member for La Brea. [*Crosstalk*] In those same minutes, unconfirmed as they were, there was absolutely no reference to any other Members of Parliament. Again, yesterday, if one looked at the process, as an observer, the Members for Diego Martin Central and the Member for La Brea were the ones interfering. So to indicate, in the slightest way, that there was any degree of interference by my good self and my colleague, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, is absolutely untrue.

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I just want to make it clear that I lend support to the matter being resolved in the earliest possible time. I am not a lawyer and I cannot question the legal status of any matter. We were strangers to the process. We sat and observed, the meeting was adjourned, and we took our leave.

Thank you.

**The Minister of Housing and Settlements and Acting Prime Minister (Hon. John Humphrey):** Mr. Speaker, I have been trying to understand the relevance of this whole debate that has strayed to a deadlock in a Local Government election result. I was just wondering if perhaps the recreation ground had been delivered earlier, whether it might have had a different result. Instead of a deadlock of 4/4, it might have been 5/3, in favour of the Government side; so maybe that is irrelevant.

The Member for San Fernando West made a very positive contribution. I have had a chance to discuss it with the Minister of Legal Affairs, and we think, in fact, that the proposal for a register of acquisitions could very easily be accommodated in the new registry. When it is established and all computerized, attorneys would be able to get access to all the data very easily. So we do support that recommendation, and I thank the Member for San Fernando West for making it.

The Member for Diego Martin East is trying to find out what acquisitions are outstanding. Acquisitions have been outstanding for some four successive governments, and have now fallen on my lap. I would suggest that the Member file a specific question. In that way, I would be able to get the Director of Surveys to provide the honourable House with the information. I have asked the Director of Surveys for that information and I am still awaiting it. When the Member files a question he should give a deadline, and I think that will help me get the information which I can share with hon. Members.

If the hon. Member for Tobago West could assist by getting a list of all the people who are being affected by the fact that these lands have been sterilized because of the new Crown Point Airport development plan, and provide me with that list, and what the needs are for relocation, I would get the National Housing Authority to work with the Tobago House of Assembly and try, in fact, to achieve that. Because there is no other way I can do it. It is what the law requires.

**3.05 p.m.**

Now, it is unfortunate that Crown Point is taking so long. The decision has not yet been taken on the selection of one of six alternative designs and this is why people are being frustrated. I am trying my best to break that deadlock, Mr.



Speaker, by bringing a fresh, new perspective into the assessment of the various designs so that we can persuade the powers that be, which are not entirely central Government but also the Tobago House of Assembly, to adopt the most rational, practical design for Crown Point, in which case we could then proceed.

**Miss Nicholson:** The site for Crown Point for the runway or relocation? What is the problem?

**Hon. J. Humphrey:** No. The reason these areas are sterilized is because the design has not been selected. The location of the terminal building for the Crown Point Airport would make a difference. One proposal is to expand the existing terminal building considerably and, in fact, that is the most practical one but that is not, in fact, supported by the Tobago House of Assembly. So again it has reached a deadlock. So if the Member will furnish me with the list of the people who are affected I will do my best to try to arrange relocation for those people.

The Member for La Brea, Mr. Speaker, was concerned about the rights of the farmers which, in fact, the Government shares. The reason it took a little while to complete the acquisition is that the Cabinet required from Caroni (1975) Limited an assurance that the farmers would, in fact, be adequately compensated and we now have that assurance in writing from Caroni (1975) Limited. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, I do not want to get embroiled in the other problem that was raised during the course of debate. Therefore, I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this House approve the decision of the President to acquire the land described in Appendix IV for the public purpose specified.

DESCRIPTION OF LANDS	Public Purposes For Which To Be Acquired
Two parcels of land containing 20.233 hectares more or less, situate at Spur Trace, Penal in the ward of Siparia in the county of St. Patrick and described in the Schedule and coloured raw sienna on a plan of survey signed by the Director of Surveys and dated 2 <sup>nd</sup> February, 1999 and filed in his office is required for a public purpose: Establishment of a recreation ground.	Establishment of a recreation ground

*Land Acquisition*  
[HON. J. HUMPHREY]

*Friday, September 3, 1999*

<b><u>SCHEDULE</u></b>	
<p>Two parcels of land comprising together 2.0233 hectares situate at Spur Trace, Penal in the ward of Siparia in the county of St. Patrick. Details of this are as follows:</p> <p>(1) 1.8248 hectares said to belong now or formerly to Caroni (1975) Limited.</p> <p>(2) 0.01985 hectares said to belong now or formerly to Ramsankar.</p> <p>These parcels are more particularly shown coloured raw sienna on a Survey Plan filed in Book 1243 Folio 14 in the vault of the Lands and Surveys Department, Knox Street, Port of Spain.</p>	

#### **FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT**

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

*Be It Resolved* that this House adopt the Third Report 1998—1999 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the expenditure from the Public Revenue which were not included in the Annual Estimates 1998/1999.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall when last we met that the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives also met on Wednesday, September 1, 1999 and at that meeting, which was a very interesting one, we agreed to a number of proposals. The proposals include, firstly, a variation of the 1998/1999 appropriation in the sum of \$55,898,504.00 broken down as follows: (A), a public sector investment programme increase of \$17,600,000 and, (B), a recurrent estimate, a variation in the sum of \$38,298,504. Secondly, under that first proposal, a write-off of overpayment of salary in the sum of \$33,280.00 with respect to the Board of Inland Revenue.

A second proposal that was agreed to was the provision of supplementary funds to meet debt servicing in the sum of \$87,820,928. Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, the write-off of the sum of \$12.3 million which represents an estimated nominal value of unsold commemorative stamps, *et cetera*, for the Post Office Division. Mr. Speaker, given the increase in the supplementary funds to meet the debt servicing

of \$87,820,928.00 the 1998/1999 appropriation will now be \$13,313,862,974.00. I shall now give some details with respect to the Heads of Expenditure.

The increase in respect of one Head of Expenditure, Head 19, the charges on account of the public debt in the sum of \$87,820,928.00 is the provision of supplementary funds. The details of this increase are as follows. Mr. Speaker, the supplementary funds in the sum of \$87,820,928.00 are required to meet expenditure under Head 19, charges on account of the public debt to meet management expenses, principal repayment and interest in 1998/1999. The necessity to seek parliamentary approval for supplementary funds is as a result of the following.

At the time of the preparation of the estimates of expenditure for 1998/1999 the prime lending rate used to determine payments was 17 per cent. However, the foremost fixed prime rate 1998/1999 stood at 17.5 per cent. This increase in the prime rate affected all the loans based on a local floating rate. Secondly, the need to increase it is as a result of estimates under certain items of expenditure, reduced during budget preparation based on the information available at that time. Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind hon. Members of this House to note that the provision of the supplementary funds in the sum of \$87,820,928.00 under Head 19 will not result in any net increase in the approved 1998/1999 estimates of expenditure as savings have been identified in a number of areas to offset this increase. [*Interruption*]

This provision of the supplementary funds will not result in any net increase in the approved 1998/1999 estimates of expenditure as savings have been identified in a number of areas to offset this increase. Do you want me to say it again? Secondly, Mr. Speaker, a variation of the 1998/1999 original appropriation in the sum of \$17,600,000.00 for the public sector investment programme, Cabinet agreed on November 19, 1992 that the Ministry of Planning and Development would assume responsibility for the Public Sector Investment Programme. As an integral part of this responsibility that Ministry undertook a review of the performance of the total public sector investment programme as of May 31, 1999.

Based on the analysis of the performance of the PSIP, the Ministry of Planning and Development recommended the reallocation of funds to a number of projects and programmes which require additional funding in 1999 as well as a corresponding reduction in the allocation to projects and programmes which have performed below expectation. These recommendations were agreed to by Cabinet. The variation of expenditure totalling \$17,600,000.00 in the first instance only

affects the development programme. The following provides information on those Heads of Expenditure which are recommended for increase as well as those recommended for decrease.

Under Head 17, Personnel Department, an increase of \$1 million; under Head 21, the Ministry of Planning and Development, an increase of \$3,412,000.00; under Head 24, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, an increase of \$6,703,000.00; under Head 25, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, a decrease of \$9 million; under Head 26, the Ministry of Education, an increase of \$1 million; under Head 30, the Ministry of Labour and Co-operatives, a decrease of \$2,500,000.00; under Head 41, the Ministry of Culture and Gender Affairs, a decrease of \$1,400,000.00; under Head 42, the Ministry of Local Government, an increase of \$5,485,000.00; under Head 48, the Ministry of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs, a decrease of \$1 million; and finally, under Head 51, the Ministry of Public Administration, a decrease of \$3,700,000.00 which gives total increases of \$17,600,000.00 and total decreases of a similar sum.

**Mr. K. Valley:** I would like to ask a question if the Minister would give way. I just want to understand him again. A while ago you were saying—and I want to take him back to when I interrupted him—that the supplementary appropriation of some \$87,000,000.00 which he was looking for under Head 19 would not increase the approved budget because these are savings identified in other areas. In other words, therefore, what the Minister is saying is that it is not really a supplementary appropriation, it is a variation. *[Interruption]* No, no, I want to understand clearly. Because if there are these savings well then, the Minister knows he ought to indicate those savings. The same way he has identified the \$17 million increase and the \$17 million decrease, that is what he should be doing if that is what he is saying. So I just want to understand the Minister quite clearly.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** Mr. Speaker, I am seeking a supplementary but I am saying that because there are so many savings identified, rather than bring a voluminous document to Parliament that I expect the supplementary, as a result of those savings, will have no effect on the ultimate budget position based upon the estimates that I have presented to Parliament. So I agree with the Member. I could have come for a variation but the variation would have been too voluminous. I am merely seeking, therefore, a supplementary as the easier way out.

**Mr. Valley:** I simply want to understand the issue, Mr. Minister of Finance. I want to know if the approved budget would now increase by \$87 million.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** It would.

**Mr. Valley:** It would? Okay, thanks.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** It would. You know, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin Central was a junior minister. He is not learning his lessons and, therefore, he will never become a senior minister. If the Member will listen and learn, one day he might end up being a senior. It may not happen in my lifetime but one day it may happen. It may not happen in his lifetime either.

**Hon. Member:** Maybe in his next life.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** Mr. Speaker, the main reasons identified by the Ministry of Planning and Development for the reduction in expenditure on projects and programmes for 1998/ 1999 are as follows. Firstly, a lack of institutional capacity continues to hamper programme implementation and, secondly, there is need for greater improvement in managerial systems and procedures. The details of the programmes and projects that have been varied and explanations of the variations in allocations have been circulated. In addition to that, as you will recall, Mr. Speaker, a number of questions were raised and I have attempted today to circulate answers to many of these questions. I know some of them have not been properly answered because we are still waiting on additional information, but I will undertake, as soon as this additional information comes to hand, to have it circulated to this honourable House.

The third area is a variation of the 1998/1999 original appropriation in the sum of \$38,298,504.00 under the recurrent estimates and there are Heads of Expenditure under the recurrent estimates that require additional funds based on actual requirement while there are others that have excess provision. The objective of this exercise, therefore, is to transfer amounts from expenditure Heads that have excess provisions to expenditure Heads that have a shortfall. The proposed variation of the 1998/1999 appropriation affects the following Heads of Expenditure under the recurrent estimates.

The Heads to be increased are: Head 5, Parliament. Parliament gets an increase of \$2.5 million. I am sure that is very good news to you, Mr. Speaker. Head 8, Elections and Boundaries, an increase in the sum of \$11,203,804.00; Head 22, the Ministry of National Security, an increase of \$14,058,000.00; Head 42, the Ministry of Local Government, an increase of \$10,536,700.00, which gives a total to be increased under the various Heads of \$38,298,504.00. And, Mr. Speaker, the Head that we want to be reduced is the Ministry of Finance in the same sum of \$38,298,504.00.

**3.20 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, again, explanations of programmes and projects which have been varied under the recurrent estimates have also been circulated to Members in the agenda.

So, in closing let me remind Members that this variation will increase the 1998/1999 appropriation by \$87,820,928. The total amount to be appropriated for 1998/1999 will therefore be \$13,313,862,974.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

*Question proposed.*

**Mr. Kenneth Valley** (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Speaker, I must confess, the idea that came to me as the Minister went through his presentation was *Aesop's Fables*, which we read as little kids. He turned to you when he read that announcement with respect to the appropriation as though it would be good news to you. Mr. Speaker, I simply want to counsel you, do not hold your breath. Because really, an appropriation is simply stating that, yes, we are increasing the amount you can spend by "X" amount, but before you can spend it, you must get the revenues; and that is what the Government does not have.

Once we look at the *Central Bank Report* I find it rather amazing that the Minister can come to this House this afternoon in an environment in which he has no money. He has been borrowing from the Central Bank; he owed the Central Bank \$1.5 billion at the end of the last fiscal year; and for the year so far, according to the *Central Bank Report*, he has increased that by \$1.1 billion; so that he owes Central Bank \$2.6 billion—

**Sen. Kuei Tung:** Scary tactics.

**Mr. K. Valley:** Scary tactics? But that is a fact! The IMF report confirmed \$1.5 billion at the end of the last fiscal year. The *Central Bank Report* indicated at page 7, I will read it for you:

"The source of liquidity growth in the system has been a burgeoning fiscal deficit which injected about \$1,094 million into the financial system since the start of the fiscal year in October, 1998. The task of monetary policy has been complicated by the absence of any Government borrowing on the domestic market, although the budget indicated the domestic borrowing requirement was more than \$1,000 million. Implementation of the borrowing programme would have partly offset resource creation in the system and reduced the demand of monetary policy."

I will come back to that. But the point is this fact is mentioned in a number of places in this *Central Bank Report*. I do not know if the Minister does not know about it. That is frightening! Extremely frightening, Mr. Speaker! So, let us understand that the one thing the Government does not have is money and the ability to get money.

Let us look at some of the points made in the *Central Bank Report*. You see, since 1996, this Minister has been coming here and attempting to fool people. I think he has fooled some of them. I think there is only one, the Member for St. Joseph. He has fooled even the Member for Oropouche. Could you imagine? The only one who has not been caught by smoke and mirrors is the Member for St. Joseph.

He comes in 1997 and promises a surplus of \$269 million. When we were responding at the budget debate last year we made the point that in fact, there must be a deficit of \$636.1 million. The *Central Bank Report* of May 1999 is now telling us at Table 14 that the deficit for 1997 was \$740.3 million. You do not know that? A deficit of \$740.3 million! It is there!

Listen! Not only is the Central Bank saying that, you know! The IMF report is making the same point. The Minister says that he is tired of coming here as if he is unaware of these things. If he is unaware of this, we are in a worse situation than I thought, Mr. Speaker. It is frightening that he does not know what is happening.

Then he comes here telling us that supplementary appropriation will not increase the net amount. I mean, he has a gall! That is the same minister who used money budgeted for October to December, 1998. We had approved a 1998 budget for 12 months; they cut the fiscal year to September; but they still used the appropriations for October—December. What we approved for 12 months, they used it in nine months. He is now coming to tell me that although we are giving him approval to spend \$87 million more—he does not have it, he will take it from the Central Bank again—that he would not use it, that he would have savings. Well friend, if you have those savings, come and let us do a variation. Let us say we are reducing these Heads and we are increasing Head 19. That is how one does it. No smoke and mirrors! We are tired of that!

Listen to what the IMF has said:

“The fiscal position has weakened from 1996 to 1998.”

*[Interruption]* What it means? It means that you have been running deficits every year since 1996 and lying to the Parliament—telling untruths, Mr. Speaker. He

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has been a stranger to the truth since 1996, telling people that he has been running surpluses.

Listen. The Minister's game is over. One can take up the newspapers any day and see everybody commenting on the financial state of this country. Because it is glaring to all, that what this country lacks is proper financial management. That is the reality of the situation.

Mr. Speaker, remember we were supposed to have a surplus also for 1998. The *Central Bank Report* records a deficit of \$424.1 million. I will bet you, when they revise this figure it is going to be larger. I want to read a statement made in the IMF Report of June. They are talking here about the fact that in 1998 things were bad and so forth. Mr. Speaker, we made the point in our budget response that the Government has been using capital revenues; in other words, receipts from divestment as income rather than a financing vehicle. The IMF, somewhere in this report, said, "Okay, fine, we will allow them to treat it that way. It is not what is done, but we will allow them to treat it that way". Listen to what it says:

"Several alternative measures of the deficit are presented in Table II, including a deficit on a cash basis, which removes the effect of wage arrears bonds, the deficit treating capital revenues, mainly privatization..."

In other words, the sale of assets and so forth. It goes on:

"as financing and the deficit with both adjustments. By any of these measures the projected outcome in 1998/1999 is weaker than in 1998."

Understand what that means. What they are saying is that listen, you had a deficit of \$405.6 million in 1998, well friend, you could look for a higher deficit in 1998/1999. For the first quarter alone in 1999, the deficit was \$424.1 million. At Table 14, Central Bank quarterly.

You see, Mr. Speaker, the smoke and mirrors continue. This is another interesting comment from paragraph 58 of the IMF Report. This is what the IMF staff noted:

"The staff has noted some deterioration in the integrity of the statistical base. Gaps and inconsistencies have emerged in the reconciliation of monetary and fiscal data, and reliability of national accounts data has become a concern. The authorities recognize the extent to which these shortcomings affect the quality of the statistical data produced by the Central Bank and other statistical agencies, and staff supports the authorities' request for an assessment mission..."



Cooking the books, Mr. Speaker. Doing all kinds of fancy things.

**Dr. Rowley:** Should we be surprised?

**Mr. K. Valley:** I want to go back to the beginning of this report, because I want to make the point that when the Minister of Finance—whether he be junior or senior—comes to the House to ask the House to approve supplementary appropriation, that Minister of Finance ought to be able to tell the House from where he is going to get the revenues to meet the increased appropriation, especially in an environment where the whole country knows that there is a shortage of revenues.

Because, when one looks at the Bill before us, one sees that in fact, what the Minister is doing is increasing the appropriation by some \$143.7 million. He said he has found savings in a few areas so that the net increase is \$87 million; he has found \$55.9 million in savings. Mr. Speaker, in an environment in which he has no money, one would expect a high level of expenditure restraint; but not this Minister. It is the same thing we saw in 1997, when the Minister got the revenues which were projected. His problem, however, was that he could not contain expenditure, so that expenditure was some \$900 million more than anticipated. So we ended up with a deficit of \$700 million in 1997. Understand what is happening.

Let me read what the Central Bank report is saying:

“Monetary policy has continued to be defined by the need to sterilize large injections of resources arising from the government’s deficit spending...”

**3.35 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, when the Government borrows money from the Central Bank, that is what is known, quite loosely, as printing money, making money out of thin air and putting it out there to command resources, and the effect of that would be seen in inflation and in our foreign exchange rate. That is where we would see the effect. The Central Bank, concerned as it is with controlling the monetary policy, is concerned.

They have mentioned it in a number of different places in this report. They said that these injections have accumulated to over \$1,000 million, since the start of the fiscal year in October, 1998. And again here, they mentioned that the absence so far of any Government borrowing in the domestic market has complicated the task of monetary policies.” So they have noted that this is causing problems for us; problems that we find difficulty in controlling because of

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the size, and the Ministry of Finance is not assisting in trying to take up some of that liquidity that this deficit spending is triggering. There has been no domestic borrowing.

Mr. Speaker, instead, the Minister came to the House to tell us yesterday, that he was awarded the mandate to borrow US \$250 million on the external market. While he is doing his deficit spending here, he is borrowing on the external market. But let me just tell him that when that money comes in and is spent, then he would be creating an increased demand in the society because that is new money he brings into the system.

Mr. Speaker, but more than that, I have a concern that for the first time, as far as I know—and I have headed that Project Financing Unit for quite some time—I am aware that a mandate is awarded to an institution without some comparable quotes. There is the concept that you must keep people honest. I have the highest respect for Credit Suisse First Boston, highest respect! Right! I am saying however, that when you are going out to the international market you must get quotes from different institutions, so that you can be assured that you are getting the best deal on the market.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, it is the first time that I am aware that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago simply “ups” and gave one institution a mandate to borrow US \$250 million, and I am saying that “there is more in the mortar than the pestle,” but I will leave that alone. More than that, I wish them luck, because as far as I am aware, at present the international market is closed to Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I have another question to ask the Minister and I want to ask him to respond to the question of whether that mandate is time bound. Is it for a three-month period, is it open, or is it whenever you can raise the money? I want to know. Simply, I want to know, because here is the Central Bank stating that there must be action in the domestic market to help the Central Bank deal with that overhang that you have created via your deficit spending.

We note the same matter in the IMF report. They have stated also that you should have been out in the market earlier, but the Minister is too busy doing other things. So that it was merely about a month ago, the Minister came here seeking approval on the borrowing limits, but that should have been done earlier, and even now that the borrowing limits have been increased, we are hearing nothing about any domestic borrowing. The Central Bank is counselling in a number of different places in this report that there is an overhang and increase in

the monetary base, which would show up in money supply, inflation and pressure in our foreign exchange as we go down the road. Mr. Speaker, they have said it.

It states here:

“should these conditions persist or worsen a possible fall-off in demand for TT dollar financial assets could pose a challenge for policy, particularly since the prognosis is for some increase in US interest rates...”

And they continue to make the point that what we are going to be seeing by the second or third quarter of the year, as we get deeper into the fiscal year, is that there would be an increase in money supply, rising inflation and there would be pressure on the foreign exchange.

So we see, quite clearly, that we are faced with a situation in Trinidad and Tobago where financial management has been extremely poor; that we have been running budget deficits since 1996; that those have been financed in the main from borrowings from the Central Bank; that there has been no attempt by the Ministry of Finance to assist the monetary authorities in controlling the rate of growth of monetary aggregates and because of that, we are faced with increased pressure now on our rate of foreign exchange, inflation, and increase in money supply which, of course, will trigger the other two.

Mr. Speaker, today really, in my opinion, it means very little. The finance that we ought to be talking about is what programmes the Government is going to put in place to control the situation as a whole. The Minister said nothing about it today, but in the newspapers we are seeing this plan about the National Enterprise Company Limited—“NEL” it is called—which is supposed to sell assets before the end of this month, simply to finance the budget.

Mr. Speaker, again, I want to counsel the senior finance Minister because this “fire sale” approach to our state company assets would not do. Again, if we were to look at the IMF report, we would see that his people, the Ministry of Finance, informed the IMF that they would be going to the market with divestment in the second and third quarters of the fiscal year 1999, and the companies were identified. National Flour Mills, they were expected to get \$168.6 million; Trinidad Cement Limited, \$110 million; Trinidad Nitrogen Company, \$300 million. So that what was contemplated—and this report was completed in June of 1999—as of June 1999, the Government’s plans were to go to the market with these individual companies and divest but, again, for some unknown reason there were delays. Again, the Minister was busy with other matters, so there were

delays. So here we are in August, and we started hearing this matter about the National Enterprise Company—

**Dr. Rowley:** With a girl called “NEL”.

**Mr. K. Valley:** The shares of all these companies would now go into NEL and individuals would be asked to buy shares in NEL before September 30, 1999. That is simply because of the failure of the Government to carry out a programme of divestment in an orderly manner during the year. Quite honestly, I have no difficulty with the concept of NEL structured properly, but a “fire sale” approach, where you are attempting to raise over \$600 million in a short space of time—

**Dr. Rowley:** And retain control.

**Mr. Valley:** —and retain control and all the other negatives associated with that concept, cannot be in the best interest of Trinidad and Tobago.

### **3.45 p.m.**

First of all, Mr. Speaker, we have to understand that public servants have not received an increase since 1983, so when you come with your \$600 million worth of shares, in one month, you have disenfranchised that group because they cannot enter the market. More than that, in an environment in which the only people who seem to have money today are the Ministers, their friends and family then, obviously, you are providing a benefit to certain select groups. That is what is happening.

If we are not careful, the long-term result of this National Enterprise Company would be that a few people would control NEL which in turn—or perhaps I should put it this way—these few people indirectly would control our operating companies via their control of National Enterprise Company. Understand that.

If you own 20 per cent of the National Enterprise Company, the shares are widely distributed because this thing about Government control is not going to last. In the medium to long term that has to go, and then you are going to find that a favoured few may very well end up earning controlling interest in National Enterprise Company and that is the long-term plan. Understand that.

We have had holding companies in Trinidad where a few persons simply hold a few shares in a holding company and the holding company then controls a number of operating companies. That is the plan. Understand that. The primary reason is to get money to finance the budget; that is the primary reason put on the table. The real reason that we are having this hurried sale is to position certain

persons so that in the long-term they would control Trinidad Cement Limited, National Flour Mills and if you are not careful, TSTT also. Understand that, because there is absolutely no way one can do a proper divestment with National Enterprise Company in the time period considered. It is an excellent idea and if given the chance and it is structured properly, it can work in Trinidad and Tobago, but the approach this Government is using will not work, it will favour only a few.

Mr. Speaker, I conclude by saying that we can come to the Parliament and appropriate anything. We can always purr out of thin air and say that we give the Parliament a further \$20 million.

Mr. Speaker, I feel for you, faced with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference. I hope that the Parliament would in fact get the resources necessary to have a good Conference. Understand however, that at present, the Government owes the Central Bank some \$2.6 billion and Government is taking no steps whatsoever to assist the monetary authorities by going to the local market and doing some type of bond issue to—as we say in finance—suck up some of that excess liability that is in the market. That is what is necessary; not foreign borrowing; not to bring US \$250 million into Trinidad and Tobago, that is merely going to expand money supply, monetary base and cause further problems. That is what it is going to do.

Thank you.

**Dr. Keith Rowley** (*Diego Martin West*): Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons the Minister of Finance appears to be so smug while the situation is as described by my colleague for Diego Martin Central, is that by its very nature the details, terminologies and discussion about high finance sound tedious to the average person in this country. Therefore, one can conclude that not very many of our citizens understand the slippery slope over which this Government is taking us.

As a result of that, there are people in the community who probably do not know better, but are prepared to accept or even to repeat comments like; “Even though they ‘t’iefing blind’, they have done well with the economy.” That indicates that even the single plus you want to give to the Government, those plaudits are not worthwhile because anybody who understands the details of our fiscal position and of the monetary policies we are trying to pursue, or that we would have to pursue if the fiscal initiatives are not rectified, would see that in the very short term we may appear to be doing well. In effect, we could be in serious difficulty and, in fact are already on the road to serious difficulty.

In the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, I remember the behaviour of Members on the other side and their supporters when the Opposition tried to point out that the

Government was not being forthright with us with respect to the country's finances. Some people still cannot believe that any Government could be so irresponsible as to not be truthful about matters with respect to the country's finances. Let us understand it. Nobody on the other side is required to take money out of their grandfather's will or out of their own pocket to finance the country. They are simply employees of the state to manage the affairs of the state.

Mr. Speaker, you were here recently when I made a statement that one of the most important things that the population does when it elects a government is the assignment that the government would have to manage the people's money. I thought that was a simple, straightforward statement that no one could make an argument with except my friend, the Member for Tobago East, who had a serious problem with that and described that assertion as mephistophelean as he is wont to do.

Any person who does not understand that one of the primary objectives of the Government is to manage the money; any person who does not understand that as important, is not in the correct position to assess the current predicament.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague just gave the overall picture of the fiscal outturn where the numbers have now come in and even as you are reading from the numbers of the Central Bank, there are persons on the Government's side who are trying to "bawl" as though you are not treating with facts. This is one of the stations of fact in the country. In the document *The Economic Bulletin* of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, May 1999, when one looks at page 4, there are a series of graphs and the one thing that strikes me is that a graph which shows agriculture performance from 1994—1998 and halfway to 1999 shows precipitous decline in agriculture in the last three years.

Those of you who do not read and those of you on the other side who believe your job is just to come to Parliament and defend the corrupt practices of the Government, should look at what page 4 says about agriculture performance in this country. What surprises me and many others is that this is a Government which came out of people who spent decades asking for a chance and it will turn around agriculture; we understand agriculture, what we would do for agriculture and so forth. Many people in this country believed that they could have and would have done that. Look at what the graph shows. My friend, the Member for Naparima can see it. Precipitous decline in agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the matter before us today, which has to do with the variations of the appropriations that this Parliament passed, one of the

things that the Minister of Finance is seeking to do today is to remove \$9 million from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and that \$9 million was—Mr. Speaker it is even worse than that. In the estimates, the Government had planned to spend \$21 million for agricultural technical support, agricultural sector technical assistance programme.

This is the kind of programme the country requires to impact upon this precipitous decline in the agricultural sector. So while the sector is declining precipitously—and one of the means of addressing that was a technical support programme for which the Government had budgeted \$21 million and which the Parliament approved—it was revised to \$12 million. So the agricultural government revised it downwards to \$12 million, and the Minister of Finance is saying that he would take \$9 million of it and from the \$9 million, \$3 million goes to the Ministry of Planning and Development. That ministry requires a whole debate by itself and I think we ought to have one very soon it is going to the Ministry of Planning and Development for computerization of Central Statistical Office's Y2K programme because the Government has suddenly discovered that an agency like CSO which handles all the basic statistics, where every primary school child, every commentator, every person knows about Y2K and its problems. Only the Panday Administration would be caught with its pants down with respect to Y2K compliance at CSO. So the Minister comes now as a matter of urgency. The Government requires to respond to the Y2K problem at CSO and, therefore, the Minister of Finance is on the hunt for \$3 million and he takes \$3 million from the agricultural sector to deal with Y2K at CSO.

Any Government bringing a budget in October of 1998 and not taking on board the requirements for Y2K compliance and resulting in a major area of governmental requirement at the CSO unattended to, requiring this kind of last minute thing, gives you an idea of how these people are running the country. So there is \$3 million gone from the technical assistance programme in agriculture. Another \$2 million goes for furniture in schools because the Government discovered that it had under-budgeted for schools so another \$2 million from the technical assistance programme is taken.

#### **4.00 p.m.**

The sum of \$5 million is taken to go to the “Ministry of Lawlessness”. If one can conclude that Y2K is urgent, yes, he has to take it, it goes to agriculture and school furniture, fine. But to make up the sum of \$9 million, \$5 million is taken from the Technical Assistance Programme for the agricultural sector: a sector in precipitous decline. The sum of \$5 million is taken and transferred to the

*Finance Committee Report*  
[DR. ROWLEY]

*Friday, September 3, 1999*

“Ministry of Lawlessness”, which is led by the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, something called the Ministry of Local Government.

**Mr. Imbert:** Check what they did.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** It is used to carry out naked and blatant discrimination and election activities in Trinidad and Tobago. The \$5 million which the Government took away from the collapsing agricultural sector, was used and was spent on 28 roads. Of the 28 roads, 24 are in constituencies controlled by the UNC to the tune of \$5 million.

**Mr. Imbert:** What?

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Of the other four, to the tune of \$600,000, those are in, what they call, the marginal constituencies that they are hoping to win.

**Mr. Hart:** What a shame.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** In fact, they ensured that the entire sum of money was spent in UNC constituencies or in the marginal ones that they target to increase their constituency numbers. That is how this Government is running this country. Today I accuse the Panday administration—if I may quote my friend, the Minister of Finance—of naked, blatant discrimination against one half of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Those of us on this side—from Tobago West to Diego Martin West to Point to San Fernando to Toco/Manzanilla—we represent a number of constituencies. When you do that, you are viring \$5 million for secondary roads under the Local Government Ministry, and you spend the entire sum in constituencies run by the UNC. That is discrimination! That is the kind of discrimination. I am not making it up. I am not making this up. They have laid it here in the Parliament. It is the last page of the document which says:

“Responses arising from the question emanating from the Third Meeting of Wednesday, September 01”

The question was asked here on Wednesday: what did you spend the money on? The Minister of Finance replied: “We spent the \$5 million on roads in UNC constituencies only.”

Do you understand? That is their behaviour, and that is how they come here to tell you that they are doing well.

Let us go back, Mr. Speaker, to this \$9 million. This \$9 million that they have taken from the agriculture ministry was meant to be Government’s contribution



towards a larger sum of money which the International Development Bank (IDB) was going to make available to Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, you have been here for a long time and you have heard, over and over, about an IDB loan that this Government met in place in 1995 when they came into office. They reviewed the situation and they signed the loan document in July of 1996. That was meant to open up the provision of US \$75 million to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. If anybody wants to look in any area to find out how this Government has under-performed, has misbehaved and has cost the people of Trinidad and Tobago a lot of resources, that person only has to look at how this Government mismanaged the IDB programme.

Mr. Speaker, having signed the document in mid-1996 and they got the first drawdown of—I think it was \$20 million or thereabouts—up to this day this day, this Panday administration led by the same Minister of Planning and Development—who has planned nothing since he has been receiving moneys for the last four years—has not been able to access another cent of that soft loan that is available.

This \$9 million that they are talking about here, was what was budgeted. Assuming that the Government was going to drawdown those moneys—you have what is called counterpart funds, where the IDB provides a certain amount and the government provides the rest of it. This \$9 million was the Government's contribution to the larger programme. But because the Government has been unable or unwilling to access the rest of the money, the \$9 million of the Government's portion is now being used by the Minister of Finance, in the way that I have just described. That is at the same time that the agricultural sector is collapsing, or I should say, has collapsed. Rather than do what is required to help the sector, the Minister of Finance is quite happy to take the counterpart funds and use them in that manner. If it was only the Minister of Finance, one would have been concerned, but the trepidation has to become higher because the Minister of Planning and Development made a statement to the press on Monday, August 16. Hear what he had to say—

You just heard, Mr. Speaker, from my colleague from Diego Martin Central about the IMF's position on its review of Trinidad and Tobago's economy. The IMF talks to the World Bank, the World Bank talks to the IDB, the IDB talks to the IMF and so forth. Those three institutions: the IMF, the World Bank and the IDB, their officers are in contact all the time because they read each other's reports on the various countries and regions.

The Minister of Planning and Development says to the local media that the World Bank feels that Trinidad and Tobago is economically strong enough to access international credit. The World Bank does not know about the deficit situation which we are talking about. As my colleague has just pointed out: the difficulty facing Trinidad and Tobago in accessing moneys on the international market.

The Minister of Planning and Development will have you believe that the World Bank feels that we are so strong economically, that we do not need their money. The same World Bank that is lending money to Korea feels that we are so much better than Korea, Malaysia and places like that—we do not need money, we must go to the marketplace. That is what the Minister of Planning and Development would have us believe.

The truth of the matter is this: the World Bank is very aware of the level of corruption and lack of transparency in Trinidad and Tobago and, in fact, is not entirely enamoured with this administration, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago will pay the price if the World Bank is dragging its feet in providing us with resources. They could deny that if they want. It was the World Bank that recorded its lack of agreement and its concern when this Government went about hiring a particular officer at WASA.

The Government is negotiating with the World Bank for large sums of money. In the middle of it the Government behaves in a very unbecoming way: with lack of transparency and using political nepotism, went out there and appointed an individual who the World Bank said was unsuited to the position. The person happens to be a close relative of a high-ranking officer of the ruling party. The World Bank objected to that. Of course, how will the World Bank behave after? How will they behave after? If today the Minister of Finance is telling us that the World Bank is not too keen about lending us money, we must remember it is the same World Bank that had that to say. That is how these things go, Mr. Speaker.

**4.10 p.m.**

If they are flaunting their corruption in front of the world as they are doing with the airport and the National Flour Mills rice racket, the World Bank public officials will take note and send those notes to the board, because the board has to be informed about what is going on in the country. Mr. President, when they did the InnCogen deal—those things got to the officers of those banks and they report that the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago is facilitating corruption, so any money going in there could end up in those holes.

Look at what is happening today with Russia. Big international investigation because moneys that went to Russia under the guise of developing Russia ended

up in bank accounts in New York via certain routes. In fact, that is now a big international scandal reaching right up to the Presidency of Russia. Trinidad and Tobago is a microcosm of that situation, understand that, so when the Minister of Planning and Development said that he is having problems accessing funds from the World Bank, it has everything to do with the behaviour of Trinidad and Tobago and his whole incompetence. [*Desk thumping*] Even where the bank has already approved money for us, he has not been able to access the money.

I was the Minister who negotiated that \$75 million loan. The Government changed in November 1996, that matter went before the board in September of 1995, and they signed the loan document in 1996. Since then, even as they have been unable to meet the conditionalities to access the money, they are paying large sums of commitment fees every quarter, because that is a requirement of the loan. So here we have these jokers sitting here, and every month they write a cheque to the Inter-American Development Bank for hundreds of thousands of dollars, as a commitment fee, having not been able to drawdown the money. Next three months another quarter million is due, and they keep paying that money out all the time, while not being able to perform.

Listen to the reason they have been unable to access the money: they are telling the Parliament that these moneys had to do with consultancies, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, and Marine Resources has been unable to hire people. One of the conditionalities for accessing the US \$75 million loan is that the Government will hire a person who is skilled to be the programme coordinator to make sure that the agricultural sector loan functions in an efficient and effective way. We all know the story about that programme coordinator. That is the said Susan Harrysingh whom the Minister spent a year and a half fighting over, whom he eventually hired, used and discarded.

The end result of that was that—and I told the Parliament—while the Minister was having fun with that situation of hiring a programme co-ordinator, it was the people of Trinidad and Tobago who paid. Look, the numbers have come in now, because as a result of a ministry's inability to hire consultants over a four-year period—four years, they had four years to hire consultants to take advantage of soft loan moneys available, to bring about technical assistance to agriculture—resulted in the Bank saying—. Then they report to the Parliament that the reason \$9 million is available now is because, having not hired the consultants, they cannot move forward with the project, therefore, the \$9 million of counterpart funds is available. [*Crosstalk*] That is what we are being told.

**Mr. Speaker:** I appeal to the Member for La Brea and the Member for Oropouche, that type of conversation, and shouting while the Member is in full flight, is really unacceptable.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So they hired people to manage their affairs, there is one Minister saying, “Anybody who says that you hire a government to manage money is a mephistophelian idiot”. The other minister said to the Parliament—“I would read it”, Mr. Speaker, so you can understand the gravity of the ineptitude. Originally, agriculture sector technical assistance programme, \$9 million to be varied to them. Originally, the sum of \$21 million was provided in the 1998/1999 Public Sector Investment Programme. At the end of May, expenditure was reported to be only \$1.3 million, so this performing Government that likes to beat itself on its chest and tries to fool people who do not know better, they had \$21.378 million, for technical assistance for a key sector like agriculture. The agriculturists from the rural constituencies, betraying the trust of farmers, were only able to spend \$1.3 million.

Mr. Speaker, listen to the reason for that lack of performance, “this is largely as a result of the protracted nature of the procurement processes experienced by the Ministry”. What that gobbledygook means is that this is largely as a result of four years of inability to hire a consultant. However, to date, only two firms were selected. I want to say a little more about this here, because I knew this was going to happen.

When this matter was raised in this House, I raised it as a serious point with the Minister of Finance, not once, not twice but repeated times in this House. On many occasions we had sittings where finance came up, and I raised this matter. I heard that Princes Town Member say that he was reviewing the hiring of consultants because he somehow had it, in his little head, that the previous Minister had something to do with consultants who were selected. When we demitted office in 1995, the question of selection of consultants to move this programme forward was well advanced. In fact, it had nothing to do with the Minister. It was the Permanent Secretary, a transparent process and the IDB working together, and the process was advanced.

What this Minister did, thinking that he was somehow undoing something I had done, he stopped the process and restarted it. The people who were shortlisted, earmarked, screened and whatever, all those people, the current Minister overturned the whole process and has not been able to restart it. Now he tells the Parliament that after four years only two firms were selected, so the money could not be spent, the project could not go ahead, and the people of

Trinidad and Tobago have been denied access to US \$60 million, or thereabouts, available to us from the IDB soft loan. It was a policy loan. [*Interruption*]

That interrupter there, the Member for Oropouche who, in fact, is so useless that the Prime Minister has now hired a retired public servant to take over his portfolio and do the job that he could not do.

**Hon. Member:** Who is that?

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Mr. Kamal Mankey is hired to do his job at a cost of \$4,000 per month, to do the Minister's work, because after four years nothing has happened in the Ministry of Planning and Development. While we know that the Government signed a loan for \$75 million with the IDB and that was laid in the Parliament by this Government, listen to what the Minister of Planning and Development told the press recently. He said, "We have a good relationship with the IDB." What does the Minister of Planning and Development understand by "a good relationship"? He has \$75 million to drawdown since 1996. Over and above the original sum, the bank has held its hand on the country for the entire period after that, but as far as he is concerned, he has a "good relationship". At the same time, he is paying the bank every three months, hundreds of thousands of dollars, while he cannot get the money. He is in no position to get the money, and he calls that a good relationship.

He then tells the press, "We have signed a \$30 million agricultural sector loan." Now, one has to ask, when did the Government of Trinidad and Tobago sign a \$30 million agricultural sector loan? What we do know is that he signed a \$75 million loan in 1996. Is there some reason why the Minister of Planning and Development is now trying to mislead the local media by saying that he signed a \$30 million loan? The reason is this: so far he has only been able to access less than \$30 million and the rest of it is now abandoned, because the requirements to get the rest of it, after four years, the Minister of Planning and Development is now throwing in the towel, so he is even disowning the loan in its entirety. He is only referring now to the original tranche. So he tells the local media, "We have signed a \$30 million loan."

This Minister must know that the loan is a \$75 million loan available in three tranches. After the first tranche this incompetent Government, led by an incompetent Minister of Planning and Development, has not been able to access the rest of the money, so he tells the press that we have signed a \$30 million loan. This Government is not known for speaking the truth. It is known for misleading and manipulating, and that is what the Minister of Planning and Development is trying to do, because he believes that somebody does not know other than that.

Mr. Speaker, hear what he tells the press, “Disbursement from this latter loan,”—which is the \$30 million loan—“is expected to start soon, and will be used to upgrade the agricultural sector and Caroni (1975) Limited.” There is no \$30 million loan that has been recently signed for any disbursement to start soon. The \$30 million was already had since 1997 and has been spent, so there is no \$30 million to come now and, therefore, there is no money coming soon. That is why the Government is going out to the international marketplace now in the way it has—and we are critical of that approach—pick up somebody and say, “Go and try to find me US \$200 million!” They have \$60 million which they have already signed and for which they are paying.

When the Minister gets up here, instead of grumbling while I am talking, he should tell the Parliament how much money he has paid so far in commitment fees, having not gotten the loan. Tell us that! Because they have \$60 million available to them, and they have not been able to access that money because of their incompetence.

Then the Minister went on to tell the press last week, Monday 16, “Sudama confirmed that proposed staff cuts at Caroni were prerequisites for the IDB loan.” So in one breath he says that this so-called \$30 million loan is to be disbursed soon, and then he goes on to say that a conditionality of the loan is staff cuts at Caroni (1975) Limited.

**4.25 p.m.**

Is the Minister saying that this loan that is coming soon will be preceded, as he says, by staff cuts at Caroni (1975) Limited? If that is what he is saying he is speaking at variance with the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and the head of the union at Caroni (1975) Limited who are adamant that there will be no staff cuts at Caroni. So look at the conundrum that we are involved in. The Minister is saying no staff cuts at Caroni (1975) Limited. A prerequisite for the loan is staff cuts at Caroni (1975) Limited. The planning Minister is telling the press, “We are getting this money soon to be disbursed to upgrade agriculture”.

So you see, Mr. Speaker, all of it is a confused mess where nobody knows what the other person is doing. Nobody is speaking the truth about the state of affairs in the country and the Government is there pretending to be good managers of our business when, in fact, on a very simple matter like proceeding to comply with the requirements of an international bank that we have dealt with over decades, you review the situation, you agree to the conditionalities, all that is required is to carry out those conditionalities and the moneys will be available to you, and the Government has done absolutely nothing.

I saw a headline in today's newspaper which stated:

“Caroni gets \$120m for sugar crop”

The article also stated that the Agriculture Minister will deliver a feature address at the Kapok Hotel because Caroni (1975) Limited is borrowing \$120 million on the 2000 crop. Mr. Speaker, I am sure you were here in this Parliament when the incompetence of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources was highlighted with respect to Caroni (1975) Limited. This was when the Minister said that the reason Caroni (1975) Limited was in its present predicament is because the previous government had allowed Caroni (1975) Limited to pre-sell its crop to raise money. I was shocked this morning when I looked at the newspaper only to see that same Minister who was telling the Parliament that the pre-selling of a product by a company, which was supposed to have been the disaster for the company, doing precisely that now.

When we said we were going to make Caroni (1975) Limited bankable, that was what we meant, that if Caroni (1975) Limited was operating properly it could do like any other company and go to the bank and say, “Look, I expect to earn \$1 million from this. I am going to pay you back. You can lend me now and finance the operation”. That was done in 1994 and 1995. This Minister, this neophyte, came to this House and tried to give the impression that, rather than being a solution to Caroni (1975) Limited problem, that was a causative factor in Caroni (1975) Limited dilemma. You all were here. You heard that. You cheered him on. And what is happening now? The same Government, the same Minister, is going to pre-sell Caroni(1975) Limited's crop and they are borrowing money. From what I see here the money that was borrowed, that he was criticizing, was borrowed at a lower interest rate than the current one.

So all of a sudden, having criticized the idea of Caroni (1975) Limited borrowing internationally, or wherever, and funding its operation as a normal business, they have come right back there and that is precisely what this Government is doing. In the meantime, for four years Caroni (1975) Limited's deficit has been allowed to run up to approximately \$1 billion and all of a sudden now you decide, “Well maybe we should put the company in a position where it can borrow this money. It is no longer a crime to pre-sell the crop and use the money to fund the operation”. That tells you, Mr. Speaker, that this Government does not know what it is doing.

Every single area one looks at, the Government goes—it is one blunder after another after another. All they can do is try to present themselves and talk to

themselves and talk to those who do not know or those who do not remember. Because when these facts come out and confront them, any person of reason would understand that what we have here is not a Government but a group of persons who have been given the opportunity to run this country and they are failing miserably at a cost to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**4.30 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5.04 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, one of the problems that we have in this country is that the Government does not see things the way the average person would see them; or the Government cannot differentiate. There are many people in the country who believe that the Government cannot differentiate between right and wrong; what is moral or immoral; what is reasonable or otherwise; or what is a success or what is a failure.

So, as I speak, the gist of my argument this afternoon is that the agricultural sector is not performing as one would have expected and, in fact, the level of performance now is worse than it has been in recent years. Members on the Government side would give the impression that I am just being bloody-minded or irresponsible, but if one goes to Table 1 of this document from the Central Bank which monitors the performance of the various subsectors, under "QUARTERLY REAL GDP GROWTH RATES, 1994 - 1999", one would see where in 1994, the agricultural sector grew by 10.8 per cent and there was a decline in 1995. But if one looks at the last three years, because in 1996, the sector grew by 3.8 per cent; in 1997, the rate of growth declined, it was only 2.7 per cent; and, as compared to the growth of 2.7 per cent in 1997, the sector declined by 15.7 per cent in 1998.

A significant contributory factor to that decline has been the underperformance of Caroni (1975) Limited, because Caroni (1975) Limited is our single largest agricultural effort. When Caroni (1975) Limited does not do well, it reflects itself in that kind of precipitous decline. And one knows what happened in 1998 with my friend and his friends with the decline in cane production and the sugar production being what it was and so forth.

Now, that being the case, that IDB Technical Assistance Programme that I am talking about, for which this Parliament approved a \$21 million counterpart funding programme, it was largely to do with providing support in the form of technical assistance and upgrading for the likes of Caroni (1975) Limited. Caroni



(1975) Limited was specifically singled out in that programme. In fact, the conditionality for that loan with respect to Caroni (1975) Limited, the IDB accepted without any adjustment at all, what we had put in place under the Tripartite Programme. It is because this Government has not been able to keep the Tripartite Programme going why today the Government must acknowledge, through its own documents, that it has not met the conditionalities as laid down by the IDB and, therefore, has not been able to access almost US \$60 million for the service of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what this Government has to own up to.

But, you see, in the face of this document that says there was a growth of 3.8 per cent in 1996; a growth of 2.7 per cent in 1997; and a decline of 15.7 per cent in 1998; this Government would call that success because the Government does not know what success is.

Only this afternoon we had the Minister of Works and Transport coming here and talking about a resounding success—not just an ordinary success, a resounding success—as he refers to the PTSC Rural Bus Programme with those old English buses.

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you the truth of that matter, and the Minister knows the truth, you know. The truth is, the buses are largely running empty on the routes on which they are supposed to run. Because the system by which the buses are operating, one can only buy a ticket at the point of source, where the journey starts. One has to buy a ticket at source at the PTSC. So any potential traveller who has not bought that prepaid ticket, and is standing by the roadside, cannot use the buses. So, therefore, the buses would pass you even if you are inclined to travel on them, and that is why if you look around the country you would see the buses in the UNC colours running empty. Because the system is not a sensible one; it is an idiotic system, where you could only buy tickets at the original point, where the buses start the trip. If you are at the bus stop and the bus is passing, you cannot board it, because all they hire is a driver, no conductor. If you pay the driver, and he is so inclined, he pockets the money.

The end result is that the PTSC is paying hundreds of thousands of dollars a month for operating those buses with virtually no revenue of any consequence! That is why when the Minister was asked if it is being subsidized, he started to give us a mumbling of some sort. It has to be heavily subsidized and, worse yet, subsidized to run empty! That is what he has called a resounding success.

So you understand that when the Government tells us about our affairs, unless you are prepared to look at the facts separate and apart from what the Government says, you could be hopelessly misled. I want to see how long the Government of

Trinidad and Tobago will continue to run those old English buses with this resounding success at the price at which they are being run. When the red ink becomes too deep and is drowning the PTSC, I want to see which people in this country would buy 10 and 12 year-old English buses from the Government. The Minister would have us believe that this Government has now been able to convert a situation which stands all over the world: old motor vehicles depreciate. Everybody knows that! Only the UNC Government has been able to convert a depreciating asset like a motor car, to increase the value by 200 per cent. *[Laughter] [Desk thumping]* So the Minister comes here and tells us they bought these buses for \$34,000 and they are now worth \$120,000! This is what the Government of Trinidad and Tobago tells the Parliament on September 3, 1999. That is what the Minister said here this afternoon!

They do not understand truth from falsehood; success from failure, so that with the financial matters when they come here and talk about deficits and we tell them it is not a surplus it is a deficit, they get on their high horse and they carry on. So today, Mr. Speaker, the chickens have come home—

**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. *[Dr. K. Rowley]*

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, I want to show Members I would not take the full 30 minutes, because I think the point is made.

Because, if we look at where the other \$2 million went, on page 19, procurement of furniture and equipment at secondary schools. I am very happy to hear that the Government did, in fact, do that because that is an area we have always had problems with, not enough furniture and so forth. So the fact that that has happened, we cannot argue with that.

### **5.15 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, but where did the \$2 million come from? You had to have a variation on the budget to find that \$2 million. Now, if the Government really wanted to find \$2 million without using the \$2 million that was earmarked for agriculture, all the Government had to do was to allow the bidding process to take place, and give the contract for the construction of the Gasparillo NP Station and Dundonald Street Gas Station to the qualified bidder who put in the best bid.

Mr. Speaker, we know for a fact—because that evidence was presented here in Parliament—the Government awarded a contract for the Gasparillo Gas Station for \$2 million more than it could have had the station built for. It did the same thing at Dundonald Street. So here we have a situation where the Government is strapped for cash. It needs \$2 million for furniture for schools, and urgently have to vary the budget to take appropriate funds from agriculture to buy the furniture. But the Government is willingly and deliberately allowing National Petroleum Marketing Company, a state-owned agency, 100 per cent owned by the state, to give away \$2 million just like that to a friend of the Government, and it was done again in Gasparillo.

Then the same contractor that did not qualify in September, with the best bid—did not qualify to build two stations—so the Government had to give it to its friend at \$2 million above the going price. Three months later, the contractor that was overlooked in September, is now given a contract to build seven gas stations and the Government wants us to believe that all of this is, pure simple coincidence. Then, my colleague from Tobago East says, that I am mephistophelean because I am saying that we have elected a Government to manage our money, and we must be careful of who we elect. This is the kind of management of the people's money. There were other options.

**Mr. Hart:** Shame.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** If the Government wanted to find \$2 million to buy furniture for schools, it did not have to vary the agricultural budget. What it could have done is not to pay loss of profit to one contractor who is the bonded contractor, so as to allow another contractor who is not the bonded contractor to carry out the work. That is what the Ministry of Works and Transport is doing.

There is contractor “A” who is the bonded contractor. Such a contractor is not being allowed to supply as per the bonded contract and, therefore, has a claim. The Ministry willingly pays that contractor loss of profit for having done no work because somebody in the Ministry is hell-bent on having another contractor do the work and, that other contractor, contractor “B” expects—when the project on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway got into difficulty having used the red sand. On the Solomon Hochoy Highway, they used the red sand as the sub-base and the contract got into difficulty and that sand had to be removed.

A particular contractor rushed and produced a mountain of pressure blue limestone but then the contractor was fired reluctantly by the Government. The Government dragged its feet but eventually it had to fire the Spanish contractor and its local associate. This contractor with a mountain of crushed limestone,

expected to get the job to provide the base for the highway. The next thing, when I came back from vacation I heard the Minister of Finance and his friends paved the whole of the Savannah with blue limestone.

**Hon. Members:** Ooh! Ooh!

**Dr. K. Rowley:** All that happened there is that the limestone was stored in the Savannah, instead of in the quarry yard to be paid for in October. That is what happened in the Savannah—that is what happened there—and that is how the Government is running its money. So it is hunting for \$2 million and taking it from agriculture. Look at the production figures in here and you will see agriculture needs help—technical assistance.

This Parliament approved money and the Government took \$9 million from there, \$2 million to buy furniture for schools because it cannot find money from elsewhere, but it can commit itself to pay for limestone that had no market, and up to now, nobody has been told the price of that arrangement. This is the quality of governance in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, we have it right here in the Parliament. This Government has two of our colleagues here holding down portfolios. One is the Minister of—I do not know what, costing us \$20,000 a month; the other is the Minister of Distance Learning \$20,000.00 a month, that is a total of \$40,000.00 a month, multiply that figure by a year and the four-year term and you will see how much school benches we could have bought for that money because that, as far as the country and I am concerned, is money the Government did not have to spend, but the Government chose to spend money like that and then it is telling us that it is desperately in need of money, so that the Central Statistical Office can become Y2K compliant or that we can buy benches for the schools.

Mr. Speaker, this Finance Bill in front of us here is a simple synopsis and a chronology where the chickens have come home to roost, demonstrating how the Government's priorities are ridiculous; how it spends money; how it discriminates—as in the case of the Local Government roads—and how it has been misleading the country, seeking to let us believe that all is well, when in fact, we are in danger of getting into very, very serious difficulty if any further external developments occur.

At present, there are people in the country who believe that we are doing well, but there is that \$2 billion deficit that we have to deal with, that fiscal crisis that the Minister of Finance is in denial over. The Minister of Finance in Trinidad and Tobago is in denial about the true state of our affairs.

We have reached the point now where bankers—the most conservative people in the country—are now advising him that listen we know that elections are coming up soon and you would be attempting to do certain things, but the precarious fiscal position must not be further worsened by the Minister seeking to do things under the guise or pretence that all is well. The advice that the Minister is getting from bankers should let the country know that these are the people who understand the country's finances and a word of warning is enough for the wise. The chickens have come home to roost and the Minister of Finance has a lot to answer for and the scales should begin to fall off the eyes of his colleagues by now, if they are not already with sight to see that the Minister of Finance cannot be trusted when he presents figures to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Trevor Sudama):** Mr. Speaker, I could not but comment on the performance of the Member for Diego Martin East, by saying that it was full of sound and furry signifying nothing. It was the bark of a Rottweiler who is, in fact, a “pot-hound”. This is the impression that came across for me.

Mr. Speaker, let me start with some of the blatant inaccuracies with which he has tried to regale this House and deal with some of the outrageous statements that he has made. First of all, he has attacked me for incompetence and my managerial capacity; and the capability of this Government. I would like to, perhaps, question his own managerial capacity, a man, who—were it not for the PNM public sector—would not find a job today and, he had to go and seek a job at National Quarries, where for the whole period of his tenancy there, they could not make a profit, but he has managerial competence.

Mr. Speaker, when the NAR government came into power in 1986, his position became rather untenable so he was sent on leave.

During the course of time that he was on leave, he accepted a job at the Seismic Unit at the University of the West Indies and as a result of that the NAR government really had to get rid of him because that is not the kind of behaviour one engages in when one is on leave here. You have not relinquished your job, but you have sought another position at a public sector institution.

**5.25 p.m.**

**Hon. Member:** Collecting two salaries.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** So that when he comes here to talk about managerial capacity and incompetence, I ask him what has he done in the Ministry of

Agriculture for the four years he was residing there, presiding over the demise of Caroni (1975) Limited and, of course, I do not want to get into National Fisheries at all this afternoon. But for four years he presided over the demise of Caroni (1975) Limited, and the agricultural sector.

He talks about the agricultural sector in decline. When did this decline first start? Did it start three years ago under the UNC Government? After 34 years of stranglehold under that PNM government agriculture has reached to the point where it is 3 per cent of the GDP. This did not happen overnight.

Mr. Speaker, it accelerated under their tenure and he spoke about what happened when they had agreed to a tripartite agreement and so forth. I want to tell him and the PNM side that if the tripartite agreement was viable it would have made provision for the following amounts as capital investment into Caroni (1975) Limited by the PNM government—\$45 million in 1993, \$45 million in 1994 and \$20 million for the pension plan. Not a penny was available during the tenure of the PNM government and it is now shedding crocodile tears about the status of Caroni (1975) Limited, its workers, and indeed farmers.

I would deal with discrimination a little later on and what the PNM government has done in 34 years of its regime: a culture of discrimination that was created by the PNM government against people who did not support them; people in the rural areas, farmers, agricultural workers; and today I hear about discrimination. Discrimination coming from whom? The Member for Diego Martin West.

Mr. Speaker, for four years he was a senior minister in government and Manning did not really appoint him until three weeks after they won the elections. He was the last person appointed, and for good reason. He had a reluctance to appoint him as a minister. He spent four years in that government and could not get a little primary school building in his own constituency of Diego Martin West; and when they lost the election, he came begging the UNC Government, please build me a school in Carenage. He represented a senior minister for four years and could not build a little school for himself and he is talking about discrimination.

This UNC Government has started the construction of a boys' school in Carenage which is 85 per cent completed and would be completed before the end of the year in his constituency, a PNM constituency, and they have no shame to talk about discrimination; a discrimination which they perpetuated over so many years of their rule and they have a certain mentality to talk about discrimination and corruption.

Mr. Speaker, he spoke about the agricultural sector loan agreement. I remind them that he and his government signed that agreement and all the conditionalities attached to it. The agreement was signed on August 11, 1995. Do you know what some of the conditionalities were in that agreement which was the precursor to the contract loan? It would reduce the protection of customs duties on the agricultural sector within two years. It would liquidate that protection and there would be no bar to agricultural products coming in and competing with the local agricultural sector and that would be done away with in two years without regard to the implications of such a condition.

When we came into office that was one of the first issues we addressed, that that phased-out period had to be longer and we had to have higher rates of protection in customs duties. You think they cared about the agricultural sector? It took us a long time to go back to the IADB to renegotiate those conditions to make that loan more acceptable to the Government and, indeed, to have limited adverse effects on the agricultural sector. This is one of the reasons for the delay.

Mr. Speaker, if that agreement was not signed and if we did not have to renegotiate those conditions, then, of course, we would have had a faster rate of disbursement. I inform this House that the first tranche of that loan has been drawn down, the second tranche is about to be drawn down and when I referred to a \$30 million loan, that was in anticipation of an Agricultural Sector Investment Loan. These are policy loans which we are in the process of having disbursed and we are already in negotiation with the IADB that as soon as the second disbursement takes place, we are going into a programme of negotiating for the Agricultural Sector Investment Loan which would deal with a physical infrastructure project in the agricultural sector as soon as we have put the policy situation right and have had all our consultancies in place.

Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of this House, I want to indicate some of the difficulties we have been having with this Agricultural Sector Technical Assistance Programme, the TAP. We have not been able to draw down because there were a number of issues there and this—for the benefit of the House—programme has three components: agriculture policy and public administration; land use policy and administration; and agribusiness development and rationalization of state-owned enterprises. You can see the complexity of this Technical Assistance Programme and why we needed to go a bit gingerly.

Late in 1998, technical and financial proposals were invited from short-listed firms for each of the three components. The valuation process was completed in March 1999, however, the award of contracts was delayed for a number of reasons.

In respect of the agribusiness development, a decision was taken to postpone the procurement of a firm until a decision was taken on the future of Caroni (1975) Limited which is integral to agribusiness development in Trinidad and Tobago. What has happened in connection with Caroni (1975) Limited, is that an implementation plan was prepared for its rehabilitation of and accepted by Cabinet for the phased private sector participation in that state enterprise. That is going on and we are waiting for the recommendations for the phased private sector participation before we go on to deal with the agribusiness development aspect of this Technical Assistance Programme.

The contract to deal with land use policy was not awarded because there was a legitimate query as to whether, with all the reports and studies we have had, it would not have duplicated work which we had done and was already available to the Government, and we had to review the situation. We did that and it was finally decided that the work to be done there was additional to the studies and reports we have had and, therefore, we are going to proceed with this consultancy and have it signed in mid-September in a matter of a week or so.

We are going to award the contract of the agricultural policy and land administration reform. We had to put certain things in place. We are going to do that and that is also expected to be signed in mid-September so we have moved apace. We have done the preparatory work, which has been perhaps a little longer but in September we are going to sign two of the components, and the third component has to await the plan and recommendations for the revitalization of Caroni (1975) Limited for its construction and the increase in private sector participation in that state enterprise. The Member spent about half an hour talking about Caroni (1975) Limited as if he did so much during his tenure. It is amazing.

The Member made a big song and dance about CSO; that we are incapable of planning and because of that, CSO has had to suffer. When one makes a budget, it is made on certain assumptions and estimates at the beginning of a period. Those estimates may not turn out to be correct, and as you proceed during the course of the year adjustments are made. Perhaps the PNM made accurate budgets and estimates and did not have to do any variations at all. They were God's gift to the financial and political world—especially the *[Word expunged]* Member for Diego Martin West.

**Mr. Speaker:** No. Not *[Word expunged]*. That would not be accepted.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** I am saying as if they budgeted to the exact cent. They had no cause for variation, they were God's gift to finance. The Member for Diego



Martin West who, if it were not for the PNM public sector, could not get a job today.

Mr. Speaker, on the Central Statistical Office we had made a provision in the current year's budget for the 2,000 census preparatory work and for the upgrade of the Central Statistical Office, and a total of \$2.5 million was provided in the current budget estimates for fiscal 1998/1999 for it. As it is, that proved to be insufficient and, therefore, we indicated that in a review we would look at their needs again and make provision so they would become fully Y2K compliant at the end of the year and be able to carry on with their work.

I am happy to say, Mr. Speaker, that the Central Statistical Office is 80 per cent Y2K compliant, they have done all the work. All that is needed to be done is the acquiring of some machines to make them fully Y2K compliant. We have done this but it seems to be a big issue with the Member for Diego Martin West.

I want to raise a point about the Central Statistical Office and where it is located which seems to have affected its performance. It is the PNM government that put the Central Statistical Office in the East in Queen Street in a very, very difficult area in which the employees fear for their safety. They are in an old dilapidated building. A prime institution for information gathering in this country: this is where the Member and his colleagues put the Central Statistical Office. I went there myself and I looked at the conditions and the physical hazards involved in getting to and from that building even in broad daylight. That PNM government who are so caring about the Central Statistical Office today—and we are right now in search of premises as a matter of urgency to get it out of there so they could do their census 2000 in time.

**5.40 p.m.**

That has been a matter of urgency for the Ministry of Public Administration and myself: to see where we can relocate them. But they have been pushed in those difficult physical conditions by no less a caring government than the PNM, which included the Member for Diego Martin West. I just want to put that issue to rest, therefore we had to deal with that.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on performance—we are told that we could not access loans, we could not implement projects, and we could not draw down. Well I want to advert to the performance of this gracious PNM between the years 1992 and 1995. Let me read from these reviews of the Public Sector Investment

Programme. Let me read to you how their performance was so exemplary. I will read excerpts, from the 1994 Review of the Public Sector Investment Programme, to indicate that they have come here to just talk politics. Some of the problems in the public service in terms of delivery are endemic: lack of capacity, drain of human resources and so forth, the difficulty in meeting some of the conditions to which they had agreed to, all these are endemic to the public service. But they come here today to blame the incompetence of the Minister of Planning and Development for some of the difficulties, which are historical and created by no less than them. They have been in government for 34 long years. The culture of the public service, they dominated that culture for 34 long years. They could not let the public service breathe of the PNMism which was imposed upon them. They come here to talk about management!

Let me read some of the excerpts from this review to indicate how the PNM performed during their gracious tenure of 1992—1995. On page 2 of the 1994 review, I quote:

“Significantly a recent review of the outturn in respect of the segment of the PSIP carried out by government ministries, agencies and statutory bodies has pointed to deficiencies in the implementation machinery as being a more important determinant of the low rate of investment than financial constraints in 1993. This is underscored by the fact that the drawdown of resources available from multilateral institutions for project financing has been particularly sluggish.”

Now that is euphemism for lack of performance. Let me read this over again:

“This is underscored by the fact that the drawdown of resources available from multilateral institutions...”

that is of course like the World Bank, the IDB and other such institutions.

“for project financing has been particularly sluggish.”

Who is responsible for that? The UNC Government? They go on to say:-

“Among the more important contributory factors are:

- (a) difficulties in fulfilling conditions precedent to first disbursement of loans and grants from multilateral sources;”

You would not believe when you heard the Member for Diego Martin West talk about how they used to expeditiously fulfil conditionalities. You would not even believe that this is a PNM government reporting; a PNM government reporting

difficulties in fulfilling conditions precedent to first disbursement of loans.  
[*Interruption*]

“(b) slow procurement of goods and services;”

Whose fault was that?

“(c) delays in securing approvals or inputs from regulatory agencies; and”

all of which were under the control of the PNM minions—all of them, whether WASA, T&TEC or whatever it was—under their control. But we still had delays in securing approvals of inputs from regulatory agencies.

“(d) projects caught up in litigation.”

They went and did all sorts of things, broke all sorts of rules. People took them to court and now they say that this is one of the causes for delay. How did the projects get into litigation if you were following the rules and the laws of Trinidad and Tobago? How did they get into litigation? Answer me.

With respect to performance, on page 6 of the *Public Sector Investment Programme 1999*, under Water and Sewerage it states:

“The \$20.6 million Interim Water Supply Project for which CDB funding has been long approved...”

note the words:

“has not progressed satisfactorily because of delays in the fulfillment of conditions prior to first disbursement.”

But you would think that the management expert from Diego Martin West was not part of that government; he was not part of that Government that could not fulfill conditions prior to first disbursement.

Let us see how they spent moneys which are allocated. I just want to give one example. The 1993 planned expenditure under Housing and Settlements amounted to \$85 million.

**Dr. Rowley:** Look your housing partner there.

**Hon. T. Sudama:** The total expenditure for 1993 is now projected at \$46.1 million. Approximately 50 per cent rate of implementation. This great Member: a great management expert from Diego Martin West could only manage 50 per cent rate of implementation. But you know we are told that this UNC Government cannot manage. Our rate of implementation for the last three years has been in excess of 75 per cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Seventy-five per cent

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rate of implementation in 1996, 1997 and 1998, that is in the record against their performance.

Let me talk about a loan, which they had concluded way back in 1993. It is called the Business Expansion and Industrial Restructuring Programme—such great managers. Hear what it says on page 5 of the 1995 *Public Sector Investment Programme*:

“The rate of implementation of the Business Expansion and Industrial Restructuring Programme has been unsatisfactory and efforts will be made in 1995 to accelerate the technical assistance component of the programme. Revised expenditure for 1994 is projected at \$4.0 million compared with an allocation of \$22.0 million.”

The sum of \$4 million expected expenditure in a whole year, when they allocated \$22 million. What is the percentage there, 20 per cent, less than 20 per cent? Less than 20 per cent rate of implementation. This is a loan from the World Bank: the same institution he talked about. I will deal with that later. World Bank, less than 20 per cent rate of implementation and they come here and talk about management.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell you that it is only when we got into power that the rate of disbursement under this Business Expansion and Industrial Restructuring Loan Programme (BEIRL) started to accelerate. Right now, we have exhausted the allocation under the BEIRL Programme, we have asked for an extension. We have so many other projects, which we can bring within the purview of this programme. This is from the World Bank. We have asked for an extension. Mr. Deputy Speaker, under their regime, for the three years that this programme was in effect, they were hardly able to—[*Interruption*] They disbursed \$4 million, this great—

I want to make this point, because I do not think that they will come back here and talk about management and the capacity to implement things again. Page 8 of the 1995 *Public Sector Investment Programme*, under Water and Sewerage states:

“After a prolonged delay attributable to the necessity to satisfy conditions precedent to loan disbursement and tardiness in carrying out procurement procedures, tenders were invited for the supply of pipelines for the CDB funded Interim Water Supply project in Tobago.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Tobago, of course, may wish to take note.

“The cost of the project has risen from \$16.0 million to \$26.0 million...”

Ten million, almost 80 per cent increase in a “one wok”. PNM management at play here. While that was the estimate—

“Expenditure on the project amounted to \$750,000 at the end of September and \$1.6 million is expected to be spent by the end of the year.”

**5.50 p.m.**

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is how the thing goes on. That is with what we have been regaled. Every day they come here and talk about drainage and flood control. This is what the review had to say:

“Inadequate maintenance in 1995...”

The UNC Government was not on the scene—

“of drainage and flood control infrastructure, stemming from budgetary constraints has given rise, cumulatively, to the need for major rehabilitation works.”

“Budgetary constraints”, so they were not giving the drainage and flood control programme any money and they allowed the accumulation of a degradation of the infrastructure in drainage. So the problems we face today are not overnight, as can be seen very clearly from this document made under their regime. This is not an overnight situation, it is their lack of performance and gross inability to get things done; their gross corruption and mismanagement, that today this is the legacy we have to face in Trinidad and Tobago, from this PNM government!

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that by now this House is fully aware of what the performance was under that regime. And they come here and talk about loan conditionalities and who is or is not competent. The Member talked a lot about the World Bank. I do not know what he knows about the World Bank to start with.

When I spoke to the press in mid-August it was in a certain context, because the question was asked with respect to the water sector rehabilitation loan and the drainage loan, which we have been negotiating for a long time. The water sector rehabilitation loan was under negotiation since 1994, under the PNM. In 1994 and 1995 they could not move a step. When we came into office we continued the negotiations and the World Bank was asking that we satisfy certain conditions. One of the conditions was that we review the tariff structure of the Water and Sewerage Authority, and we said that we would deal with that.

Another condition was that we reduce the staff of WASA, and that was an ongoing programme of staff reduction. Another condition was that we provide a

regulatory framework for the utilities, including water distribution, and we said, yes, that we would put legislation in place to do that. They also said that we must put in place or show intentions that the Water and Sewerage Authority management and its operations would be privatized, and we also went along with that. We said that in order to access this loan if we have to sign interim operating agreements with a private sector operator we would do this, in order to see if it was acceptable.

After we satisfied all the major requirements the World Bank kept shifting the goal post, as my friend from Caroni East said. They said, “Well, you will have to bring a private sector investor into WASA.” In the meantime, the utility is being run down, and there is a very poor supply of water to industrial and domestic users. This Government had to access money on the private market to deal with the urgent imperatives of rehabilitating the Water and Sewerage Authority in order to improve that utility.

When we do this and spend a lot of money on asset refurbishments, on pipeline relaying and capital infrastructure, then our relationship with any new private investor has to be different, because we now have a major investment and stake in a rehabilitated water and sewerage utility. No World Bank or anybody is going to pressure this Government and say, get into a “fire sale” and sell off the utility of WASA, get in a private sector here to run and own WASA at any cost. No World Bank is going to tell us that! We said, “No, if those are your conditions, we have to think about them, and the terms on which we deal with a private sector operator or investor have to be satisfactory to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.” Were it left to the PNM, they would have gone ahead and subjugated themselves to the World Bank in whatever terms and conditions they wanted, in the same way they subjugated themselves to the IDB, saying they will liquidate customs duties in two years and leave the agricultural sector unprotected. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is well known that the World Bank seek—although they would lend selectively—to concentrate their lending on middle and low-income countries, because they are development institutions. Even our neighbour Barbados has been graduated from World Bank lending because of their per capita income; so that is always a possibility. They will not tell you directly, “Look, I do not want to lend you, I am informally graduating you,” but they would make the conditions difficult for you to access lending. That is why in report after report they could not meet conditions for first disbursement. These

great managerial experts could not meet conditions for first disbursement. This is what the World Bank does, and this is what I said. It appears to me that this is what the World Bank is thinking in terms of lending to Trinidad and Tobago.

Despite that, we were able, earlier this year, to sign a postal sector reform loan with the World Bank, because we negotiated conditions which were acceptable to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. That is why we signed that postal sector reform programme loan.

When the World Bank came to us with the drainage programme, to which they had virtually agreed, they said, "You have to do a number of things; you have to get more and more private sector contractors involved in drainage execution works." We said, "Yes, to the extent that that is feasible, we are going to get contractors involved in the physical works in drainage, that is no problem." But they said that this loan would be promised on the extent to which, when we disburse the loan there is cost recovery.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know what "cost recovery" means? It means that those who are the beneficiaries of a drainage programme, primarily farmers and people like that, would then have to pay back. We have to recover from them; cost recovery from the beneficiaries. I argued, "Listen, these poor farmers are some of the lowest income people in the whole country,"—thanks to 34 years of PNM pressure which got them into that situation. "Where are they going to get money to meet cost recovery requirements?" "That is not possible, at least, not at this juncture."

The they said, "Another condition is that you must retrench three quarters of the people in the Drainage Division of the Ministry of Works and Transport." I told them, "Over the years there has been attrition and, today, the Drainage Division employment is at its very minimum, so to further retrench there, you do not want a Drainage Division in the country at all." We told them that if those were to be their conditions, then we would have to rethink the loan programme. The PNM could go and supinely take whatever conditions are imposed upon them, but the UNC Government is not going to do that. This is why we are telling the World Bank that we need to renegotiate proper conditions before we enter into any loan arrangement with them, particularly, when it deals with critical sectors such as water, drainage and flood control.

Then the Member talked about an IDB soft loan. I did not know where the IDB gives soft loans. Which IDB is he talking about? To start with, IDB giving soft loans—to show you how the fellow knows little about what he talks, he just talks

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for talking sake, like when a rottweiler barks, he just barks for barking sake. [Laughter] If he could tell me what window the IDB has for soft loans, I will gladly ask him to join the Government and to be our consultant. [Laughter] IDB soft loan! I want him to point me to the window of the IDB that grants soft loans. The most the IDB would do is give a few thousand dollars for a grant for a pre-study of a project sector or whatever. But he getting IDB soft loan! When he was in government, I do not know why he did not access a soft loan for the agricultural sector. [Crosstalk]

Just for the record, I want to state, I have spoken about the Business Expansion and Industrial Restructuring Loan saddled on us from 1993 by the PNM government which, when we inherited it, we looked at the stiff conditionalities. That is why they could hardly draw down any money on that loan.

Then we had another loan called the Investment Sector Reform Loan, which was supposed to reform the investment climate in Trinidad and Tobago to facilitate both domestic and foreign investment. And they talk about performance! That loan was signed in 1993, and in that year they were able to draw down the first tranche of \$22 million. It was a \$75 million loan. For the three years that they were in office, they could not draw down a penny on that loan, simply because they were unable to meet the conditions for the second tranche. Of course, if you did not have a second tranche draw down, you could not have third tranche drawdown. We went in and after a year or so, we met the conditions to draw down the second tranche of the Investment Sector Reform Programme Loan, and just earlier this year we satisfied the conditions to draw down the third tranche, which they could not do in the three years since the loan was signed, and they were thrown out of office.

I did not want to participate in this debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but when you hear the rubbish, nonsense, foolishness, bombast and bravado of this Member for Diego Martin West, I had to get up and respond a bit. One has to get up and respond to the nonsense that is spouted week after week in this Chamber; as if he is some big expert on loan financing, performance and implementation. He is a big expert, but Manning did not want to see him in 1991 and 1995. He was such a big expert that Manning did not want him too near. It took Manning three weeks to appoint him, and then he gave him a ministry that he felt was not an important one in the PNM scheme of things. That is how he got that ministry.

### **6.05 p.m.**

Well, the Member for San Fernando East looked at his performance after that, the management expert *par excellence*, and when he could not get his way with



Mr. Manning, he decided to challenge the Member for San Fernando East. Well, you know, some people have delusions and some people have delusions of grandeur. I do not know into which category the Member for Diego Martin West falls; delusions of grandeur of his power and the sound of his bark and so forth, but of course when it was put to the test his delusions were exposed, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As I said, I do not want to go on for too long but I want to raise an issue because it is like a cancer eating away at the politics. We come here week after week and are faced with two elements of the propaganda. The first is that this Government is corrupt and everything we do is charged with corruption and so on and so forth. They even tried to bring corruption into the textbook issue. This is why I made it a point of duty here this afternoon to read out the procedures we followed in the acquisition of textbooks having met all the World Bank conditions and the procurement procedures and so forth. They say that whatever is done there is some element of corruption and they feel that once they create an aura of corruption, that is going to pitchfork them into office. That is one of their assumptions.

The other assumption is that in order to galvanize their core support in whatever part of the country they may be, they say this Government is engaging in racial discrimination. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a point beyond which one really cannot carry this argument simply because it is going to have effects on the body politic and on society which is going to create a divisiveness in this society that it has never seen before. Never before in the history of this country has the charge of racial discrimination been made with such vehemence as this PNM Opposition makes.

When one looks at our pattern of expenditure in this country, one will see that we have spent more money and more of government resources in PNM constituencies than we have spent in our own traditional support areas. Those are the facts, whether it is for the building and repair of schools—[*Interruption*]

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

*Motion made,* That the speaking time of the hon. Member be extended by 30 minutes [*Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. T. Sudama:** Of course, you know, however, when they cannot take the jamming—[*Interruption*] [*Interruption*] The Member is nonentity. You are trying to challenge the Minister of Finance. Every time that hon. Member gets up in this

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House it is as though he is some expert in finance, but when he was there under the PNM—[*Interruption*]—Yes, that is why he gave away BWIA. That is the best deal he ever made, this great expert in finance. When he was in the government in the Ministry of Finance he could not rise above a certain level but he was a great expert, and when he came into government under Patrick Manning he could not rise above a certain level. So all I could call him is a submerged expert [*Laughter*] because he cannot rise too far. He is always being submerged by something, a submerged expert in finance. The hon. Member comes here week after week to regale this House about his so-called knowledge of finance.

I was on this issue because it is a serious issue and I will tell you how the thing works out. The evidence is there. The Minister of Local Government built more roads in the East/West Corridor in PNM areas than he built anywhere else in this country. The Minister of Works and Transport was on the same scene. This UNC Government provided water in Laventille, an area which never saw water under 34 years of PNM rule. The Minister with responsibility for the environment is here.

We have letters from Point Fortin saying that under the PNM they could not see a drop of water but since the UNC has come into power, we have sent water into Point Fortin, La Brea and all those areas which had never seen water under 34 years of PNM rule. Despite all that, they come here to talk about discrimination. It is like one of these wind-up toys that one cranks up, and when they come to this Parliament it is either corruption or discrimination, discrimination or corruption. They alternate it, you know, discrimination/corruption. It is like a wind-up toy that we are faced with every day in this Parliament.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we built and refurbished more schools in the PNM areas than we did in UNC areas. The records are there. In the report of the Ministry of Education in our Public Sector Investment Programme the records are there. They still come here and cry discrimination. We are building health centres and upgrading the health facilities in many PNM areas yet, again, they come here to cry discrimination. However, what really gets me is this, because they try to put you in a catch-22 situation. When, in fact, they do acknowledge that a UNC Government is devoting resources in PNM areas they say, “Ah, you see, they want to buy PNM supporters. They want to bribe and they want to buy PNM supporters”.

Now resources are devoted in their areas and the people acknowledge that they are getting a better deal, their facilities are being improved, the state of the environment is being improved and so forth they say, “You see, the UNC wants to buy you out, but do not sell your soul, you know. They want to buy you”. When

one sees all these commentators, from Ryan come down, in the press and how they regaled after the fact that they won a few more seats at the electoral level they say, "The PNM supporters are not for sale". But, you see, the conundrum is this. When one does things in their areas and their supporters benefit, they say, "Listen, they are trying to buy you. The UNC is trying to buy you". When nothing is done in their areas they cry discrimination.

How do you win? This is a no-win situation according to their mentality. If you do, you are buying; if you do not do, you are discriminating. What could you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, advise should be done in such a situation where we have a plural society with a certain historical pattern of voting in Trinidad and Tobago? The UNC did not create that pattern of voting, we inherited it. We are trying to do something about the political, ethnic and cultural cleavages in Trinidad and Tobago society. We are trying to create bridges. We are trying to build trust and confidence in people who have not supported us. When you do that, well, you are trying to buy them. You are trying to buy their souls.

They were in power for 34 long years and could not give a holiday to the Baptists. We came here and within a matter of two years [*Desk thumping*] gave the Baptists a holiday in this country; Baptists who by and large, do not support this Government. We gave them a holiday because this is what they wanted. We tried to bring them into the fold because we are creating an inclusive society in Trinidad and Tobago. This is what we did. People are known not by what they say but what they do. For 34 long years the Orisas could not get their marriages recognized in this country. We, a UNC Government, have passed a law to recognize marriages under the Orisa religion. [*Desk thumping*] But you know, every time you do something, in the face of the evidence, it is discrimination. We have some hidden agenda behind whatever we do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can only say on behalf of the Government that this Government will do what it has to do. This Government will carry out its mandate. This Government will do to all citizens without fear or favour, affection or ill-will. We have taken that oath and that is the way this Government will carry on. It is not a question of votes; we will do it regardless. If we feel that it is necessary to carry out the programme in which we are engaged of creating a uniform society, a programme of building national unity in Trinidad and Tobago, then this Government will do it regardless of the consequences. That is what we are committed to.

All the disunifiers in this country, they are there. That Member for Laventille East/Morvant, have you found the deed yet? Week after week the Member writes

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in that newspaper. What do they call it? [*Interruption*] The *Express*. Some of these newspapers I do not really read because they pollute the minds. I do not really read it but sometimes I see his photograph appearing there. When I flip through I see a page there, week after week, writing articles about and promoting divisiveness in the society. This is what is told to me by other people who read the articles, but I would not read them. You know I would not waste my time. I have better things to do than to read the rubbish that you write in some *Express* newspaper. However, they are all guilty of it on the other side.

I ask hon. Members today, when you see what we have done as the UNC Government, when you see our performance over the years, when you see that we have gone out there and taken bold measures in the interest of the people of this country, when you see, as I pointed out earlier this afternoon, this Government had the courage to promise a reduction in the price of primary school textbooks to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and to do it despite all the opposition that was engineered by the PNM, know that we went ahead and did those things because we felt they were the right things to do.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just wanted to say this afternoon I have answered their foolish argument about incompetence and nonperformance and so forth. These arguments coming from the Member for Diego Martin East, he is the last man who should talk about competence and performance. He should be happy that there is a PNM public sector to find something for him to do, because if he had to decide to find something in the private sector, all now he would be still looking for what—big management expert. Secondly, I have dealt with that issue of performance of this Government and what we have done. We have done—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order, order!

**Hon. T. Sudama:** We have dealt with the performance of this Government and all these loans which are like millstones around the neck of this Government which they entered into, like the Investment Sector Loan and the Business Expansion and Industrial Sector Loan. We have put that behind us. We will negotiate loans in this country which we feel are in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We will not go into any negotiation because a multilateral institution wants to pressure us into accepting a loan. We are not going to do that.

**6.20 p.m.**

This is why we have been doing well. They say how some people believe that the Government is performing and behaving well. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the records are there to show.

This Government is committed to doing what it is duty bound to do, to implementing its mandates and, by the will of God, we shall do so and do so successfully.

Thank you.

**Mr. Colm Imbert** (*Diego Martin East*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am always amazed at the ability of the Member for Oropouche to twist the truth. I have sat in this House since 1991 and I recall in either 1992 or 1993 the Member reading from a CSO report for 1993 and claiming in this Parliament that it was the CSO report for 1994. I wondered how, in all conscience, an hon. Member could do such a dishonest thing.

**Mr. Sudama:** Will you give way?

**Mr. C. Imbert:** No. I am not giving way. Sit!

**Mr. Sudama:** A point of order.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The Member has not given way.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Today, another classic example—Mr. Deputy Speaker, would you quiet down the Member for Oropouche, he is mumbling.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Ignore him.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Ignore him, thank you. *[Interruption]* Yes, he has to go home, because he is not telling truths. I will prove that the Member for Oropouche—*[Words expunged]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member for Diego Martin East, you know quite well that is not a term that we use: offensive behavior, words and language about Members in the Chamber. If you make yourself available to Standing Orders 36(1) to (10), it will guide you correctly. That has to be expunged from the record.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Okay, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he is a purveyor of falsehoods. You know, we heard the Member in his weak and feeble attempt to deal with the substantive issues raised by the Members for Diego Martin West and Central; the substantive issues that this UNC administration does not wish to take up loans from the multilateral institutions that are at concessionary rates and will save this country hundreds of millions of dollars in interest. The UNC administration does not want to take up these loans because under the IDB and the World Bank conditions you cannot thief! That is what is going on. In his weak and feeble reply, the Member for Oropouche told the following untruths, and I took notes.

The IDB does not grant soft loans—and we heard a little falsetto in the back, “Who tell you the IDB does grant soft loans?” A soft whining tone, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the finance committee meeting, I asked the Minister to give me the rates of interest on existing loans. I did it for a reason. Because those jokers on that side come here and talk a pack of errant nonsense and they feel nobody would check the information. If the little falsetto voice had checked the document before us today and looked at the penultimate page, he would have seen, “Interest on foreign loans, national development loan, IDB—interest rate, 4.9 per cent! If he would flip to the page before, without breaking into a falsetto, he would see the interest on floating rate bonds, 12 per cent, 11 per cent, and 10.5 per cent. If he would go through the rest of this page—I know they do not read, you know—the loan from the Federal Republic of Germany, 7 per cent; CDB loan  $7\frac{3}{4}$  per cent; U.S. \$125 million loan,  $9\frac{3}{4}$  per cent; Bank of Japan Loan, US prime, which is somewhere between 7 and 8 per cent. The IDB, 4.9 per cent! That is a soft loan, if you did not know. And he was the senior economist in the Ministry of Finance! He ought to know!

**Mr. D. Singh:** You are not costing the conditionalities, man.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** I have been in this House now for nearly eight years and I continue to be amazed at the untruths that the Member for Oropouche will just get up in this House and say, things like, “Who told you IDB does grant soft loans?” and “ramajay”, but he run away though, because he knows what I am coming with.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the other issue that we need to deal with is this whole question—you see, if you had to borrow on the local market at 12 per cent, let me inform those Members who want to know, and I know some of the non-economists want to know. The economists know, you know. The Member for St. Joseph knows. The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre knows, but he just would not say. But some of them want to know.

If you borrow \$500 million at an interest rate of 12 per cent, the interest is \$60 million a year. If you borrow \$500 million at 5 per cent, the interest is \$25 million. The country saves \$35 million on a loan of \$500 million from the IDB, per year! Out of five to ten years, one is talking about hundreds of millions of dollars in interest, and that is one loan I am talking about! But you see, they prefer to give away billions of dollars of taxpayers’ money in paying 12 per cent interest on the local market, when they could get 5 per cent from IDB. They prefer to give away billions of dollars of poor people’s money because they do not want to subject themselves to the conditions and scrutiny of the IDB and the World Bank,

because they cannot thief under the World Bank. That is what it is all about. That is what is going on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the other issue is that of the UNC spending more money in PNM areas. I remember the Member for Arouca North raising an issue in the last budget about a virement, an expenditure on a certain number of roads—Local Government again—and out of 100 roads, 99 were in UNC areas.

**Mr. Hinds:** I remember.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** You remember.

**Dr. Rowley:** It was 127.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Sorry, 127, and 126 were in UNC areas! Sixteen million dollars or something like that. It is on record in this Parliament. That was last year. Now, this year, \$5.5 million vired—*[Interruption]* Local Government, over \$5 million of the \$5.5 million spent in UNC areas. And a little pittance spent in PNM areas. He ran up in Maryland—“ramajay”, “gallery”, wining, doing the “Dhanraj”, whatever the dance—and built a road on red sand or whatever it is he did; the road collapsed. The road stood up for election and it collapsed about a month after election. The whole road fell away.

You know, in Diego Martin there is the Sierra Leone Road. There has been a problem with that road with a water main. We asked the Minister of Works and Transport why he was not paving that road. He said that WASA has to fix the water main first. But this bright Minister of Local Government, two weeks before the local election, he and the Minister of Misinformation parachute out of the sky on the road and said, “Oh, my God! We have to fix this road”; two weeks before election. Do you know there are leaks on the road again, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I drove on the road yesterday, I drove on it this morning, and I drove in water. The pipes are leaking again. The road is destroyed again. You know, we told them to fix the pipes first. Stop wasting taxpayers’ money. It lasted for five weeks and the pipes are leaking again and the road “mash up” again. It is a disgrace!

Now, the other issue I need to deal with, before I go into the substantive before the House—let me deal with some of the nonsense spoken by the Member for Oropouche, that the UNC started construction of a boys’ school in Carenage, to be finished in 1999. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the contract went out for bids in 1995 before the general election, bids were received, recommendation was made for an award. We came here in 1996 and asked, “What is going on with the Carenage Boys’ School”? Because we knew that drawings had been completed, tenders had been invited and so forth. In 1996, the answer was that there were no drawings, no

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plans were ever done, so the school could not be built. A complete untruth. The answer in 1997 was that they had delays in the project management and procurement process so they could not do the school. In 1998, they had no money. We are in 1999, a school that should have been completed in 1996, and he has discriminated against the children of Carenage for four years, and he is boldfaced enough to come and say that the UNC is giving a school to the children of Carenage. For four years, children cannot go to school in Carenage because of the UNC, because it is a PNM area.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in one breath he says that the PNM did nothing about the water sector/drainage loan. Ten minutes later he said that in 1995 the PNM had already agreed to all the terms and conditions for the water sector loan. Ten minutes later! And then he goes on to tell untruths about the conditions of the drainage loan. You see, he cannot remember. I think he is suffering from Alzheimer's, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I took notes here. He said that we had agreed to retrench three-quarters of the people in the Drainage Division; we had agreed to charge farmers for the drainage loan. He is actually saying that he did not say that. It is on *Hansard*. So in one breath he says the PNM did nothing, and 10 minutes later he said we agreed that poor farmers must pay for drainage infrastructure, we agreed to lay off everybody in the Drainage Division.

For four years, what have they done? All they have done is flood Chaguanas, Caroni, Couva, Port of Spain, Morvant, Sangre Grande, Mayaro, Champs Fleurs, and Aranguez. I mean, flood on the main road, Mr. Deputy Speaker! First time in 100 years the Main Road flood! I tell you. I saw people on Charlotte Street climbing wall. For four years this UNC administration cannot do anything. Nothing.

This UNC administration, that Member for Oropouche, will come into this House and put deliberate untruths on the record, like the interest for IDB loans. What nonsense! It is an absurdity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us deal with the school books issue, that is such a source of pride and joy to the Member for Oropouche. I have noticed they have awarded contracts for \$8 million for publishing of books. You see, it is all about money! When you have two books recommended by Prof. Ramchand, the first person—*[Interruption]*

I will tell you who he is. The first Trinidadian to get a personal chair in West Indian literature at the University of the West Indies. *[Desk thumping]* Prof. Kenneth Ramchand; that is who he is. A personal professorship for those of little education on the other side who do not know. There are about three personal chairs in the entire University of the West Indies on all the campuses.



**6.35 p.m.**

It is the most difficult thing to get and the Member for Tobago East could tell you about that. What is the significance of a personal chair? The man is distinguished in academic and Prof. Ramchand's Committee recommended two books. Take or pick book No. 1 or pick book No. 2. One book costs \$69.00 and the other \$49.00.

So the parent of the poor child could go in the bookstore, both books meeting the curriculum needs of the schools and dealing with the academic requirements of the child. You can buy the \$49.00 book or the \$69.00 book if you want but not under this UNC administration. They have scratched the \$49.00 book and you must buy the \$69.00 book. They are putting \$20.00 more in the pocket of some partner and we are talking about hundred of thousands of books—millions of dollars in corruption. That is what it is all about.

The reason they went with this one-book matter is that their friends and family would get the contracts. [*Desk thumping*] That is what it is all about and they cannot back track—

**Dr. Rowley:** And they are lying on the World Bank.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** —and telling untruths on the World Bank. That is why the World Bank had to get them to correct it and a senior public servant in the Ministry of Education had to come out and issue an apology—

**Dr. Rowley:** To the World Bank.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** —and correction to the World Bank and then they fired him and send him home—he gone! Because under this UNC administration, anybody who speaks the truth must be fired or disciplined, that is how they operate. [*Desk thumping*] You come out and speak the truth—go home, go home. That is Government UNC style.

The Member for Oropouche was also talking arrant nonsense in here about the agricultural sector, nonsense! Look at the *Central Bank Economic Bulletin*, May 1999. Sugar production in 1994, 169,000 tonnes; sugar production in 1998, 100,000 tonnes, a decline of 50 per cent. Let us go to cocoa, 1,488,000 kgs in 1994; 1,270,000 kgs in 1998, a decline. Coffee 1,014,000 kgs in 1994; 367,000 kgs in 1998. Mr. Deputy Speaker look at that, coffee declined under this UNC—these brilliant brainy men over there—from 1,000,000 kgs of coffee in 1994—that is Trinidad and Tobago production—to 367,000 kgs a decline of 65 per cent under that brilliant Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. Citrus from

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10,000,000 kgs to 7,999,000 kgs. Every economic indicator in the agricultural sector is down—every single one is down.

Look at employment in the agricultural sector, down! Caroni production, down! That Minister will go down in history as the Minister who was responsible for the lowest production in sugar in the past 20 years in Trinidad and Tobago; [*Desk thumping*] that is that performing UNC administration—

**Dr. Rowley:** They lied about the tariff.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** —in order to try to deflect the criticism on this side. Again, the Member for Oropouche—a stranger to the truth—talks about the agricultural loan under the PNM: that we were removing protection from farmers and allowing foreign competition.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know what went on? They had a system of negative listing that was replaced by tariffs. Do you know what is the import duty on chicken parts? One hundred and ten per cent. That is the duty on chicken parts and you are telling us that our farmers want more protection than that! That was under the PNM system of replacement of negative listing with tariffs; the duty and tariff on imported chicken parts is 110 per cent.

**Dr. Rowley:** Sugar, sugar.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, sugar is negative listed. So according to the Member for Oropouche, our farmers need more than a tariff of 110 per cent to be put on foreign chicken to compete—he is promoting inefficiency, that is what he wants—put 200, 300 or 400 per cent. That is management UNC style. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know it is effective. The replacement of negative listing with tariffs is effective. It is working. Which farmer in Trinidad and Tobago is suffering because the Minister cannot deal with a tariff of 110 per cent, you tell me. [*Interruption*].

**Dr. Mohammed:** What about cement? [*Interruption*]

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, you see the nonsense. We are talking here about agricultural commodities and he is asking me about cement. The Minister grows, eat and process cement. [*Laughter*]

**Dr. Rowley:** And he is the Minister of Agriculture.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** I now understand how they think. What is going on in this country is that the entire economic and financial system is totally out of control.

When one looks at the responses to questions to the Minister of Finance by the Member for Diego Martin Central in finance committee, the Member enquired what was the original sum in respect of the loan facility and procurement of vehicles and equipment. The response was that the original sum was \$51 million, which was subsequently increased to \$106 million.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you see what is going on in Trinidad and Tobago today. Original loan for the Cherokee jeeps and Mercedes Benz fire tenders, \$50 million and now it is \$106 million. And it is two sisters. They feel that people do not know. One sister is selling Cherokee and the other the fire truck and they feel that people do not know; and both of them are friends. They do not know that one sister is selling Cherokee jeeps and the other Mercedes Benz, fire tender—you know the thing with the ladder, right! They think people do not know what is going on in Trinidad and Tobago. Two sisters in one family and the third one in NP. If they want to know what I am talking about, the sister is in NP, okay—that is the third one—and they are friends with all of them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me ask the Minister to explain why the loan went from \$51 million to 106 million. I just want to know, that is for the Cherokee jeeps—and the same thing I just said. You see, they do not know what is going on—if you are in your documents. I asked the Minister to state, what were the cost variations and so on and he said an increase in the cost of equipment. What equipment is this Minister talking about? Is that the jeeps or the fire trucks? And the inclusion of additional equipment. What is he talking about? I would like to know.

You know, the Minister of Finance hardly ever answers any direct questions in this House. You put a straight question to him and he does not answer. Well this is a direct question. What does this mean, an increase in the cost of what equipment? Was it that the Cherokee jeeps cost more money or the fire tenders? Right! And the inclusion of additional equipment, what is he talking about? I want to ask the Minister to please tell me, okay. I want to know *[Interruption]* well exactly. You have to wonder about the individuals you are dealing with, they have floating contracts. It is like a floating rate loan—it floats. *[Laughter]*. It starts at 50 and it goes to 70 and so on. *[Interruption]* That does not go down, it floats; it is always going up. I would really like the Minister to answer that question. Please answer that question.

The other matter that one looks at is the answers. The statements made by the Minister of Planning are really not accurate. We have asked the meaning of the protracted nature of the procurement process for a programme in the Ministry of

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Agriculture, that is the Agricultural Sector Technical Assistant Programme and here is the answer.

The selection process started in late 1998. Now, my memory tells me that the UNC came into power in November, 1995—I think so. So what happened between November, 1995 and late 1998? What was the Minister doing apart from killing all the cane in Caroni with froghopper *et cetera*, and brought in some foreign-used rice mill that never worked.

**6.45 p.m.**

Why did the selection process start in 1998? What happened in those three years?

**Hon. Member:** It is the PNM's fault.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Is it the PNM's fault that the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources took three years before he began the process of procurement for consultants? One thing for which I am happy and I must compliment the public servants for is giving us the truth. We asked some questions and we got truthful answers from the public servants. If it were coming from somewhere else we know we were not going to get a truthful answer. It is little wonder—the Minister of Agriculture started his procurement process for consultants three years after he was supposed to—he cannot draw down on the loan.

When we look at some of the other answers like the Cipriani Labour College, the Ministry of Works and Transport was commissioned to undertake preliminary designs to the Cipriani Labour College expansion in early 1998, and this is under the public relations man, the Minister of Works and Transport. It was finished in June 1999. It took 15 months to complete designs, to put an “outhouse” in the Cipriani Labour College. Fifteen months to add on two rooms to the Cipriani Labour College, that is delivery UNC style, 15 months. *[Interruption]*

It is here, and I hear a falsetto piping up “mischievous, mischievous”.

The Ministry of Works and Transport was commissioned to undertake preliminary architectural designs which commenced in early 1998 and were completed in June 1999. Fifteen months to do some drawdown that could be done in 15 days. That is delivery UNC style and from then to now they cannot do anything.

Could the Minister of Finance explain the nature of the delays encountered in finalizing the project management contract for the refurbishment of the National Archives? The reply given was that the Ministry of Culture and Gender Affairs is

the implementing agency for this project, however, “this ministry does not have the technical capacity to implement the works and relies on other institutions for assistance.”

“Yuh” ever hear more? It is pass the buck. You ask them why the National Archives has not been built or upgraded. The Ministry of Culture and Gender Affairs does not have the ability, so it depends on other institutions. What other institutions? The Ministry of Works and Transport, Ministry of Local Government, and NIPDEC? These are the other institutions. Who is in charge of these institutions? The UNC. Do you know what this answer is saying? Because the Ministry of Culture has to depend on all the other ministries of government under the UNC, they cannot do the work, they have to rely on other institutions. It is nonsense.

Listen to this. Could the Minister of Finance explain the reason for the delays in commissioning an environmental impact assessment with respect to the food park programme?

“The lands in Debe are owned by Caroni (1975) Limited, the change in use requires the conduct of an EIA. Caroni (1975) Limited was contracted to conduct the EIA.”

They talked from April to August, this brilliant UNC administration. A little piece of flat land. It took nearly five months to do an EIA.

Asked whether the Minister could explain the delay in the construction of the administrative complex, the answer was: in addition to the delay at the early stages, there were delays in the preparation and execution of the project management contract.

What is this really saying?

Asked whether the Minister could explain the low expenditure in respect of the institutional strengthening of the Property Management Division, the reply was that the project involved the hiring of nine personnel, the process was unavoidably lengthy. It started in October 1998 and concluded in April 1999. Eight months to hire seven persons. That is implementation rate “eh”? Transparency.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you go through this whole matter, it is an admission of total failure and incompetence. As I said, the weak and feeble reply of the Member for Oropouche. Imagine the Member for Oropouche who wrote a diatribe in the *Daily Express* week after week after week, published a book with his diatribe and the whole thing was focussed on how many persons of a

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particular ethnic group are employed in the public service and how many are not, and every single week you have to look at this diatribe. Fifteen years of diatribe from the hon. Member for Oropouche about how many persons of a certain ethnic group are hired in this division and how many in that division and giving statistics and all sorts of things. And the Member for Oropouche would have the audacity to say at no time—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member for La Brea, the Member is asking if you could tone it down.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** The Member for Oropouche would have the audacity to say that at no time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago has any government been under so much accusation and attack with regard to racial discrimination. Fifteen years he writing “yuh” know, about carrying on, beating up, getting on, all “kinda ting”. I would ask hon. Members, when they get up in this House to say something sensible.

We have a healthy democracy in Trinidad and Tobago and people are entitled to express their opinions and they cannot take it. That is what is going on. You see, it is very easy when you are in Opposition and you are one of them to get up and make all kinds of wild statements, but when you are in Government and people are confronting you with the truth—like the fella they fired from the Ministry of Education—and exposing its corruption, its inequities, its discriminatory tendencies and incompetence, their thin skin comes out and it is seen from the Prime Minister down.

One thing I have noticed since the Local Government Election is that we are now dealing with a lame-duck Government and, for those who do not know, a lame-duck Government is one that cannot do anything right. No matter what it does, it cannot do anything right because it would panic, get frustrated, and worry about losing the next election so it would make rash decisions. And we are looking at a lame-duck Government.

Look at the things this administration has done during the several weeks since the Parliament was on recess. Look at the nonsense it did at the Queen’s Park Savannah. Nonsense! “Yuh” have Ministers backing down, “I ‘doh’ know ‘nutten’ ‘bout’ that.” When they ask the Minister of Finance he say, “Me, I ‘doh’ know ‘nutten’ ‘bout’ that; the Minister of Culture and Gender Affairs: “Not me, I ‘doh’ know nothing. They ask the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources he says; “Not me, they ‘ain’t’ talk to me.” It is a lame-duck Government. It is on a down, it is sliding.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am happy for that because it means it will continue to go down and down and down. Look at the National Awards. Look what they do with our Trinity Cross. They gave it to a foreigner and cannot say why and everybody vex. Every group in the country, no matter what creed, race or social strata they belong to. Everybody vex. Our supporters vex; their supporters vex; Hindus vex; Muslims vex; Christians vex. Everybody vex. Cabinet Ministers and all vex. This lame-duck Government.

The Member for Diego Martin Central has asked about the deficit that is reported in the Central Bank document and I would like the Minister to tell us what is really going on. The Minister has come to this House and has spoken about surpluses and Central Bank is reporting deficits. As I said, this Minister hardly ever answers a straight question. I am asking another straight question.

What happened to the surpluses that he reported in this House in his various budget presentations, and are the deficits reported in the Central Bank's documents true, or is it that the Central Bank is issuing false and misleading data? That is a straight question and it is relevant to this debate.

The other question about which I have been reminding you: I want to know about this matter with the Cherokee Jeeps and the fire equipment. How come it went from \$51 million to \$106 million? Give us some more information please. Have some of the beneficiaries of that largesse been given more money? I just want to know. I want the Minister to deal with the issues that the Member for Diego Martin Central raised about the deficits. I want him to deal with that issue. If he does not deal with anything else, well, no big thing. It is not unexpected, but deal with these issues, these are real issues because the people are getting fed up with this blatant corruption, this triad. Every day you read in the newspapers that they get another contract, and now we are reading that the Cherokee jeep contract has gone up again, and the statistics are misleading. We need to know and I am urging the Minister for once to answer a straight question in this Parliament.

Thank you.

**Miss Pamela Nicholson** (*Tobago West*) Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like you to deal comprehensively with the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre for me please, because I would not like to deal with him in the way he should be dealt with. He is very absurd and rude and he must not disturb representatives in the House.

**Mr. D. Singh:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I need protection—*[Inaudible]* *[Words Expunged]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, the statement you just made is offensive to the Member for Tobago West, I would have to ask that it be expunged from the record. Please do not make offensive remarks about Members. She has asked for protection, and she was not offensive in her asking and I think if you are doing anything to offend her, it would be wise not to do so at all.

**7.00 p.m.**

**Miss P. Nicholson:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to give a different drift to the discourse this evening because I believe that my colleagues on this side gave a thorough analysis of what is taking place as far as this Bill is concerned. I am going to—[*Interruption*] Yes I am going to name the Bill, leave me alone.

“The Bill seeks to supplement and vary the appropriation provided for by the Appropriation Act, 1998/1999 and to authorize the utilization of any sums accruing from a reduction in expenditure under certain Heads of Expenditure for the purpose of meeting any liability incurred through the increase in expenditure under other Heads.”

I am using a different approach because, if I remember carefully, on Wednesday, I raised some very important questions to the Minister of Finance here. I told the Minister of Finance that when you went through the documents you had to ask yourself the question whether Tobago is a part of the country or the unitary state called Trinidad and Tobago. That was the basis that I used to analyze my case. I said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I pointed out to him on Wednesday, that his information was incorrect. When you go through the appropriation documents and certain weaknesses are observed as appropriation and variation from the Tobago House of Assembly, the Opposition members are right to say that people corrupt and people are dealing in nepotism and all those kinds of questions.

I raised the question that in Tobago you have a situation—I am raising it again—about transparency and accountability. I am not blaming anybody in Tobago; I am blaming the Minister of Finance and the Government, because the Tobago House of Assembly Act says that a particular financial regulation should be in operation in Tobago. I would like to quote, Sir, section 52 of the Tobago House of Assembly Act 1996. It says:

“Within two months of the coming into force of this Act, the Assembly shall, subject to the approval of the President, make such Financial Rules as are necessary for the proper management of its finances, and such Rules shall, when made, be laid in Parliament.”



The Assembly produced their documents to the Government and it has been almost four years and the financial rules that should be prepared to guide the Tobago House of Assembly have not reached the Parliament. I raised a question in this House about the financial rules and the Minister pointed out to me that—this was his reply—the Tobago House of Assembly should function in a particular way. He said:

“The financial regulations in operation in the Tobago House of Assembly, to ensure accountability, transparency and the prevention of corruption, derived from the legislation governing the public sector of Trinidad and Tobago of which the Tobago House of Assembly is part.

Section 78(2) of the Tobago House of Assembly Act, 1976 makes provision for the Tobago House of Assembly financial rules 1993 to remain in force and apply to the Assembly with such modifications as are necessary for conformity with the Act until such time as financial rules made under section 52 of the Act come into force.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a situation in Tobago right now where scholarships are being given out in Tobago, and we are very happy. We are very pleased for our people to get scores of scholarships. But of course, we will like these scholarships to be given out with a certain structure. Firstly, you should advertise and, secondly, there should be interviews. When you advertise, all of Tobago and Trinidad will see the advertisement and everybody in the 50,000 fold in Tobago would be able to apply for them. We do not want a situation where politicians are using public funds, taxpayers' money, to promulgate or galvanize themselves politically in the country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have a document here coming out of a question that was asked in the Tobago House of Assembly, for the Chief Secretary to tell the Tobago House of Assembly about the scholarships. In this document one will see that \$17 million was given out in scholarships in Tobago in this period: the 1998/1999 financial year. The sum of \$17 million was given out in scholarships; approximately 101 scholarships.

When I looked at the documents given to us by the Ministry of Finance, I searched and investigated it thoroughly. The Tobago House of Assembly, in the estimates of 1998/1999, did not receive any money for scholarships—or they do not have a scholarship fund—in that document showing that the Tobago House of Assembly got \$5 million or \$2 million for scholarship or if they vired and made up and got to the \$17 million. What attracted my interest to that is when I looked

at the document I saw where, I think it is the personnel division in Trinidad—was given \$1 million more on their \$2 million for scholarships in the country.  
[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** For Trinidad or Tobago?

**Miss P. Nicholson:** That was for Trinidad and Tobago, the sum of \$3 million. They had approximately \$2 million before. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was approximately \$2 million. They were given another million to meet the needs of the scholarships that were given out in the country. When I saw that I said to myself that I should go through the document. I went through the document and I did not see anything showing the \$17 million. One does not know where the funds came from, for the scholarships: if they asked the Minister for \$17 million and he sent it for them, or if some supplementary business was done quietly. I do not know. We want to know!

**7.10 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, that is why I am congratulating the Chief Secretary, because if the Government and the Ministry of Finance recognized the Tobago House of Assembly as they should, at least, by now the Minister should have spent some time with certain members of his staff to assist the THA in putting a financial structure in place, we would not have had this problem. [*Desk thumping*] This is important. If this happened between Trinidad and Tobago, one can imagine how much is left out down here. That is why I think the Member for Diego Martin Central spoke about the statements made by the Central Bank. He spoke about the gaps identified in the reports on our finances. I consider it to be very important.

I saw that the Personnel Department was being given an increase of \$1 million. They got \$2,850,00 and they were given another \$1 million, and the sum \$17 million has been given in Tobago scholarships, but that sum is not showed here. My question is: does the Tobago House of Assembly report to the Ministry of Finance? The money is given quarterly, *en bloc*, my question to the Minister of Finance is: does he receive a report from the THA as to how the money was spent, how they vired and that kind of thing, before he gives the next bloc vote? Is anybody monitoring the THA's spending? He should now be putting the structure down and monitoring to see that it is followed.

What is the role of the Auditor General in this country? I was told that the Minister of Finance could instruct the Auditor General to investigate finances anywhere, if he gets complaints. That used to be my daily and weekly complaint. I am still complaining, but nothing has been done. That is why Tobago must

complain, especially when we are so important in the Government sitting here. No recognition, and that is why the Chief Secretary said, and I am quoting from his speech:

“I am forced again to report that the relationship between Tobago and Trinidad continues to deteriorate, due mainly to the incompetence and evident lack of goodwill of the Government in Port of Spain.” *[Interruption]*

I am doing this deliberately—the Government has not responded. I am doing this deliberately because there is need for response from the Central Government re: Tobago’s case. *[Desk thumping]*.

Mr. Speaker, I support the Chief Secretary strenuously here because the Government is non-caring, insensitive and nonchalant about what is going on there. Tobago could bail out if they want, that is the side I do not support. I do not support the secessionist line, but I support some of the statements he is making about the relationship.

The Act gives a lot of room for the Tobago House of Assembly to have meetings, to be negotiating, to have dialogue with the Government, Prime Minister and all the ministers. You must have that leadership quality. If the Tobago representative—*[Interruption]* I would not worry with the Member for Arima. Mr. Speaker, the point I am making is that this Act gives a lot of room where they can negotiate, consult and so on. The position has reached a thin line now, and I said today I am going to raise my case and also to open up the Tobago question to all of them sitting on that side, because Tobago is responsible for them being seated there. If ever there is a government that should pay extra attention to Tobago, it is the Panday Government.

The first time the Minister of Finance came to Tobago officially was after my departure from that Government—that is why he could be pointing there—he went on a tour with the Chief Secretary and his team to visit his roads, those roads that if they were \$11 million, \$40 million was spent already. Mr. Speaker, do you know what his statement was? “Excellent work is being done; I do not know what Pam wants; I do not know what the Minister for Tobago West is talking about, I find “yuh” work looking good.” The whole of Tobago knows that there are certain problems, but he finds everything is good. But he never paid attention to what he should, that is, putting down a financial structure in Tobago, and coming here with the financial regulations.

I am sure he is not coming back here after the election next year. I am sure he is not coming back here, so he does not care. Is he going to take a whole four or five years to come to the House with the regulations? That is ineptitude!

He promised me very sincerely that he would bring the answers, up to now I have not heard from him. Seventeen million dollars, I have it here. How many people gone on premed? About 11 people are going on premed studies to St. George's University, 10 persons are going to Grenada, one person is going to the United States, so you have some \$701,511.30 on the 11 persons, and this is 100 and change—*[Interruption]*—I will give you after. There are A' level students who can go to the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and they have not gotten this, but people with O'levels have gone to St. George's University. That is what I am talking about. If the Minister was doing his work, this would not have happened. It would have been corrected. So the same case that he is raising, is the same case I am raising for Tobago. Show concern.

The next area that I spoke about was the section where \$1 million was given to the Ministry of Education to buy furniture and other equipment; I am sure the Member could remember very clearly. I reminded him that before we got into government the technical/vocational wing of Signal Hill was complete. That must have been a national policy which created it, and up to now it is not opened. Every time questions are asked, the answer is that there is no money to put in furniture and the basic equipment, and for teachers, and there are no teachers.

I asked the Minister of Education that question already, and this is what is being said. That was a national policy position. Even if Tobago has some small problem, the Ministry of Education should be linking with the Tobago House of Assembly to address the problem. Over three years the technical/vocational wing has been there, unopened, yet Tobago needs trained, skilled people; we need that. In the construction industry in Tobago right now, probably 95 per cent of the workers are from Trinidad, because Tobagonians do not have the skills. We are saying that this is urgent. Over four years and that wing has not been opened. The Minister said that he might have told me something about that today.

The third question—I am going very local and clear because I cannot see how this document could be correct, when certain things are left out like the \$17 million. I raised the question about the writing-off of a debt with some workers with the salaries they were paid. I told the Minister that we have a bigger problem, and I am sure that he has not paid any attention to it. This document could show it to him too. The Tobago House of Assembly Act gives the THA the opportunity to employ contractual workers. I talked about it here already, but what is really happening is that it is not really used for its real purpose. It is used to provide another public service, a parallel public service, over 200 workers. There are some 41 clerks that are employed contractually, so there is no security of tenure for

those young people, because when they come out of school with their O'levels and so forth, that is the job they are given. They employ them for one year or six months, and when that is up they are given another six months or a year. That is what is taking place. Nobody is communicating.

I ask the question: what is the role of the Constitution? Does it supersede the THA Act and all the other Acts? What is the role of the Cabinet re Tobago? What is the role of the Chief Personnel Officer? What is the role of the Public Service Commission? Is that the institution that takes care of public servants in the country?

In the Chief Secretary's Independence Day speech he articulated that certain things should be happening, and the Attorney General refuses to respond. Here is where the Attorney General is important in the interpretation of the Act. The Central Government has a constitutional role to play. *[Interruption]* That is the impression one is getting. It is as if the Government is pushing Tobago to take a certain line.

What the Chief Secretary is saying is partially true. But he is recommending another line which is not my thinking, because I do not feel that is the best thing for Tobago, not in 1999 going into the new millennium, but there is that whole question of insensitivity, uncaringness and ineptitude is present. He also said that this Government cannot run its place and is inefficient. He was very serious, but most of what he was saying is true.

There is another situation, Mr. Speaker, where people who are about 75 years old—this document will show—one or two retired workers, being employed in the Agricultural Division to cut down with misletoe; \$5,000 per month, \$1,200 for travelling, loan for a car, and young people with O' and A' levels are there, trained and cannot be employed. This what the contractual scenario is being used for.

There are people who—let me see if I could get a good example for the Minister—this lady here is a Director of Social Services, trained, two-year contract, \$7,565.60, \$1,200 travelling. This is a retired person.

**7.25 p.m.**

The point I want to make, Sir, is that the politician—the Chief Secretary—is setting the salaries. The CPO does not set the salaries, you know. Usually information is given to the Cabinet; the Cabinet approves and sends that information to the CPO and the CPO then determines the salary one should get. Then there is no communication with the Public Service Commission. That is why the administrators were employed for the same salary as that of a permanent

secretary with travelling allowance, a new car and that kind of thing. This is the danger of what is taking place, that is why I am raising my voice here.

When the politician does that the politician is playing a certain role, a certain game.

**Dr. Rowley:** Godfather.

**Miss P. Nicholson:** Certainly. When you give 111 scholarships at \$17 million and you give another 111, by the third year the entire Tobago population goes in a certain direction and there is a whole dictatorship emerging because it is one person that is doing all of this. It is not the Assembly. There is a total misinterpretation of the Assembly right now. Nobody is looking at the interpretation document that the Attorney General did and sent to the Tobago House of Assembly. They say you do not know your law. They do not use it.

If it was followed, I am sure the role of the Public Service Commission would have been recognized. When the Tobago House of Assembly wanted basic clerks, like a Clerk I and Clerk II, they would have sent to the Public Service Commission and the young people with O'Levels who sent their applications to the Public Service Commission would have gotten their jobs and then would not be beholden to anybody.

There is another situation now with the parallel public service being set up and the setting of salaries. I am very concerned about that, and I want to know how we could have a Finance Division in the country and an Auditor General and no action is taken. What is the role of the Auditor General? Or, if the Government was functioning with the Tobago House of Assembly and they were sending reports to the Government and they saw these things, the Government could have sent an accounting firm to do a proper audit of the THA's finances. I am tired of questioning this but the Minister of Finance says, "He ain't know what Pam want. The roads good and they are doing a brilliant job here and every day that is on TV6". Pam is the obstructionist. I could live with that.

Retired people are being employed—60, 70 and 75 years old—while there are young people with O'Levels and A'Levels who could be doing the same jobs they are doing. I am giving you a name there. I am not going to give you a name here. No, I now recognize the name. I should not call the name. This man is a technical assistant getting a salary of \$5,000.00 with a travelling allowance of \$700.00. He got a new car loan from the Tobago House of Assembly. He is the 75-year-old person I am talking about. Then there is another one about 69, a technical assistant in the agriculture division receiving a salary of \$5,700.00 per month. *[Interruption]*

Well, that is the cry. The young people say they do not understand how they are taking young people's money and giving it to these retired and old people. Of course, there are a number of young people as well but, I mean, the people must be seeing the abuse with the retired people that they are employing. Retired contractual workers receive those salaries; engineers and so forth who are working with the Works Department are getting less because they are public servants. That is another danger of the whole situation, the public service salaries as against what these people are getting. You could get this document from them because questions were asked in the Tobago House of Assembly and this document was the prepared answer. So that is my concern, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I feel that if the Ministry of Finance were playing its role with the Tobago House of Assembly, we would not have had this problem. "Early o'clock" this problem would have been addressed.

We have another situation emerging where public servants are being urged to retire against the background that you are going into another position—for public purposes you are doing that and the next day that person is re-employed under the contractual system. The Public Services Association has sent out bulletins telling public servants that if the retirement approach was improper, by getting proper leave and so forth, they could lose all their securities that they should have at the end of it all. They are going now to head a division. This is the situation.

Much of these moneys would be vired from, for example, sports, community development, culture and much of the money is from the recurrent funds. Public servants in health, sports and other divisions wait for two weeks and more to get their salaries. That is another question I am asking you. If you give the Tobago House of Assembly their money every quarter—that is another complaint, that those people in Port of Spain, the Government, are not giving them their money. There is a deteriorating situation with people and their salaries, so I would like the Minister to say whether the THA gets its quarterly bloc vote of funds or whatever you call it; I do not know.

In some places people are given their basic pay and if they are to get travelling allowances they are told they have to wait. This is the situation. If the THA use funds, like from recurrent, into development, that is viring. Do you not call that viring? You transfer it from one area to the other. Well, I do not see anything in your documents telling me that so I could know what is the true position on the Providence Road; what is the true position with regard to finances for health. I see not a word in these documents about Tobago.

That is why I am asking the question, is it Trinidad and Tobago? What is the financial link between the Ministry of Finance and the Secretary for Finance in the Tobago House of Assembly? Is there any link? Does he report? Do you monitor? Do you send the Auditor General to check on anything? Is this the correct approach? Is the Government supportive of the position where retired people are going back and getting job immediately? It is not hundreds but a good bit of them. Some retire from down here and they go to Tobago and they are getting \$8,000.00 per month?

The Gender Affairs Manager, she is a retired person. She is getting a salary of \$6,162.00. The Central Statistical Office, some are coming from there and are heading certain divisions getting a salary of \$8,000.00 a month. The planning division that was set up to do certain works recently, no report was received. They have not said a word about them in this document because the head of that division, who is the consultant, is receiving \$40,000.00—I do not know if it is TT dollars or US dollars—per month.

Then there are a number of young people—well who have just come from the university—receiving \$10,000.00 a month, and the other public servants who are there and might be graduates also, and who have been working for several years, are barely getting \$5,000.00. It is a conflict situation. It is a situation that can destroy Tobago when it should not be destroyed. This is a Government that does not care, [*Desk thumping*] because if this Government cared it would not have this situation.

We are in a crisis situation with the ferry system. We are not saying that we do not want the long-term system that is being recommended. What Tobago is saying is that the ferry is an essential service. If the Panorama collapses today there is no boat to travel between Trinidad and Tobago so that Tobago will be serviced with its food, because the vendors come from Trinidad with empty trucks, buy our food, our fruits and everything and return the next day. That is how it is going on.

There is a situation where I do not know what the Minister of Works and Transport is saying. The Prime Minister is saying we have a good ferry system. Even though the boat is functioning good today—because that has happened before, where that boat collapsed with two engines running, but then there was the other limping one, the MV Tobago, that was functioning. That is why the Chief Secretary for the Tobago House of Assembly is making his statements. If the Government were showing some care, one would have seen action in certain directions. Where is the Auditor General? Where is the Minister of Finance who



should be sending up a team from his Ministry? Why do they not sit with him and chat?

There was a situation about three weeks ago where the staff of the National Housing Authority was instructed that the people's money should be put into the Tobago House of Assembly fund. This is another crisis situation because the contracts that the people have—you know, like the houses in which they live at Bon Accord and all the other places—are with the National Housing Authority. The people really do not have a contract with the Tobago House of Assembly, but because of the lethargy in the Government's handing over process re the Tobago House of Assembly, people feel that they are not taking any action and they are going to act.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

So the NHA workers in Tobago were instructed that after collecting the funds from people paying their mortgages, that money must be paid to the Tobago House of Assembly fund. The cashier resisted because the cashier said, "Well, I am not really working with you. I am working with National Housing Authority and unless I get something in writing I would not". Now the workers were brought into the thing, which is very dangerous; a number of the workers were brought into the situation.

When they communicated with Trinidad, Trinidad said, "Go home". They went home for the day. The locks and keys were changed and the new locks were put on. When they went the next day no action was taken and the workers went home. I learned that they were back on the job recently but the matter has not been regularized. That is because of the Government. The Minister must go and sit down with these people. The provisions of the Act should be handed over to the Assembly on a transitional basis. There are some areas that would take a longer time, we know this, but there are some that could be addressed immediately. These problems were not addressed and this is the position that exists in Tobago.

If you are concerned about the welfare and well-being of Tobago, Mr. Minister of Finance, you should communicate with your Secretary for Finance. You must have dialogue. Set up a proper financial structure in the Tobago House of Assembly where taxpayers' moneys can be accounted for. It is absolutely urgent and necessary. If Tobago is part of Trinidad and Tobago, that should be reflected when you bring your appropriation documents here. If we know certain things have taken place in Tobago we can look and see them because they would be reported. When you do not report what is happening in Tobago, it means that

*Finance Committee Report*  
[MISS NICHOLSON]

*Friday, September 3, 1999*

your report is improper and incomplete. It then leaves me to wonder if what they are saying about Trinidad is really so.

When we have a situation like this—the Prime Minister has a big role to play. This document—the Tobago House of Assembly Act—says that he could call the Chief Secretary, the Chief Secretary can call the Prime Minister, he can go to Cabinet meetings and so forth. When you see something is deteriorating, if you are a sensible Government you would have been acting a long time ago. The Chief Secretary should not have been able to say a word like that. Some of these things that were said by him should not have been said.

**7.40 p.m.**

This is a situation where the people of Tobago feel that you have cheated them! And the people are of the opinion that this Government does not care because they want Tobago to break away, to take drastic action that can be to the disadvantage of Trinidad and Tobago, because this is not the time.

Now, when Member for Oropouche said that he is concerned about unifying Trinidad and Tobago, this is the business we are talking about, unifying Trinidad and Tobago on this crisis. This is what we want; to unify Trinidad and Tobago on this crisis that we have. [*Desk thumping*]

When Caroni (1975) Limited says it wants \$120 million to pay cane farmers, the Government guarantees that they will get a \$1 billion loan from the European Community or some group like that. The Government guarantees that, but it cannot give Tobago money for the boat, it cannot rent the boat, it cannot lease a boat for essential traffic between Trinidad and Tobago. It might be 1,000 cane farmers as against 45,000 to 50,000 people. The unitary state is Trinidad and Tobago, and Tobago must be given its due respect. You cannot view Tobago as another village in Trinidad.

So, Mr. Minister of Finance, I would like to know about the \$17 million re the scholarships. Our problem is—those of us who understand—these scholarships were not advertised for all the people in Tobago. Nobody interviewed anybody. There used to be a committee dealing with that; that was disbanded. And you just have to go to one person to get a scholarship. So taxpayers' money—

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for Tobago West has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Dr. K. Rowley*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Miss P. Nicholson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Members of the House.

You are using taxpayers' money sending people for premed—these are not A'Level students, you know. Some of them have A'Levels, but premed—to St. George's University in Grenada. Some have gone for six years, some have gone for four years; this is what we have here. Some are going to UWI Cave Hill, but that is our place. But the danger of this whole situation, as I pointed out, is that A'Level students who want to go to the University of the West Indies within the confines of Trinidad and Tobago, are not getting these scholarships; but you are sending O'Level people to go and do premed work. When you are going to do medicine you should have a certain background—*[Interruption]* I would not say quality, because you could leave with your O'Levels and go and study after and then get to A'Levels and move on from there. But if you advertise the scholarships, then it would be approached in a different manner, have a committee to investigate, interview them and that kind of thing.

Another thing that will be happening here, these 101 persons that we are training, are they coming back to Tobago, or to Trinidad and Tobago? About 50 of them have gone to the United States of America; are they coming back here? That is another question. We want to know that when they go to study they will be coming back here.

So these are the questions: we want to know about that \$17 million. We want to know about the salaries that are set by the politicians. That is a very serious question and we want the Attorney General and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to answer that. We want to know why we cannot get the other ferry. When, every time Caroni (1975) Limited bawls out, you are responding. When the workers say, "We not moving", you give them their \$20 million and you pay them their money. When the cane farmers go to Caroni (1975) Limited and say, "We are not shifting from here", we wait for a month, you guarantee a big loan and they get their money. I am not against that. But I would like to know that you are addressing the Tobago problems also.

I am one who supports the unitary state of Trinidad and Tobago. I could stand up and argue my case on that. But what I am saying, I feel that probably the Chief Secretary believes that he is not treated with respect and that nobody cares. This is the impression you are getting from his discourse when you read it. He said that the Minister of Finance promised—I could quote this part here:

“In 1998/1999 the Minister of Finance said the following:

‘Mr. Speaker, this Government has every intention of working with the Tobago House of Assembly to assist them in achieving its objective of developing Tobago and improving the quality of life of the people of Tobago. Therefore, in this new fiscal year, I will be working with the Tobago House of Assembly to make this a reality within the context of achieving the common good of all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, I plan to meet with the Tobago House of Assembly to discuss the probability of allowing the Tobago House of Assembly to access grants and/or loans for development purposes from external sources’.”

He is quoting Minister Kuei Tung here. He continued:

“My fellow citizens, nothing has happened on this call. Government has avoided action by raising one red herring after another, even though the law is very clear on the right of the Assembly to borrow and to raise grants from domestic and international sources.”

The point I am making is, I do not know why the Minister of Finance made those statements. Because if he knew his role properly, I do not think he would have said this. So he opened up and told them that he was going to give them loans and grants, and when they went to him, it is one red herring after another. Then the Minister, who also said that he could get \$100 million in overdrafts, told them to go to the Attorney General, but the Attorney General is not responding. Mr. Attorney General, I am not saying more on that, but I am just emphasizing some points made during his discourse. This has happened because of how the Minister addressed his position. Then, when he came to Tobago last year—

#### PROCEDURAL MOTION

**The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House continue to sit until the completion of the Finance Committee Report and the Bill.

*Question put and agreed to.*

#### FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

**Miss P. Nicholson:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this is what is going on right now. You must remember that you will have a certain tension building up at this time and I want to appeal to this Government of Trinidad and Tobago, that Tobago has put into power, to recognize that it must play its role, that its business

is not just to ignore. That is another problem. The people feel that you all are just ignoring them.

There is the situation with the Scarborough Hospital where it should have been almost completed; nothing has been done up to now. *[Interruption]* I am raising what I know about. It is up to you to tell Tobagonians what you are doing. We have not seen that. The Mason Hall Secondary School has not started as yet and that is a school that should have been completed by now. There are a number of other cases that could be raised.

What I am trying to point out is the urgency for you to play your role; for you to meet with the Assembly, negotiate, consult, have dialogue. I have taken this action because I believe people get more out of negotiating, dialogue and consultancy, than this brash position that I see here. But I support him partially in what he is saying, that you are not playing your role in the way you should play it.

I thank you, Sir.

**Mr. Assam:** And you support Charles?

**Miss P. Nicholson:** "Nah". I said partially. *[Laughter]* Mr. Speaker, let me clear myself. I am being misconstrued, so let me clear up myself properly.

Mr. Speaker, what I support is the argument of insensitivity, of your uncaring fashion, your lack of respect, and your ineptitude in addressing Tobago's cause. That is what I support in what he said. What I do not support is the other half, as I said earlier, the line that they all are up to the brink that you have brought Tobago and the next step is to go over that brink.

I thank you, Sir.

**The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung):** Mr. Speaker, let me thank Members on the other side, as well as my colleague, for the very interesting remarks and concerns expressed in this debate.

I begin with the last speaker first. I want to start by indicating to the Member for Tobago West that we find ourselves in a rather awkward position where we are being damned if we do and damned if we do not. I say that because the Member for Tobago West is quite aware that Act No. 40 of 1996 gives the Tobago House of Assembly certain powers, responsibilities and obligations and they have responsibilities for many areas, including finance and therefore, she is aware that the role which the Secretary for Finance for Tobago plays can be equated to the role that the Minister of Finance would play in Trinidad. *[Interruption]* I am being careful in what I have said.

So in essence, if the Secretary for Finance gets his vote as required by law, *en bloc*, quarterly, I am not in a position to tell him how to spend that money. As a matter of fact, even though Parliament has voted that money for the Tobago House of Assembly, the Tobago House of Assembly exercises its discretion with respect to that money that has been voted by Parliament. There is absolutely no requirement for the Tobago House of Assembly to request the Minister of Finance's approval for any virement.

**Miss P. Nicholson:** Mr. Speaker, they are to be guided by the Exchequer and Audit Act and if they are to be, it should be a system similar to yours, and I am saying that is not happening. I am also saying, if they report, you should tell us about the \$17 million and so on. You must get reports.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** The reports we get are merely a monthly disbursement of what they have spent and what they have collected; that is merely what it is. We have no idea whatsoever as to whether they have taken personnel expenditure and paid contract workers, or whether they have taken contract money and paid for goods and services; we have absolutely no idea. *[Interruption]* It is a concern, but the law provides them with the authority to allocate as they want. You know that the Assemblymen are elected people and they are there by the wishes of the people of Tobago. I did not put them there! Therefore, they have a responsibility to the people of Tobago with respect to how they dispose of the funds that are sent to them by Central Government.

**7.55 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, if I seek to interfere and call the Secretary for Finance and say: I want you to tell me how the money is being spent, he will tell me, "yuh too dam farse" and that "I have no responsibility to Parliament, with respect to how that money is being spent." That is the law and, therefore, in giving the Tobago House of Assembly the administrative responsibility—

**Mr. Valley:** I understand that there are regulations, which ought to organize the conduct of the Tobago House of Assembly. The question is, where are those regulations and in the absence of those regulations, are you saying that they can do whatever they want? Basically that is what I am hearing.

**Miss Nicholson:** That is what you are saying.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** No, I did not say that. You are putting words in my mouth. I came here and answered a question which the Member for Tobago West says, that in the absence of the regulations—there are already, regulations—

there are no specific regulations to deal with the Tobago House of Assembly yet. That is being discussed between the Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly. We have not arrived at a full decision, even though it has taken a long time, and that is because we had a team of experts looking at it to see how it can be done.

In the absence of those financial rules and regulations that are specific to the Tobago House of Assembly, the ordinary rules and regulations that refer to the finances, with respect to the Exchequer and Audit Act and so on, apply in the meantime. So that the Auditor General has a responsibility over the rulings of the Tobago House of Assembly, not me, as the Minister of Finance.

**Dr. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I am very grateful that the Minister has graciously given way but I am a little confused. In May of last year, I think it was, I asked a question in this House with respect to the transfer of funds from the Central Government to the Tobago House of Assembly, where there were accusations that funds were not flowing to Tobago. The Minister of Finance told this House that the reason the funding had not been transferred as it should have been, was because he had a problem with the accountability, or lack of it, emanating from Tobago. So, how come at that time, the Minister could have told the House that, but today he is saying, if he requests of the THA any information pertinent to how they are disbursing their funds, the Clerk would tell him “he dam farse”.

Mr. Speaker, I am very confused now and I think the Minister may reflect on what is on the *Hansard*, with respect to the question he answered last year, about how much money went to Tobago by June of that time and why the rest was sent? The Minister told us that he had problems with accountability and, in fact, there was an innuendo of strange dealings and he said that he was not happy and he asked certain questions.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** At the time I tried to explain this, I did not say it was a question of accountability. The system as it operates now, is that when the Tobago House of Assembly requests money for a quarterly *en bloc*, they are allowed to collect certain moneys in Tobago. If they do not tell me how much money they have collected—to begin with I am in a position where I may send quarterly *en bloc* far more than what was anticipated by Parliament because they have to inform me as to what moneys they have collected. If they have failed to do that, then I have a problem. That is what I was trying to explain, that they have to tell me exactly how much money they have collected, so that I can send a net difference or make an adjustment for the following quarter. That is where we were having some problems. *[Interruption]* Oh, Geez.

**Dr. Rowley:** In that situation what kind of system is that? Suppose the THA tell you that they have collected none, what is the reporting system to allow you to verify that they have collected \$1, \$12 or \$50? If they report and just tell you anything, do you then send *en bloc* to suit what they tell you? What kind of system is that?

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** That is the system. They have to inform us as to what they have collected and the Auditor General would check those same numbers.

**Mr. Humphrey:** This Parliament passed the THA Act.

**Miss Nicholson:** What I want to find out is in the Exchequer and Audit system, do you have headings and so on, for example, in the case of your recurrent and development funds, is it like that? When they report to you, is it in that fashion that the information should come to you?

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** This means then that you were there when I said that quarterly *bloc* votes are going to create problems. To begin with, one of the problems I ran into this year was quite different from last year, where the revenues because of the oil situation, were depleted earlier this year, I could not give them the quarterly *bloc* votes because it meant that the people of Tobago would now be getting a quarterly *en bloc* before the people of Trinidad could even get one month's pay. I explained to them the problem and that is why I have had discussions with the Tobago House of Assembly on an ongoing basis.

So I do not understand how it is, on the one hand, they are saying that we are uncaring and insensitive, when we are being told that we are not supposed to interfere with the business people of Tobago. On the one hand, if you do, you will get damned and if you do not they will say that you get damned because you are uncaring and insensitive. *[Interruption]*.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please, order please.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** I paid the money within the confines of the responsibility given to me. The Act says that you send the money *en bloc*. Parliament said so. What does *en bloc* mean?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissesar:** In a block.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** There is only one interpretation of *en bloc*. They get their money quarterly in advance. The only person who does that. *[Interruption]*.



**Miss Nicholson:** What is the Exchequer and Audit Act?

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** The Exchequer and Audit Act says that they must spend the money in accordance with the public wishes and, therefore, in the best public interest. That is all it says. Therefore, they will go and audit the expenditure that was made by the Tobago House of Assembly, as to whether it was in keeping with the wishes of Parliament and whether the procedures are such that they are in keeping with what is expected within the Constitution. That is what it is. The Ministry of Finance cannot assume—and I want to throw this out to you. If you have evidence that the money is being mismanaged or misappropriated then you have a responsibility to let the Auditor General or me have the information and I will ensure that the Auditor General does an audit. I have no such evidence.

**Miss Nicholson:** I have said it and you did nothing.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** I cannot send them on a wild goose chase, Madam. I have to send them with a specific request to go and investigate. The Auditor General cannot be running all over Tobago looking to see where the mismanagement and misappropriation took place. She has to be given some specific guidelines or some specific area to investigate, so that she can have her people investigate specific transactions.

In the case of the \$17 million, I explained to you that I am not aware of it. You seem to have more information on Tobago with respect to the Tobago accounts than I have, and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. I am not a Member of the Tobago House of Assembly. I cannot request information from the Tobago House of Assembly unless they are willing to give it to me.

In the case where you have asked certain questions, I have given you the answers to the best of my ability. You have asked me: Could the Minister of Finance indicate whether virements made were communicated? I have said that we are only notified of virements made by the THA through monthly statements of expenditure, transfers or releases and correspondences submitted to the Ministry. That is all I have.

**Dr. Rowley:** Sorry to be disturbing you like this, but I really want to understand what is going on. Mr. Minister, through the Speaker, suppose it comes to your attention that moneys transferred from Trinidad to Tobago in the manner you have described, have been placed outside of Trinidad and Tobago in an investment bank or similar institution, what would be your reaction to that?

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** I assume that you are giving me specific information with respect to that transaction.

**Dr. Rowley:** It is a scenario.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** I am developing the scenario for you. If I am given specific information of that kind, I have no choice but to ask the Auditor General to seek to see whether she can determine whether this is true or not, but I must have something. I must have reasonable doubt. I cannot go on the basis that—

**Dr. Rowley:** Why would you do that if you have said that the people in Tobago who receive the money from you are free to do as they please? Why are you going to ask the Auditor General to go and do what? *[Interruption]*.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** I am saying that they have the responsibility. First, we forget that we are dealing with people who have been elected by the people of Tobago. Secondly, we seem to forget that there are people in Tobago who are decent people. So when the money goes, I do not make a cheque. To begin with I do not issue the cheque and secondly, the cheque is not made out to the Chief Secretary, as Secretary for Finance; it is made out to the Tobago House of Assembly. Okay. So there are systems and I am trying to understand why are we sitting here making all kinds of crazy scenarios because we think that things are in some kind of haphazard situation in Tobago, it is not like that.

Money goes to the Tobago House of Assembly to be deposited in the THA fund, which was created by this House. So I do not understand what are these alarmist remarks. Then the Member enquired: How is it that the THA granted scholarships in the sum of \$17 million? I have asked the THA and they have not yet responded. I am awaiting their response. I promised that I would give a response by today, but if they have not responded to me, I cannot give you a response that they have not given me, and so it goes on.

I answered each question raised in Finance Committee to the best of my ability, based upon the information supplied to me by the various Ministries as well as the Tobago House of Assembly. So Madam, all I can say is that we are trying our best with the Tobago House of Assembly. We are trying to work with them. In the meantime if they feel that what they have got is not enough, they are free to go in public and state what they have. We have never once challenged anything that the Chief Secretary has said. He has made all kinds of statements and we have sat and listened because we are not going to get involved and wrapped up in the—*[Interruption]*. Sorry?

**8.05 p.m.**

He can choose to say what he wants. We have a responsibility and we carry out our responsibility diligently and to the best of our ability. We act responsibly and we are not going to legitimize one irresponsible statement with another. It does not make sense. We prefer to try to deal with our business as quietly as we can and hope that the people of Tobago would understand our position. We are not pushing one line or another as suggested. Our line is that we want to work with the people of Tobago for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

When I made that statement in the budget which the Member quoted, I made it in all earnestness to try to work with the Tobago House of Assembly, but if its demands continue to be far in excess of the resources available to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, then I have no choice but to do what I have to do and if anyone is upset, there is not much more I can do.

So we are working with the Tobago House of Assembly and trying our best to find a resolution of how these things are going to end and if we do have any evidence that there has been mismanagement of funds, or misuse or abuse of funds, I would welcome it because I do not think I can sit and allow such a thing to happen and let it go unheeded.

Mr. Speaker, I started there and I know it has gone a little further. I hope today we got a better understanding of the situation which exists between Trinidad and Tobago. I know where the Member for Tobago West heart lies and I know she would like to see things done in a particular way and that she has concerns, but unless we have specific, hard evidence, we are not going to upset the relationship which exists between Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly on pure suspicion or allegation that cannot be substantiated.

There were a couple other questions which were raised by my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin Central, and while I listened to him I seemed to recall that I gave him a document but I will give him another copy. When we talk about fiscal surplus and fiscal deficit, he better than I, know that there are certain conventions as to how one arrives at a surplus and a deficit and that an accounting deficit is not necessarily determined the same way the fiscal deficits are determined by economists.

On Wednesday, August 19, 1998, I gave the Member a reconciliation which showed him, based upon his asking, and he asked the same question one year later. I showed him after certain adjustments were made which were accepted by international economists including the IMF economists. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** I surrender, Mr. Speaker, I cannot say anymore.

**Mr. Imbert:** Would the Minister gave way?

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** No, I am not giving away, I want to get out of here and worse, I am not giving way to you. I was hoping that when the floods came it would be over your head, because you are one person who cannot escape floods. *[Laughter]*

I want to talk for a few minutes with respect to the Government's borrowing from the Central Bank. The information given me from the Central Bank is that Central Government had a surplus of \$876.2 million as at September 30, 1998. I did not manufacture these papers. I know he would like to think this is my handwriting, but these are figures given to me—

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, if the Minister would give way, I was just referring to the Auditor General's report which stated quite clearly that there was an overdraft on the Government's account of \$1.5 billion and there has been this argument between the Auditor General and the Treasury in their attempt to try to take people's pension money and trust funds money and say it is Government's money. Check the Auditor General who is the authority.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** I am also told as at September 02, 1999 which was yesterday, Government had a deficit of \$665 million which we are addressing. So to tell us that it is \$2.6 billion is misleading this House.

In any case, the fact is, the same Central Bank report to which the Member referred, I have already indicated in sittings in this House that I am referring to the *Annual Economic Survey, 1998* from the Central Bank. Has the Member seen this one, or is it a different report from his? When the Member talks about the May Economic Bulletin, he knows that during the year, it is not necessarily the same situation at the end of the year, instead, he talked about the first quarter results. We know that the first quarter of this year—and I have accepted that—we had a deficit; we had to because of our oil prices. In spite of oil prices being what they had been between 1996, 1997, 1998 and now, we have been able to manage the country's finances in a way far superior to anything that has been shown before. *[Interruption]*

What does that mean? It means that the fiscal situation—that is why I asked what he understood by that—has worsened because the revenues are worst. What he did not read in terms of the IMF situation is that the IMF said that it

congratulates the Government for handling a situation where the oil prices got worse from year to year. He read half the statement and expects us to believe that the IMF only made half a statement. Why not read what the selected table Economic Indicator for 1994—1998 says? In 1994—1998 we have had growth for each year. As a matter of fact, the IMF has already indicated—

**Mr. Valley:** It has nothing to do with that.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** It has nothing to do with the growth.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Member for Diego Martin Central knows that if we continue like this—

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** Maybe I should wind up quickly and do not bother to give way. I would answer one specific question which was asked. The suggestion that we had bought more Cherokee jeeps, when we came here we talked about the Emergency Response E999 system. To answer the Member's specific question from \$53 million to \$106 million. We bought \$42 million worth of Emergency Response System, the \$53 million is only the vehicle and some equipment which were needed for the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Services. That is what we started off with; the \$53 million as the Member knew. So \$42 million went to buy emergency, the E999 system, we had \$4 million in exchange rate charges and we spent \$9 million to buy 10 ambulances. I hope that satisfies the Member. That adds up to \$106 million. *[Interruption]* The explanation we gave is that it went from \$53 million to \$106 million.

Mr. Speaker I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this House adopt the Third Report 1998—1999 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the expenditure from the Public Revenue which were not included in the Annual Estimates 1998/1999.

#### FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) BILL (1998)

*Order for second reading read.*

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

That a Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum, the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 1998/1999, be now read a second time.

*Finance Bill (1998)*  
[SEN. THE HON. B. KUEI TUNG]

*Friday, September 3, 1999*

Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that this Bill is substantially the matters which had been debated with respect to the report of the Finance Committee, I beg to move.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

**The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung):** Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 70(1), I beg to move that the Bill be now read the third time and passed.

*Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be read a third time and passed.*

*Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.*

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Monday, September 06, 1999 at 11.00 a.m.

The limited purpose of the sitting on Monday is in respect of the amendments to the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill coming from the Senate dealing with parliamentary committees. We will complete Motion No. 1 under "Private Business" by the Member for Fyzabad and, by consent, we will do the Motion on the adjournment on Monday.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 8.23 p.m.*