

Leave of Absence

Monday, October 18, 1999

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, October 18, 1999

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAVERS

[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 Tobago West, who has asked to be excused from today's sitting. The leave of absence which she has sought is granted.

APPROPRIATION BILL (BUDGET)

[THIRD DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 08, 1999]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Trade, Industry & Consumer Affairs and Minister of Tourism will continue. The Minister had spoken for approximately 10 minutes and has a balance of 35 minutes.

The Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs and Minister of Tourism (Hon. Mervyn Assam): Mr. Speaker, I want to say from the outset that I hope no one interrupts me, because I did not interrupt the previous four speakers on that side. I shall not be entertaining any interruptions.

Mr. Speaker, when we took the adjournment last Friday, at a rather late hour, I was almost like the night watchman. I hope, this morning, I would be able to see more light and my innings would be a little more scintillating.

I was attempting to make the point that the last speaker—the Member for San Fernando West—had made some unfortunate points during the contribution; notwithstanding the repetition that took place, arising out of the contribution of the Member for San Fernando East, the Member for Toco/Manzanilla and of course, the URP specialist of Arouca North. The Member for San Fernando West stated a number of matters that were both interesting and unfortunate. He spoke about this Government maintaining high taxation. I want to correct for the records that this Government is the only government, in recent history, that has attempted to reduce taxation in every single category. In fact, when the PNM assumed office

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in 1991 it started to raise taxes in every area, including corporation taxes, income tax and a whole set of nuisance taxes including transaction taxes, taxes on general insurance and taxes on various other areas. They started to whittle away at the various credits that taxpayers had, in terms of their mortgage interest and their maintenance costs and so forth.

In addition to the 15 per cent value added tax that was imposed by the NAR, they bumped up taxes considerably. To come to the House today and say that tax levels are high, is unfortunate, because this Government has not only reduced income tax and corporation tax, and reduced the business levy which they introduced, reduced the tax on interest in the banks which they introduced and bumped up the amount of personal credit to \$20,000 and added another \$18,000 so that people's disposable income could be increased. We went and introduced a whole range of social welfare matters. That is a matter that I hope would be laid to rest. I hope the business community would also understand that too. Because although they said—some of them—that there was no increase in benefits to them—meaning there was no reduction in corporate taxes and so forth—one must understand the purpose of a budget: which I intend to dilate upon as I go along.

The next point—the unfortunate point that he made, although I said to him very briefly last Friday, that he was both honest and courageous. For a member of the People's National Movement to stand up, in the person of the Member for San Fernando West, to say: "Raffique Shah was right when he wrote the PNM had engaged in banditry and corruption while they were in office," is quite a testimony to the kind of government that we had in the past. He was merely making a comparison with respect to the degree of their banditry and the degree of their corruption. Again, I want to congratulate him for being so honest, because I said open confession is really good for the soul.

Mr. Speaker, what is a budget? The Minister of Finance read *The Budget Statement: A Blueprint for Human Development and Sustainable Growth*. I hear Members opposite, some of the newspapers, even some members of the business community say that he did not explain a number of things in the budget. Indeed, no budget is intended to be a document to include all of the various numbers, activities and plans of a government. Because we have the *Public Sector Investment Programme 1999/2000* which indicates the developmental thrust that this Government will pursue during the next year. We have the *Draft Estimates of Revenue for the Financial Year 1999/2000* which indicates, clearly, every Head and Sub-head from which revenue will be derived—although they said it was not contained in the budget speech. It is in a document fully and comprehensively

analyzed and presented. There is the *Medium Term Policy Framework 2000/2002* which is the document that states the philosophical underpinnings of the developmental process for the next three years. Also, there is *the Review of the Economy 1998/1999* which tells you the performance of the Government during the last year. Every document is there. Therefore, the criticism that the budget speech does not contain a number of ideas, figures and information is totally misleading and erroneous.

What has this Government sought to do in the last four years, and what is this budget seeking to do in the coming year, Mr. Speaker? This Government inherited a situation from the last administration. They have always come to this House and boasted that they were the ones who put things in place and they were the ones who started this and they are the ones who initiated that. Do you know there is a parable called the parable of the talents? I was hoping that the Member for San Fernando East was here: he who boasted that he was a Born Again Christian. If that were true. Let us assume what he was saying is true—that is only an assumption—it means that we were good stewards: that the talents that you gave us, we invested and we increased them many fold: to the benefit of the entire community of Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, we should be congratulated for that, if your assumption is right: that you left us talents.

Mr. Speaker, we have still done well, even if it is an inheritance which we got from them. But, I want to assure them that every government and every successive government inherits either good or bad from its predecessor. It is for that government to take the various measures necessary to continue the production of wealth, the production of goods and services and the improvement in the quality of life of all of its citizens. That is our stewardship which we are commenting on today.

There is no doubt, the figures cannot be disputed, there can be no disputation whatsoever that, in the last four years this country has moved forward. It has moved forward in the sense that inflation has been reduced and reduced successively over the last four years. What other important indicator in terms of economic growth and prudent economic management do you want than your low level of inflation of just over 2 per cent?

10.10 a.m.

What do you want in terms of a reduction of unemployment when we arrived on the scene four years ago it was almost 19 per cent to 11.7 per cent? What better indicator do you want that we have been able to manage the exchange rate and

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keep it fairly stable—only a little depreciation over the last four years— notwithstanding the fact that when they came into office in 1991 there was a massive devaluation in April, 1993 or 1994 when they devalued our dollar from \$4.65 to \$5.70? Massive devaluation! Yet, we have been able to manage the currency with very little erosion in its value *vis-a-vis* the U.S. dollar against which it is floated. That is management!

Our reserves have more than doubled in four years. What more can one ask of a government? Mr. Speaker, it is a little more than that, because I, myself, will be the first one to say that numbers are not only important, although numbers tell a story, and these are the economic indicators that investors look for—the international financial institutions, the institutional investors, whoever they may be. These are the numbers one looks for, but we go beyond that. We go beyond the numbers and we speak of human development.

What is human development? That administration, when they were in a most liquid position during the years of the oil bounty, do you know what they did? They taxed and they squandered. That is what they did! That was the economic policy and strategy of that government: tax and squander! They taxed people, they had surpluses and they squandered it either on subsidies, subventions, hand-outs and they loaned to other governments to the extent that they were insulted by a certain government to which they lent \$200 million, when the head of that government who is now deceased said that all the money that Trinidad got went through the system like a dose of salts. Yet he is asking me the name of the Jamaican Minister. He has the gall to sit there and ask me the name of the Jamaican Minister when they insulted his Government by saying that all the money they collected went through the system like a dose of salts!

That happened throughout. Instead of engaging in human development, that government taxed and squandered. Today, we are not taxing and we are applying the resources that we have been able to garner in order to achieve human development. What is human development, Mr. Speaker? It is precisely what we are doing, have done and continue to do. We are putting the money into education, training, skills development and redevelopment. That is human development. If one looks all over the country, one will see skills development centres mushrooming and people are being trained in some of the most high-tech areas to prepare them not only to enter into employment, but also to enter into self-employment, and that would add to the stock and will redound to the GDP of this country.

That is human development. It is sinking one's money in health, because a healthy nation is most important for the continuation of sustainable development.

[Laughter] But, it takes time, Mr. Speaker. When one inherits a situation where children were being wrapped in brown paper under their administration and there were no drugs in the hospitals, they were re-using hypodermic disposable needles—and I have no doubt that perhaps this has contributed to some of the transmitted diseases today because these needles were re-used during their administration.

We have a situation which we inherited that we have to reverse, and one cannot reverse a situation in three years. They will see the infrastructure that is being put in place where the health system and the health sector of this country will be second to none in the Caribbean and in Latin America! *[Desk thumping]* That is human development.

Human development is developing the sporting capabilities of one's people, and that is what we have been doing. We have been doing that all along. I see the Member for Tunapuna is smiling. I am sure he is happy about that, because never before has he seen such a move and a programme to develop sport, particularly among the youth of this country. The investment in sport is phenomenal with the coming on stream of three more stadia in Tobago, Arima and Central Trinidad; making it five with the upgrading of two others—the Hasely Crawford Stadium and Union Park.

We have been putting in all kinds of indoor sporting facilities and swimming pools and developing the leagues, and Trinidad will be hosting in the year 2001 the under-19 football. That is progress! We hosted the hockey in 1996 in the constituency of the Member for Tunapuna. A tremendous success. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon Members, I ask, could we please listen to the Member's contribution in silence. He started off by indicating that he was not prepared to give way. The answer to that is not to interject when he is speaking. I ask you please, every single Member on the Opposition Benches, and elsewhere, will have an opportunity of speaking. Do not jump the gun. Please, I ask you.

Mr. Bereaux: Do you guarantee that, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Member for La Brea, you know that comment which you made while you were sitting, while I was on my legs, is improper. You know that.

Mr. Bereaux: I recognize that.

Hon. M. Assam: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Trinidad cricket, soccer and swimming—all of our sports are at an high where recently we defeated Colombia in Miami and also in international golf through Mr. Ames. So, we are doing very well.

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In terms of culture and the performing and creative arts, there is an explosion taking place. Trinidad has become the centre of this explosion and we will see even more taking place in the year 2000 as we put onto the calendar every month of that year, entertainment year for Trinidad and Tobago, which will have synergies with the tourist industry.

Mr. Speaker, we are beginning to see a network of infrastructural development that you have never seen in this place before. I remember when I was Chairman of St. George East, and the Member for Arouca North knows it, I used to lament at every meeting the poor state of the infrastructure of this country, and I used to say to the council that if that PNM administration had invested half a billion dollars on the drainage and infrastructure of this country, we would have had one of the greatest countries in the world.

Infrastructure, particularly drainage, is critical to nearly every activity in the land, but they neglected it, and today, this Government has to take up that particular challenge. We are building overpasses, extending highways, building new roads and doing everything possible: drainage, sidewalks and so forth, electricity in different parts of the country, telephones in different parts of the country. Water, Mr. Speaker! Something that was a commodity few people enjoyed is beginning to go through the taps—not only the standpipes—of individual homes in this country. You will see, come the year 2000, how many more people will enjoy the benefit of water 24 hours a day. Something that eluded the PNM for 30 years. That is what human development is all about!

The Minister of Education is busy opening schools in the north, south, east, west and central, whether it is primary schools, pre-schools, secondary schools, whatever, and the SEMP programme will demonstrate that this Government is going to abolish the Common Entrance Examination by the year 2001. One will have the Common Entrance Examination in 2000 so that by 2001 the system will kick in.

Mr. Hinds: We will see.

Hon. M. Assam: Why do you not listen? All of that is human development, the removal of trauma from teachers, parents and students with respect to the Common Entrance Examination. [*Desk thumping*] Human development, Mr. Speaker, is empowering people; not saying it, but empowering people in this country, and that is what this Government has done over the last four years in all of its social developmental programmes.

So, when we talk about human development, we are not talking about a hand-out, dependency, a URP job, a five and a 10-days, which the Member feels is

human development. Human development for us is meaningful, sustainable and creating a sense of dignity and self-worth in the human being that will enable this country to have sustainable development into the future. We intend to prepare this country for the 21st Century, and that is why the Prime Minister has spoken about a quality nation, that is why we are introducing computers in all of the school, that is why the skills development centres are there and that is why this country has been the focus of attention of so many types of investors from so many different parts of the world. This is what we call human development!

Mr. Speaker, this Government has a lot to talk about. Although they spoke about self-glorification, we have a lot to thank the people for and to glorify ourselves about, because it is through the people we were able to effect these changes and bring about these developments.

In terms of my responsibility in the Ministry of Tourism, which I assumed a little over a year ago, it is about the first time that any Government has been serious about the development of tourism. Whenever one goes abroad, people ask, "What is Trinidad and Tobago doing about tourism?" They ask because previous PNM administrations have felt that tourism was not important and that all of our eggs should be put in the basket of energy, but we know the fate of energy, we know the volatility, we know the kinds of serious economic collapses we have had as a result of over-dependence on energy. Therefore, the strategy of economic diversification, particularly through the services sector, is one on which we are placing enormous emphasis.

Mr. Speaker, we have been engaging in institutional strengthening, product development, public awareness, protection enhancement of the environment, and one of the things we are trying to do is ensure that when the tourist comes here, he does not come merely into a hotel around a pool. TIDCO has been involved in the development of what we call community tourism, so if one goes to La Brea, Toco, Debe, St. Joseph, St. James, Caroni, wherever, one will see evidence of that kind of tourism activity. We are also putting in place Tourism Action Committees (TACs) in all the various communities of this country to bring about a sensitization and awareness to everybody of the importance of tourism in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, when we assumed office, the tourism arrivals in this country were in the vicinity of less than 200,000. Today, tourism arrivals are in excess of 400,000 and increasing. In fact, in 1998, tourism arrivals increased 21 per cent, so that we were able to win the Crystal Palm Award for our contribution and development of the tourism industry in the Caribbean. [*Desk thumping*] In 1999, we expect to have a 7 to 8 per cent increase in tourism arrivals in Trinidad and Tobago.

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What is this doing in terms of investment? We have had investment in a number of tourism plans. Do you know what that will do? It will create a situation where we are most likely to import labour in the very near future. In fact, Tobago will become a country of over-employment by the year 2000, and that is a fact. By the end of 2000, Tobago will be in a situation of over-employment, a situation that I experienced many years ago when I visited Bermuda. There were so many jobs available and so few people, so people had two and three jobs at the same time, and they still had to import labour into Bermuda. That is what will happen in Tobago because there is so much investment already on the ground, with more investment coming and I hope we can have the cooperation and collaboration of the Tobago House of Assembly in terms of the thrust towards a tourism industry.

10.25 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, many people do not know what is going on. Even in Trinidad, very quietly, we have had new hotels—Chancellor; Ambassador; expansion of Kapok; a complete renovation and expansion of Holiday Inn; expansion of Hilton; a number of guesthouses like, Monique and so forth; a number of ecolodges. In fact, the Asa Wright has now been proclaimed one of the most important—

Mr. Speaker: I appeal to the Member for Diego Martin West, please. What is really happening is that the hon. Member is speaking to the Speaker. There is a certain type of behaviour that is fit for the platform. But I ask you please, let us all *audi alteram partem*, hear the other side. You may not agree with, but the reason we have the balance, why we call on somebody from the other side afterwards is to refute, if necessary, all that has been said. But please, I am sure that there are some Members on that side interested in hearing what he is saying and, perhaps, some Members in the audience. Perhaps some Members over on this side—No, there are some members from the other side there. But please, let us keep the level high and let each Member be able to say his thing, notwithstanding that one does not accept it. Please.

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Speaker, Asa Wright is considered one of the most outstanding ecolodges in the world. We have one in Grande Riviere where people go to look at the turtles. I just opened one two months ago in Aripo Heights, and we just turned the sod for a hotel at the sight of the new Piarco International Airport. It goes on and on.

There are two hotel chains that are interested and they are far advanced: Hyatt and Four Seasons in Tobago; and the Tobago Hilton should be opened by January 2000. We have Sanctuary, we have Stone Haven Villa, we have Blue Waters, we have Plantation, and the list goes on and on. The tourism industry is doing very well.

We are developing a tourism industry totally different from our neighbours and the rest of the world. We are not going to have mass tourism. We are going to have niche tourism. We are going to have sustainable tourism. We are going to take care of the environment and, we are going to be assured that the people working in the industry will be well paid and they would have mobility to the highest management positions.

When one looks at the accommodation in the tourism industry, in 1994 there were 2,950 rooms. Today there are 3,650 rooms and, by the time it is completed, and those other things that I have just called are completed, we will have close to 5,000 rooms by the year 2000, because we want to have about 3,000 in Tobago and about 5,000 in Trinidad with a cap of about 8,000 rooms. That is going to make a significant difference with respect to employment. Because not only would you have direct employment in the tourism industry, you would have the synergies and the backward and forward linkages into manufacturing, agriculture, agroprocessing, entertaining, arts and crafts, the marine and yachting industries, only to name a few.

I just came back from a meeting of the cruise ship industry in Puerto Rico and one of the things we insisted on as Caribbean Ministers of Tourism is that the cruise ships must not only come here and pay their head tax of US \$5, and perhaps spend another US \$25 to \$40, but the cruise ship liners must purchase directly all the products and services. I was able to extract from them lists of products and services that they will consider negotiating with. Already Angostura is selling to the cruise ship lines 15,000 cases per year, not much, but it is a start. Already, paper supplies from our own mills here are being supplied to the cruise ship lines. We want to expand to vegetables, fruits, to all other kinds of services, particularly our condiments.

Further, what this will do is that you will have new investments coming into the country outside of the energy sector. That is the critical thing, because we have been attracting investments in the energy sector, but not as much in the non-oil sector. I have been advised by TIDCO that the non-oil sector is going to be taking off with a speed in the year 2000, because a number of projects have already been approved for start-up.

In the tourism industry alone, we have had approval for \$1.2 billion in tourism facilities. With the coming on-stream—because it is now before the Senate, the other place—of the Tourism Development Bill, this will give an enormous fillip, because we have moved the focus now, not only for hotel development, but for tourism facilities development where dive shops, restaurants, tour operators, tour

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guides and all of the associated activities with tourism will be given the same kind of benefits and equal opportunity to thrive and develop and to create the kind of job and infrastructure for tourism development. When you add that to what TIDCO is doing in terms of community tourism, we will have a well-rounded tourism industry. Mr. Speaker, just a flavour of what is taking place in tourism.

With respect to the area of consumer affairs, in fact, it is very interesting to read the *Daily Express* of Friday, October 15, 1999, “Prices take a 2.2 per cent drop”. They come here every year—particularly the Member for Arouca South—and talk about how prices are rising. I have not heard that chorus for a long time, because we have been able to keep prices on a leash. In fact, prices have been falling in many areas, not only in terms of food, but other commodity prices also. It is very interesting to see that prices have taken a 2.2 per cent drop. They have enumerated all the areas where it has dropped. So it is not only in food, it is in all kinds of areas, both in terms of plastic, non-metallic, chemical, food, glass, concrete, cement, tobacco, alcoholic beverages and non-alcoholic beverages.

What we have been doing at the Ministry of Consumer Affairs is to put a framework and to continue to develop that framework so that, in fact, our slogan “the power is yours” could be a reality. This has been happening. If one reads the newspapers, one would see in every daily newspaper, two and three times a week, articles educating the public on some of the most important aspects of their lives with respect to consumer sovereignty, with respect to how people should go about ordering their lives and the choices that they have. If you look at the television you would see the same thing.

What we have been trying to do is develop an appropriate legal framework for consumer protection. I came to the honourable House not too long ago and moved an amendment to the Consumer Protection and Safety Act where we brought every conceivable institution under the net that was hitherto not there. We went further and said we are going to blacklist any supplier of good or service who continues to violate the sovereignty of a consumer. Therefore, we now have a clause inside that law calling them ‘recalcitrant traders’. I have taken a proposal to the Cabinet recently, and the Attorney General is preparing the appropriate documents in order to do so. Development of an empowered consumer through education; development of a vibrant consumer movement—and we have already had a number of groups installed; development of effective teams among our employees; and transformation of the division into a learning organization.

In accordance with that very law, where it provides for a consumer guidance council, I had the honour to inaugurate this council only two and a half months

ago and the council is now working in order to ensure that the consumer protection laws, but more importantly, that book which I laid in Parliament, *A Consumer Policy for Trinidad and Tobago*, is implemented in accordance with the Act. They have a responsibility to report to the Cabinet and to bring in all the other agencies in order that work can be done.

We also have a strategic plan, 1998/2002 and we will obviously be implementing that plan as the years go by. We are also looking to amend other types of legislation: the Small Claims Tribunal; the Consumer Protection and Product Warranty; the Hire Purchase Act; and the Supply of Goods and Services, because we feel consumers must be subjected to truth in lending, truth in advertising, truth in reporting, where the newspapers must be brought to account for reporting facts and not allegations.

We have also started a developmental process where we are testing and rating selected products; development of computerized database and complaints; education of the business community. In fact, right now we are very much involved with the Ministry of Trade and the financial community and other service producers to ensure that when we go to the ministerial meeting in Washington in November/December, we have a particular position today with respect to trade and services in this new regime of the World Trade Organization. So the Ministry of Consumer Affairs is working quite assiduously with trade and the financial sector and other groups to bring about this, Mr. Speaker.

We have also been involved in a number of other areas. We have been identifying activities that impact and we are working with the Bureau of Standards, so that the Standards Act, which I piloted in this House, is implemented in accordance with the law. We are also working with the Ministry of Works and Transport—and also with Environment—with respect to emissions and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries in terms of CNG cylinders. So we are extremely active.

We have gone beyond that. We are part of Consumer International Relations of Latin American Countries (CIROLAC). We have now taken the initiative to establish a Caricom Consumer Agency and Trinidad and Tobago is taking the lead. When the Heads of Government Conference took place here in July of this year, we brought in the Secretary General and the members of the staff and we are beginning to work on the mechanism and structure to give effect to this.

Mr. Speaker: Hon Members, the speaking time of the Member for St. Joseph has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. M. Assam: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to all the Members of the House for extending my time.

So, Mr. Speaker, I move on to the Ministry of Trade and Industry, which is another one of my responsibilities. Mr. Speaker, as you well know, I laid in this honourable House some time ago an industrial policy, a trade policy, and a small-, micro- and medium-enterprise policy; all documents laid in this House. In furtherance of these documents, the Ministry has been working with the private sector and with international agencies and organizations to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago's position with respect to market access is secured and assured.

We have been involved in the FTAA negotiations, which is the Free Trade Area of the Americas negotiations, and there are nine groups. Trinidad and Tobago is involved in all nine groups and we have provided not only the chairmanship, but also technical assistance in the areas of intellectual property, thanks to the Minister of Legal Affairs; in the area of sanitary and phytosanitary measures, thanks to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources; in the area of government procurement, thanks to the Minister of Finance; in the area of E commerce, we have somebody who has a Ph.D. in my ministry and very much qualified in the area of E commerce—[*Interruption*] Yes, E commerce, electronic commerce. I am sorry forgive me, we call electronic commerce, E commerce—We are also involved in the investment area, thanks to TIDCO. They are helping us in that area. So we are involved in a number of areas positioning Trinidad and Tobago in the world in order to make sure that Trinidad and Tobago's position is not jeopardized or undermined in any form or fashion.

We have also been engaged in negotiated double-taxation treaties, engaged in intellectual property treaties, engaged in investment, promotion and protection treaties, so that the business community of Trinidad and Tobago benefits. So when I hear the business community saying there is nothing for them in the budget, I am amazed. Because we are putting the infrastructure in place, we are putting the security net in place to ensure that all of our manufacturers, all of our exporters, whether they are micro, small, medium or large, are not in any way at a disadvantage in the international economic marketplace.

In fact, what this budget has done—and you know what used to happen? When the PNM was in power there used to be jitters for months in the business

community, particularly in the financial sector: What new taxes? What new measures? How are they going to finagle the budget and accounts of the country? When the budget of this country is being read by this administration, there is no such fever, there is no such intimidation. You know what is happening at the stock market? The composite index of the Stock Exchange has risen by almost 100 per cent, Mr. Speaker! One hundred per cent!

10.40 am.

And do you know what is happening? If you look at what is taking place on the Stock Exchange, they say they are as bullish as ever. What greater sense and demonstration of confidence in an economy, in a financial system and in Government's prudent financial management, than the manifestation and reflection of a bullish Stock Exchange. [*Desk thumping*] People continue to invest, Mr. Speaker, and do you know what I feel proud about? Although the business community say they want more tax break, if one looks at the profit and loss statements, particularly those of the public companies that are published—sometimes I get a little peek into even the private companies—some of them are making super-normal profits. I am not unhappy, because when the private sector makes profits—and I want them to make profits; I want them, of course, to have a social conscience; I want them to pay their taxes; I want them to employ more people; I want them to add to the GDP so that the economy and the tie that we are trying to construct, grows.

Mr. Speaker, in previous budgets, we have increased from 150 to 200 per cent, any investment in new labour. We have given them 130 per cent credit when they invest in training. We are now trying to open up market space for them, so I said, we are in the Free Trade of the Americas Agreement (FTAA). We are also involved in the post-Lome negotiations which are taking up much of the financial and human resources of our Ministries and other Ministries of the country, through the instrumentality of the regional negotiating machinery. We are also involved at the same time, in concluding the Caricom/Dominican Republican negotiation. Trinidad and Tobago is ready and has been ready for the longest while.

Cabinet was unanimous in supporting me, in reducing both lists, the phase reduction tariff and the most-favoured nation list, to about one dozen items. Unfortunately, our other partners have not been able to go beyond 120 items. And we are having a meeting of the Prime Minister's sub-committee on external economic relations, I think on the 24th or 25th of this month, followed by a head's meeting for two days. And I am hoping, with the astute chairmanship and leadership of the Prime Minister of this country, who is Chairman of Caricom,

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that he would be able to get our Caricom partners, once and for all, to come to their senses and bring their lists so that we can conclude the Caricom/Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement before December 31, 1999.

Also, we are pursuing the Caricom/Cuba Free Trade Agreement. We have signed a number of Memoranda of Understanding; the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs was there recently. We signed cultural; we signed scientific; we signed sporting and so forth, and the last thing now is to finish the free trade agreement with Caricom and we are hoping now that this could be concluded.

The final stages of the legislation to conclude the Caricom/Colombia Agreement is now before the Attorney General and I hope it would be laid in Parliament before long. We have also initiated a free trade agreement with Costa Rica and Mexico. There is a little hitch, of course, with Costa Rica because of an anti-dumping complaint but we are hoping to sort that out. But complementary to all of these activities are the activities of the anti-dumping unit within the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Speaker, when one considers that this Bill was piloted some time in 1994, and really was passed in 1995, came into effect in 1996, when I came into this honourable House in order to have it promulgated, in fact, and also to present the regulations to the Bill, between 1996 and today, we have had to investigate 13 cases of anti-dumping. It shows you the vigilance of the unit; and we have been able to conclude, so far, four, and nine are still being investigated. These are time-consuming and very costly things, because sometimes you have to go to the country. In fact, we had to go to New Zealand on one occasion, in order to deal with the cheddar cheese problem. Sometimes you write and you do not get any information and you have to make sure that you live within the law, because you could always get a case against you for judicial review and the process could be stalled. But, Mr. Speaker, we have some very capable people who have learnt a lot, and who understand the process and I want to tell you that our anti-dumping is World Trade Organization (WTO) compatible.

I had to go to the United States on two occasions—July of 1997 and August of 1999—to defend this country's steel industry against all kinds of accusations of dumping and over-supplying. We were successful before the International Trade Corporation; we were successful before all of the agencies in making sure that no case against our steel industry has been preferred successfully. We are still awaiting the judgment of the President of the United States, in whose sole discretion will be decided whether Trinidad and Tobago will have to pay for some kind of injury to the steel industry, although we have not injured the steel

industry. It is really coming from Kajistan, Indonesia, India, Mexico, Canada, Venezuela and Trinidad in no way, because our steel wire rods are really not part of the whole global steel imports into the United States. These are the kinds of things that we have been doing, Mr. Speaker.

More than that, we have been attempting to ensure that we have the right staff in the Ministry. When one moves into that era of globalization, one needs to have international lawyers, people who understand international trade; people who understand international business. There must be a whole cadre of professionals. We have been building a team of professionals: highly qualified, well-experienced people, so that we can prepare ourselves for any eventuality, but indeed, to negotiate.

We have also been teaching people how to negotiate, with the help of Latin American Economic System (SELA) and with courses put on by TIDCO, and we have been sending some people away. Thanks to the World Trade Organization, they have been offering annual scholarships to train our people and we have been taking full advantage. Also, Japan has been very useful in assisting us in this particular area of trade negotiations and so forth.

So that the Ministry of Trade and Industry has been, in a sense, a very important catalyst for the development of trade. Mr. Speaker, when you see the figures, you would see that our exports continue to rise. The non-oil sector continues to perform, and in fact, in the first six months of this year when oil prices went flat; when commodity prices associated with energy went flat, it was the manufacturing non-oil sector that took up the slack and enabled this country to move along in a manner without little interruption or flutter. Even though some of the revenue was anticipative, was not collective, we still were able to make a very valuable contribution in this area.

With respect to small business development—I am sure you recognize that very recently we had small business development week and the tremendous success of small business development week. We have now been able to get the loan of \$20 million. On my recent visit to China I was able to unlock some of the imponderables associated with this loan and the loan agreement is now about to be signed and that money will go to the Small Business Leasing Development Company which will do a very important thing for small businesses. Hitherto, small businesses had to go to the bank, even though they had a guarantee from the Small Business Development Company and they could go to a commercial bank and get 80 per cent of the capita required, they still had some very unconscionable interest rates. And when you are small and you have to pay 17, 18, 19, 20 per cent

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interest rates, it does not make your business viable and sustainable. What we are going to do now, through this leasing company, is to buy the equipment and lease it to you at some very concessionary rates. So that the high interest cost and high interest rate one has to be paying back will be totally obviated, and it will make small business much more sustainable.

We have also, Mr. Speaker, with the concurrence of Cabinet, appointed a task force which has been reported, and we are now in the position where we are developing an implementation schedule for the task force that would now see a take off of the small business sector in this country.

10.50 a.m.

We have appointed a new chairman and we are hoping this chairman would bring to bear his expertise and experience in the small business sector. We have also joined Venture Capital with the Small Business Development Company. It used to reside in the Ministry of Finance and we thought that the best place to locate the Venture Capital Company—we had a bit of a problem and we had to come to this honourable House in order to move an amendment to the Venture Capital Bill which we have done. We have appointed an administrator and the company is now on stream and the regulations would soon be completed and promulgated, that would now give that momentum to the Venture Capital Company. I hope the Member for Diego Martin Central will benefit from it—*[Interruption]*—and myself, because I believe in small business and venture capital in order to promote economic and sustainable development in this country.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the Free Zone Company, that is a little squabble that the Member for Diego Martin Central alluded to in his own way, asking me who is the Minister from Jamaica. What has happened is that we got advice from our Attorney General. I have to accept the advice of my Attorney General. He is the legal adviser to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and if he tells me something, I have to follow his advice, pending the ruling of the Legal Committee of Caricom. We have been following the advice. There is no lack of transparency, no unfair trading practices. Trinidad and Tobago has always held its head high in repaying its interest and its debt, following and complying with the World Trade Organization. In every international forum that we have a membership, Trinidad and Tobago has been an exceptional member, so to say that Trinidad and Tobago is engaging in unfair practices, according to “*The King and I*”, It is a false lie”. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that Trinidad and Tobago has been an exceptional member of Caricom. We want Caricom to succeed. We cherish

Caricom. We benefit from Caricom, but the other people benefit from Caricom too, and nobody must use an occasion to sully the name of Trinidad and Tobago, either regionally or internationally because of their own domestic situation. This is something that should not be countenanced. I hope that good sense would prevail because Trinidad and Tobago has absolutely no skeletons in its closet.

With respect to training, we have embarked on a very widespread training programme for all our staff, particularly computerization. I want you to know that we are Y2K compliant both in terms of hardware and software. Come December 31, 1999 and January 1, 2000, the Ministry of Trade and Industry would be able to service all its clients in the usual way. It does not matter what aspect of our activities, we are Y2K compliant.

We are also in the process of doing what we call “speaking to other ministries”, so we would be putting in a networking system, not only within our ministry but intra-network to speak to other ministries, so that we would be very much Y2K compliant and highly computerized.

We also have another area of the National Business Information Centre, and this has been of tremendous use not to only the small business sector but also to all of industry in this country. We have a resource library, a video viewing, an Internet and email service, a telephone enquiry service, a customer counter service and an information package and letter service. All these things are in place to ensure that the Ministry of Trade and Industry is user friendly and serving the public to the best of our ability.

The Export Trading Company (ETC) is one of the areas that we need to look at because we are not too happy with some of its performances. Initially, it was intended that the ETC should not only do its own thing, but should assist small businesses in making them export ready, in terms of labeling and quality, but also helping them to collate their products so that we could ship under one label which is *Buccaneer*. This has not been too successful but I intend to use whatever influence and persuasion I have to ensure that this comes on stream in the new year, or else we may have to use another mechanism in order to ensure that the Export Trading Company succeeds.

With respect to the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards, this is what I consider to be one of the classic success stories. When we consider the reputation and the credibility internationally of the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards, where we sit on every regional and international council with respect to standards, we should be very proud of the work they have been doing and continuing to do. They continue to do so not with the amount of resources that

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they require to do so, but they have attempted to improve their self-efficiency in a number of ways:

Mr. Speaker, do you remember when I came to this Parliament and piloted the Standards Bill, which was passed? There was also provision for a subsidiary company for them to do consultancy and so forth, and that has been coming on stream very slowly, but that would enable them to increase their revenue stream in order to supplement whatever subventions and other revenue they get from the Government. So now you can have laboratory accreditation, ISO accreditation, certification, product certification, standards information centre, regulatory functions, certificates for tourism, training, and standardization; all of these things are part of the portfolio successfully executed by the Bureau of Standards.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

The EXIM Bank is one of the most important vehicles for the development and promotion of export. Every country in the world, whether it is the EXIM Bank of Japan, Korea, the United States, Germany or the United Kingdom, all have been used as important instruments for promoting exports. In fact, the EXIM Bank of Japan is very much tied to JETRO which is the Japan External Trade Organization, and this is how Japan has been able to promote its products all over the world. We are trying to use the EXIM Bank in a similar fashion.

You should be proud to note that a bank whose capital base is so slim has been able to be instrumental in insuring for nine months, up to September 30, 1999, \$214,884,455; that is only in insurance. But in terms of financing, preshipment financing, both direct advances and guarantees they have been able to do \$26,140,037. With respect to preshipment discounting, including export credit insurance, \$188,744,418. This is truly an exceptionally good record for a company that has such a small capital base. We are hoping that the private sector would come forward because when it has been restructured from the Export Insurance Company of Trinidad and Tobago (EXICO) to the EXIM Bank, we have a provision for private sector participation.

We have a number of financial instruments they have developed: the EXIM Trade Certificate, the various lines of credit, the computerization upgrade and they are now able to ship to countries, or facilitate shipment to countries hither unexplored.

The Tourism Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO) is one of the companies that have been in the forefront of inward investment and tourism and industrial development. They have been engaged in a number of activities, as you

know, Mr. Speaker. In fact, many people feel that they are in too many activities, but a company like TIDCO is one that many people rely on to assist them in cultural, trade, and tourism types of ventures and activities. So perhaps this is one of the reasons you would find them in a number of different things.

They have been successful in a number of areas. The Chelsea and Birmingham Flower Show, the Miss Universe Pageant, the distribution of interactive CD-ROM, the European road shows, site development, eco-tourism, an adventure book, visa promotional project, Internet marketing. They have been in all types of special projects and they now have a subsidiary company called PIDCOTT, which is the Property and Industrial Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago. They are now responsible for developing the industrial sites into freezone sites, enabling the Freezone Company to have much more space and ready availability of factory shelves to attract investment into Trinidad and Tobago.

They have been involved in the construction of sanitary sewer systems at O'Meara Road. They were involved in the expansion of the Trinidad Hilton Conference Centre, and the latest we started last year is the Prime Minister's annual tourism award, which is giving a great fillip to the tourism industry. Of course, you know that the Prime Minister's Export Performance Award has been expanded to quality and productivity and some other categories which, hitherto, were only based on volume exports.

With respect to the Point Lisas Port Development Company (PLIPDECO), it has been doing exceptionally well in expanding the port facilities and the estate to bring it to one of the most important investment areas in our country, the Point Lisas Estate. They continue to expand. They will have to do more dredging in order to create another harbour there because of the amount of activities and expansion that has taken place there. Of course, this is going to cost a lot of money so they may have to go to the market before long to ensure that they have the kind of finances available for this expansion. Just recently, I had the honour to preside over their award of ISO 9002 certification.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the National Flour Mills which has been one of the centres of controversy—[*Interruption*—you thought that I would not have mentioned it, but you know that I am not afraid; when I stand up to speak, I have nothing to fear—It has been one of the centres of controversy with respect to rice shipments, having written off a substantial amount of money last year, and made a very small profit. It has emerged in very bullish way. In fact, in the first six months of this year it recorded a profit of \$32 million.

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I recently met, in my office, with a special envoy from the Ministry of Commerce of India and they are exploring what went wrong with the shipment. Many interesting things may, in fact, emerge. In fact, some of the things the Prime Minister has been saying, I was amazed to hear from this envoy, a certain congruence in terms of the information that the Prime Minister has mentioned in this Parliament and elsewhere, when this special envoy came to my office, only last week. Although I would like to say it is water under the bridge, all is not lost, because we have been advised that we may still recover both from shipper and from Lloyd's Insurance, a substantial part of the money that has been written off. This is the information I have received. The way it was put to me it seems to be quite credible and realizable.

What we need to do with the National Flour Mills is to deepen the operation so that we could take advantage of more of the possibilities of the products that we import. For example, soya bean; instead of just crushing it to make meal and oil, there are many other products which can be made that would be quite important to the development of a food company and for the provision of other things we import into the country like soya milk, soya flakes, soya burgers, lecithin and so forth. These are some of the areas they are looking at very seriously with respect to expanding that company's range of products.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of our plans for the year 2000, we intend to complete free trade agreements with Venezuela, the Andean Community, the Central American Common Market and to start some kind of discussion with Mercosur so that we would not be left out when the free trade area of the Americas comes on stream. *[Interruption]* The what? If you are well positioned with free trade agreements in your own area like the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, and Colombia, it gives a small country like us the kind of leverage and muscle to be able to deal with all the eventualities and sometimes some of the difficult situations that you find in a larger cluster, like from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, encompassing thirty something countries. That is the point I am trying to make.

11.05 a.m.

I am sure the former Minister of Trade, the Member for Diego Martin Central, understands that, because I understand that he was at the first meeting in Miami with you, and he went on to the first meeting in Denver, Colorado thereafter. I thought you would have understood it, you being the Prime Minister when you went to the meeting in Miami.

Mr. Speaker, one of the areas of most concern to us is our own Caricom. You are aware that for years we have been trying to deepen and widen the integration

movement. We have attempted to do so in a very evolutionary manner and one of the first things we did was to look at the Treaty of Chaguaramas which was signed some 25 years ago to see how relevant that is today to the operations to Caricom; whether in fact the terms MDC and LDC are still relevant, and what they mean because they are still invoking Article 56 and Article 29 against you.

In fact, at the last meeting—and that is the reason I was not present at the presentation of the budget on October 8, 1999—I was attending the Council of Trade and Economic Development Ministers of Trade Meeting in Guyana. It is interesting that they are now moving from quantitative restrictions, at least, that is what the LDCs are putting on the table to tariffication. It is an improvement because quantitative restriction is a curse on free trade and they are moving from quantitative restrictions to tariffication, but still, the tariffication to which they are moving is punitive against the MDCs, particularly to Trinidad and Tobago because we are the country with the advanced industrial platform.

Mr. Speaker, what we have done is developed nine protocols, seven have already been signed by Trinidad and Tobago although some of the other countries have signed, there are two outstanding protocols to be signed and we were hoping they could be signed at this Heads of Government meeting taking place here on October 26 and 27, but they are not quite ready simply because the smaller territories feel that they need more time to look at the dispute resolution and the other thing. So we are hoping for the next intercessional that takes place in St. Vincent in February, the two new protocols 8 and 9 would be ready for signature.

There is a mechanism whereby if four members have signed it, provisional acceptance, the protocol keeps it, so we would have that forming the basis of what we call the single market and the single economy of Caricom which we hope to come on stream after a long, long time in the year 2000. What this would do is that we would have harmonization of fiscal incentives, harmonization of certain kinds of laws like company law, we would have movement of skilled persons, movement of capital, movement of more products. Hopefully, all of this trade barrier, whether it is non-tariff barrier or tariff barriers will either come to an end or would be substantially reduced because it is important if we move into the FTA, if we move into the Dominican Republic, if the post-Lomé Convention says reciprocity is the name of the game and REPAS would come into effect, that is Regional Economic Grouping in Africa and so forth, if all of these things—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You have one minute.

Hon. M. Assam: All right, I am winding up, Sir, Just give me half a minute, with great respect. If all of these things come on stream, Trinidad and Tobago will

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be well-positioned and Caricom would be well-positioned to take its country and its region into the 21st Century.

Thank you.

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin East*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I had suffered a pain on listening to the budget address on Friday, and to listen to the outright untruths, manipulation of blatantly bogus figures, wrong numbers, and then listen to the Member for Tobago East say: "Why are we talking about the numbers, we should be talking about other things." We should be helping them to deal with corruption, I believe that is what he said. Then at some ungodly hour in the night, I had to suffer through the Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs and Minister of Tourism which has been repeated today. Unadulterated nonsense!

I think I need to put things into perspective. I opened the *Trinidad Express* of October 18, this morning and on page 3 I saw a headline relating to some speech given to the San Juan Business Association by the Minister of Finance over the weekend and I quote:

"Kuei Tung also defended the numbers used in the 1999/2000 Budget, following allegations by Opposition Leader Patrick Manning that the figures used were erroneous.

Kuei Tung said the figures were those provided by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) in keeping with standard practice. Those figures, he said, showed that inflation peaked at 13.7 per cent during the Manning administration..."

He goes on to say:

"I am not a statistician. I am not even an economist. So if I am wrong because of a number it is not because I am wrong, they have been given [the figures] to me and I am satisfied with them..."

Precisely what the Leader of the Opposition said that he would do. As soon as his bogus figures were exposed and he could no longer pervade untruths, he blamed the public servants. How disgusting!

Let me go to the document and I would show that even in his attempt to blame the public servants he cannot help distorting reality. In the *Review of the Economy 1998-1999* which was laid in this House by the Minister of Finance on October 08, 1999.

"APPENDIX 9

POPULATION, LABOUR FORCE AND EMPLOYMENT ESTIMATES (Mid-Year)"

We go to Unemployment Rate and we see the unemployment rate projected for 1999 based on figures from the Central Statistical Office to be 14.6 per cent, but this hon. Minister of Finance says the figures were provided by the CSO so if they are wrong, he is not wrong, but the CSOs figures in his own document says that Unemployment Rate is 14.6 per cent, but in this hon. Minister's budget address, he tells us that unemployment has dropped to its lowest level in 15 years to—Look at it on page 14 of *A Blueprint for Human Development and Sustainable Growth*.

“From an average rate of 18.8 percent for the four-year period prior to 1996, unemployment has declined to its lowest level in 15 years. By the end of June the rate stood at 11.7 percent.”

Mr. Hinds: You hear lie.

Mr. C. Imbert: What utter nonsense, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Kuei Tung: Would the Minister gave way?

Mr. C. Imbert: No I will not. You are going to purvey untruths again. I will not. All right.

Mr. Kuei Tung: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the numbers I quoted, I said June 1999, but you are not paying attention, like you did not pay attention to the wall that fell upon you. This says provisional as at March 1999. There is a difference between March 1999 and June 1999. Even short people know that.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you see his attitude? That is why I will not give way again. In his own document, he says the projected figure for 1999 which is based on figures that he has would be published by the Central Statistical Office which would show that unemployment in June 1999 was in excess of 14 per cent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, he cannot help it. Let us go to the inflation rates. In the *Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Economic Bulletin May 1999*. The retail Price Index on which inflation is based. In 1993, it is 10.8 per cent, 1994, 8.8 per cent, 1995, 5.3 per cent, 1996, 3.3 per cent. Where on earth did the Minister get his figure of 13.7 per cent during the Manning Administration? Where? I would go back now into the *Review of the Economy 1996* which was presented by this same Minister in this House.

Let us see what the Retail Price Index was for the years in question. You see, he just cannot help it. In Appendix 8, *Review of the Economy 1996*, presented by the Minister of Finance:

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	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
“CONSUMER PRICE INDEX Sept. 1993=100”	3.8	6.5	10.8	8.8	5.3

But in the *Daily Express*, he says; I guess he was misquoted:

“...that inflation peaked at 13.7 per cent during the Manning administration as opposed to a little over 5 per cent during the Manning Administration...”

What utter nonsense! I have used his own document laid by the Minister of Finance in this Parliament, that Minister of Finance. It confirms what the Central Bank document of 1999 confirms and what the Central Bank document of 1998, 1997 and 1996 confirms. They feel we do not keep these documents. They feel we do not go back and check the nonsense they said in 1996, 1997 and 1998. The CSO tells him unemployment is 14.6 per cent, but he puts in the budget it is 11.7 per cent. His own figures tell him that inflation peaked at 10 per cent in 1993, he says it is 13.7 per cent. It is little wonder that he could come in this Parliament and make statements such as he has reduced the country's debt burden.

Let me go to the relevant Appendix on that. Appendix 16 in his own document Total Public Debt And Debt Service, source, the Ministry of Finance.

1995	1997	Oct. '97/ Sep '98	Oct '98/ Sep '99p
18,812.0	19,964.3	21,768.6	22,618.1

So \$18.8 billion was our total debt in 1995, it is now \$22.6 billion, but he reduced our debt burden. You hear the nonsense. What is the man-in-the-street to think and the Minister says people are not interested in numbers, they are interested in trends. That is what he said. The figures were merely representative of trends. Look at his trends: 18.8; 19.9; 21.8 and 22.6. It is going up. Borrowing, borrowing, borrowing. This is what we have to deal with. Every time you catch him with his pants down. First he blames the public servants, and then he says the people are not interested in that.

11.20 a.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you see it is typical on that side; typical behaviour of the individuals on that side. They have no interest in governing this country, no interest whatsoever.

You know, going through these documents, looking at the *Review of the Economy 1996*—which was just after the UNC came in, and looking at the *Review*

of the Economy now, you will pick up some very interesting things because he is correcting the figures. When he came in 1996, he wanted to paint a picture of non-performance on the part of the previous administration. So he puts in his document at Appendix 2 1996, that the growth in the economy—constant 1985 prices—was 2.4 per cent. But he knew that was not true. He knew that the PNM had the highest level of growth in the last 10 years of this country. He knew that. So he comes back in 1999, gross domestic product at market prices 1985, 95/94, 4 per cent.

Mr. Manning: “Ah ha! Ah ha!”

Mr. C. Imbert: He is now correcting the numbers. Having pervaded untruths in this Parliament, and having said that there was minimal growth under the PNM, he now comes back and admits it in 1999. Appendix 2, review in 1999, growth in 1995 was 4 per cent under the Manning PNM administration. [*Desk thumping*] And what was growth in 1996? It was 3.8 per cent; 1997; 3.7 per cent. It is declining. That is the trend. They want to talk about trends. The growth in the economy continues to decline. Do you believe these figures? Next year he will come and correct them.

Dr. Rowley: The Stock Market is bullish—

Mr. C. Imbert: The stock market is bullish according to the Member for St. Joseph.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I bought some stocks on the Local Stock Market about one year ago, and I have since seen them declined in value by 33 per cent. But that Member for St. Joseph will tell me, the Stock Market is bullish. If you look at the Stock Market over the last 12 months, virtually every stock has declined over the 12-month period, Mr. Deputy Speaker, an indication of lack of confidence.

Dr. Rowley: That is a trend.

Mr. C. Imbert: That is a trend—another trend. You know, look at the Stock Market as a whole and there has been a total decline over the last 12 months. That is a trend—trends, trends. He wants to talk about trends.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the other matter that is a trend in Trinidad and Tobago is the unabashed trend of increasing unadulterated naked corruption. That is a trend and the ability of the Members on the other side to pervade untruths.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me go to some development issues and go back in times. *Public Sector Investment Programme 1997* laid in this Parliament by the Minister of Planning or the Minister of Finance, December, 1996. Let us take a look at what he said. Page 21, *Public Sector Investment Programme 1997*:

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“One of the new projects to be implemented in 1997 is, the construction of an interchange at the intersection of the Churchill Roosevelt and Uriah Butler Highway.”

Mr. Valley: What year was that?

Mr. C. Imbert: The year 1997.

“The total cost of the interchange is estimated at \$70 million and it is projected that the works to be undertaken in 1997 will incur expenditure of \$20 million. The interchange will assist significantly in reducing the congestion at this intersection and will facilitate an easier flow of traffic between the main population centres along the east/west and north/south corridors...”

Dr. Rowley: That is the \$100 million they spent on Miss Universe.

Mr. C. Imbert: Imagine that!

“An allocation of \$20 million has been provided for the commencement of construction of a highway for San Fernando to Princes Town.”

[Laughter]. I have not seen this highway.

Dr. Rowley: They thief the highway too.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I mean, that was 1997, the rubbish they were talking in 1997. Just going on and on every year.

Let me go to 1999/2000. Let us see what they have to say about that. What do they have to tell us about the highway infrastructure in 1997? What have they got to tell us? You know it is amazing. *[Laughter]* I cannot find the over-pass inside here. Where did it go? Mr. Deputy Speaker, where is this over-pass that was supposed to be constructed in 1997? Where is it? Where on earth is it? Is it in the mind of the Minister of Finance, because when I read the speech, I am hearing about all sorts of things?

I heard the Minister of Labour—a mechanical toy, I think he was described by the Member for Diego Martin West—animated toy. Following the eloquent prose of the Member for Mayaro, the Member for Nariva says, “I am so happy and I am so proud that three secondary schools will be built in my constituency, in the coming fiscal year and this has never been done before.” And all sorts of things.

Let me read from the Minister of Finance, page 21:

“Furthermore, we will construct ten new secondary schools at Waterloo, Valencia, Brazil, Debe, Tableland, Biche, Matura, Blanchisseuse, Coryal/Cumuto, and Manzanilla.”

Well, let us not talk about the location for these schools, where there is a school population of 20 and 30 children. Let us not talk about that. Let us go straight into *The Ministry of Education Development Programme*. Page 68. Very interesting. It makes very interesting reading. You read what the Minister says about the development programme.

Dr. Rowley: Assam said there are details inside there.

Mr. C. Imbert: Of course, when the Minister presented his non-event on Friday, everybody told us, go into the documents. They are replete with information and you will find everything that you want to know there.

Dr. Rowley: That is the only true thing that they have mentioned.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes that is true. I have found everything I want to know inside of there. I go to pages 68 and 69 of the *Development Programme*. Secondary Schools. Listen to this.

“Construction of Mayaro Composite, construction of Cedros Composite, construction of Tranquillity Government, construction of Cunupia government.”

But this is strange. What did the Minister say? Waterloo, Valencia, Brazil, Debe, Tableland, Biche, Matura, Blanchisseuse, Coryal/Cumuto and Manzanilla. [Laughter]. Let me go back here. *Draft Estimates of development programmes financial Year 1999/2000*. Page 68, Ministry of Education, Secondary Schools:

“Mayaro Composite, Cedros Composite, Tranquillity Government, Cunupia Government.”

That is it! Where are the rest of them? Where are all the schools in Waterloo, Valencia, Brazil? Where are they? I am seeing some other schools here but none of the schools is listed here.

Dr. Rowley: There is no provision for them.

Mr. C. Imbert: Where is Blanchisseuse? Where is Waterloo? Where is Valencia? Where is Brazil? Where is Debe? Where is Tableland?

Dr. Rowley: They are not there.

Mr. C. Imbert: I cannot find it.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker: Could I just ask that anybody who finds it necessary to be a supporting cast, to leave the hon. Member and let him please present his

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contributions. I would ask the other side that is not now, interjecting or interfering with him and Members on his own side, not to interfere with him because it interferes with the quality of what he is putting forward. I ask you, please. The hon. Member is speaking to me. Please do not disturb him. Do not disturb him for me, please. Let him speak to me.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you Mr. Speaker.

[*Dr. Nanan rose*]

No, No, you will have your turn to speak. I have just read out a list of schools which, according to the Minister of Finance, will be constructed in all of these areas in 1999/2000. I have gone into the *Development Programme*. I am not seeing it. I went to the back of it. There is something called “Infrastructure Development Fund” and sometimes projects that are not placed in the first part of the development programme are placed in the Infrastructure Development Fund.

11.30 a.m.

So I went to the Infrastructure Development Fund on page 148 of the estimates and I looked for the allocation under the Ministry of Education. I thought to myself, perhaps I had missed something. In the 1999/2000 Estimate of Expenditure under the Infrastructure Development Fund, the Ministry of Education—zero. So perhaps the Member for Nariva could ask his honourable colleague, where are all these schools. Maybe he could tell me. Where are all these schools? I would love to hear.

I heard the Member for St. Joseph carrying on about their commitment to sport, and if we go to the Minister's speech, you know, this resumé, this *curriculum vitae* that we got from the Minister of Finance about the wonderful things he and his administration have done over the last four years we hear:

“Sport development is integral to national development.”

He goes on:

“...we propose to establish...a National Centre for Sport Administration...Government will award an annual three-year scholarship...in the name of Ato Boldon....We will commence construction of a multi-purpose Sport Facility...”

Now, I do not think it is generally known that in 1998, 1999—I think the Member for Chaguanas knows, and I will ask him through you, Mr. Speaker: what was the allocation for infrastructure development in the Ministry of Sport

and Youth Affairs in the fiscal year 1998/1999? I will allow the Minister to answer that. What was the allocation for sporting infrastructure development under the development programme in fiscal year 1998/1999? I will give way. I see the Minister is struck dumb.

The 1998/1999 *Draft Estimate of Development Programme*, Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, Consolidated Fund, allocation—zero. I want the press to take note of this. This Government that likes to bleat about its commitment to young people, and the Member for St. Joseph was carrying on about their commitment to sport, allocated not one red cent to the upgrading of sporting infrastructure under the development programme in the 1998/1999 fiscal year and spent no money—zero. You know, one has to really wonder at these individuals, Mr. Speaker. One has to wonder at what they are doing and what they are telling us because when one looks in the documents and one listens to what they have to say, it does not make any sense.

Let me deal with this whole question of drainage. Let me go to the *Public Sector Investment Programme 1997* presented in this House by the Minister in 1996, page 19:

“In order to address the serious drainage and flood control problems which exist throughout the country, the Government has embarked on the preparation of a comprehensive drainage and flood control rehabilitation programme for which assistance is being sought from the World Bank. Discussions with the Bank for a loan of US \$90 million are well advanced and negotiations are expected to be completed by the second quarter of 1997.”

What happens in fiscal 1998/1999? Let us go to the PSIP document, 1999/2000 and take a look at what they have to say under drainage, Mr. Speaker. I will come to roads in a little while. This is in October 1999. The whole of 1997 went, the whole of 1998 went and the whole of 1999 will be expired shortly and this is what they are telling us:

“Processing of the proposed loan from the World Bank for a Comprehensive Drainage Development Programme (CDDP) did not progress as planned as a consequence of the prolonged negotiations...”

Could you imagine that?

“Meanwhile, the Bank funded Water Sector and Institutional Strengthening Programme, drew to a close with a study of the Caparo River Basin substantially completed...”

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Now the interesting thing about this is when we left office, Mr. Speaker, we had virtually completed negotiations for this US \$90 million drainage loan and you see it in the 1996 PSIP document where they say they feel they will complete negotiations in 1997. They wasted the whole of 1996 but they are telling you that in the second quarter of 1997 they are going to complete negotiations and construction will commence shortly thereafter.

In October 1999 they are telling you that the processing of the loan did not progress as planned but they completed the Caparo River Basin study. Mr. Speaker, the Caparo River Basin study was completed by the PNM administration in 1995. The consultants submitted their final recommendations in 1995 and it was on that basis that we were negotiating with the World Bank for the improvement of the flood control measures in the Caparo area in 1996. I cannot believe that four years later, after a study was completed, I am reading in the PSIP document that the study was just completed. What have they been doing, Mr. Speaker? I mean, what is going on?

A \$400 million programme to alleviate flooding in south, central and north Trinidad should have commenced in 1996 so that as we stand here today, with a tropical storm outside there, the people in Chaguanas would not have to buy tents, batteries and bread and study to build ladders to go up on the roof, right. If this caring administration on the other side had followed through with what they said they would do and what they should have done, all of those flood control measures would have been in place already. It is a “shoulda” “woulda” “coulda” government. That is what they are. [*Desk thumping*].

It is simply amazing and that is why you see the admission of defeat, Mr. Speaker, in this budget statement from the Minister of Finance:

“To alleviate this perennial problem, I propose to establish, this year, an Agricultural Disaster Relief Fund to provide much needed support to our farmers in the event that they are affected by natural disasters.

The details of the operations of the Fund will be worked out before the end of 1999.

I have allocated \$15 million to start this fund.”

So it is only farmers who are affected by floods? So all the residents of north, south and central Trinidad are not affected by floods? Chaguanas does not flood? This flood relief slush fund is appropriately called a slush fund because when one mixes mud and water one gets slush.

This \$15 million slush fund is what this UNC “vaps” coalition wants to administer in an election year to their friends and family. I would like to know how come it is only confined to farmers. Why can all those people who are right now bracing for floods in Chaguanas not get access to this flood relief fund? I mean, it is absolutely ridiculous, Mr. Speaker. A \$400 million loan was available to them and for four years they have been there fooling around, dodging, hiding, ducking—every year “We go do it”; we go do it next year”; we go do it next year”; the thing taking too long”; the conditions too hard”; we cannot do it”; we cannot do it”. It has been four years, Mr. Speaker.

Do you know what the problem is? It has nothing to do with conditions prescribed by the World Bank because if it had, they would not have said in 1996 that they expect to complete negotiation within a couple of months. It has nothing to do with that. What it has to do with is when one has to follow the tendering procedures prescribed by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank one cannot “tief”, Mr. Speaker. When you have to follow those tendering procedures you cannot “tief”.

Let us go through a number of projects now—Whitehall. When we demitted office in 1995 we had awarded a contract to MTS to refurbish Whitehall at a cost of \$5 million and refurbishment was in progress when the coalition came into power. Over the last three years we have seen that \$5 million refurbishment of Whitehall, through highly irregular tendering procedures. They abandoned all known tendering and evaluation procedures in the country, just abandoned them and contracts were just handed out right, left and centre to their partners and their friends.

One saw the breaking up of contracts from \$10 million down to \$1 million and so forth, with the Minister directly overseeing the whole thing. One saw the contract for the refurbishment of Whitehall go from \$5 million to \$10 million to \$15 million to \$20 million to \$25 million and the projected cost will now be in excess of \$30 million. For what purpose? A display of self-aggrandizement; importing marble tiles from Italy, chandeliers from Europe so that, as my hon. Friend from San Fernando West said, when you look at a picture of the Prime Minister playing golf in his designer clothes, “Sugar workers take that”. They call it—where is the Member for St. Joseph—*nuevo arrive*, “just come”, Mr. Speaker. That is what *nuevo arrive* means, “just come”. So that we are now saddled with that \$30 million debt on that refurbishment of Whitehall.

I notice they are quick to spend money on refurbishing Whitehall. They could spend \$30 million giving money to their friends and family on Whitehall but

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would they fix the President's House where the roof is leaking? No. Would they fix the Red House where the roof is leaking? No. They cannot even allocate five cents to fix this honourable Chamber but they could spend \$30 million on chandeliers and Persian carpets and marble tiles for the Prime Minister's office.

That is this Government and, of course, no known tendering procedure was followed. Money just flowed like water. They cannot fix important edifices in this country like President's House, just because they are vex with the President. I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, I take that back. I should not bring him into this discussion at all. I take that back. But they cannot spend five cents fixing President's House or five cents fixing the Red House but they can spend \$30 million on Whitehall. Why? It is because they did not follow tendering procedures. You see if that was a World Bank loan Whitehall would still be in the condition it was in 1995.

Look at the maximum-security prison, Mr. Speaker. When we demitted office we were engaged in a dispute with the contractor. The extent of the dispute over electronic locks for the prison cells at the maximum-security prison was of the order of \$10 million to \$12 million. They wanted \$30 million, we were prepared to settle at \$18 million to \$20 million. So that the extent of the dispute was \$10 million, \$12 million. The maximum-security prison project was virtually completed in 1995. I toured that facility with the contractor in 1995 and I saw the installation of the electronic gates in progress at that time. Virtually every building was complete. They were putting beds in the prison cells and so forth. In 1995 toilets were going in and all we had at that time, essentially, was a dispute over the cost of the electronic locks and gates for the cells; as I said, a dispute of the order of \$10 million to \$12 million.

You look in the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, Mr. Speaker, and what do you see under the Ministry of National Security? A \$200 million prison contract awarded under the NAR administration in 1991 is now worth \$292 million. How on earth did the \$10 million variance and dispute between the PNM administration and the contractor turn into a \$92 million additional payment? Four years later they cannot even open the prison yet, Mr. Speaker. There is overcrowding in our prisons. They had to keep those unfortunate souls who were hanged by the hangman in Port of Spain creating mayhem and traffic congestion because that prison up there is not ready for occupation and it was 90 to 95 per cent complete in 1995.

They took four years from November 1995 to October 1999 to manipulate the process, increased the cost from \$200 million to \$292 million and it cannot be opened yet.

11.45 a.m.

The original contract was three years; it was a 36-month contract—executed in March 1999. I remember well, it should have been completed in March 1995, but because we were engaged in the matter relating to the locks, we did not press the contractor, to finish in March 1995; we had given him an extension to November or December, 1995. He could have finished then. What on earth has taken place between December 1995 and October 1999? There are liquidated damages in that contract. There are penalties in that contract, Mr. Speaker, which will run into millions of dollars. This Government, when it is dealing with its friends, does not impose penalties.

Look at the NP gas station matter. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries came in this Parliament and told us that penalties, liquidated damages would be imposed for the delay of the Richmond Street and Gasparillo gas stations. No penalty has been imposed! We are seeing all kind of manoeuvres to allow the contractor to wiggle out of that. No penalty has been imposed on the contractor at the maximum security prison, although the prison is almost five years late. No penalty because their friends are involved. That is why the Government is not going to the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, because it would have to follow proper procedures and terminate contracts when contractors do not perform.

Let me now deal with the Solomon Hochoy Highway. The lowest bidder on that contract in 1996 was a firm called **Cuebertus**. **Cuebertus** was not associated with any known friend of the UNC. That was its problem: it was not associated with any known friend of the UNC. So, what does the Government do? They went to **Cuebertus** and said: “Look, we cannot afford to pay you the money you have tendered. It does not matter if you are the lowest bidder, we cannot afford your contract. We want you to reduce your price.” **Cuebertus** had tendered approximately \$127 million. The Government went to **Cuebertus** and said: “Chop it down to \$105 or \$110 million.” **Cuebertus**, of course, said “No. I tendered on this job at \$127 million, why am I going down?”—I understand it is \$120 million—“Why am I taking \$7 million off my price, what for, and you want me to do the same job? **Cuebertus** quite rightly said “No” and left, paving the way for the Government to start bidding with the second bidder: Comlysa Lain, who was, however, associated with a very well-known friend of the UNC: one of their favourite contractors. Of course, a typical pattern flows. The Government did not give **Cuebertus** the contract at \$127 million but they negotiated with the second bidder for the same figure or a higher figure, for less road. “Yuh tink it easy, Mr. Speaker?”

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The Government sat and watched Comlysa Lain fool around on the north/south strip for 24 months. People were taking four or five hours to get from San Fernando to Port of Spain every day and they sat there watching. All the Members of Government are from south. They all have to go down there every day or every other day. They spent 24 months watching this contract, until eventually—[*Interruption*] The international agencies do not allow things like this to go on forever. The European Development Fund is not going to allow a contractor to be there doing 10 per cent of the work in 100 per cent of the time. Eventually, the Government was pressured into terminating the contract. As my Opposition Leader said and in order to cloud the issue, the Government terminated the contract at the library as well. I would talk about that in a while. The Government realized that it could not get away with what it wanted to do because of the procedures set down by the European Development Fund.

What has the Government done? Nothing! There is over \$100 million in concessionary loan funding available to this country. Over \$100 million, available to this country, for the urgently needed rehabilitation of the Solomon Hochoy Highway. What have they done? They have done nothing. When did they terminate that contract? It has to be over six months ago. They have done nothing and they will do nothing because there is no way that they will follow the procedures prescribed by the European Development Fund.

Dr. Rowley: And who suffers?

Mr. C. Imbert: And who suffers? The population of Trinidad and Tobago suffers. The population suffers. Because once the Government has to adhere to normal tender rules, “dey cyar tief, nobody could tief” that is the problem.

Look at the airport, Mr. Speaker, a project that is supposed to cost \$400 million escalates to \$900 million under this “clean” Government. I see the Member for Tobago East has joined us. If the Member really meant what he said—that we should assist him in rooting out corruption—I would ask him to root out corruption among the friends and families of his government. That is what I would ask him to do, if he really meant what he said. Of course, that would be a conflict of interest. The airport, from \$400 million to \$900 million; the tender procedures manipulated; NIPDEC’s tender rules changed to allow a sole selective award to one of the UNC’s favourite contractors.

Imagine, in order to tender on that project, one has to put down a non-refundable fee of \$63,000. No wonder people are not tendering on the packages at the airport. Whether one wins or losses the job, one has to put down a fee of \$63,000—non-refundable. Do you think any contractor in Trinidad and Tobago,

seeing the way things are going, seeing that it is the policy of this Government to award contracts to the highest bidder and not the lowest bidder—I have never seen anything like this before: a policy of a government to award contracts to the highest bidder instead of the lowest bidder. Do you think any contractor with any sense would put down \$63,000 as a tender deposit that he would not be getting back and he already knows that everything would be going “whoosh”? Everything is going “whoosh” up the road. He knows that already. Before the documents are opened, everything going “whoosh”.

One contractor gets over \$500 million in contract awards: inflated contract awards. Typical. The Government does not deal in five cents and ten cents, Mr. Speaker. It does not deal in small change; everything with the Government is big.

Look at the desalination matter.

Mr. Hart: Murder.

Mr. C. Imbert: Look at that. One contractor tenders \$4.45 per cubic metre. Another one tenders \$3.32 per cubic metre. What do they do?

Mr. Manning: \$4.45.

Mr. C. Imbert: \$4.45. They are tired of \$3.32. There is more room inside for people to get what they are supposed to get. The Government did not take the lowest bid, because the higher the bid, there would be more flexibility inside for people to enrich themselves.

Mr. Hinds: The minister is living in a glass house.

Mr. C. Imbert: One really has to ask oneself: how boldface can a government get? How boldface can a government get?

I understand that desalination contract would cost this country an additional \$900 million in unnecessary expenditure. If the Government had gone for the lower bidder this would have saved the country \$900 million. But no, they have to go for the higher bidder. That is how they operate. This is how tendering is done under the UNC: go for the higher bidder, give them a Government guarantee, give them a take-or-pay contract, tie this country, tie our children’s future for the next 20—30 years paying back millions in unnecessary and corrupt expenditure while they go on their merry way.

11.55 a.m.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Imbert: We now have a new policy in Trinidad and Tobago which is, the highest bidder shall be awarded the contract or, have no bids at all! Just call one's partner and say, "This is a contract I wish to organize with you. Let us talk price and we will fix up". The same way the InnCogen matter was done. Just call your partner and say, "Look, we will tell them that we need to have more electricity over the next 5 to 10 years. Let us produce a study showing increased electricity demand over the next 5 to 10 years". Then they say it is an emergency so they do not have time to invite bids or evaluate tenders. They have to rush and get somebody to build a new electricity plant.

Mr. Assam: How do you know to "tief" so well?

Mr. C. Imbert: I am watching all of you. It is very interesting. They get a study commissioned showing an increased demand for electricity. They say there is no need for tenders because it is an emergency and go and hand a contract to their partner, tying this country to billions of dollars of expenditure with a loan guaranteed by the Government, a take or pay contract for 30 years.

Next thing, when one reads the Minister's own documents, one sees that the demand for electricity is projected to decrease in 1999—2000. Out of the Government's own documents, the demand for electricity, because projects were not implemented and certain plans that were in the pipeline are not going to come on stream anymore, demand for electricity is now going to decrease, foreign investors are shying away. All sorts of things.

So, we now have this monster in Caroni producing 225 megawatts of electricity which we do not and will never need, and we have to pay for it for the next 30 years! [*Desk thumping*] Typical behaviour! Of course, fire in Colville Street to show well, boy, if we did not have InnCogen, is trouble. Mysterious fire in Colville Street!

Mr. Speaker, someone gave me some documents over the weekend on this Toco ferry port. Everything this Government does has a twist to it. In everything they do there is an angle. I distinctly remember about 10 years ago being involved in examining the feasibility of that ferry port. This is before I was involved in politics. It was around 1988—1989. Having examined the feasibility, we determined at that time that it was a marginal investment. It was interesting to

learn over the weekend that a contract will soon be awarded for the ferry port to the highest bidder with a Government guarantee. *[Laughter]*

It is so interesting the way this Government operates. It has a technical committee in the Ministry of Works and Transport recommending no Government guarantee be given to the developer of the ferry port, but the preferred bidder, the price of his project is the highest by millions and millions of U.S. dollars, and he is getting a Government guarantee. The lowest bidder does not want a Government guarantee but his price is too small!

Mr. Valley: How does the Attorney General feel about that?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Nothing.

Mr. C. Imbert: I think the Attorney General has been totally bypassed and sidestepped in all of this. We heard the Member for St. Joseph state that the Attorney General is the legal advisor for Government and we must follow his advice. That does not apply to the airport. The Attorney General advised that the contract to Northern Construction be cancelled and be sent out for competitive bids, but the Cabinet did not follow his advice. *[Desk thumping]* It is so convenient, Mr. Speaker, that they use the Attorney General when they want, but when they want to do their “scul”, the Attorney General is no longer their legal advisor to the Cabinet.

I shall wait with baited breath to hear the announcement of yet another scandal—this Toco ferry port—and we will see all sorts of articles appearing in the newspapers, I am sure, just like the desalination plant where the highest bidder got it instead of the lowest bidder, where a Government guarantee, again, has been given for a marginal project and, as I say, the boys and the girls laugh all the way to their foreign bank accounts in the Isle of Man, the Cayman Islands and so forth.

I am advised that two chairmen of two state enterprises are involved in the successful contract for the ferry port which has been given to the highest bidder. In due course we shall see what they will do. That is management UNC style. *[Desk thumping]* They know that they are unpopular and that they will be out of office in the next 12 months. They could stretch it down to February 2001, but come March 2001, that is the end of them! *[Desk thumping]*

You see this growth, Mr. Speaker, we do not have growth in our economy. We have growth projects. *[Laughter]* Growth in awards to the highest bidder! So, we will see a feeding frenzy over the next 15 months, all these mysterious projects: the InnCogen, the desalination plant, the Toco ferry and, well, the airport gone clear. *[Laughter]*

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Then there is the overpass. This overpass we keep hearing about, I would love to know what procedures are being put in place to ensure transparency and equity in the award of this contract for this overpass we keep hearing about. I would love to know, but they will never tell us. Just like the desalination plant, they refuse to have a public opening of tenders. After the InnCogen scandal, one would have thought that at least they would have a little shame so that when the tenders were opened for the desalination plant, at least one would be able to see the cost of the plant, the price per cubic metre. No! They are not opening anything.

It is only after they awarded the contract that we are starting to hear all kinds of “ole talk”. They did not know that the lowest bidder was involved with the largest desalination plant in the world. Nobody told them. There were sweeteners attached to the winning bid. Imagine that! That is a Freudian slip. Do you know what a sweetener is in contract negotiations? That is a euphemism for a bribe, Mr. Speaker! The Member for St. Joseph could tell you that. It is a Freudian slip.

Mr. Assam: I know about bribe?

Mr. C. Imbert: No. What a sweetener means. When a man tells you he won the bid because he added a sweetener and the person involved came out and said it was the sweetener, Mr. Speaker, it is the most amazing thing I have ever seen. They tell us to go through these documents. Every single document we go through is inconsistent with the statements made by the Minister of Finance, inconsistent with his speech, with the pious declarations of the Prime Minister. *[Words expunged]*

Mr. Speaker: Is the suggestion that he did something improper? We want to know.

Mr. Panday: I thought you would never intervene, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order! I am simply asking the Member who is on his legs whether in pursuing that line there is any suggestion of impropriety.

Mr. C. Imbert: No.

Mr. Panday: So why are you mentioning me?

Mr. Hart: The Speaker is on his feet!

Mr. Speaker: I really think that the hon. Member is sailing very close to contravention of the Standing Orders and, for the sake of the record, as you know, a Member is not permitted to make imputations of impropriety against—
[Interruption] I beg your pardon? This is serious. One could come with a

substantive Motion and allege anything, but you know that it is not permitted to do this and, I really construe what you are saying as making imputations against the Member for Couva North which I will not permit. I order that what has just been said be expunged from the record.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that when similar allegations are being made—

Mr. Speaker: I will not have that. To make imputations now against the Speaker would be slightly different. I have ruled on the matter. I have asked you a very simple question, whether the line you were pursuing was to suggest that the Member was corrupt or dishonest. You have answered it. I have indicated that I have looked at the surrounding circumstances of what you were saying and I think it is an inescapable conclusion. I have, therefore, ruled that you should not pursue that and that it should be expunged. I do not have to give you the assurance that any source from which that type of imputation comes will be dealt with in a similar fashion.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wish to put on record now that I am very surprised that the Prime Minister, in the light of the controversy that existed in this country over a certain matter, would be so unabashed, so blasé, so uncaring about what people's reaction might be to engage in the golf game to which I referred. [*Desk thumping*] That is all I was saying.

I felt that his actions were that of a shameless person. That is all I was saying. [*Desk thumping*] I was imputing no improper motive, I was not alleging any corruption. All I was saying was that I felt him to be a shameless person. After all the controversy in this country over InnCogen, he would be shameless enough to be playing golf with the man who orchestrated the InnCogen matter! [*Desk thumping*] That is all I was saying. I hope I have now reassured you that I had no intention of imputing any corruption. It was simply the very shamelessness of the hon. Prime Minister. I just could not take it! Anyway, let us move on.

12.10 p.m.

I hope I have reassured you that I had no intention of imputing any corruption. It was simply the very shamelessness of the man, the hon. Prime Minister, I just could not take it, Mr. Speaker. Anyway, let us move on. If looks could kill, I dead now. [*Laughter*] If you see their faces, Mr. Speaker! I let the cat out of the bag, that is what happened. We shall see what occurs next as they descend into the gutter. That is a pattern of behaviour of the people on that side, when you expose their business, what they do. We shall see now as they descend into the gutter.

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Anyway, Mr. Speaker, let me deal with the Road Improvement Fund. The Road Improvement Fund, by law, requires the Minister of Works and Transport to report to this Parliament every six months. Accordingly, the Minister should have reported in June 1996, December 1996, June 1997, December 1997, June 1998, December 1998, and June 1999. The Minister has reported once in four years. We should have had eight reports in this Parliament from the Minister of Works and Transport on the Road Improvement Fund.

You know why? Quite apart from their absolute contempt and disregard for the law, if he were to report on the activities of the Road Improvement Fund, a number of very curious things would emerge. The country would discover, for example, out of the \$200 million that has been collected from the Road Improvement Fund since the UNC coalition sneaked its way into office, \$180 million has been spent in the constituencies of the UNC. That is why they would not report to this Parliament, because over 90 per cent of the people's money in the Road Improvement Fund is being spent in the constituencies of the UNC. They have corrupted the entire concept of the Road Improvement Fund. *[Desk thumping]*

When we established that fund, we established a reporting mechanism so that the Minister of Works and Transport would come to the Parliament and give us the list of roads and the expenditure on these roads. While one can understand, due to the pressing nature of the duties of a Minister of Works and Transport, that perhaps a report might be six months late, nine months late, we will give him that; but not four years, Mr. Speaker! If one checks the East/West Corridor, the majority of the gasoline in Trinidad and Tobago is purchased, in St. George West and St. George East. That is where the majority of gasoline is purchased in this country; where the majority of the road improvement tax is collected; where there is most traffic in Trinidad and Tobago; where, on certain roads like the Western Main Road and Saddle Road in my own constituency, the traffic is as much as 10,000—15,000 vehicles a day. Not one red cent will they spend in our areas! But they will go into remote rural areas where one car might pass in a month and they will spend millions and millions of dollars. They spent \$14 million on a road through the cane field in Penal, 30 per cent of the annual allocation of the Road Improvement Fund, they spent on one back road in the Penal area.

They want to know why they lost the local government election. You see, people know these things. When people go into the remote rural areas and see government expenditure in these remote areas, where nobody lives, and then they have to come into town, they have to pass on the Eastern Main Road, they have to go down to Chaguaramas, they have to go to Maracas Beach, and they have to

pass down the Eastern Main Road, the Western Main Road and Saddle Road, it is pothole after pothole and grass growing out of the sidewalk. There are major roads in the Diego Martin area where the grass has not been cut on the side of the road for four years! They want to know why they lost the local government election [*Desk thumping*] and why they will lose the general election.

Mr. Hart: They never win a general election yet.

Mr. C. Imbert: Starving the local government bodies of funds. Starving them! They have the Minister operating—they want to call you a marshal now. I think somebody with a pseudonym wrote a letter saying “praise to the Minister of Local Government, let’s call him field marshal”. Obviously orchestrated out of some backroom in the Ministry of Local Government.

You see, there are very, very serious issues taking place in the country. In the constituency of Diego Martin West, a tender was awarded in 1996 for the construction of a primary school. Listen to what I am saying, Mr. Speaker. The contract was awarded in 1996. Four years ago! The school is not completed. That is the UNC’s record. Four years to build a modest primary school in Diego Martin.

Mr. Hart: That is UNC style.

Mr. C. Imbert: The school is not finished. Mr. Speaker, that school is not going to be used until the 2000 school term, so it will be five years that the UNC has taken to build one little primary school.

But you see, they could spend \$4 million to pave the Savannah in four hours; they could do that! They could spend \$100 million in three months to watch some teenagers down in Chaguaramas. But when it comes to dealing with the people's business, when it comes to fixing schools, when it comes to putting bulbs in the light sockets in the intensive care unit at the hospital, they cannot do that. It is \$25 for a bulb, you know, but they cannot replace the bulbs in the general hospital. I guess they cannot get a kickback from that \$25, the kickback is too small. So no bulbs for the intensive care unit. Even if they put in all the bulbs there, it is still too small to get any reasonable generosity. [*Laughter*]

I have to come to this Parliament and listen to the Minister of Finance tell me how well they have managed this country. Everything in that budget speech is an untruth. Every single statement he made is an untruth! [*Desk thumping*] Every single figure is wrong.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Numbers do not matter!

Mr. Sudama: Who said so?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: He said so.

Mr. C. Imbert: It is not the first time, Mr. Speaker. The Minister said that people are not interested in numbers. You know, we are going into a new fiscal year and they are so boldfaced, they have additional revenue of \$2 billion. They have made no changes to the taxation system, the same taxation system which has underperformed for yet another year under this Panday administration, Panday regime. Where taxation from companies was supposed to be \$1.43 billion, it was \$1.18 billion. Value added tax in the recently concluded fiscal year underperformed by \$100 million. So they had a revenue shortfall of \$871 million, of which \$400 million is underperformance of their taxation measures. But they leave everything intact, they change nothing, all these things that are underperforming, say it is working well, and I am going to get an additional revenue of \$2 billion.

You know, that is even when they got a windfall from oil. They have not told you that the royalties that they received in 1998/1999 were \$70 million more than they were supposed to get. If you look at page 24 of the *Draft Estimates of Revenue*, under “Royalties”: 1998/1999 Estimate, \$461 million; 1998/1999 Revised Estimate, \$535 million. What does that tell us? That tells us that the average price for oil in fiscal 1998/1999 was in excess of the \$14 figure in the budget. That is the only way royalties could be more than the projected figure.

Mr. Sudama: What does royalty have to do with production?

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, sure. They have changed nothing. But revenue from oil companies—and I am not talking about royalties, because that is shown. Not many people know this, you know. They have Estimated Royalties of \$507 million in 1999/2000, not much different from the last fiscal year. But taxation on oil companies, which has nothing to do with the royalties, is going to be increased by \$1 billion.

So, Mr. Speaker, I reject this budget. It is a mishmash, a hodgepodge of bogus numbers. The Minister himself has disassociated himself from the numbers, he said it is not him, it is the public servants. It is a pack of untruths and distortions of reality. The Public Sector Investment Programme has totally underperformed in the last year, despite the change of the financial year to maximize the dry season. This Government, in sum, is an absolute disgrace.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Health (Dr. The Hon. Hamza Rafeeq): Mr. Speaker, the 1999/2000 budget allows for us to proceed with the Health Sector Reform Programme, to which we are committed, as well as to achieve some of our stated

targets. For this and for many other reasons, I congratulate the Minister of Finance for this budget.

Mr. Speaker, the health sector in Trinidad and Tobago has made significant progress since we assumed office in 1995, but we still have a long way to go. There have been infrastructural developments done at the major institutions. There has been millions of dollars worth of equipment purchased for the major institutions. There has been a significantly increased supply of pharmaceuticals at the public institutions. There have been many more ambulances in the system. There have been new services introduced at the institutions. There have been increased hours of service at many of the primary care centres. There has been increase in almost all categories of staff in the health sector, with the exception of nursing staff. However, being the sensitive area that the health sector is, we are not only guided by numbers. Even if we are able to achieve 99 per cent success in any or every area, and one person whose life we could have saved dies, we are concerned about that.

I intend to address all these issues in greater detail during my contribution, but I would like, first of all, to respond to some of the issues that have been raised by Members on the other side.

12.25 p.m.

Firstly, I would like to deal with the issues that have been raised by the Leader of the Opposition. In his contribution, he said that when, or if, the PNM gets back in office, he will answer the cries of doctors and nurses. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, none of us can accurately predict the future but if we can judge from the record of the Member for San Fernando East, as Prime Minister, this is what the doctors and nurses can expect.

In 1991, the salary of the intern was \$4,382; in 1995, when he demitted office, the salary of the intern was \$4,850. That is an increase of \$468.00. At present, the salary of the intern is \$6,274. *[Desk thumping]* An increase of \$1,424. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, with respect to a house officer, in 1991, the salary was \$6,345 and when the PNM demitted office, it was \$6,844, an increase of \$499. The present salary is \$8,670, *[Desk thumping]* an increase of \$1,826. With respect to a registrar, in 1991, the salary was \$7,686 and when the PNM demitted office in 1995, it was \$8,213, an increase of \$627. Mr. Speaker, a 1999 salary for a registrar is \$12,153, *[Desk thumping]* an increase of \$3,940. With respect to a Senior Medical Officer, a specialist, in 1991, the salary was \$8,316 and in 1995, when the PNM demitted office, the salary was \$8,854; an increase of \$538. Today,

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the salary is \$13,056, [*Desk thumping*] an increase of \$4,202. And he said that he will answer the cries of the doctors and nurses when he comes to office.
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please!

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, in terms of the nurses. In 1991, the nurses had an allowance of \$1,345. In 1995, four years after PNM rule, when the Member for San Fernando East was the Prime Minister, the allowances remained at \$1,345. [*Interruption*] We have increased the allowances to \$1,616, an increase of \$271. [*Desk thumping*] That, Mr. Speaker, is not all.

You would recognize that the Minister of Finance, in his budget presentation, on page 27 says;

“...I will shortly establish a Task Force to examine the current remuneration structure, particularly as it relates to our teachers and nurses.”

The next issue that the Leader of the Opposition raised in his budget speech, he asked the question: What has happened to the Couva Hospital? Can you imagine such boldfacedness? [*Laughter*] What has happened to the Couva Hospital? After 34 years in government, four years as Prime Minister, he asked today, in 1999: What has happened to the Couva Hospital? Mr. Speaker, after 34 years of asking, pleading, begging, filing questions, raising motions in this honourable House; even demonstrating and being ignored at every stage for the last 34 years, today, the hon. Leader of the Opposition asked: What has happened to the Couva Hospital?

Mr. Speaker, in March this year, construction of the Couva Hospital began with a projected construction time of one year. We are now seven months into construction and the building is about 70 per cent complete. [*Desk thumping*] We are on target for April 2000, opening. Since the Leader of the Opposition has realized after 27 years in Parliament and four years as Prime Minister, that the people of Couva need a new hospital and he is interested in knowing where it has reached, I am issuing an open invitation to him, to join me on a tour of the Couva Hospital anytime, at his convenience, the people in Couva would love him for it.
[*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Minister for giving way, and I just wanted to accept the invitation so kindly extended by him.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting is suspended until 1.30 p.m.

12.34 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, when we took the break for lunch, I was responding to some of the issues that had been raised by the honorable Leader of the Opposition. In his contribution, he asked what happened to the Arima health facility. The Arima health facility is probably the most expensive health centre in the Caribbean, if not the entire world. It was built by the PNM at a cost of \$42 million, and only two weeks ago I paid what, I think, was the final bill on the construction of that facility; a bill of close to \$1 million.

The cost of the Couva district health facility which will offer almost the same range of services will be constructed at about one third of the cost. The architecture of that facility is totally unsuitable for a health facility and is posing to be a nightmare as far as maintenance is concerned. Before responding, I would like to mention one incident.

We came into office in November 1995, and I reviewed the situation at Arima and was told then that they needed about six months to get that building completed, and so we put a deadline of June 15 to open. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) on the board of the Central Regional Health Authority took that challenge and they opened the facility on June 17, which was a Monday. During that intervening period—the local government election was called on June 24—on June 17 when they opened that facility, the Chief Executive Officer and the board asked me to come there to do a ceremonial opening. I refused because I did not want it said that it was being used for political purposes and up to today, we have not had a formal opening of that facility but the services are being provided.

The list of services are as follows: women's health, antenatal and post-natal clinics, cervical screening, pap smear, family planning, health office facilities, immunization, lifestyle diseases clinics for diabetes, hypertension, chronic diseases and nutritional counselling, specialized services, that is radiology, ultrasound, ECG, laboratory services, pediatrics specialty clinic, pediatric asthma clinic and specialist medical clinic, and pharmacy services as well.

Dr. Rowley: Does it not have a casualty department?

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: Twenty-four-hour accident and emergency services.

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition also mentioned St. Ann's Hospital and that his government did refurbishment work there. That is true; a lot of money was spent refurbishing the St. Ann's Hospital, but there is a lot of work that was done four years ago which we have to repeat, because the work was badly done.

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A lot of the area is leaking and we have to do refurbishment work on some of the areas that were already refurbished.

The Leader of the Opposition mentioned that his government built a new wing at the San Fernando General Hospital. I must say that that was one of the major achievements of that government. It was one of the major contributions to the health sector in Trinidad and Tobago, and that is something we are grateful for. But I just want to mention that when we took office in 1995, that building was neither completed nor commissioned. It required at least \$100 million to complete and commission the entire building. A substantial portion is already commissioned and in use and there are plans for the rest of it.

While I am on this point, the Member for San Fernando West, when speaking, wondered why we were making a big issue of putting 60 beds into the new wing when all we had to do was buy 60 beds and move them across, or move across 60 of the existing beds. This clearly demonstrates a lack of understanding of what is required in the health sector. The space is there, but all we have are four walls and a floor that is not tiled. The requirements of a surgical ward are completely different from that of a law office, where you can probably move in furniture and air-conditioning. [*Laughter*] And maybe a library and a cash register. Mr. Speaker, if I were to put beds there with no oxygen, sluice room, system for infection control, no facilities for the dressing of wounds, toilet facilities, bathrooms, lights, water or so many other facilities, then I can be justifiably accused of recklessly putting the lives of patients at risk. These are some of the works we need to do before we can move patients into that facility.

The Leader of the Opposition and the Member for San Fernando West also inquired as to why we have not yet implemented or what is the status of the national health insurance. It is questions like these that make me wonder sometimes about the honesty of politicians. While the PNM was in office, they developed the Health Sector Reform Programme, which we have modified and adapted. But they had programmed the introduction of national health insurance in the second phase of the programme, that is, after the first seven years. The question of the implementation of the national health insurance, therefore, never arose in the Health Sector Reform Programme in its first phase, and at this time we are under the first phase.

When we came to office, shortly thereafter, I recognized the importance of financing the health sector. We have, with the concurrence of the InterAmerican Development Bank, brought that issue on the front burner. A lot of work has already been done and just one month ago we received a report from a study done

by the Health Economics Unit of the University of the West Indies with clear recommendations on the way forward. Consideration is being given to introducing a pilot phase first before going nationally, since it is such a fundamental departure from the way business in the health sector is done. In the meantime, the contract for the unique identifier registration system has been awarded, and work is progressing on that.

The Leader of the Opposition also raised the issue of employees in the health sector and he said that when he comes back into office he would bring all of them under one authority. When the PNM demitted office in 1995 they left this issue in one unholy mess. Today, we have been able to take quite a few initiatives to deal with that issue and I will deal with this particular little issue a little later. I will also deal with the issue of primary care development, which he mentioned, a little later as well.

Mr. Speaker, before I leave the Leader of the Opposition I want to digress a little to make one point. Do you recall the eggnog incident a few years ago when 14 mentally ill patients died? Do you recall that this incident took place under the watch of the Member for San Fernando East as Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago? Today, I want to say publicly that I do not lay full blame for that incident at the doorstep of the then Minister of Health, for I know how the system operates and I know what can happen in the health sector.

The first point I want to make is that every day there is a potential for some kind of crisis in the health sector. No health sector in any part of the world is exempt from this, and no government anywhere in the world will be able to completely eliminate this. What we do, is work continuously and tirelessly to put systems and contingencies in place to minimize these occurrences as much as possible, and to reduce the impact when they occur. That is one lesson I thought the Member for San Fernando East should have learnt from that incident, so that he would not unduly seek to politicize headlines such as “pregnant woman has died in San Fernando, and a generator has failed.”

Mr. Speaker, I am not making excuses for these. In fact, whatever happens in the health sector, whether it is the ambulance driver who was found sleeping in Point Fortin so that there was no ambulance to take a sick patient to the San Fernando General Hospital, or a generator not coming on automatically when it should, I take full responsibility for it because, at this point in time, the buck stops here. I am just making the point that as we seek to minimize these occurrences we may never be able to eliminate them completely because of the nature of the sector.

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When a doctor, in his best judgment, makes a decision on a patient and two days later in hind sight it turns out to be a wrong decision, I can only say that our quality directorate is putting protocols and standards in place to minimize these occurrences and bring them to the barest minimum. The regional health authorities have been mandated to strengthen their management and maintenance systems to minimize these occurrences. I, therefore, understand why the egg-nog incident could have happened and, as I said, I thought the Leader of the Opposition should have learned this lesson.

What I do have a problem with, however, is that a commission of enquiry was set up to inquire into that particular incident, the commission did its work, submitted its report and when we came into office they had to make representations to us to get paid for their services.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to respond to three issues raised by the Member for San Fernando West. He inquired as to why we are now engaging in the design for the Point Fortin Hospital. That question is fairly innocuous, and I would answer it. But then he went on to say to the people of Point Fortin that it is only a matter of time and deliverance is near, soon the People's National Movement would get back into office and the people of Point Fortin would get their hospital. If I did not know the Member for San Fernando West so well—I do not know him personally—and the gentleman that he is, I would have said that was one of the greatest examples of hypocrisy that I have ever had the misfortune to witness in my entire life.

The PNM took the decision, before we came to office, to close the Point Fortin Hospital and build a polyclinic. This is in black and white, and the Members on that side are fully aware of this. My advice to them is, therefore, if they should get back into office one of the first acts should be to apologize to the people of Point Fortin and thank this Government for reversing that decision. [*Desk thumping*]

When I assumed office at the Ministry of Health in November 1995, and I had the chance to familiarize myself with the health sector reform programme, I thought that it was sheer madness to close that hospital. North Trinidad is served by Sangre Grande Hospital, Mount Hope Hospital, Port of Spain General Hospital and supporting facilities like Arima, St. James and, of course, St. Ann's Hospital. South Trinidad which serves a population from Couva to Cedros to Mayaro is served by one general hospital and that is the San Fernando General Hospital.

In addition, the distance from Cedros, Point Fortin to San Fernando is further and takes longer than any other point that is being served by the Port of Spain General Hospital, and takes longer because of the terrain. Consideration must also

be given to the fact that Point Fortin, La Brea and Cedros are also developing and growing communities.

1.45 p.m.

I therefore approached the Inter American Development Bank and made a case for a hospital in Point Fortin. They indicated that if that had to be accommodated under the Health Sector Reform Programme, they required a feasibility study to be conducted, and those who have been involved in loan programmes with the Inter American Development Bank and are familiar with the tendering programmes, would understand how long this can take.

The consultancy was procured and conducted its study. The report was presented a few months ago and recommended that a hospital be constructed in Point Fortin. The Ministry of Health accepted the report with some modifications and it would be going to tender for designs soon.

As far as the Scarborough Hospital is concerned, the Member for San Fernando West also pointed out that there were many issues to be dealt with before that hospital could be constructed. First of all, when we came into office, a Memorandum of Understanding had to be signed by the Ministry of Health, the Tobago House of Assembly, and the Ministry of Finance with regard to the Tobago component of the Health Sector Reform Programme. This took a lot of negotiations and was finally signed. Then the Inter American Development Bank required a feasibility study to determine the site and the size of the Scarborough Hospital. This also took a long time because of the widely divergent views on these issues. This has now been resolved and the recommendations accepted by all parties. Tenders have gone out for the design and construction supervision, but after initially agreeing to this approach, the bank expressed reservations about linking the design and construction supervision. This has now been resolved and tenders for designs will be awarded soon.

Mr. Speaker, finally the issue of pharmaceuticals and availability of pharmaceuticals to the public sector was raised. In 1990, the allocation for pharmaceuticals in the public sector was \$53,901,000. In 1991, it was \$57,023,000; in 1992, when the PNM came into office, the allocation for pharmaceuticals was \$41,122,000; in 1993, it went down to \$35,193,000 and in 1994—and remember, there was a significant devaluation in 1993—the allocation for pharmaceuticals went from \$35 million to \$44,932,000. In 1995, the allocation was \$48,492,000.

Mr. Speaker, when we came into office in 1996, the allocation was \$61,109,000, in 1997, \$60 million. Up to September 1998, \$61,620,000, in

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1998/1999, \$72,487,000 and the allocation for 1999/2000 is \$89 million for pharmaceuticals. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, in addition to this, last year in my contribution I indicated that we were approaching some of the drug companies with a view to reducing the cost of pharmaceuticals to the private pharmacies. After a lot of discussion and negotiation, we were able to provide 16 products for chronic diseases such as glaucoma, diabetes, cardio vascular diseases, asthma and arthritis at private pharmacies at a cost to the public of between 30 and 60 per cent of the cost that they were previously. This has made a significant decrease in the drug bill of patients suffering from these diseases.

Mr. Speaker, we have now been able to begin implementing the sale of over-the-counter drugs in shops and supermarkets after the legal and administrative mechanisms have been put in place. This has already begun to impact positively on consumers and we expect this programme to pick up further during the coming months.

I would now like to get into some other aspects of my contribution. The Health Sector Reform Programme as it has been designed, was not designed for short-term gains or successes. It is a systematic approach that deals comprehensively with long-term solutions for the health sector. There is always the temptation to abandon the programme and seek short-term successes in the interest of political expediency. However, if one succumbs to this type of temptation, yes, there would be short-term successes, but in the medium and long term, we would have gained nothing and 10—15 years down the road, we would still be where we are today, or maybe, even worse off. Faced with these options, what does one do? Seek short-term successes for political gains, or put the structures in place to have more lasting benefits for the population? Mr. Speaker, while not neglecting the urgent needs of the population, we have chosen the latter. It must be recognized that this requires much discipline, and a lot of courage among the policy makers—that is the Government—and understanding from the population.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot continue to equate health care with hospital care. We cannot continue to equate health care by the amount of sophisticated equipment we purchase for hospitals, or how many sophisticated procedures we can perform. If we do, then we would continue to pour increasing amounts of resources into our hospitals and continue to be inefficient and ineffective in the management of our health sector.

We recognize the importance of our hospitals and the need to equip and staff them adequately, but if we do not develop our primary care sector, we would be

making very little health gains. Because of the demands of the population and the policies of previous governments, primary care has been treated as the bastard child of the health sector. We have taken a conscious decision to address the primary care sector and we have already been able to demonstrate some tangible successes in this area.

Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Finance in his budget speech speaks about a development programme budget for the health sector of \$142 million, this will be spent on physical infrastructure, human resource development, training and other physical investments that will benefit the entire population of Trinidad and Tobago and I will expand on this a little later. However, I think the population is entitled to know what is done with the allocation of over \$800 million on an annual basis and also to understand some of what we have done in terms of the development of the health sector within the past few years.

The health sector has over 10,000 employees of various categories, but on an annual basis, these are some of the things that we do. The total admissions to the hospitals for the year is 140,000; total visits to Accident and Emergency Departments, 350,000; total Outpatients Clinic visits to Port of Spain and San Fernando General Hospitals, over 250,000; total number of surgical operations for the year, over 15,000; total health centre visits for the year, 765,000 and total x-ray procedures for the year, over 100,000. These are some of the things we do on an annual basis.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to deal a little now with some of the infrastructural development that we have done in the last couple years. We have carried out substantial infrastructural development works at both the hospitals and our primary care centres. I will not mention all but I will highlight a few. The Ste. Madeleine Health Centre has been completely refurbished and serves as a model for a primary care centre. The community is involved in the running of the centre and provides valuable input and support. Since it has been opened, there has been a 50 per cent decrease in the number of non-emergency cases from that area seeking care at the Accident and Emergency Department of the San Fernando General Hospital.

Mr. Speaker, the Woodbrook Health Centre has also been refurbished and provides a range of services for residents of Woodbrook and the surrounding areas.

The Barataria Health Centre, which was burnt down before we came into office, was completely refurbished and also provides a range of health centre services to the residents of that area.

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The Matelot Health Office has been completely rebuilt and commissioned. As I mentioned, the Arima District Health Facility was just completed and the Mayaro District Health Facility. In the Mayaro District Health Facility, some of the services that are provided are: 24-hour accident and emergency services, health centre and clinic services, family planning, child health, ante-natal clinic, nutrition, health education, male clinic. Four days a week, dental services; 8.00a.m.—4.00p.m x-ray services, 8.00 a.m.—4.00 p.m. pharmacy services, and a 24-hour ambulance service.

I would briefly mention also, some of the improvement works we have done in some of the hospitals. The Port of Spain Hospital, refurbishment of five operating theatres, complete refurbishment of the main x-ray department, new accident and emergency x-ray facilities, complete upgrade of seven wards, upgrade of the ante-natal clinic, new pharmacy and physiotherapy waiting rooms.

St. Ann's Hospital, the roof to seven wards was repaired, complete renovation of one of the wards, upgrade of the main electrical station.

At the St. James Medical Complex, upgrade of the chemotherapy room including air-conditioning, complete refurbishment of physical medicine wards and departments, purchase of two new Cobol sources for radiotherapy machine.

We have bought over \$15 million of biomedical and other equipment for the Port of Spain Hospital and the other institutions. In terms of the San Fernando Hospital, the ultrasound services there have been improved and expanded with the introduction of state-of-the-art ultrasound technologies. We have commissioned 40 new paediatric in-patient units, refurbished neonatal units and expanded it by 22 cots; commissioned a new 22-bed dedicated female orthopaedic ward, commissioned new 22-bed psychiatric ward, expanded the gynaecology ward by 10 beds to reduce the overcrowding, commissioned the new regionally integrated centralized sterile services department—and that is a major achievement.

Upgrade of the kitchen facilities at the Area Hospital, Point Fortin, re-established the dedicated radiology services and upgraded the accident and emergency services at the hospital.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most important areas in the health sector is human resource development. Our human resource strategy includes making an assessment of our present stock of employees and their qualifications determining our human resource needs in the long-term and then training, re-training and recruiting to satisfy these requirements. It also involves in our case, transferring of employees from the public service to the regional health authorities among other things.

We have put a lot of emphasis on training of all categories of staff, particularly our nursing staff and over the past years we have trained 20 nurses in intensive care and there are 18 who are currently in training; 43 nurses in operating theatre nursing; 55 in trauma and emergency care; 134 and 45, two batches in midwifery; 120 in district health visiting; 37 in district nursing; 15 in paediatric nursing; 35 in home nursing for enrolled nursing assistants and 10 in community health nursing.

Mr. Speaker, we have also been training nurses at the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies in operating theatre techniques and other areas.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, earlier this year, 100 students commenced a two-year training programme in this course, to be enrolled student-nursing assistants. Another group of 100 will commence training in April 2000.

At present, there are about 4000 students who are in training for the registered nurses programme. In addition to this, we have trained 14 dental nurses, 30 dental surgery assistants, eight social workers, 56 public health inspectors in public health engineering, 27 in vector control and 30 others to be clinical instructor chemists, medical physicists, pharmacists and so on.

In addition to that, as part of our human resource strategy, over the years, we have been able to appoint permanently to the public service staff 466 persons and promote 472 persons. I mention this because it is of importance to the public servants who would like to be transferred to the regional health authorities and would like to have their appointment confirmed before they do so. We have been able to deal with 938 cases as opposed to 588 cases in the same period that the PNM was in office.

Mr. Speaker, finally, during the period 1983—1988 a total of 537 students successfully completed training in general and psychiatric nursing and were registered as such by the Nursing Council. Despite recommendations to the Public Service Commission, however, they were not appointed because the Ministry of Finance did not confirm the availability of funds to fill these vacant posts. Funds have since been confirmed and 307 of these trained nurses, who remained in the service, were appointed with effect from January 1, 1998. All this time they were carrying out duties and responsibilities of registered nurses but continued to be remunerated as student nurses.

In May of this year, Cabinet agreed that these nurses deserved to, and should be fairly compensated for performing as nurses, at the appropriate terms and

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conditions for the period 1983—1988, and that their services performed, prior to that date of appointment, be taken into account for superannuation purposes. As a result of this, 307 affected nurses received over \$3.8 million in payment to compensate for the loss suffered during that period. That was an injustice that we have corrected.

Mr. Speaker, as you know we have also established the pension plan for the regional health authorities and earlier this year, we have amended the Regional Health Authorities Act to allow for the preservation of pension benefits for public servants to be transferred from the public service to the regional health authorities.

In the area of services, we now have eight-hour walk-in emergency care at many centres where this service was not previously available. We have established an eight-hour walk-in emergency service in the constituency of the Member for San Fernando East, that is in the Pleasantville Health Centre. We have also introduced this service at the Ste. Madeleine, Penal and Rio Claro Health Centres and they also exist at Couva, Chaguanas, Arima and Mayaro.

Our immunization programme is one of our success stories. We have not had for the last three years a case of polio, measles or yellow fever. We are ahead of many other developed countries in the world, as far as this is concerned. We have at present over 90 per cent coverage for diseases such as diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, polio, yellow fever, measles mumps and rubella. Later this year, we will be introducing the haematophageous influenza vaccine for children less than one year of age and the Hepatitis B vaccine is already being given to those who are at risk.

We have opened the second surgical paediatric ward at the Wendy Fitzwilliam Paediatric Hospital and the Thalassaemic Clinic. We have x-ray and ultrasound now available at the Arima and Chaguanas Health Centres. Over the last three years we have had an innovative programme of volunteer services, and we have received from volunteers, over 6,000 man-hours of service already.

Mr. Speaker, the Food and Drug Department is one of the most important support services in the health sector, and on an annual basis do approximately 12,000 investigations for us. They investigate over 12,000 samples. This department has been woefully neglected over the last few years—that is before we came into office. We have sought to bring this department up to scratch, and even though there is much work to be done, we have recruited for that department, three new food and drug inspectors. Because we have added this to the cadre, the

Food and Drug Inspectorate has now expanded its operations to include more field surveillance. They have reported that in collaboration with the custom officers at the airport, they have been able to make a significant dent on the pharmaceuticals suitcase trade.

The Drug Advisory Committee of the Food and Drug Department has established a sub-committee to deal with herbal products, and is in the final stages of preparing a draft that probably would need legislative changes.

The other department located there is the Pesticide Toxic and Chemical Department. When I came into office that was a department which was created by legislation and the staff was one individual. We have been able to increase the staff at that department. We have now recruited three pesticide and toxic chemical inspectors and they are performing many services for us.

One of the areas of weakness that we still have is the Food and Drug Inspectorate in Tobago. We do not have a regular presence in Tobago and this is something that we find unsatisfactory, and we will be seeking to address this fairly shortly by having a permanent presence in Tobago.

One of the other departments that is under direct control of the Ministry of Health is the Insect Vector Division. This year, so far we have been able to decrease substantially, the aedes aegypti index in Trinidad and Tobago and because of that, we have been able to decrease both the amount of dengue cases and dengue haemorrhagic cases and in addition to that, persons who died from dengue haemorrhagic fever.

The malaria-free status of Trinidad and Tobago has been maintained. This was secured by the conduct of vigorous malarious surveillance programmes, an element of which was the collection of over 25,000 blood smears for the year. We continue to promote and maintain food hygiene in the country, registering food premises, food handlers, taking food samples, and developing guidelines for milk sanitation. Recently you must have seen that we have stepped up our campaign against poor conditions of sale and preparation of food. Some outlets have been closed and others given notices.

We have established a Drinking Quality Surveillance Programme and among the other functions of this department is to investigate complaints. They have investigated over 4,000 complaints and served over 1,500 notices and laid 18 court matters so far.

The study and review of lead poisoning among children have been completed. Thirteen have been identified for chelation therapy and treatment for them has started at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex.

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Mr. Speaker, I mentioned on a previous occasion, that we have started both in the south/west region and in Tobago, a Pilot National Emergency Ambulance Service. This service will eventually provide well-equipped ambulances, with trained emergency medical technicians to respond to emergencies at home and on the road and offer a degree of emergency treatment and transport to an appropriate health facility. Over 200 emergency medical technicians will be trained and the advertisement is now in the newspapers. The accreditation of the course is being done by the National Training Board, and in the south/west region and Tobago people will be able to access this service on a phased basis from December of this year.

2.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in the field of health promotion we have been training health professionals in social mobilization and community participation and within the five regional health authorities approximately 250 health professionals and community members have already been trained. There is Project Life Style, which is a three-year school-based pilot project to promote healthy lifestyle practices in three participating schools—Tabaquite, Gasparillo Composite and St. James Secondary. The activities for the first year, which have been completed, included education for teachers, parents and cafeteria staff. The teachers now have sample lesson plans to work with as they participate in the implementation of this programme. There is also health promoting schools' competition, mental health promotion and training of the trainers for community members and health professionals.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to this there is also the La Beta self-help group project in the north-west region, the Adolescent Wellness project in the north-west region and the well Weight Management Healthy Communities programme in the eastern region. There are also adolescent health programmes in the eastern region. There has been a series—

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

Motion made, That the hon. Minister's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon H. Rafeeq: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House for extending my time.

Mr. Speaker, continuing in the area of health promotion there have been health fairs throughout the country. There is an integrated diabetics care services in the La Romain Health Centre. There is an integrated audiology programme for children in the county of St. Patrick where 30 per cent of entry level students are tested and those who are found to have a problem are dealt with at the San Fernando Hospital. There are 1,700 students in the east who have attended workshops in AIDS and sexuality, teen pregnancy and youth empowerment. Forty community peer counsellors have been trained to follow up care at home. There have been nutritional diabetes workshops, health walks and special health promotion projects for men and the elderly.

In the area of AIDS we continue our health promotion, promoting a healthy lifestyle among youth in our rapport programme. There is continued implementation of peer education and counsellor training programmes in junior secondary schools. There is continued sensitizing of the RHA's management in the management of mother to child transmission and in post-exposure prophylaxis. We are developing manuals for mother to child transmission and post-exposure prophylaxis and there is ongoing training for medical students and community education and support, Mr. Speaker, for men who have sex with men and commercial sex workers.

We have also, during the years, passed a couple pieces of legislation which have impacted positively on the population. There is the Regional Health Authorities (Amdt.) Act which I mentioned, the Mental Health Act which has been amended, the Dental Profession Act, the Interpretation Act and the Pharmacy Board Act. Those are some of the areas we have been engaged in within the last couple of years. I can go on, Mr. Speaker, but I should like to spend the next few minutes talking about some of the plans we have in the coming year as they relate to the health sector and particularly within our budgetary allocation.

The focus in the year 1999/2000 will be in four main areas. Firstly, strategies and actions to further advance our primary care thrust; secondly, to improve the environment of care particularly in the major hospitals; thirdly to alleviate the overcrowding problems in the major hospitals particularly San Fernando General Hospital and, fourthly, to reduce significantly the backlog of cases awaiting surgical operations.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of infrastructural development, I have mentioned that the Couva District Health Facility is already 70 per cent complete. We expect the physical works to be completed by March 2000 and we expect to open that

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facility by April 2000. The equipment will be placed on order very shortly and there is a commissioning team for the facility.

This facility will offer 24-hour accident and emergency service, basic X-ray facilities, laboratory facilities, specialist clinic facilities including mental health, dental facilities, health education and health centre services. There will also be a 15-bed observation facility and an ambulance bay to cater for major accidents and emergencies. During the year we expect construction to begin on three other such facilities—Princes Town, St. James and St. Joseph. Secondly, Mr. Speaker, all the Regional Health Authorities in Trinidad have signed contracts for design works and construction supervision for all the health centres in their regions. Some are to be rebuilt and others are to be extended or refurbished.

The following health centres will be rebuilt during this fiscal year—Cedros, Moruga, Lengua, Penal, Cumana, St. Helena and San Raphael. The following health centres will be refurbished and upgraded—Granville, St. Mary's, Chatham, Penal Rock Road, Toco, Rio Claro, Tabaquite, and Claxton Bay. To support our primary care thrust the following initiatives will continue, one, the training of primary care physicians in a post-graduate diploma programme by the University of the West Indies. This will be done in modules that are relevant for their responsibilities in the area of primary health care. The first course is expected to begin in January of the year 2000. We will continue our training of district health visitors and district nurses. This will continue at the University of the West Indies.

Mr. Speaker, a number of health centres in furtherance of our primary care thrust will be opened to give 8.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. service. Further, in relation to primary care, the national ambulance service pilot project that I mentioned would have been completed by the end of this fiscal year and assessed with a view to implementing it nationally. In the pilot itself there is a lot of information that we hope to gather and systems will be put in place that will inform the design of the national service. This is an innovative and revolutionary project and we look forward to implementing this on a national basis.

Mr. Sinanan: Thank you very much Minister of Health for giving way. Could you indicate whether the relocated Roy Joseph Health Centre would be one of those centres to be worked on in the new fiscal year?

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: The Roy Joseph Health Centre is one of the enhanced health centres that will have to be reconstructed. We do have a difficulty with that health centre at this point in time as far as the site is concerned. We are working on that and by the time we have finished acquiring

lands for that we will not be able to accommodate it in this fiscal year; certainly within the next fiscal year.

One of the areas of greatest irritation, both to staff and patients, is the environment of care. In the health sector reform programme there were significant components in this area that were not addressed. We are of the view that this is important enough to be given some priority attention. Some work has already been done at the Port of Spain Hospital and this will continue at the Port of Spain, St. James and St. Ann's Hospitals. As far as the San Fernando Hospital is concerned, Mr. Speaker, the bathroom and toilet areas will be completely refurbished with the addition of handrails and other safety features for the patients. Repairs to the roof of that building will also commence during the fiscal year.

One of the perennial problems at our major hospitals has been the question of overcrowding. With the transfer of the paediatric department from Port of Spain Hospital to Mount Hope, the problem of overcrowding has been significantly eased at Port of Spain Hospital. However, Mr. Speaker, in the case of San Fernando within the last three years we have added 60 beds to the original bed complement. We now have a bed complement in the San Fernando Hospital of 720 in 1999. However, even with this bed complement there is an 82 per cent overall occupancy rate. This is highest in the medical, surgical and gynaecological wards where the occupancy rate can go as high as 120 per cent.

An occupancy rate of 120 per cent in a medical ward, or any ward for that matter, does not allow for optimum care. The strategy to deal with this in the short and medium term is as follows. There are about 30 children who are on the wards who are not ill but who have nowhere else to go and no one to look after them. As part of our community care programme these children will be placed in suitable homes run by NGOs and their care will be funded by Government.

This initiative will be a joint one between the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social and Community Development and the Ministry of Planning and Development through the community development fund. Work has already begun in this area and we expect the relocation to be completed by the end of this fiscal year. Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the orthopaedic and general surgical wards will be transferred from the main hospital building to the new wing and when this comes on stream we expect an increase of over 96 or at least 96 beds to the complement of San Fernando Hospital. Work on this project will begin and we hope completed by the end of this fiscal year.

In the area of mental health, when the health sector reform programme was designed, mental health was completely left out. This was a fundamental flaw in

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the health sector reform programme and we have now addressed this. After several consultations and discussions, seminars and workshops and the presence of an international expert on mental health, a mental health plan has now been developed for Trinidad and Tobago.

In keeping with the basic philosophy of the health sector reform programme and in keeping with international trends, the plan emphasizes a primary health care approach and focuses on health promotion and disease prevention. It also emphasizes community care for mentally ill patients rather than institutional care. Implementation of this plan will begin shortly and the issue of managing mentally ill patients in the community will be dealt with the sensitivity which it deserves.

There are a couple of other areas that I should like to address. I should just like to say a couple of words on the question of AIDS. As you know, Mr. Speaker, there is a high incidence of HIV/AIDS in Trinidad and Tobago. We are continuing all our efforts particularly aimed at educating our young people about prevention of HIV/AIDS and counselling our population. At present we are in the final stages of developing our new AIDS plan for an expanded response and this will be launched on World AIDS Day December 1, 1999.

As far as dental care is concerned, in the past this was not given the attention that it deserves. However, we have developed a dental health policy for Trinidad and Tobago and we are continuing to improve the services. At present we offer services at 53 health centres all over Trinidad and Tobago and it is served by the following staff—16 dentists, 49 dental nurses and 34 dental surgery assistants and we continue, Mr. Speaker, to train all categories of staff in the field of dental health.

On the issue of human resource development, this remains one of our greatest challenges. Cabinet appointed an interministerial committee to develop strategies to move our public service employees across to the employ of the regional health authorities. This committee is being supported by a consultancy which is being jointly funded by grant funds from the Inter-American Development Bank and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. The consultants have already been hired and they have commenced their work. They have already met with many of the major stakeholders and reviewed most of the relevant documentation. They are expected to submit their report together with an action plan in two months' time to the interministerial committee for consideration.

Cabinet will then decide on the course of action which may also include amendments to existing legislation. As I have already mentioned, in the meantime

the Regional Health Authorities Act has been amended to preserve the pension rights of public officers when they transfer to the employ of Regional Health Authorities and we expect by the end of this fiscal year to have significant movements in this area.

Mr. Speaker, our health promotion efforts remain one of the cornerstones of our primary care strategy. Bearing in mind that our epidemiological pattern now resembles that of developed countries, we will continue to step up our health promotion efforts towards disease prevention and control. We will join the rest of the world and continue our unrelenting campaign against tobacco use. As the advertising war between the different brands of cigarettes continues here in Trinidad and Tobago, the casualties are the young people and eventually the health sector.

2.25 p.m.

During the year, we will be coming to Parliament with legislation with regards to tobacco use, particularly dealing with the question of advertising. We are also having discussions with various individuals and agencies regarding the possibility of legal action against tobacco companies.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot conclude my presentation unless I say a few words on the Y2K issue as it affects the health sector. This is an issue that has been engaging the attention of countries all over the world and has been raised on several occasions at the Pan American Health Organization and World Health Organization which are providing valuable guidance on this issue. We have made a list of all our equipment that are likely to be affected by the Y2K problem. This list has been validated by two Y2K experts who came here through the Ministry of Information. Some of the equipment are Y2K compliant. Some are being made Y2K compliant and others are in the process of being procured.

One week ago, through the Pan American Health Organization, we were able to secure the services of an expert in the health sector to visit and assist us in developing contingency plans. Several exercises have been completed. We are also in contact with the private health sector as far as this issue is concerned.

Finally, there are close to 6,000 persons who have been scheduled for surgical operations in the public hospitals, some of whom have been waiting for up to three years and others who have been given appointments for the next three years.

In the specific case of cataract surgery, there are approximately 2,500 persons who are awaiting surgery for what is essentially a curable cause of blindness.

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In the field of urology—which includes prostate problems, kidney and bladder stones—there is a waiting list of approximately 1,000. The waiting time for surgery is approximately four years.

In the area of gynaecology there are approximately 1,000 cases of scheduled surgery with long waiting times. There are those who can afford to pay for these operations and who can access surgery in the private sector within a short time. However, the vast majority of patients scheduled for surgery in the public sector cannot afford to pay.

While we are putting systems in place to deal with the problems in the long term, there are people who are suffering and who are in need of urgent attention. There has to be, therefore, a separate strategy to deal with this heavy backlog of cases so that we can become current.

Mr. Speaker, with the help of the private sector and funding received from the Minister of Finance, we are launching a massive surgery programme that will eliminate most of the backlog of cases, so that by the end of this fiscal year, there should be no one waiting for a surgical operation in the public sector for more than three months. This is our millennium gift to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

As another special project, there are also a number of children who require surgical operations for heart problems. Last year, for the first time, we successfully performed, at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, 10 such operations for children suffering from heart disease. This year we did another nine cases. Mr. Speaker, during the next fiscal year, we intend to do 70 cases thus eliminating a large portion of the backlog of the cases of children waiting for cardiac surgery. This will be our gift of life to those 70 children. [*Desk thumping*]

As I conclude, I urge the population of Trinidad and Tobago to come on board with us because health is everybody's business and every citizen should take their share of responsibility and take their health seriously and we in the Government will continue to do our part.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hedwidge Bereaux (*La Brea*): Mr. Speaker, I wish to join the debate on a Bill entitled “An Act to provide for the Service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2000,” referred to in common parlance as the “Budget”.

Mr. Speaker, I come directly after the Minister of Health. I need to say that if I had just arrived here from a different planet or somewhere in the North Pole,

having heard the hon. Minister of Health, I really would not know that he was talking about Trinidad and Tobago. Some of those things he said appeared to have ignored a number of the major problems in the health sector. I would not deal with that now; he is a nice gentleman so I want to spare him that for the moment.

Many adverse comments have been made—both inside and outside this Chamber concerning the budget presentation presented by the hon. Minister of Finance—concerning its barrenness and lack of analysis and detail. The descriptions—worse budget ever presented by any Minister or by any government; an insult to the intelligence of the population; intended to hoodwink; downright disgraceful—are but a few.

The nature of adversarial politics being what it is, there have been a few feeble attempts by Members of the other side to defend and/or apologize for the Minister and his handiwork. Even the Minister, within the four corners of the budget—to which the 1st and 34th pages refer—has already prepared an escape route. I heard the Minister over the television this morning magnifying and amplifying on that escape route.

In the first page of the budget the Minister says:

“I wish especially to thank the numerous individuals and organisations whose recommendations have informed the preparation of this Budget.

This is their Budget.”

So the Minister had nothing to do with it.

On page 34 of the budget statement states:

“To change a set of policies that have worked so well for our country would have been, among other things, a betrayal of the professionals whose insight and hard work have influenced our fiscal and economic policies.”

The unstated conclusion is: “If any measure fails, if any statement is untrue, do not blame me, it is not my budget, it is the public servants’ budget.” The Minister said it on the television. This morning I heard him on TV6 saying he does not do any figures, so if any thing is wrong do not blame him.

Mr. Speaker, I propose later in my budget, to deal with some of the contributions of those who supported this budget and these apologists for and defenders of the economic policies and performance a la Brian Kuei Tung, Minister of Finance.

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For the moment, let me state that I make no disparaging remarks on the style and the content of the Minister's budget presentation. Indeed, this is his fifth budget presentation. It is really more of the same. The sloppiness, the lack of analysis displayed in this budget is only a matter of variation and degree from others that have gone before. I have come to expect nothing better from him. My only comment on it would be to quote from the contribution made by the hon. Member for Oropouche—now Minister of Planning and Development—on the occasion of the first presentation made in this honourable House by hon. Minister of Finance. He was unfortunately a PNM Minister of Trade and Industry then. I was embarrassed then, as I was embarrassed today.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

This is what hon. Trevor Sudama, Member for Oropouche, had to say:

“I want to remind the Minister that when he comes to speak in this House, he speaks on behalf of his administration and therefore he ought to have been properly briefed as to what kind of presentation we would accept in this House.”

2.35 p.m.

“I want to advise him that it is not enough to come to this House and say that this has been going on year after year, in which case, it makes it into a form of ritual, that you come here and you merely say, ‘because this has been going on year after year I am coming here in January 1992 to propose another extension.’

It is same thing. The policies work, we are going to do it. The public servants put something forward and that is theirs. It goes on:

“I expected the Minister to come here today to indicate to this House, how much of the large import bill of \$1.2 billion for machinery items in 1990. It is an analysis that the Ministry of Industry and Trade has to make and present to this House...”

There are a few other comments, but the point is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that has been the pattern of his behaviour all along, so we have no need to expect anything different. .

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am, therefore, going to deal with him in respect of what he says. He has put it like that, I will take him at his word and I will deal with him at his word. You know they say “by thy words thou shall be judged and by thy words thou shall be condemned”.

I will now deal with the Minister's budget statement. This is what he says on page 1 of the Budget statement:

"...the last four Budgets have impacted on the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in a positive and meaningful way.

The content, the strategy, the language and the impact of the Budgets of this Administration have been people focussed and people centred."

He goes on to say:

It was, and it remains fundamental to us, that the sole function of economic policy is to deliver results. Results that contribute to a better life for every man, every woman, and every child in Trinidad and Tobago."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government came into office on November 7, 1995. Let us, therefore, look at what has been the lot of the people of Trinidad and Tobago since then. Most of us, and at least I am sure—he is not here now—the hon. Member for St. Joseph knows that one of the corporal works of mercy is to feed the hungry. Do not mistake me as meaning that it is the duty of the Government to provide food for all the hungry in Trinidad and Tobago but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by the Minister's own admission, the sole function of economic policy is to deliver results that contribute to a better life for the people.

Let us, therefore, look at what the economic policy has done to the price of food in Trinidad and Tobago. I take my cue not only from his words but from the statements made by a number of persons who were interviewed prior to the delivery of this Budget speech. I just want to read some for you.

When this Government came into power, they made a big deal about removing the VAT on certain items, so let me start with:

	1995	1999
Arawak Processed Chicken per lb.	\$4.99	\$7.01
Live chicken per lb.	\$2.25	\$3.00
Eve Corned Beef (12 oz)	\$4.99	\$5.99
Green Butterfly milk (1/4 litre)	\$1.99	\$2.99
Nestle Condensed Milk	\$4.39	\$5.09
Macaroni (400 grams)	\$1.89	\$2.25
Oxtail per lb.	\$4.99	\$10.30

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	1995	1999
Mighty Foam	\$7.99	\$10.89
Palmolive Soap (140 grams)	\$5.99	\$7.99
Goat Imported per lb.	\$5.89	\$10.63 (23.42 per kg.)
Vienna Sausages (141 grams)	\$1.99	\$2.90
Choice Flour (2 kg.)	\$4.99	\$6.80
Pig Tail per lb.	\$5.99	\$6.80 (18.29 per kg.)
Orchard Orange Juice (1 litre)	\$4.99	\$10.05

Sugar, you know was raised when they gave an increase to Caroni (1975) Limited so they could fund their private DEWD! *[Interruption]*

They can make jokes with me all they want. The people asked for lower food prices, they made a call for it and I am showing what the four budgets before did to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Desk thumping]* So, when the Minister comes here and talks about \$600 or \$1,800 up on the salary of a doctor, having regard to the fact that COLA has increased, we realize it is a pittance he is talking about and the doctor himself, even at that salary, will have difficulty in purchasing these things. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is only with respect to food prices, but there have also been increases in construction materials. Cement has gone up, and we know that the only answer the hon. Minister could give about that to deal with that crisis was to call Trinidad Cement limited (TCL) a rogue company and then TCL behaved like a vagabond and increased cement to \$37 per bag after VAT—I have bought some quite recently.

You see, cement by itself is not the only thing in construction that has increased. As a result of that, the price of commercial building has also increased from \$300 per square foot in 1995 to \$425 per square foot in 1999. There are also corresponding increases in the price of rent, in the cost of shelter, generally, and now that the Member for St. Joseph is here, the other corporal work of mercy is to harbour the harbourless. Here are a few figures:

Rental	1995	1999
Mt. Dor (2 bedroom)	\$1,500	\$3,000
Chaguanas (well kept 3 bedroom)	\$ 600	\$1,600
Diego Martin	\$1,200	\$2,800
Property		
Mt. Dor (2 bedroom)	\$260,000	\$380,000
Chaguanas	\$160,000	\$275,000
Diego Martin	\$240,000	\$435,000

Everybody knows this is the truth.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to illustrate further, the Minister in his 1998—1999 budget stated as follows:

“Mr. Speaker, this Administration is also concerned at the alarming rate at which the cost of pharmaceuticals for certain illnesses such as Glaucoma, Diabetes, Hypertension, Heart Disease and Asthma has grown.”

We heard the hon. Minister of Health just now repeating some statements about what they did to reduce the price of drugs. I do not know which drugs they are talking about, if it is Dole Chadee's drugs, but I can tell you about this kind. Further, when this regime came into power, in order to benefit its friends and its lobbyists in the supermarket lobby, it came to Parliament with a Bill to amend the Pharmacies Act to permit supermarkets to sell certain non-prescription drugs. This was done against the advice of the Pharmacy Board, and all health conscious persons and professionals. However, they advanced a number of bogus reasons for carrying out their intentions, chief among them was that competition, which the supermarkets would engender, would operate to lower the prices of the non-prescription drugs to the consumer.

Even in this area, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the facts show that these items were less expensive in 1995. No matter what they did, whatever subterfuge and public relations gimmick they used, these are the facts. With respect to pharmaceuticals, if my pronunciation is a bit out in respect of these matters, I hope to be corrected by the doctors in the House.

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Antidiabetic	1995	1999
Glucoday (50)	\$1.75	\$2.05
Glynase 3mg	\$1.30	\$1.80
Hypertension		
Brinerden	\$1.00	\$1.45
Vasotec 10mg	\$3.50	\$4.05
Asthma		
Ventolin Inhaler	\$37.00	\$41.50
Zanten Liquid	\$40.00	\$60.45
Ventolin Expectorant	\$40.00	\$46.45
Over the Counter Drugs		
Andrews	\$1.50 each	\$1.75
Panadol	\$2.50 (14's)	\$2.80
Comptrex	\$1.50 per pk.	\$2.50
Panadol 500	\$10.50 (18's)	\$11.99
Cafenol	\$9.15 (20's)	\$10.55
Bandages	\$11.85 (20's)	\$12.40

The Member for Fyzabad has just reminded me that when they give out drugs, they give out expired drugs. *[Laughter]*

I have gone through this list, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to point out that the hon. Minister of Finance went on to say that if the numbers are wrong, they are wrong, but what is important is what the people get out of it. As much as I do not tolerate and do not encourage people fiddling with figures, if he could really show me that the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago are better as a result of what this Government is doing, I will vote for them, but he cannot show me that.

When people are suffering for food; when I, who live close to my constituents know that the incidence of people having to come to try to get assistance for food for their children and themselves has increased substantially; when the Minister of Finance—who has now decided, although he took no vow of poverty, to cry on the television how poor he is up to now—comes to tell me that it is not a question of numbers but the lives of the people, and he knows that the lives of the people are better, I say to myself that we cannot stand for that.

2.50 p.m.

It goes further than that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We had here just before, the hon. Minister of Health stating that he started off by trying. It is a classic example of people trying to blame the PNM. The PNM had been in power for the past 30 years before we went out of power in 1986 and came back in December, 1991. A number of people, including the Member of Parliament for Tobago East, like to blame the PNM for everything. But they forget that in the last 13 years, the PNM had only been in government for three years and ten months. So many of those children who grew up and are causing all the problems today, were at certain impressionable ages when both the NAR government and this Government have been in power, and that is why they behave like that. We did have our own deviants, but we never had it like this.

More importantly, when people see the feeding frenzy and the behaviour, the lavish consumption by Members of Parliament, they tend to feel that they too should have it. Because they hear about the rape of the Treasury and they too, think about that.

Mr. Assam: How many houses do you have?

Mr. H. Bereaux: Several.

Mr. Assam: So you are not lavish?

Mr. H. Bereaux: No, I am just frugal.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was speaking to you. When the Member for St. Joseph was delivering his diatribe, I was not in here because I could not take it. Now he is worried about how many houses I have. Regardless of what that is, I have been frugal, therefore, I have only one wife. I did not change any numbers, so I have saved my money as a result of that. We work together.

Mr. Assam: Are you talking to Dr. Eric Williams?

Mr. H. Bereaux: No, I am speaking to you, through the Deputy Speaker.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition and Political Leader of the People's National Movement, in his masterful response to the budget statement in respect of the health sector stated, and I quote:

“Although the UNC Government met a six-year plan for the Health Sector Reform Programme starting in 1995...designed to transform a health sector...they had no definite concept and policy for delivering quality healthcare to the population.”

They did not understand the concept of the Regional Health Authority and could not, therefore, implement the programme. It is from this platform that I intend to focus on one of the most unfortunate cases of mismanagement, neglect and plain incompetence which any country, I believe, has ever had the misfortune to undergo.

To do so, I propose to undertake a historical analysis of the health allocations under the PSIP for the years 1996—1998/1999 and, where applicable, to refer to the variations of appropriations in relevant years, supported by the notes and minutes of the Finance Committee. I remember that on assuming office, this Government met a Health Sector Reform Plan in place scheduled to cost US \$170 million. A loan of US \$112 billion from the Inter American Development Bank. This is what it says in the PSIP of 1996, and this is why the health sector is where it is today. I quote:

“The vehicle for major new initiatives is the Health Sector Reform Programme (HSRP) which aims to effect comprehensive reform of the existing health care delivery system. Implementation is programmed to take place over a six-year period at an estimated total cost of US\$170.9 million. The IDB is expected to provide Trinidad and Tobago with a loan of US\$ 112.0 million to assist in the implementation of the programme. Formal negotiations, which were previously scheduled for late 1995, have been delayed—“

And this is where the indictment begins, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

“...at the request of the new administration to permit a review of the programme.

The assumption has been made that the HSRP will commence on a modest basis in 1996 approximately \$33.0 million in expenditure.”

So they decided to do it, on a modest basis in 1996. Look at what happens? When we look at the transfers in 1996, \$10.4 million decrease in expenditure for health. No increase, \$10.64 million decrease. Hear what they increased. You will recall,

1996 was the year of the local government election so they thought they would give Sadiq Baksh the money to run up and down, play the fool and start to try to buy votes. That is where the debacle started; of the \$33 million, did not spend \$10.64 of it because they wanted to transfer it to the Ministry of Works and Transport to try to win an election, which they lost, and then talk about winning.

Then we come to the PSIP of 1997. They said:

The Health Sector Reform Programme will be advanced significantly in 1997 with the commencement of loan funding from the IDB. The entire programme is estimated to cost a total of US \$192 million to be expended over a period of seven years...”

So not only did they take away a year in 1996 when they did almost nothing, because they delayed the health sector implementation, they also increased the time. Then the Minister had the audacity to come here and say that it was understood that at the end of the first seven-year period, you would not deal with the health insurance. No! It was never seven years; it was a six-year period in the first instance. When you are speaking, speak the truth. Do not follow these other fellows. You are a decent fella by and large, you know, but do not try that on me. I am here and I am looking at you carefully.

So in 1997, they were going to move it forward significantly, but let us see what the history is. Let us look at the history, see the history of their performance. In 1997, they took away \$25,150,000 from the Health Sector Reform Programme. Hear why they took that! I am going to read how they performed.

“An allocation of \$72.93Mn was made in the 1997 PSIP for this project. As at the end of June 1997, expenditure of \$4.95Mn had been incurred on the project.”

They allocated \$72.93 million and they could have only spent \$4.95 million. It goes on:

“Key elements of this project have not been implemented due to the fact that the Ministry of Health has been unable to fulfill all the conditions precedent to the first disbursement.”

It is the Ministry of Health. I did not write this, you know. The PNM did not write this. This is an assessment of the Ministry of Planning and Development. It continues:

“This impacts upon both project implementation and project expenditure. Of particular importance is the fact that many key technical and advisory staff,

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inclusive of the staff for the Project Administration Unit, have not yet assumed duties and are therefore unable to advance implementation of the programme's major and inter-related components. In addition, IDB loan funds, which accounts for seventy per cent (70%) of this year's projected allocation, cannot be accessed until all conditions precedent have been met."

So they did not do their work! They cannot do it.

"It is anticipated that the following outstanding conditions will be met by the end of October 1997."

So they wasted 1996, they wasted 1997, and then they listed some things that they were going to do. But you cannot worry about what they say they are going to do, because they never do it, they are never competent enough to do it. So that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, tells you about 1996 and 1997. They took the money in one instance and put it in URP, and in the next instance, they put it into URP too. That is all they could do. Use URP and put it there.

I am not dealing with that. I am dealing with why health is in the problematic state that it is in. In the Public Sector Investment Programme of 1998, they come back again with their favourite statement.

"Implementation of the Health Sector Reform Programme, which was delayed in 1997, is expected to gain momentum in 1998. The Ministry of Health has been allocated \$127.3 million to carry out the programme during the year. The entire programme will be implemented over 7 years."

I am going to come back to this, but let me deal with 1998, which is a comedy of errors. This is what they had to say about the decrease of allocations. I am going to put it in the record. I will tell you why, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You see, the Minister of Finance comes here every year and he makes a big hoorah about all that he is going to do. But then he slinks like a thief in the night when the time comes for the variation of appropriations. Quietly, the procedure in the House causes people to have to leave, so the finance committee meeting is in private, nobody hears that, and only when we raise it sometimes afterwards, nobody is taking it on because it is variation of appropriation. But, here, as one of my lecturers used to say, God is in the details and the details come after nine months or so of a year when we see what you did not do, we see your slackness!

Slackness at the Ministry of Finance and, in particular, the Ministry of Planning and Development, which is headed by an incompetent; incompetent from the time he was a young man. Fired from Republic, Royal or one of those banks. A man who has been fired from more jobs than most people have held. I

can now understand why he is not Minister of Finance, notwithstanding all the time he has been talking about economics in this House.

Let me get to it. In 1998, \$25—*[Interruption]* You do not worry about whether this is the first, last or other time I am speaking in this House. While I am here, I will do my job. When I am not here, somebody else will do my job.

A decrease in the sum of \$25 million, and hear what it is. They took away \$11,720,000 from technical support and training. Then the Minister wants me to believe what he said he is going to do for technical support. This \$25 million was taken to put into the URP. Then they tell my hon. Colleague from Arouca North, Jarrette Narine, that he was only focusing on URP; he knows why he was doing that! Because he knows that is the source of the scampishness and the corruption that you all try to get away with. *[Interruption]* I do not focus on it, but I am showing you technical support:

“This project was allocated \$19.220Mn in 1998. Only the Health Promotion activities and the Oncology Projects are on stream. The Health Needs Assessment Study and Training and the procurement IS/IT equipment components are delayed because they are dependent on the assumption of duty of the Project Managers of the IS/IT late in 1998 and on the installation of Community Care Programme.”

They did not spend \$11 million.

Under Specific Studies, \$1,160,000, and at certain scheduled studies, the ambulance services, which he is boasting about now, should have been there since early 1998, so what is he telling me about ambulance? He came here to boast about it. He should be crying for the neglect and the manner in which he has treated this country and the health sector in this country! He should be crying, not boasting!

3.05 p.m.

The original budget of \$5 million was allocated to cover consultancy fees and the procurement of ambulance equipment, however, the project manager for the national ambulance services was expected to assume duty in late 1998. The project manager is required to develop an implementation plan and terms of reference prior to incurring any expenditure and consultancy fees. Given the status of the project development, the projected expenditure is now \$3 million—so there is \$2 million to go to the Unemployment Relief Programme.

Do you know why they cannot hire people on time? It is because they go around and have to find out what is their political affiliation before they give them

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the job. So it takes time! That is why they could never move anything forward because they are spending too much time in trying to hand pick people of their own kind. People who support them! That is why there is the problem. Let me give them a piece of advice; if you hire citizens of this country, and put confidence in them, they would perform regardless.

With respect to the communications programme, only \$650,000 was implemented, and do you know all they could spend is \$200,000—not on the communications—they were spending it on a communication's programme for the pension plan—\$450,000 cannot be spent. Again, that is the kind of performance.

Now, they were talking about infrastructure. No wonder, as regards to the environment, as the Minister said, the hospitals are not conducive to good health care. This is because there was \$6.97 million to spend and what did he do? This project was allocated \$37 million in 1998, for the construction of district health facility repairs to major hospitals and equipment. "Implementation has been slow." Here what it is: "Because consensus was not being achieved among the Project Administration Unit (PAU), (NIPDEC) and the regional health authorities on a priority list to inform the design", but they got the Project Administration Unit, they have NIPDEC and they said that they cannot reach a consensus. Who is the boss of all three, me? No, it is the Government, it is the Minister, it is this inept, incompetent administration, which cannot even get three units—which they control—to move to spend \$6.7 million on infrastructure in hospitals.

Are we wondering, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that operations must be completed by TV lights? Are we wondering that there are ambulances with no wheels and people die? Are we wondering of those things? And then some—where is he, the man from St. Joseph comes to talk about brown paper and babies, during the PNM time. But we put some thing in place to correct it and they did not have the competence; or the ability; or even the care to try to do it. That is what is happening.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I deal with genuine politicians. I do not have anything to say to people who have betrayed their people. So if those who know they did that, would not interfere with me, we would all operate well.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

And as you return, Mr. Speaker, the National Community Care Programme; \$2,700,000 million. This project was allocated \$3 million in 1998. "However, performance has been hindered by absence of a project manager. That officer is expected to assume duty in late 1998, funds in the sum of \$2.7 million will be available for re-allocation."

This is the history of the three critical years when this health sector reform programme would have been off and running and, therefore, any delay, any problems in the health sector today, particularly in infrastructure and other areas, can be laid squarely at the doorstep of this Government and this administration for the situation which they allowed to develop. It is not that health was a bed of roses, but we took steps to correct it. And if when they had delayed the programme, they had come up with some fundamental changes we could then properly say they were coming up with fundamental changes, to make things okay and, as a result of that, we could understand the delay. But they just delayed for delay sake like the national library; like every other thing they delayed, such as community centres in the La Brea constituency—there are three of them; they just stopped them and would not build them. Four years! But do not worry, they would leave just now. *[Desk thumping]* The Government would leave just now and they would be built soon.

So, Mr. Speaker, that is the situation. It helps. That is why you have—*[Interruption]* Definitely, I have—and I am certain the national community will look at the promises of this administration, and this Minister in this budget. One does not need a pinch of salt to take this, one needs a whole barrel of epsom salts because when one takes it, it certainly does other things to you.

Let us look at some of the statements made by the hon. Minister in respect of all the things; he gave us a long list of all the areas: he is going to deal with tobacco use. It is quite clear that there are certain lifestyles which cause certain problems; one is smoking and the other is drinking. I always say that any vices I have, are wet, so I drink but with a lot of moderation. We have a government here who is talking about lifestyles and health, but when they came into power—the one day we had an opportunity to have some people not being able to get alcohol to buy; they made it possible to buy liquor on Sundays. *[Desk thumping]* And the unfortunate part of it—the hon. Minister of Health—I do not know what is his religion but I only could recognize his name and I believe that he is of the Muslim faith. I have my Muslim friends who always try to stop me and tell me, do not drink. One of them is my good partner and as a result of that I have come around to drinking much less because we move around and I do not drink. *[Desk thumping]* Then we have the tobacco—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order, please!

3.15 p.m.

The Member spoke about the Point Fortin Hospital and then tried to give the impression that the People's National Movement wanted a polyclinic and office and when they came into power that was changed. Mr. Speaker, let me tell you, if

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the Member for Point Fortin would be honest—[*Interruption*] I am not calling you, “yuh see dat”—

Dr. Griffith: Well, who is the Member for Point Fortin?

Mr. Speaker: The speaking time for the hon. Member for La Brea has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: I want to suggest that the hon. Member continues to speak to me and not to them.

Mr. H. Breaux: I have no problem with that, Mr. Speaker; you know I always take your advice and ruling.

Mr. Speaker, without meaning to call anybody, but I would tell you, since the Member does not want me to call his name I will leave his name out. It is a fact, that the persons who did the report did say a polyclinic for Point Fortin, but I and other members of the PNM, at that time, rallied and caused them to change that position. If you did not see the changed position that is a problem for you. That is why when the persons involved with me in raising that matter, heard that they were still having a polyclinic, they got in touch with me and I raised it as a definite matter of urgent public importance in this honorable House. That, too, comes back to the old story. I raised it and caused the action and when they did it, they claimed that they did it, but they did it as a result of initiatives by me.

At the same time, I hear them boasting about water by the year 2,000. You know I had to suffer the ignominy of being thrown out of this House in order to get water for La Brea. Now, when you see the pipes down there, it is the humble Member of Parliament for La Brea who did it. Did no one tell you? I caused it and that is the fact! [*Desk thumping*] I paid the price, but it happened. So do not try to take away from me the things which I have done. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Mr. H. Breaux: I could understand the exuberance they have for the points I am making. I just want to correct the hon. Minister in a couple of matters, or to point to some matters. Take for instance, he said that they had \$72 million for drugs. He is incorrect; it is \$69.937 million in 1998/1999, and that was not the original number. The original number that they told us they were going to give

was \$79 million, so they cut \$10 million from it. He should tell us that, in fact, the allocation for drugs here was originally \$79 million. He cut off \$10 million, made it \$69 and boasting about it. He should tell us about the \$10 million he took away, because the Panadol they have to give people in South all the time, that is what is causing the problem.

As he is talking about the South Western Regional Health Authority, that body is not properly constituted. It is required that there must be a medical person on it, and I understand that the medical person on that board has resigned. If the Minister wants to do his job, appoint somebody who would accept it. But as of now that body is not properly constituted.

The hon. Minister spoke about the money being spent on operations: cataract, prostate and kidney stone operations and so forth. I want to tell him, here you have a backlog of cases—and I listened to Dr. Anand Chattergoon when he said this. There is a backlog of operations and the Ministry is going to pay doctors to bring it down. When it is brought down, the Minister has to tell me and this honourable House how he is going to ensure that the same people who are being paid to bring it down do not just let it mount again.

I am not saying do not do that, but if the Minister had spent some of the \$6 million that he sent back for infrastructural development to buy an ESWL machine that shatters kidney stones from outside without the necessity of an operation—[*Interruption*—I do not know, but you find out and buy it; when they make me Minister of Health, I would do it. You find out!

Take for instance, if you have to get—[*Interruption*] Do not worry about whether we get back or not; while I am here I am going to make sure that you do what you have to, and do it properly. There are a number of machines, for instance you have specialized X-ray machines, you have to find yourself in Mount Hope to do it. We do not have it in San Fernando. You hear Dr. Jeewan Ali talking about a lack of a neonatal clinic in the San Fernando General Hospital, when are we going to get that? I understand that money is going to be spent on a burns unit for San Fernando General Hospital. I am advising you to get the oil companies and the big companies in Point Lisas to fund it, because they are running hazardous operations and so it is their duty to assist in providing the kind of environment of care for the employees who are likely to be damaged. Do not spend our moneys on that. [*Interruption*] No, I cannot give way now; I am in full flight. [*Laughter*]

The hon. Minister made a big hoo ha about \$35 million in respect of pensions; a contribution to the pensions for the regional health authorities. The Health

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Sector Reform Programme provides \$50 million. He said that in 1999/2000 they are going to put \$35 million. Firstly, I have looked in the budget documents and I only see \$21.5 million. I am not an accountant, and I do not know whether money may be hidden somewhere that the uninitiated like myself cannot find it. What the Minister did not tell us is that that money should have been put in since last year. The PSIP says, I like to quote these things: “an initial injection of \$35 million was budgeted for deposit into the fund in fiscal 1998/1999.” Now the Members tell me they did not put their house in order, they did not have the Act in place and that is why they did not put it there. I would prefer them to tell me that they did not have money, then I would say that if you did not have money, I would excuse you. But they did not put their blocks in place; their ducks were not in order. So do not come now in 1999/2000 to make me feel “yuh doing such a big thing for Trinidad and Tobago that yuh putting \$35 million.” It is a year too late.

That is why there were nurses outside the San Fernando General Hospital walking up and down clamouring for uniform allowances and various things. Would you believe that the hon. Minister had the audacity to come here and tell me about their increasing allowances for nurses? He scrupulously—I must thank him for that—kept away from talking about any pay for nurses because he knows that I was listening, and I know that the President of the Public Services Association has been on them to get nurses their proper salaries.

As we are on that, he keeps talking about training nurses, but he is training nurses to go abroad. They are not going abroad only because of money. I agree that if we are playing that we are interested in health give the nurses more money and better conditions. The nurses were striking, causing industrial action because they were horrified at the condition in the hospital.

I do not really want to come here and say all the things I am told, but a number of nurses and doctors have been talking to me, telling me about the state of affairs, but I am trying to give the hon. Minister a chance. But when I catch him here trying to play—as it is said, “when you jump in and want to play mas' you cyar fraid powder”. He came here and tried to attack the honourable and distinguished Leader of the Opposition after such a brilliant speech. [*Interruption*] When you come here and attack him, I have to deal with you, unfortunately. Mr. Speaker, I want to point out again, the parlous state of the health sector in this country must be laid directly at the feet of this Government.

I want to get on to a few other points. I was reading the *PetroVision* quite recently—I am from the oil industry, [*Interruption*] I am from the oil industry—and it talked about terminalling in the Point Fortin area. I say that is a good thing.

Then, Oil Tanking Trinidad and Tobago Limited has been formed as a joint venture between Petrotrin and Oil Tanking Caribbean. The magazine went on to say that a local company, Terminal Operators Limited, will be associated with the venture. I understand that they will be bringing oil from, among other places, Colombia. Mr. Speaker, I want you to focus on that for a while, seeing that Colombia is not only famous for oil but also for cocaine.

When I looked in the front of the magazine I saw Mr. and Mrs. Darren Bissoondath clapping—we know him—and Mr. and Mrs. Khalid Mohammed, otherwise known as “Uncle Khalid”. I understand that a gentleman by the name of Rampersad is also involved. I want Petrotrin to be careful that cocaine does not come into those terminals in vessels. I am sounding a warning to the country about it. I am not going to say anymore, I have sounded a warning. Point Fortin is too close to home to have this going on. I am sounding a warning. I do not want you to give them a backdoor, a funnel, and a conduit pipe to pass cocaine into this country.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I go further. There is a situation which I read in the *Daily Express* of October 15 where it says: “Government would begin discussions next Monday for an ethane petrochemical complex”. It is my information that they want to do polyurethane, ethane, and ethylene and that two companies have made bids, Liondell Chemicals and Nova and the Petrotrin people have submitted bids. Petrotrin co-hired Chem Systems to evaluate the bid and the preferred bidder is Liondell Chemicals, but some move is being made, through the backdoor, to bring back Nova to talk. I am sounding another warning that this kind of behaviour will only put the name of Trinidad further into the mire. Please, now that it is not yet done, do what is the correct thing. Mr. Speaker, the person who gave me this information is one person who always upbraided me about being a Member of the PNM and he was so incensed that he came to my office—I did not go by him—and told me.

As we come to La Brea, Trinidad Lake Asphalt, I heard on the news recently of an intention to sell Lake Asphalt, but more important than that—and I am sorry the hon. Prime Minister is not here—I understand they are trying to sell Lake Asphalt and one of the persons involved, is somebody who proposes to sell one-third of the mining rights of Lake Asphalt and to use a certain system where there is some query as to whether, in fact, they actually have the patent.

I think that whole transaction needs to be looked at because I understand that on a previous occasion, when the chairman of the board of Lake Asphalt and the

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vice-chairman were in the presence of the hon. Prime Minister together with Carlos John, Carlos John was the man instructed to do the transaction and the chairman and vice-chairman were left out. That is what I understand. So I am signalling that we need to look at these kinds of questionable transactions carefully.

Now that I see the Member for Tobago East is back here, I noticed on the last occasion when he got up to speak after the Leader of the Opposition, he spent time to chastise and tell him he would never be Prime Minister again, or if he wants to be Prime Minister, that would not happen; but it is not a question of being Prime Minister. I would have thought that as the Minister of Tobago Affairs, he would have spent his time talking about the \$12 million of our money that is somewhere else, or spent his time talking about the teachers in Tobago who cannot get paid after they have worked. I would have thought that he would have spent his time talking about the ferry in Tobago that is non-existent at this time, rather than concerning himself as to whether the present Leader of the PNM would be Prime Minister again. We had a Prime Minister, the first Leader of the PNM, he was not, so another Leader of the PNM was Prime Minister and another one was Prime Minister after that. So the Member ought not to worry about that. A PNM leader would be the next Prime Minister. Worry about Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I represent the constituency of La Brea. It is fashionable for people to say that nothing could be done about the roads of La Brea, but La Brea itself is only a small part of my constituency and I want to debunk the first idea that nothing could be done about the roads of La Brea because it can and it has been, from time to time, once there is proper maintenance. The strategy of this Government is not to do anything about those areas of the La Brea constituency where they have traditionally lost and it is now becoming very apparent that they do not intend to do anything about those roads. All of Palo Seco, Los Iros and most of La Brea on that other side, the roads are in a terrible condition.

I hear the hon. Member for Fyzabad whispering not so softly on the side and I want to tell this honourable House what he did in his capacity as Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Works and Transport when URP was under that ministry. Certain of my constituents went to see him about a basketball court that was partially finished in Los Bajos and he gave them all sorts of undertakings and when they left he made disparaging remarks about them which had returned to me via people who are no longer his friends. And to this day, that basketball court is not completed.

Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate that Daly Village Community Centre, Los Bajos Community Centre, Salazar Trace Community Centre, the road between

Lot 10 and Parrylands, and in particular La Brea, the PTSC transport bus will not go into La Brea. I am putting it down in this honourable House that we need service. It is not my fault that the people love me and would not vote for the UNC, they love the PNM, but they pay taxes and as they pay their taxes, they are entitled to be well-treated and fairly treated by this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Joseph and the Member for Tobago East have the habit of coming here and saying that the little criminals—as he calls them—between the ages of 16 and 20 were not born at the time of this Government and he is very correct. As I said before, during the last 13 years, the PNM were in government for three years and 10 months. He always talks about counting. If he counts, he would realize that a 16-year-old during the formative years would have been under the NAR and the impressionable years would have been under this uncaring Government after you had a PNM government in place that had taken certain steps to have programmes in place for job opportunities for young persons. Steps like the youth camps which we had way back.

We have now a Government that has decimated those projects. I know its classic statement is that poverty is not an excuse for crime and I agree with that, but poverty itself, in the face of wanton misuse of public funds, is an incentive for people to become frustrated and uncaring and willing to lash back. Therefore, when we think about scouring crime and dealing with youth crime, you on that side, in particular, have to say *mea culpa* for the behaviour that you—if you do not know what that is, it is not my fault. Because it is through your behaviour, the obvious feeding frenzy going on in this Government has some kind of effect on the young people of this country and when a programme like the Civilian Conservation Corps has been terminated, one realizes that it is doing things in order to cause—whether you are aware of it or not—young people to choose the other side. I am not justifying it.

I want to deal finally with the TSTT situation. There is a situation in the country at this time where the Communication Workers Union is on strike and is calling for a share of the profits and the hon. Member of Public Utilities is on record as saying that a call for a share of the profits of the company is ludicrous.

Mr. Speaker, sharing the profits of a venture is one of the oldest known ways, in Trinidad and Tobago, of compensating workers and I want to remind those of you who know the history about how the parang situation came about.

After the estates got paid around the middle of October and they picked cocoa, they would give a certain share of the money they made to the workers. I am not saying that you necessarily have to give, it is more a question of a definition of

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profits. For a Government which came to this Parliament and spoke about Employees Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) it is improper and foolhardy to say that asking for a share in the profits is ludicrous. What you have to do is ask: What profits and say how you want to share and let us sit and negotiate that because the banks arrange for sharing profits. All the advanced and forward-thinking industries talk about sharing profits. Of course, they give you employee shares and those are dealt with in a particular way. So since you know that, and discussion and negotiation is the key to things reaching consensus, I would have expected a Minister of Public Utilities, particularly one who is trained in the law to say: “Well, you want to share profits, what do you mean? How do you understand profits? Is it net profit, or gross profit?”

3.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Could it be that you were anticipating me? I was about to suggest to you that your time is up and that you start to wind-up your contribution.

Mr. H. Béréaux: Mr. Speaker, I thank you. I was saying that one has to look at the nature of the profits and work out something. TSTT is losing millions of dollars, and part of that money belongs to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is time that this matter be brought to an end. I do not mean by holding the union by the scruff of its neck, but coming together as sensible people and discussing the matter and finding a *modus vendetta*.

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

The Minister of Local Government (Hon. Dhanraj Singh): Mr. Speaker, the budget presented by the Minister of Finance on October 8, 1999, is a collective document presented to this House by this Government. The Government must be complimented for laying in this House its fifth budget. Coming against the background of near political domination by one party—the PNM—this is a major achievement. The possibility exists for a sixth budget also by this Government.

The last PNM led Government had the privilege of laying only four budgets. So, in terms of achievement, we have presented one budget more than the last PNM administration. We are also fast approaching November 5, 1999, and on that day, we will also pass the term of office of the last PNM administration. The last PNM administration lasted for three years and 10 months and we will soon be passing that period. Mr. Speaker, I say this against the background of statements made by the Leader of the Opposition on many occasions, that we will not last one month. He further went on to six months, one year and so on.

The Minister of Finance must be complimented for managing the country's financial affairs during the 1999 financial year. Despite depressed oil prices for the first eight months of the year and low commodity prices throughout the year, such as: methanol, urea, fertilizer and steel, this country was able to achieve a rate of growth of 6.9 per cent. This rate of growth is outlined in the *Review of the Economy* at Appendix II. This speaks volumes about the healthy state of the economy, the confidence level and character of the Minister of Finance.

I heard the Leader of the Opposition making apologies for introducing the Minister of Finance to the political arena. I wish to ask the Member for San Fernando/East, what attracted him and his party to the honourable Minister of Finance in the first place? *[Laughter]*

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way. Whatever it was it did not take me long to realize the error that I made and I took steps to rectify it with dispatch. *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. Members: They do not believe you.

Hon. D. Singh: Mr. Speaker, before going on, I would like to respond to some of the statements made by the Member for La Brea. He spoke on almost every topic. He seems to be an expert now, but when his government was in office, they never called upon him to lead any ministry or to make any substantial contribution at that point in time. He spoke about money being transferred from ministries to the URP programme. I wish to indicate to him that the budget for the URP Programme was \$90 million and that allocation remained at \$90 million. We did not get any additional funding other than the \$90 million for the financial year ending 1999. I want to make that statement. He also spoke about getting water in La Brea and I wish to state that it was under this Government that they were able to get water down in La Brea. It is good that he stood up here and let the national community know of the good works of this government in coming to his needs and the people that he represent.

I also heard the hon. Member making claims for community centres and other facilities in his area. I wonder what he was doing during his last term of office and finally found that he has so many needs. The community centres that were outstanding should have been completed during the term he was in government.

Mr. Speaker, we have statements being made by the Member for Toco/Manzanilla when he stood up and addressed this House. The Member for Toco/Manzanilla, before coming to this House was the Chairman of the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation. At that time, a PNM Member of Parliament also

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represented the Toco/Manzanilla area and the PNM was in Government at that time. From what I was told, the Member for Toco/Manzanilla did absolutely nothing. He was absent for most of the time when the Corporation held meetings, so no work was done in that area. No wonder the Member comes to this Parliament with a huge shopping list of things to be done.

I want to put on the record some of the achievements of this Government in the Toco/Manzanilla area. We have completed the Monte Cristo Park; the Platanal Bridge which was broken down for the last 30 years; the Jacelon Bridge and San Pablo Bridge; the pavilion at the major regional ground in Sangre Grande. We have done a lot of road paving. One of them that comes to mind is the Kowlessarsingh Trace, where over \$1 million was spent on that road. Mr. Speaker, this is only the work that was done by the Ministry of Local Government and several other ministries are doing a lot of work in that area.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Toco/Manzanilla wants to jump unto the bandwagon and steal our thunder. So that every opportunity he gets, whenever he knows that we are undertaking any project in his area, he comes to the House and makes a big “hurrah bruha” of what he is saying. Noise—lots of noise to get public attention so that they will feel that he is doing the work in Toco/Manzanilla, but he is doing nothing.

The Member for Arouca North also in his contribution referred to a matter that was already dealt with by this House. He spoke about contracts being awarded to PR contracting firm by the Chaguaranas Corporation and contracts being awarded to Jogie contracting firm in the Couva Corporation.

That matter was dealt with earlier in the year, sometime in April, and I think the Member for Arouca North really did not have much to say.

3.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the 1999/2000 Budget as it affects the Ministry of Local Government. Under this budget, and I am speaking about the recurrent allocation, for the year 1999/2000 the Ministry of Local Government has received \$584 million. This means, when compared to an allocation of \$559 in 1998, we have received a difference of \$25 million. Now, this is much more than what the PNM gave to the Ministry of Local Government during its administration.

If you take, for example, the last year under the PNM administration, the recurrent expenditure for the local government bodies stood at \$411 million. So comparing 1995 to 1999 some \$173 million has been given to local government. This will certainly result in the provision of better services, such as in the area of

scavenging, where we have more areas being developed and we have a greater responsibility towards picking up a greater volume of rubbish. We will be adequately able to deliver our truck-borne water supply. We will be able to better supply our contracting services, *et cetera*.

With respect to the development programme, under the 1999/2000 Budget some \$70 million has been allocated for developmental works. This is \$26 million more than the 1999 allocation, that is the financial year just ended. As you know, Mr. Speaker, local government is now responsible for several functions. We have been given additional responsibilities and, clearly, the population is coming to the Ministry of Local Government for greater resources, greater infrastructural development and the Ministry of Local Government has had to respond to every kind of problem that one can think of.

The Ministry proposes to accelerate its development programme in terms of market construction, bridges, administrative buildings and roads. Mr. Speaker, the \$70 million given to the Ministry has to be divided among 14 corporations, so when you divide that among 14 it boils down to around \$5 million. Now the kinds of problems that we have in the Ministry, \$5 million per corporation really would not solve the problem, but this is a vast improvement on what the PNM provided to local government during its time in office.

I wish to put on record the allocation to local government bodies from 1992 onwards to 1995. Under the PNM administration's development programme in 1992 the Ministry of Local Government received \$20.1 million; in 1993, \$20.3 million; in 1994, \$20,495,000.00 or \$20.4 million and in 1995, \$22.2 million. Now when you compare this to \$70 million in the years 1999 to 2000, clearly you can see where this Government is holding true to its mandate of empowering local government bodies to clearly carry out their functions.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM would speak about decentralization, but decentralization has no meaning if the local government bodies do not have the financial resources to carry out their functions. I say this to let you know that we are about empowering people. We are true to our commitment, that is, letting communities get on with the business of taking charge of their affairs. By providing them with this kind of money we are hoping that much more developmental work that is people-centred will be taking place and will be carried out by the local government bodies.

I hear the Member for Diego Martin West making public calls for the Diego Martin Corporation to become a borough. Mr. Speaker, I would like the Member

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to answer, what has really come about during the last four years to cause him to make that public call for the Diego Martin Corporation to be made a borough? Is it that under this Government the corporation has seen greater developments in terms of infrastructure and greater autonomy and will be better able to manage its affairs? I wish to put on the table here some of the developments the Ministry of Local Government has undertaken in the Diego Martin area.

We have recently completed road repairs to Smith Hill and Scorpion. A major water project is being undertaken by a self-help group in which the Ministry of Local Government is providing auxiliary services such as the backhoe, the labour as well as the sand and the gravel, *et cetera*. We have also paved Sierra Leone Road and we have constructed a turnstile. Also, under this Government, construction of the Carenage Boys' Government School has taken place, so the area is being developed. I can, therefore, understand why the Member for Diego Martin West now thinks that the Diego Martin area is ready to be considered as a borough.

Mr. Speaker, I now go on to the specific allocations made to the various corporations in the budget. Under the recurrent budget the Port of Spain Corporation received \$77.8 million; the Diego Martin Corporation, \$26.9 million; the San Juan/Laventille Corporation, \$54.8 million; the Tunapuna Corporation, \$53.7 million; the Sangre Grande Corporation, \$26.5 million; the Chaguanas Corporation, \$22 million; the Couva Corporation, \$33.6 million; the San Fernando Corporation, \$44.4 million; the Princes Town Corporation, \$28.3 million; the Point Fortin Corporation, \$16.5 million; the Siparia Corporation \$24.7 million; the Rio Claro Corporation, \$21.7 million; the Penal/Debe Corporation, \$16.8 million and the Arima Corporation, \$21.4 million.

Mr. Speaker, the corporations that give the most trouble and make the most noise are the corporations that have received the lion's share of the allocation. I want to repeat that. The corporations that give the most trouble and make the most noise are the corporations that will receive the lion's share of the allocation. They are, the Port of Spain Corporation with \$77.8 million; the San Juan Corporation with \$54.8 million; the Tunapuna Corporation with \$53.7 million and the San Fernando Corporation with \$44.4 million. These four corporations out of the 14 corporations have received approximately 50 per cent of the allocation of \$470 million. Mr. Speaker, let me say that again. These four corporations out of the 14 corporations have received approximately 50 per cent of the allocation, that is, \$230.7 million.

These allocations, while they have been historical in that we have inherited this type of allocation, there is a fallacy that the population size in some of these

areas is extremely large and that they are dealing with a greater number of people and so have to provide additional services to these people. However, Mr. Speaker, the Port of Spain Corporation which will receive \$77 million has a population of 63,125. The Chaguanas Corporation which received \$22 million has a population of 68,000 people. I make this point against the background of the problems that are being highlighted in the newspaper where certain corporations say they are not getting money and the money is not enough and what have you. Again, where the Port of Spain Corporation with a population of 63,000 people is getting an allocation of \$77 million we have the Chaguanas Borough which has a population of 68,900 persons getting an allocation of \$22 million.

Mr. Speaker the point about it is that they do not complain. The \$22 million they get go a long way in carrying out their responsibilities. That is the point that I make here. [*Desk thumping*]. When one looks at the population of Siparia, Penal, Couva, Princes Town, Sangre Grande and compare their allocations to San Fernando, it is the same story. Let us look at the population of San Fernando. The San Fernando population at this point in time, serviced by the San Fernando City Corporation, is 70,352 persons. They got \$44.4 million. So with a population size of 70,352 they were given an allocation of \$44.4 million.

However, when that is compared to, let us say, the Couva Corporation under the region of Couva—and the data were compiled by the Elections and Boundaries Commission with regard to the number of electors in the area and we took the data for the age group from zero to 18 from the CSO data. So, Mr. Speaker, do you know the population that is serviced by the Couva/Tabaquite Regional Corporation is 162,954 persons and the budget for the Couva region is \$33 million? You know, they do not complain. They carry out their functions with a certain amount of zeal and zest. They never have time to complain. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, corporations such as the Tunapuna Corporation, which receive a sizeable allocation, continue to mismanage their affairs. Recently the corporation made allegation of owing some \$5 million to creditors.

4.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, that corporation receives its allocation and the council is responsible for how it spends its funds. If the Chairman goes off willy nilly and starts to repair his building and office and does not make proper provisions for it, that is not my fault. If he has two centenary celebrations in one year, that is not my fault. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, the mismanagement in the corporation continues. Recently, the corporation hired 30 additional workers. If I could tell you that the Minister of

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Local Government, in the last four years hired 10 persons, that would be a great achievement, but the Tunapuna Corporation goes on to hire 30 additional workers and they do not have the funds to pay for it. So, then they will go to the public and a big statement will appear in the newspapers: “Minister sabotaging workers in the Tunapuna Corporation by withholding funds”. We do not have the funds for it if the Minister of Finance does not give them to us.

It was not planned. All I am saying is that if the corporations manage their affairs properly, everybody will be able to go through their allocations and able to deliver to the population. I wish to put on record that the Tunapuna Corporation has been given an allocation of \$53.7 million in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the Unemployment Relief Programme. The 1998—1999 financial year was a difficult one for us in the Ministry. We had an allocation of \$90 million for the programme. This was as a result of declining prices for oil and, as a result, the Unemployment Levy Fund did not perform as expected. This was some \$40 million less than the allocation provided to the Ministry in 1998 but, despite that reduction, we were able to manage the programme fairly successfully. We were able to employ over 60,000 persons—and I understand that the Member for San Fernando East had a problem with the figures—but that is the data coming out from the tabulations from the various regions.

The corporations that take their mandate seriously to carry out this programme have had tremendous success with the programme because every corporation knows what its budget is going to be like in advance, and every corporation can therefore plan how it is going to carry out its programme in the months ahead. With that kind of planning and that kind of short funding, despite the \$90 million, the moneys came as was budgeted. So, everybody knew what their funding was going to be and they were given the funding on time. Corporations that were determined in carrying out this programme according to policies laid out by the Cabinet had tremendous success with regard to the programme.

Some of the major achievements which I wish to lay in this House are the construction of the Monte Cristo Park in Sangre Grande, a major bridge was constructed over the Centenary Extension Bridge in the St. Augustine area to provide farmers access to farming lands. We have worked with the Ministry of National Security to construct the Cunupia, Freeport and St. Mary's Police Stations as well as many others. We have constructed the Debe Recreation Ground pavilion and several other pavilions. We have constructed and opened the Hermitage, the Macaulay, the Union, the Cascade, the Princes Town and Punjal

Community Centres, as well as several others throughout Trinidad and Tobago. We have done several bridges, and to name a few: Abdul Trace Bridge, Mapapire Trace Bridge and the Gran Couva Trace Bridge. These are just a few of the projects undertaken by the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP).

Mr. Speaker, the 1999—2000 budget for the URP is expected to be in the vicinity of \$130 million. This increased allocation will go a long way in providing increased relief to the unemployed, increased training and, at the end of the day, provide increased infrastructural development.

In closing, I wish to state to the Minister of Finance that we in the Ministry of Local Government take our mandate very seriously and we are geared up to receive all our funds to carry out our programme in 1999—2000 and beyond.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Eulalie James (*Laventille West*): Mr. Speaker, taking part in this budget debate gives me the opportunity to highlight the incompetence of this Government, and the Leader of the Opposition must be complimented for alerting the national community to the many inaccuracies emanating from the Minister of Finance in what he called a budget presentation.

A cursory glance at the Minister's statement revealed that this Government did not take the Laventille community into consideration. They showed clearly that they have no interest in Laventille when it comes to the distribution of funds, provision of amenities and, above all, improving the quality of life for the people of Laventille. [*Desk thumping*] Their hypocrisy for Laventille was exposed on the day the budget was presented, when they failed to indicate what was in store for my constituency.

Mr. Speaker, for the four years that this Government has been in existence, very little or nothing was done to improve the ills that exist in Laventille. I know they would want to remind me of the Maryland Road that was repaired, but if the Minister did not allow his political games to get the better of him, he would have done a better job. [*Desk thumping*] He bluntly refused to liaise with the San Juan/Laventille Corporation where he would have been properly advised of the problem.

The Minister believed that he could undermine the corporation in order to make his government look good. He was of the misguided view that if his Ministry repaired the road during the time they repaired it, his political party would score points for the local government election, but history has proven him wrong, Mr. Speaker. They got a sound licking! The people of Laventille demonstrated that they cannot be easily fooled, as usual.

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What is even more scandalous is the fact that when the Minister claimed credit for repairing the Maryland Road, little did he expect that the poor quality and mismanagement of the project would have blown up in his face. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, Mr. Speaker, the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation is, at this time, querying why material for building houses could wind up on the credit list for the Maryland Road. Today, the corporation is still puzzled at the outstanding bill of over \$700,000 and the road is even worse off than before!

Mr. Hinds: Shame!

Mrs. E. James: It is really a shame on the Minister of Local Government, Mr. Speaker.

Some dangerous trends are developing in local government where the Minister, in answer to questions on this side, confirmed to this House that it was moneys from the road funds being utilized in his jaunts up and down the country fixing roads. We warned the Minister before and we will say it here again today. He is utilizing the road funds illegally!

The Ministry of Local Government is not a designated highways authority. The only institutions authorized to build and repair roads in Trinidad and Tobago are the Ministry of Works and Transport, the municipal corporations and the Tobago House of Assembly. [*Desk thumping*] I want to refer him, if he is doubting me, to check for himself section 6(2) of the Highways Act, Chap. 48:1.

Mr. Speaker, it is evidently clear that the Minister is only a conduit of his ministry for holding the road funds for corporations. He uses his power to victimize and choke the corporations, particularly the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation which is in Laventille West.

Mr. D. Singh: Not true!

Mrs. E. James: Secondly, in order to advance his underhand practices, he handpicks people in the different corporations who would agree to carry out his bidding and sometimes, in doing that, they bypass the Central Tenders Board.

Mr. Assam: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, is “underhand practices” parliamentary language? Is it imputing improper motives?

Mr. Speaker: It all has to do with the circumstances in which it is used and, in the circumstances, I will let it pass.

Mr. Manning: You feel you are the Speaker now!

Mrs. E. James: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of these officers have the privilege to give out contracts to the tune of \$25,000 and the Minister uses this

opportunity to have them give out the contracts without reverting to the tendering procedure, therefore, clearly, putting themselves in a position to offer the contracts to friends and family. This practice is an offence to the Central Tenders Board regulations.

For example, it is my understanding that the paving of the lookout just on top of my constituency, the Lady Young Road, was executed using this process to the tune of approximately \$625,000. So, in order to use that without getting people to tender for the job, they give it out in \$25,000 contracts. Mr. Speaker, this cannot be right!

4.25 p.m.

Continuing with the ills in my constituency, I wish to mention three other roads that are in very deplorable conditions, namely, the Laventille Road, St. Barb's Road and the Trou Macaque Road. I have been constantly writing to the Minister, not so much for him to fix it himself by using the road funds, but to siphon the road funds through the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation for them to do the job. He has not done anything about those three roads so far. The Laventille Road is the worst. I drive in the taxis regularly and every day taxi drivers are approaching me on the fixing of this road. Mr. Speaker, they are paying their 5 per cent tax on gas at the pump as well and they need to be considered! *[Desk thumping]* Why is he not getting the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation to fix the roads in Laventille? Give them the money, they can do the job, they are capable! And do not say they are misusing the funds. If you will do the correct thing, no funds will be misused. Any misuse of funds, you are doing it, not the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation! *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Hart: A wicked fella.

Mrs. E. James: You see, Mr. Speaker, he never replied to me to the several letters that I have written him. He may speak to me here, give me a little word when I am here in the Parliament, but that is not what I want. I wrote him officially and I expect him to reply to me officially. *[Desk thumping]* He has never done that, he does not have the courtesy to do that!

Mr. Hart: No class.

Mrs. E. James: Mr. Speaker, that is another example of blatant discourtesy demonstrated by these Members.

Speaking of the discourtesy, I am tempted to bring up something that happened recently on the Beetham. Because it is a habit and they must stop it.

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They must recognize the lawful representatives of these constituencies. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hart: No respect.

Mrs. E. James: What happened to me last week, happened to my colleagues from Arouca South, Toco/Manzanilla and Tunapuna. When they told me about it, I boasted and said, "Well that ain't happen to me". Because when they turned the sod at the Beetham school, they had the courtesy to invite me and allowed me to speak on behalf of the people, but when they came to open it last week, I was invited as a guest. How could you invite me as guest in my own constituency? Why did you not allow a voice for the people? How would you know how the people feel about your putting this school in the constituency? [*Desk thumping*]
Mr. Speaker, I really object to that strongly. They must change their ways!

If they had the chance, we would not be sitting here, because they do not respect the people whom we are representing. They do not want us to talk in here sometimes. They must stop their stupidity. [*Desk thumping*] We are representing people. It is people who put us here, just as people put them there. They just happen to be the Government at this point in time, but the tables will turn at some point soon, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hart: Just a matter of time.

Mr. Breaux: Deal with them, deal with them.

Mrs. E. James: Mr. Speaker, another problem I am facing in my constituency is lack of water. It is a source of worry to me because many times I am not allowed to sleep or they wake me up very early, and that is their privilege because I do not stop anybody from calling me; my number is in the phone book.

Mr. Hart: Partap, nobody "doh" call you.

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

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.05 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mrs. E. James: I was making the point that water, in my constituency, is a source of worry for me. My constituents continue to call me to assist them and sometimes, there is precious little I can do to assist them. Imagine in Laventille, we have a large number of tanks, and yet some of these tanks remain empty. Mr. Speaker, this ought not to happen. If these tanks are filled with water, there will be no problem, not only in Laventille but surrounding areas, as well.

I will always remind this Government of the total waste of taxpayer's money used to paint two tanks on the hill and, in addition, they say to prepare the site as a tourist attraction. Mr. Speaker, I brought this up last year in the budget and the hon. Member for Chaguanas replied and said that maybe it is not happening as yet, but it may happen during the next year. But I want to let him know that not one tourist, to date, has come to the area. Not one, Mr. Speaker. Neither the promise of these small entrepreneurs to bring out their goods for sale: whether it be their craft, food or whatever, nothing like this has taken place. They fooled the people, Mr. Speaker. I want to reiterate that this Government has done absolutely nothing to improve Laventille. In spite of all the "gallery" and public relations gimmick, Laventille remains the same.

Through the Unemployment Relief Programme, the PNM took a programme of repairing drains, building retaining walls and so forth. Today, if you visit the area, you would encounter those drains and walls that we were able to complete, and to date, no attempt whatsoever has been made by this Government to continue the projects.

It is also customary, throughout the years, and because of the high unemployment situation in the constituency, mothers would be able, through that programme, to gain employment, particularly, during the August vacation from July to September. They were not so fortunate this year. This programme assisted them during that period to purchase the school books, uniforms and whatever is needed, to send the children back to school. So one could well imagine the plight of these mothers who were unable to acquire the much needed funds to assist them to send the children to school. Mr. Speaker, it was horrible! Many of them approached me and I had to go out begging to assist some of them, but I could not satisfy the majority.

I think that was very bad, on the part of the Government, to treat the mothers of Laventille that way. Some were fortunate, however, because in order to generate the revenue that they needed—and they did it because they wanted the money—they had to agree to canvass for the UNC in the recent local government elections. The facts are that right after the elections, the programme was stopped. That tells a story.

However, as one of my colleagues in his earlier presentation said, "you know when something good happens, or where justice is due, you give due recognition". I noticed that work has begun on Sogren Trace as it relates to the sporting facilities. Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to thank the Member for Tobago West, a past Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs in the UNC Government.

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It came about as a result of my visit to her in that ministry and the favourable discussions that followed, a whole plan was laid out for those grounds. I must also add that even though she has left that Government, I am happy to see her plan implemented and I say “thanks” for that. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, let me talk a little about women and gender issues. In our society today, women are important to the development of this country, in fact, in any country in the world, but most of them suffer setbacks as a result of being unemployed. Many of these women are single parents and heads of households. In some cases they are the sole bread winners in the family and as such, need to be employed to maintain themselves and their families. The Minister in his budget speech made mention of a National Women’s Training and Employment Programme entitled, “Women’s Second Chances,” which clearly indicates that this is the Government’s answer to deal with the female labour force. No specifics are given on the type of skills to be taught and, by extension, how this training would assist in providing sustainable employment for these women.

The situation becomes more frightening when we consider the thousands of young men and women coming out of secondary schools every year and are unable to find jobs. It is safe to conclude that this Government has no policy to address the relevant needs of the women, in particular, of this country. Many of the jobs available give rise for concern for women’s safety. As a parent and a mother, I feel sure that all parents and mothers, in particular, would join with me, in expressing their grave concern at the ungodly hours of night and early morning that our young women are forced to journey home after the type of jobs made available to them by this UNC Government. I speak, specifically, of casinos. Just recently we know of one young girl who got killed because of the late hour in the early morning that she went home. She had to walk because there was no transportation out to assist her.

I think that the Government should look at this and probably enforce something that these people would put in place to ensure that these young girls get home safely after leaving work at those ungodly hours. Mr. Speaker, danger lurks in the dark! Given the nature of crime in this country today, we are truly concerned. Further, if the Ministry on Gender Affairs Division is doing any thing at all to curb domestic violence, the wider public is unaware.

Domestic violence is on the increase in this country. While we agree that it affects both male and female, women, in particular, are injured and killed almost every day. The Minister’s answer to this is to create safe houses near police stations. The police service is already decimated. What will be done to ensure that

they receive specialized training for the task? How long are these women expected to stay at these centres? What kind of programme is envisaged to ensure the safety of these women after they leave the safe houses and return to their home environment?

5.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, these questions need to be answered, and I await the answers because we are truly concerned.

Hon. Member: From whom?

Mrs. E. James: From the Minister of Finance. Indeed, the Minister of Social Development should have an input in this as well.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk a little about culture. So much can be said about culture generally. The way it is treated by this UNC Government, it is apparent to me that they do not understand the psyche of our people. Last year, I talked about the Best Village Programme and indicated that I would like to see it back to its full strength, the way the People's National Movement had it and the way we left it. Maybe the Minister could add to it, make it more viable, whether financially or otherwise. The Minister gave me a whole long "ole talk" about what he intends to do. This is what he had to say to what I said to him:

"I take a little umbrage to that because I was given that responsibility a few months ago and I made press releases. Everything that was said by that Member was part of the press releases."

He went on to say:

"Best Village will be better than before in Trinidad and Tobago. We will ensure that every community will take part in Best Village. The first thing I did was to ensure that Best Village would be run from 1998 to 1999. It will not be a three-month Best Village competition starting in October and finishing in December, but instead it would be for one year."

This is what he said, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Manning: Who is he?

Mrs. E. James: The Minister of Social and Community Development speaking:

"We are taking it in phases to ensure that by the time July, 1999 comes around, we would be at the finals of the Best Village competition. Nothing will be removed. The Folk Fair will continue, La Reine Rive will continue..."

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I stop there, Mr. Speaker, because I listened to a programme with the Permanent Secretary and she was trying to justify this and that. When people came down on her about the La Reine Rive she made some sort of excuse about no money and what not, but the very next day a release came out that they would have La Reine Rive because they found the money. They had no intention of holding La Reine Rive, but the people opt for what they wanted and they immediately found the money.

The Minister knows that he did not run the Best Village this year, as he intended. They took all the concerts to South; your humble servant, who is accustomed to going every year, was unable to go. I heard that the number of people who attended was not enough. People were not able to support their community folk groups. In fact, he said he would try to ensure that every single one I could tell him about folk groups in my area that did not take part. He did not do as well as he thought he could have done. He ought to examine that again; go back to the drawing board and put Best Village back on the footing that it was. Only the PNM knows how to run Best Village. [*Interruption*]

You could say what you want because you run to the ground already. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Griffith: Who laughs last, laugh best.

Mrs. E. James: Mr. Speaker, we must always remember that the Best Village produced the best: people like Singing Sandra, Lady B—she still works in the Ministry—Sugar Aloes and your humble servant, because I was a part of it. [*Desk thumping*] I used to perform with Central East Port of Spain, so I know what Best Village is about.

Hon. Members: Ralph Maraj.

Mrs. E. James: Oh yes, I would not take that away from him, because he was involved in theatre and everything and part of the Best Village as well.

Mr. Imbert: He is still involved in the theatre.

Mrs. E. James: I want to beg them here today, do not kill the Best Village; do not kill our culture. Notice I said our culture, because some of them believe only in a certain section of culture, but from the inception when Dr. Williams put this on show, when he had that vision for the Best Village, it was meant for every sector of this nation; not one and not the next. Some decided to stay out but everybody could get involved in Best Village, that is what it is for. We are supposed to come together as a nation, and the culture could bring us together.

We must ensure that this proud legacy, the Best Village, is left in a good condition for our children, their children and generations to come.

To continue, Mr. Speaker, the greatest single cultural event in 1999, carnival apart, was the Miss Universe Pageant. The entire population was sensitized to what was touted as the tremendous benefits to be derived from it, for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The benefits were not to come a whole year and something after but, in some cases, they were to be immediate. If you could throw your minds back, the hotels fixed up and spent a lot of money and many of them were not patronized because the people did not come. That was supposed to be an immediate benefit. The reality is that after some five months the population still awaits all these benefits. They also await accountability for the millions of tax dollars spent.

Mr. Speaker, the building at Chaguaramas, in spite of the call to turn it into a cultural centre, still stands there wasted. All that money they took to repair the place, why would they not put it to good use, and make it the cultural centre of Trinidad and Tobago? Mr. Speaker, I could remember vividly too, Singing Sandra was conned into singing something positive about that Miss Universe project. In her song she sang of the financial benefits to be derived to the small businessman. Come out and sell your craft, your toolum and so forth. Nothing like that happened.

I remember there was a big craft village in the Savannah. People had to pay a big sum to get one of the stalls. Mr. Speaker, today, nobody sold a thing, and in addition to losing money on the goods, they lost the money they paid for the stalls too, because they did not give them back a little portion. They lost everything; they are poorer than before. This reminds me of a little quote "the poor will always get poorer and the rich will get richer."

We are all aware that the intention of the Ministry of Culture and Gender Affairs was to have the various national interest organizations, and I am referring to the steelband, the National Carnival Band Leaders Association, Trinidad and Tobago Unified Calypsonians Organization, take responsibility for the operation of carnival 1999. In fact, it was started in 1998. Some eight months later, these three organizations have still not received all their moneys to pay to the different people they owe. They have expressed concern as it relates to the allocation and disbursement of funds to ensure the viability of carnival.

The Minister in his presentation announced an allocation of \$24.5 million for carnival in the year 2000. But, Mr. Speaker, I would like him to think about the

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disbursements still that are still outstanding in 1999. With this \$24.5 million they most likely would have to go into it to fund the moneys owing and that would not leave \$24.5 million to run carnival next year or any other cultural programme.

There is deafening silence of the Minister of Finance as it relates to the allocation of land at Chagville for the National Steelband Association. I am not hearing anything and he is a steelband person, and I expect him to say something on that to assist them to acquire that piece of land. Recently, they lost their building through fire and they are accommodated at the Savannah, but they are not comfortable. What is being done to help Pan Trinbago; right now they have no telephone? The telephones are dead, they still owing the people. All these things are happening to them, yet the Government is not really coming to their assistance.

This brings to mind the question, what is happening to the remainder of the \$7.5 million to be paid to Pan Trinbago? I understand that presently it stands at \$10 million as a result of accumulated interest. Why would they not give Pan Trinbago their money?

Mr. Hart: A Tobagonian is in charge!

Mrs. E. James: They must show that they care about what happens to our culture, whether it be steelband, Best Village, calypsonians or anything else relating to our culture. I know that we have the other side of our culture, the chutney and that kind of thing, so they must show the caring for all aspects of our culture, not one and not the next. [*Desk thumping*] They must show a caring for all those ambassadors who go out there in different parts of the world and make us proud, most of all when they are here in Trinidad and Tobago as well. I appeal to the Government to look at our culture carefully, examine if they are really doing enough.

My contribution will never be complete if I do not inquire of the Minister of Social and Community Development, about the status of the remainder of work to be done at the complex on the hill in the Despers panyard. Earlier this year, I asked a question on this same topic, in this honourable House, and we were told that work would commence in May of 1999. We are in October 1999, not a stroke! Nothing has been done and the time is coming around again when they have to prepare for carnival. They are exposed to the elements; the rain, sun, dew, and everything else.

Mr. Speaker, Desperadoes is one of the best steelbands in the world [*Desk thumping*] and this year they won the Panorama finals, which makes them the best

for this year 1999. [*Desk thumping*] At least, the Government should recognize what they are doing for this country, and assist them. We started that building I think it was in 1995 and four years after it is not completed. Is it because it is in Laventille and you want to treat the people of Laventille how you want? But, Mr. Speaker, they would not have anything to do with that, because they are waiting for them to come up to open that building. [*Desk thumping*]

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we want to implore the Minister to ensure that this building is complete. However, it is not only the shed for Desperadoes. There is electricity, the water, roads, plus the drainage. There is no proper drainage at that complex up to now, so it is a long way off before it is opened. In fact, Mr. Speaker, from the look of things, the People's National Movement will open that centre.

I hope that I have sensitized them somewhat to the plight of the people of Laventille and it matters not whether it is a PNM government and they believe that the majority of the people support PNM. They are taxpayers and should be given their fair portion. I implore Members on the other side to consider Laventille in its 1999/2000 programme and do what they could to make the lives of those unfortunate people easier. [*Interruption*] I cannot listen to that, I can only commend them when I see it happen. Right now, everything is on paper and just words with no action behind it.

Mr. Speaker, I remember vividly over the years they have been in office, they have been putting forward this performing theatre to be on stream and the carnival institute which they are now bringing. All these things had been on paper since they came into office, but we cannot commend them until we see these things actually happen. We cannot take their word for it. So not until things happen will you receive the kudos you deserve.

However, as I close, I hope the many concerns I raise would not go unheeded. These concerns are real and I expect those on the other side to consider them.

Thank you.

The Minister of Information, Communications, Training and Distance Learning (Dr. The Hon. Rupert Griffith): Mr. Speaker, it is said that every job has an occupational hazard.

[Members of the Opposition walk out]

Let us stop to allow the irresponsible Trinidad and Tobago Opposition to leave. I pause to let them leave, Mr. Speaker. Kindly leave, because we are really talking to the national community.

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Mr. Speaker, this Opposition is on record as saying that this Parliament is part-time and the Opposition's record of absence is of the highest level. Check the *Hansard* record and you will see how often Members are absent on that side. So when they walk out here today, as they have done in the past, it makes absolutely no difference because every day when we have Sitting in this honourable House what we see on that side are empty chairs. It makes absolutely no difference if they walk out. That is the irresponsible Opposition we have in Trinidad and Tobago. They are an absolute waste of time. Mr. Speaker, this is the fourth budget presentation of this administration and I take this opportunity to compliment my colleague, the Minister of Finance for a very people-friendly budget, a budget that would redound to the development and growth of this country. I compliment and I take my hat off to him for presenting such a budget.

Mr. Speaker, I was talking about occupational hazards when some of those on the other side walked out. I compliment those who stay, they are showing some strength and maybe, among some of them we might see some make the next bold step.

Every job has its occupational hazard, and I believe being in this House for nine years, one of the occupational hazards is coming day after day to listen to the contributions from those on the other side. I was telling the Minister of Finance, if there were not such stringent copyright laws brought by this Government in this House, perhaps we would have recorded some of the contributions, particularly the contribution of the Leader of the Opposition, and anyone who is suffering from a bad case of insomnia and cannot sleep, we give him that tape free, because even those on the other side fell asleep during his contribution.

If you look at the Members on that side when the other Members are speaking they are asleep and that speaks loads for itself. They come to this House and do not make any significant contribution. This Government, is keeping hope alive that one day we will see something of substance coming from the other side, decided to give them seven days to read the documents. Past experience will show that the budget is presented on a Friday, and debated on a Wednesday. In previous years, I have seen when the budget was presented, they were given until Monday for their contribution.

The Minister of Finance, and those of us on this side, decided to give them seven full days because we really hoped and prayed that they would come with some substantive information. But what do we see? It is the same old tapes being played speaker after speaker. They talk about all kinds of corruption without any substantiated evidence. We tell them from time to time to bring evidence and this

Government would deal with it, but each one gets up and says the same thing over and over, slinging mud hoping that it would stick, but clearly, the people in this national community are getting very tired of hearing the same old story without any evidence.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance presented a budget with no new taxes and no increase in taxes. Do you know of any country, at the stage of development of this country, which has ever presented a budget to the national community with no new taxes or no increases in taxes? Name me one. Before they begin to show some level of sophistication and appreciation of the efforts of this Government in terms of all the things every Member of this side are doing to improve Trinidad and Tobago, they come with the same old story of corruption and mud slinging.

Mr. Hart: Talk about the budget.

Dr. The Hon. R. Griffith: This is my preamble, I am coming to the budget in a minute. If you listen to them, there is nothing of substance. Criticisms, “ole talk”, bacchanal, accusation of people in corruption inside and outside of this House, people who cannot defend themselves. That is it. Look at the *Hansard*, almost 50 per cent of the contributions came from the other side and what do you get? Nothing of substance. That is what the Opposition presents to you. Mr. Speaker, I just hope and pray that one day they would see the light, wake up and make some sort of contribution with substance.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to my own constituency and there were many sound bites coming from the other side and, indeed, His Worship, the Mayor of Arima, in terms of nothing is being done in Arima. The Leader of the Opposition spent an hour and a half, maybe a little more, in this honourable House and talked all sorts of nonsense, in my opinion. But one of the things that really took the cake is when he talked about the Magistrate’s Court in Arima. He said the Minister of Finance lied, that no construction has started in Arima.

This morning I drove by the site and I want to tell you if the Opposition could sink so low in its rebuttal to a budget like this one which the hon. Minister of Finance presented, to single out what they perceive as an error because they have not seen foundation and maybe structures going up and saying that the Minister of Finance lied—

They also worked overtime doing sums to see if they could discredit the Minister’s figures, but up to this morning, I drove by the site where that Arima Magistrate’s Court would be built and the old derelict building which was on site

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has been demolished. The debris was carted away, the place was completely fenced in preparation for the construction and, in discussion with the Attorney General, I am advised that the plans are already in place for the construction of the Arima Magistrate's Court, yet they come here looking for things to try to discredit this Government. They cannot find anything. They have to look so far and wide that the Member would spend so much of his time in his long, sleepy, drawn-out contribution about not having a Magistrate's Court in Arima.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at what is going on in Arima and its environs—and I want to bring you to the various documents which were presented before this House. We thought that by giving them seven days to read—any second standard child could have read all those documents in seven days; they returned talking about the denial of those of Arima in particular, and the East/West Corridor.

On page 33 of the *Public Sector Investment Programme 1999/2000* under “Business and Trade Expansion” you will see that:

“...\$5 million is allocated for the development of detailed engineering designs for a Science Technology Innovation Park at Wallerfield.”

Wallerfield is in the Arima constituency, maybe they do not know that. On page 34 it says:

“Some \$4 million is allocated for development works at Industrial Estates.”

When one looks at “Social, Cultural And Community Services” on page 38 one would see there is provision for YTEPP, and I would talk a little more about YTEPP later:

“In Fiscal Year 1999/2000, the YTEPP Community-based Programme will be supported by the CDF. An amount of \$3.1 Mn. is provided to conduct fifty (50) skills training courses for 1500 young persons in low-income communities.”

That is not all. I will tell you more of what YTEPP is doing because they say that the youths of this country are being neglected and we stopped the YTEPP and the Civilian Conservation Corps, but I will let you know how frivolous and vexatious some of these unsubstantiated arguments are.

On page 39 of the same document one would see that:

“Three million has been provided to complete the Remand Home for young un-convicted offenders in Aripo...”

Aripo, for those of you who do not know, is also in the constituency of Arima.

Mr. Speaker, in my constituency, there are plans for the construction of four new schools, two at the secondary level and two at the primary level and when the Minister of Finance said that Santa Rosa would have a new primary school that would house 640 students and would cost about \$6.8 million and Aripo Primary School, the response was: Where is that? They do not know where that is. He is only calling places. Why do they not stop for God's sake and take a map of Trinidad and Tobago, do some research and see whether the Minister of Finance was talking the truth if they think he is lying. I want to tell them, since they are so lazy to do the work, that Santa Rosa Heights and Aripo are in my constituency and this Government has already turned the sod for the construction of those two primary schools. [*Desk thumping*]

I said that there are two secondary schools to be built also. One is in Blanchisseuse and one in Brazil. I am advised by the Minister of Education that the signs would go up in a matter of days and I can assure you that we will be turning the sod for those buildings before the end of this year.

On page 42, one would see that the skills development facility is also earmarked for Arima.

5.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, then they talk about neglecting the youths. This Government, recently through the media and several documents that came through this honourable House and elsewhere, stated that four stadia would be built for the FIFA under 17 World Cup. One of them is in Malabar. Malabar falls not within the Arima constituency, but within the Arima environment and that is catered for the youths in the area, yet they are saying that we did nothing.

Mr. Speaker, on page 42, paragraph 169, PSIP, you would see that there is commencement of the design for the Arima indoor sporting hall. But yet the Mayor of Arima and his colleagues are saying that not enough is being done for Arima. When one looks at La Fillette—that is part of my constituency as well—never in the history of the people of La fillette did they ever had pipe-borne water. I thank my good colleague, the Minister of Public Utilities. One would recall, I think it was in 1992, when we walked the length and breadth of La Fillette fighting for water in the community.

When I was in the People's National Movement, I approached four Ministers of Public Utilities—one of my colleagues on this side here; Minister Ralph Maraj was a Minister of Public Utilities at one time. I also approached Minister Morris Marshall, Minister Barry Barnes and Minister Ralph Maraj who was there for two

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months and Mr. Patrick Manning himself, who was the shortest Minister of Public Utilities. Not one of them could have delivered. After walking with this hon. Minister of Public Utilities, I want to announce to this Parliament and the National Community, come November 13, 1999, we will be commissioning the water supply in La Fillette and every home in la Fillette will have pipe-borne water. *[Desk thumping]*

The Mayor sent out some sound bites mourning and crying all over the place—that is his usual pastime—that nothing is happening in the Arima Borough Corporation. If one looks at the Draft Estimates on page 190, one will see that the Arima Borough Corporation is getting—well it is appropriated for them—\$1.9 million and that is for drainage, irrigation and for local roads and bridges. The Mayor was saying that not one road was built in Arima, by the Ministry of Works and Transport and \$1.4 million was allocated for local roads and bridges in Arima Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, when these Members get up and try to score petty political browney points, by many innuendoes and lies and so on—this is a educated society. The people of this country enjoy a high level of literacy, and if they think that they are fooling them they are not and they would be rudely awoken come the next general election is held. Their tails are in the air because they have won a couple local government seats—a percentage of 39 per cent of the people voted and they feel that they will win the general election. Mr. Speaker, we say no more on that and time would tell what would happen in this country. The people can see for themselves the quality of presentations. Anyone who gets up and says that nothing is being done in Arima—harping on the court—we can tell them more.

Mr. Speaker, I turn my attention to the budget contribution 1999/2000. At the last budget debate, when I accounted for the intended activities and programmes of this honourable Government that were entrusted to my stewardship, the Ministry of Information, Communication Training and Distance Learning was merely four months old. Today, the foresight of this Government in creating such a Ministry has already begun to pay rich dividends to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Within one year and four months, this proactive arm of the government is up, running and delivering.

Before assuming office, and moreso after assuming office, this Government was, and remains convinced, that the most critical development mass of any country is a well trained human resource cadre in the diverse areas of expertise. As part of our promise to the nation, we held fast to our commitment to focus on restructuring the system of training in this country. Consequently, upon the

disaster that had been portrayed as education and training by the former administration, we had the obligation to turn around that system and create a revolution in education and training in Trinidad and Tobago to save this country from going down the road to ruin. That is what we had to do.

Mr. Speaker, this administration created the National Training Agency. We inherited a labour force of approximately 82,000 unemployed persons of which, 40,000 were within the age group of 16—25 years. The situation was precipitated by disturbingly, low university graduate throughput, ratio of about 4 per cent. In essence, only 7 per cent of the population has been exposed to any form of tertiary education.

Employers have been constantly bemoaning the difficulties of finding workers with adequate skills. The most striking features of Trinidad and Tobago's economy has been the unholy coexistence of an untenable labour surplus and shortage of skilled workers. So in some areas there was a surplus of people who could not find jobs and in other areas there were jobs for which there were no skills. That is what existed for a long period of time in this country and we set out immediately to address that situation to put this country on a growth path.

Mr. Speaker, in addressing this mismanagement this Government established the National Training Agency (NTA), in May 1999. The agency commenced operation as a limited liability company with responsibility for developing training policy. Immediately, thereafter, the agency proceeded with the development of a strategic plan. An early output of the plan has been the commencement of the rationalization of the system of training in this country. Work along this path was done in close collaboration with technical and vocational training institutes in Trinidad and Tobago and, indeed, some in the Caribbean.

A training schedule has been formulated, prioritizing energy, hospitality and tourism, construction, information technology where we have great shortage. We cannot find enough information technologists in this country to fit the needs and help us meet the requirement for Y2K compliance and, provide the information technology needs we have throughout the public service. There is a tremendous shortage in that area and we have set out to correct that shortage and also other sectors like sport and that sort of thing.

Mr. Speaker, a project was initiated to strengthen alliances among training institutions, business and industry. Partnerships have been developed with training agencies in Barbados and Jamaica with a view to sharing experiences and reaching for solutions that are applicable to regional communities.

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The Government is cognizant of the immediate challenge ahead. In this regard, the thrust will begin with vocational training. For the 1999/2000 fiscal year, the Government has mandated the National Training Agency to revise the standards for vocational training to make them consistent with, not only local but also internationally acceptable levels. This revision will cover, among other things, assessment, measurement, certification and accreditation and quality assurance.

5.55 p.m.

The process will be supported by setting up an Industry Training Organization, ITO, to define the specifics on occupational standards and competencies required for different industries. The National Training Agency will continue to collaborate with other training agencies in the region with the intent of playing a significant role in information of the Caribbean vocational qualification body for the technical and vocational education and training.

Mr. Speaker, the National Training Agency will also work conjointly with the Ministry of Labour and Co-operatives, and my colleague here is providing the greatest amount of co-operation in operationalizing the national human resource management system. A subset of that system, the labour manpower system, will be established to address, in the main, manpower training and technical and vocational areas in the country. I look at Metal Industries Company Limited, one of the training agencies in my Ministry and, at the micro level the Government's training programme continues to serve the nation in good stead.

Over the last fiscal year the Metal Industries Company Limited successfully conducted the first local master craftsman examination. I think hats should go off to them for that, Mr. Speaker. In conjunction with Fritz Werner, and that is a German company, the University of the West Indies and the Ministry of Education and also industry representatives, they were able to conduct that first testing. The programme was managed and delivered by the staff of the Metal Industries Company Limited. Approximately 167 students underwent training in this programme, of which 150 successfully completed the course. Is not that a success story, Mr. Speaker? Yet they come in this House and talk about nothing is being done for the young people of Trinidad and Tobago.

At another level, the training of trainers, some 400 persons benefited from a Metal Industries Company Limited training programme including trainers from various industries throughout Trinidad and Tobago to which journeymen trainees are attached, trainers from various centres for training disabled persons including one group in Grenada. Instructors from the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs

were also trained. Members of staff of the Point Fortin Vocational Centre were also trained. Welding instructors from the National Energy Skills Centre, instructors from Clifton Dupigny College in Dominica and officers of the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Services, all of these trainers were trained by Metal Industries Company Limited.

Under another training module the Metal Industries Company Limited provided training for a cadre of nationals in disciplines of manufacturing, engineering, technician, tool making, precision machining, maintenance technician, professional welding, non-destructive testing, certified welding inspection. Metal Industries Company Limited's welding department, which was accredited in 1999, conducted training and examination for the American Welding Society. That is one of the largest international organizations in the world for the accreditation and certification for welding and Metal Industries Company Limited was accredited to conduct that test and assessment on behalf of that organization. That is what is happening. Members on the other side should come to this House and compliment this administration for those kinds of initiatives. The Metal Industries Company Limited currently has a clientele of about 300 customers spanning the local and 12 regional markets.

Mr. Speaker, I turn my attention to the Youth Training Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP). You heard the plethora of nonsense that was spoken to in the budget rebuttal by the hon. Leader of the Opposition and the Member for San Fernando East. Mr. Speaker, the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme, (YTEPP), in this Ministry is also responsible for the merger of the Civilian Conservation Corps. You heard from the last speaker, the Member for Laventille West, who said we closed down YTEPP. She said we closed down the Civilian Conservation Corps. The objective was to maintain discipline and the environmental-type training work of the Civilian Conservation Corps and to tie it in with the YTEPP training programme because the Civilian Conservation Corps did not provide a certification.

What we sought to do was to tie it in with the YTEPP so they get the skill training component, the discipline training component and the environmental training component and at the end of it all, Mr. Speaker, they will receive a certification which will make them more marketable and more saleable. [*Desk thumping*] I also want to tell you we are now on the sixteenth cycle which will commence in a matter of one week. That is what is happening. So again lies, half truth and more lies. The 1998/1999 fiscal year enrollment figure under the YTEPP programme was 10,075, of which—listen to this, Mr. Speaker—7,594 or 75 per

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cent were successful in their examinations. By any means that is a good percentage. Yet they say we closed down YTEPP and we closed down Civilian Conservation Corps. I mean, how low can they go to score some Brownie points?

Under a training programme which was hosted in conjunction with the Ministry of Social and Community Development—again I want to thank my colleague for the high level of co-operation, the Member for Chaguanas—150 persons completed a short course programme in small business management. One of the advantages of the YTEPP training is the operational capability to reach distance communities. The previous administration thought that anything in the rural areas where there are a few people living was not worth their time or the resources that were charged under their administration for these areas. They were deprived over the years.

This administration sought to redress that by creating mobile YTEPP training units. We went to some of the remotest areas in the country, Mr. Speaker, and ensured that the people in those rural communities were exposed to training second to none. That is a caring government. It is only a caring government that would consider people, all people, the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago and not as those Members on that side did. The mobile training units went to Cedros, San Raphael, all over Trinidad and Tobago, too numerous to mention here and I do not wish to take up my full 75 minutes so I will leave the rest of those alone.

However, Mr. Speaker, YTEPP did not only function as a training agency. It has been serving as an employment exchange and yet they say we closed it down and we are doing nothing for the young people. The employment bureau within YTEPP supported its training programmes by actively seeking to facilitate placement of YTEPP graduates. So we not only trained them, we sought every effort to ensure their placement into the world of work. Towards this end, employment was found for 464 YTEPP graduates. The Tobago division of YTEPP initiated an alliance with Tobago Plantations Limited and some 21 YTEPP graduates have been involved in the Hilton project over the past fiscal year.

Government, in creating partnership between industry and training institutions, a joint venture between YTEPP and Pernod Ricard (Trinidad) Limited implemented a highly successful training module in agricultural skills development. Mr. Speaker, my good friend, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources was extremely happy for this training programme in developing training modules in agricultural skills. A significant portion of the graduates of this programme has been absorbed on the establishment of the

Pernod Ricard (Trinidad) Limited so they gained employment after they were trained. YTEPP will also increase its training curriculum to offer courses in small business enterprise and the world of work. YTEPP business management training programmes will be conducted in Arima, Tunapuna and the recipients of the micro credit loans from the Ministry of Social Development. YTEPP division in Tobago will pursue programmes with a view to fostering a continuum of partnership with the Tobago House of Assembly.

I want to turn my attention to distance learning. The escalating demand for training is beyond the delivery capacity of the traditional education and training system in Trinidad and Tobago. Distance learning is intended to reduce the backlog in the demand for training. This Government has established a distance learning infrastructure which became operational in December 1998. Already an agreement with Open College, an associate of Ryerson Polytechnic Institute, to facilitate distance learning training is in effect.

Negotiations are underway with a number of other training providers including Athabasca University, Canada, Indira Gandhi National Open University in India, George Washington University in the United States of America and the Commonwealth of Learning and the University of New Brunswick, Canada. It is intended that appropriate courses will be identified for local circumstances for trainees.

What we are seeking to do with all of these international agencies is, through web-based training or training through the Internet, students who have registered at the distance learning secretariat can now access, through the Internet, through web-based training, programmes just as any students on campus in those universities and for quite a lower cost. There is no limit to the number of students who can access higher education. So it is our vision that we will move from 7 per cent access to well over 35 per cent access in higher education by the year 2001 or maybe before. Those are our plans.

This Government has established community-based distance learning centres in Pinto Road, Arima; the Victoria Prichard Learning Centre, Toco and Munroe Road Community Centre in Chaguanas. Twenty-nine additional community-based distance learning centres, most of them in rural communities, are earmarked for operation within the next fiscal year. Not only are we opening distance learning centres, through the National Information Systems Centre we are also training as facilitators, people who are already computer literate so that they can go into these community-based distance learning centres and not only give instruction in computer literacy, but also instruction through, like, the entrepreneurial

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programme being run on 610 Radio every Tuesday and Thursday night or instruction through television.

As you know, the Information Channel has been designated the distance learning channel. The facilitators will manage these distance learning centres. We have already, since the outset of this distance learning programme, trained during the period January, February, this year, 14 facilitators, during the period June 14 to Friday 25, and only last week Friday 25 facilitators graduated from the National Information Systems Centre community-based distance learning training programme, a total of 53 people already trained to be placed in the community-based distance learning centres which we will be opening.

6.10 p.m.

I heard grumblings on the other side that we are only doing these things in opposition constituencies. Facilitators were trained in Arima—yes, that is my constituency—but they were also trained in Toco. When the Member for Toco/Manzanilla got up and spoke loudly and criticized everything as though nothing is happening in Toco/Manzanilla, why did he not say that this Government opened the second community-based distance learning centre in his constituency of Toco? He will never say that! [*Desk thumping*]

We have people trained in Pt. Cumana, Blanchisseuse, Chaguanas, Brazil Village, Wallerfield, Maloney—which is in Arouca South—Couva North, Couva South, Laventille, San Juan, Barataria, Naparima, Freeport, Caroni, Todds Road, and the next scheduled training, which will start within one week, has participants from Tabaquite, Rio Claro, Mayaro, Valencia, again, Barrackpore, Princes Town and Siparia. An estimated eight persons will start the training in a matter of weeks.

Mr. Speaker, this is where we have already decided to put community-based distance learning centres. Those centres will start off with at least 10 computers with free access to the Internet and they will have a television and a radio. Radio, ubiquitous as it is, they can access any kind of training coming over the radio and, as I said before, we have Radio 610 which will be providing training exclusively.

It was only four weeks ago we opened a centre in Munroe, Chaguanas, and those which will be opened in a short while are the Couva North Distance Learning Centre in Chase Village and Couva South Distance Learning Centre in Camden Village. We have one on the Eastern Main Road, Laventille—where is my friend from Laventille West? You do not get anything? It is earmarked to open in Laventille in November!

Mrs. James: You are not sure if that is in my constituency. .

Dr. The Hon. R. Griffith: All right, you do not want it? The next one will be Bethel Distance Learning Centre at Bethel Academy in Arima. Listen to where this one is going to be opened too—Spree Simon Community Development. In whose constituency is that?

Mrs. James: What are you putting there?

Dr. The Hon. R. Griffith: A community-based distance learning centre. You do not listen! The next one will be the La Queza Distance Learning Centre in Freeport, there will be one at the Todds Road Community Centre in Cunupia, Princes Town Community Centre in Princes Town, Brazil Distance Learning Centre for the Brazil community, the Rio Claro/Mayaro Distance Learning Centre. There is the Valencia, De Merive Hill Distance Learning Centre—where is the hon. Member for Toco/Manzanilla? There is the Naparima Distance Learning Centre, the San Raphael Distance Learning Centre and the Barrackpore Distance Learning Centre. These are the ones which will be opened before the end of this year, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Government has embarked on a home-grown vocational skills training programme targeted for host home operators. As you know, the tourist industry is one of the growth industries in this country and we are beginning to see a shortage in a number of people with hospitality skills. Many of these training programmes will be done through the distance learning mode such as the host home operators, front desk operators, and so forth.

A training complement in entrepreneurship, a venture start-up programme has been launched, and this is on Radio 610. Mr. Speaker, when we launched that programme on Radio 610 some weeks ago, by the time we put out the advertisement, before the end of the day, we had over 350 persons enrolled to take that course in the young entrepreneurship programme, and they are now taking that course through the distance learning mode.

Mr. Speaker, we have put together teams of people looking at things such as formulating strategies for distance learning and the production of training materials. The team has also been mandated to develop a comprehensive plan for delivering distance learning throughout the country via telecommunication systems as a parallel to this exercise. The team is also responsible for assessment of training needs predicated on distance learning delivery models, and that is well in progress.

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I turn my attention to information technology and Y2K. Everyone is talking about Y2K. We live in a knowledge age dominated information technology society. Our lives are dictated by information technology. So dominant is information technology on our everyday life that the bravest uncertainty of the new millennium is the chaos that is likely if microchips in computer systems are not upgraded to recognize the year 2000. In essence, health, transport, banking, electricity, water, telecommunications, as well as all other essentials, can be disrupted by non-Y2K compliance posing consequences that are not yet exclusively appreciated.

In an effort to address the likely outcome, this Government has established a national Y2K Task Force which I have the honour to lead, supported by a secretariat. The critical functions of the task force are to co-ordinate the Y2K compliance activities, both in private and public sectors, provide information and resource facility for matters relating to Y2K, enhance national awareness and promote education on the nature and scope of Y2K challenges. Mr. Speaker, if one looks at the newspapers and television, one could see on a daily basis that this task force is providing information to keep the country current and up-to-date on our situation on Y2K compliance.

We provide information on the best practice for Y2K readiness and assess the state of Y2K readiness of the national community. To date, impact assessment has been undertaken on computer hardware and software at all Government ministries, departments and the Tobago House of Assembly. Also, we are monitoring all of the private sectors. I do say here that most of them are already compliant. Mr. Speaker, I will be coming to this honourable House in the next couple of weeks to bring this House and, indeed, the national community, up-to-date on the Y2K readiness of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, some 800 non-Y2K compliant computers have been replaced throughout the public sector. Centurion cards and right time software fixes are used to update remaining non-Y2K compliant computers. We are using these cards to upgrade our computers. This Government has created a uniform computer system throughout with an agreement with Microsoft Corporation for the use of desktop software throughout the public service. A small business sector specialist has been working closely with small businesses in the country with a view to raising the Y2K awareness of small businesses, identifying critical situations that must be addressed and assessing with the development of contingency plans.

Mr. Speaker, as part of the Y2K compliant exercise, in excess of 800 public officers received training. I want to give the House the assurance and, by extension, the national community, that Y2K compliant plans are at a mature stage to make the public service and the private sector organizations ready before December 31, 1999. I want to give you that assurance.

I turn my attention briefly to the Information Division. The prime organ for disseminating Government information to the public is the Information Division. Over the past fiscal years, the Division engaged in a number of critical national building endeavours, including providing coverage at events such as the Miss Universe Pageant, the Caricom Heads of Government Conference, supplying the public with some 800 audio and video programmes, over 20,000 booklets, 700 radio and television programmes, 150 television news items, 300 photographs for newspaper releases and 400 speeches. It also provided audio conference facilities for 120 national meeting seminars and set up an information centre equipped with video and audio systems, Internet access and data-base information.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do not wish to take up the full 30 minutes. I will just touch on two more critical bits of information in my Ministry: the National Broadcasting Network (NBN) and the telecommunications industry, because they do have a tremendous impact on the lives of the people of this country.

When I look at the National Broadcasting Network, the restructuring of the information delivery has been widened to incorporate the state-owned broadcasting and communication network. Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, in his presentation said—and I heard him say at one of his meetings—that when the PNM comes back in power—he did not say when; I think maybe he meant the year 2020 and beyond—one of the first things he is going to do is disband the National Broadcasting Network.

Clearly, he does not know and understand what this Government is trying to do. In August, 1999 the National Broadcasting Network was formally incorporated and it has been amalgamated with all state-owned broadcasting and communication media. The intent is to rationalize cost, minimize duplication and expand the capability of the network to satisfy consumer demand. An important

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layer of National Broadcasting Network remit is to support the Government's thrust in providing international, regional and local trading material to communities. National Broadcasting Network will be a credible instrument for public information education at enrichment programmes.

Mr. Speaker, I turn my attention to telecommunications. This area of telecommunications is the highest growing industry in the world today. Earlier in this contribution, I intimated that the new global economic order is being reconfigured by information technology. The dependence of information technology on telecommunications is likened to that of a vehicle on its engine. This Government is cognizant of the importance of telecommunications to new ventures such as electronic commerce, telemedicine, high speed data and voice transmission, voice over internet providers and distance learning, just to name a few.

The Internet has become an integral part of every person's life, upping considerably the demand for broadband transmission facilities. Approximately one billion telephone lines exist globally today, however, only 20 per cent are in the developing countries, though 80 per cent of the world's people live in those countries. So, you see what is happening as far as telecommunications in the developing world.

6.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the disparity is starker in the area of Internet services. Developing countries account for 5 per cent of global Internet traffic. If developing countries are to close the widening economic gap, evident is the need for expansion in the telecommunications infrastructure, to enable the provision of quality service at affordable pricing. This problem has spared no developing country.

Telecommunications is of great importance. If one looks at development of other technologies over the years: electricity took 50 years before it reached fifty million people; radio took 38 years before it reached 50 million people; television took 13 years before it reached 50 million people; Internet took four years before it reached 50 million people. So you see the growth of Internet and the need for telecommunications technology in any one country.

By the year 2000, voice over Internet provider will account for 90 per cent of the telecommunications traffic. By the end of 1997, there were 600,000 Internet users. At the end of August, 1999 there were 2.1 billion Internet users. There are 100 million telephone lines and 36.9 million mobile telephones—in other words, cellular telephones. Electronic commerce (e-commerce) is a \$2 billion industry, and it is likely to double in about a year's time, that is the projection.

Trinidad and Tobago, like so many developing countries, if it does not put the telecommunications sector in place to access emerging technologies, it will seriously be left behind, and the communication gap between developing and developed countries will certainly widen.

So, Mr. Speaker, in closing, this Government will be coming to this Parliament with legislation during this term; legislation that will speak to the development of a Telecoms Authority, which will regulate the telecommunications industry in Trinidad and Tobago. It is the Government's intention to liberalize the Telecoms industry in Trinidad and Tobago. We have already asked for proposals for mobile and cellular technology and we have applicants that we are processing right now and, in a reasonably short period of time, licences will be granted for mobile technology.

Mr. Speaker, we already have in place a mechanism for dispute resolution, which is more than likely to occur. Because the history of telecommunications around the world will show that wherever there is a monopoly carrier, with any new entrance into the industry, there is always need for dispute resolution, and we have already put those measures in place.

Consistent with our agreement with the World Trade Organization for opening up our sector to competition, this Government already has in place measures for interconnectivity. Therefore, when the sector is opened up the lone carrier we have, must, by law, allow other incumbents to interconnect into the system.

Regulatory policies have already been established. Once we have established the Telecoms Authority, and we have granted licences—we have already served notice for opening up telephony with fixed lines and we already have proposals for cellular technology. When we look at all of the trends, such as global crossing technology which will allow point to point technology—that simply means that we can access information from any point in the world that will be carried to another point; when we look at Project Oxygen, which is laying cables throughout the length and breadth of the world to interconnect people point to point source; and when you look at failing iridium—but I understand they are on the backswim—we are poised with the legislative measures and the telecoms measures we are putting in place to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago will not be left behind. We would ensure that the gap between the developing and developed countries would be closed in Trinidad and Tobago. We would be on the cutting edge of telecommunications technology. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that we will be able to communicate at high speed, real time, in any part of this world.

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

Mr. Edward Hart (*Tunapuna*): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure for me to join the budget debate. Unfortunately, today I have to speak after the Member for Arima. Mr. Speaker, Malcolm X once said, “A man who stands for nothing will fall for anything”. [*Desk thumping*]

I have quite a lot to say so I cannot spend much time on the contributions of the others, but I think I must say something, through you, to the Member for Tobago East. He was the first speaker over there. He ranted and raved for 75 minutes about the usual things, how they closed down his radio station, talking about our political leader, criticizing left, right and centre. He followed that up on Saturday at the Holiday Inn by calling our calypsonians “duncy” and ignorant. I am pleading with him to stop insulting our artistes. He has been doing it all the time. Whether it be calypsonians, whether it be steelbandmen, best village dancers, I find that he is really overdoing it. This is his second budget debate contribution, and up to now not one word about his constituents in Tobago. What about the people in Argyle? What of the people in John Dial? The people in Speyside and Charlotteville, does he not care about them? Coming after the former representative for Tobago East, he is an embarrassment and he must stop this nonsense! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance, the avid mas player as he is, made mas with his budget presentation in several areas, [*Laughter*] some with which my colleagues dealt with or would deal with. I would deal specifically with sport and youth affairs.

Before doing so however, may I empathize with the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs for the manner in which the two ministries have been given allocations. As a matter of fact, what they are assigning to the hon. Minister of two very important people-oriented ministries—the Ministry of Social and Community Development and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs—is a true indication of the type of importance attached to the two portfolios. Indeed, it reflects Government’s ignorance with respect to the true meaning of sport and, by extension, the bases for sport development and the role of sport in relation to national development.

Notwithstanding the so-called plan suggested by the hon. Minister, Mr. Speaker, my friends opposite, my colleagues, as I have mentioned in previous budgets, the basis for sport is physical education. There would hardly be any true progress in sport without accent being placed on physical education. Mr. Speaker, you just have to look at the respective countries, Brazil, excellent physical education programme; America, good education programme; Canada, England,

Australia, India, New Zealand, South Africa, Nigeria and Cuba, all these countries have been doing well, principally because of the nurturing of their young ones through physical and health education programmes.

I have said it on diverse occasions in this House, Mr. Speaker, we must catch them young, catch them early. The accent at an early age should be on organic fitness, which is an aspect of physical education, so that the participation in an exercise programme, practised in a healthy environment would be habit forming. I am sure that this will enable many to enjoy active living with minimal risk of orthopaedic injury or disability and to ensure against heart attack, of which there is no absolute protection. Mr. Speaker, our people are falling down like ninepins. Young people are collapsing. Even in this House we have some Members who experienced problems with their hearts; even the Minister of Health.

Mr. Speaker, I know it is not right to draw you into the debate, but I simply want to commend you for that cricket game that you organized with the CPA delegates. It was a day I will never forget. However, when I walked into the Oval early that morning, the first thing that struck me was two large ambulances with the doors wide open. *[Laughter]* I said, “Well, the medical experts expecting something today”. Right away, as the Vice-Captain of the team, I went to my Captain, the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs and I told him, “Well listen, the ambulances are out there, ‘yuh’ not so fit, you go behind the wicket, you would not have to run about”. *[Laughter]* I care! I also told him, “Ensure that the Prime Minister has nothing to do. Do not give him the ball. Give it to Dr. Rowley”. He did that and it was history. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, why I am belabouring the point on physical education, is because of two main reasons: one, as a preventative measure to avoid the high incidence of people suffering from degenerative diseases; and, two, to enable the young ones to acquire certain basic skills which would be necessary for participating in different disciplines of sport with a modicum of enjoyment and success. For the information of those hon. gentlemen opposite, the physical education programme is not just a question of running, jumping, throwing and the playing of games.

To cite an example with which we are all familiar, people are becoming weight conscious. Some go to gyms, but many walk and jog around the Queen's Park Savannah, parks and other areas where the pollution level is very high, much to their detriment, as breathing in those areas adversely affect the lungs. I plead with Members opposite to give some consideration to these facts.

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Mr. Speaker, in the world in which we live today, modern technology has unwittingly contributed to many living sedentary lives. Our youngsters too have been saddled with studies for examinations, burdened with taking to school books—the number has now been reduced, controversially, but thanks to the Minister of Education. Fellas, give him a little thing. It is very rare they give the Minister of Education something, you know. Take a bow, Sir. We also have television programmes, many of which are not truly educational. Some of those television programmes are horrible, Mr. Speaker. The result is that, apart from those who show talent in sport, or develop a love or an appreciation for physical recreation, the nation is becoming physically degenerated.

Moreover, there are concomitant problems: lack of productivity; absenteeism from school and the workplace; more people are hospitalized with complaints brought about principally by hypokinetic disorders such as hypertension, chronic fatigue and anxiety states, coronary artery disease, to name just a few. Sixty beds at the San Fernando Hospital would not help, you know, Mr. Minister of Health. Mr. Speaker, I have to belabour the point that much more money must be spent on physical education, if we want to improve our sport programmes. Incidentally, our health bill will also be reduced as in modern times, greater emphasis is placed on preventative medicine.

Mr. Speaker, included in the benefits are an appreciation of motor learning, an appreciation of skill development, an understanding of human nature, the development of social attributes, to mention just a few important benefits which accrue from a good physical education programme. So, the children coming from that type of programme, apart from understanding the importance of exercising in a healthy environment, would, if they so desire, continue to participate in physical recreation and, if they think they are proficient, would move into the realm of sport; a domain now reserved for the talented, dedicated, committed and where money is a prime factor.

6.40 p.m.

Last year, I told the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs that there is a difference between physical recreation and sport, but sometimes, apparently, he does not listen. One can look at the postural defects, and I am suggesting now, to the Minister of Education, that he should listen to his technocrats in the field of physical education and they would attest to the fact that lip-service is still given to the subject at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. In a short space of time the Minister has built a reputation for chasing away his staff, firing people. The Minister must listen; he must consult with his staff.

I now turn to the other aspect of coaching. Over the years we have had many coaches: we have had ICC coaches; we have had coaches from the International Tennis Association, and if we analyze the benefit which accrued from their visits, we would realize it is minimal in relation to the amount of moneys spent. Why? I have actually attended or observed what has happened in those courses. Mr. Speaker, the coaches, good as they are, concentrate basically, on strategy and tactics because they know the country from which they come. The coach is already enamoured with sport psychology, how to motivate. The coach knows about methodology; the methods used in implanting knowledge with respect to skill development. The coach is aware of anatomical and physiological factors as well as the bio-mechanical principles. I am saying, therefore, that apart from bringing these coaches, greater emphasis must be placed on the sub-disciplines of coaching, otherwise we would be spinning top in mud.

This brings me to the point, Minister of Finance, of the building of four stadia. The average person would say fantastic, but looking at it from an analytical viewpoint, who would really benefit from the construction of these four stadia? Think about it. After the international tournament, few would have access to the facilities—we already have the Hasely Crawford Stadium—and I would tell you, why. There is the indoor hall in my area. Principally, because they would not have the financial wherewithal to rent those facilities. *[Desk thumping]* That is why. He would not understand that. He is kind of hard-headed. Mr. Speaker, it was rather surprising to hear the Minister say that primary and secondary schools would benefit from the use of those stadia; they spoke about night sports and people would be going in there and utilizing the facilities. We have facilities already and they are under-utilized! Because if these groups do not get sponsorship, “crapaud smoke their pipe”. They cannot! Who is benefiting from the Hasely Crawford Stadium? *[Interruption]* I was on coaching courses there, and the foreign coaches always tell you that the stadium is being under-utilized. *[Interruption]* The first time the Minister went to the stadium is when he became a Minister, so please ask him to shut up.

May I politely inform the hon. Minister that school kids, especially at the primary school level, should not even be allowed to play football on those large fields. The Minister must understand that. Mr. Speaker, the youngsters may benefit from participating in track and field, but most certainly, not from football. Let us tell the authorities in football, once again, that those primary school children should play on smaller size fields. One cannot have an eight-year old standing by a goal post 8ft by 24ft. Do you understand? If they do not know the dimensions, please let them go to the Eddie Hart grounds where they would get those dimensions.

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On that very note—*[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, the Minister is not willing to learn. *[Interruption]* You see, the Minister undermined the Member for Tobago West to get that job and suddenly he gets swell-headed; he is a rogue; he does not listen; he must listen. The blind people crying out, he would not go to their assistance but he was in Miami watching a friendly football match. He was in Winnipeg watching the Pan Am games; 24 athletes—he slashed 12 and they had to stay home. The athletes were going to run but he left with his political entourage, drinking scotch whiskey. Mr. Speaker, what did he benefit from going to Winnipeg? He came back here with some foreign coaches; he rubbed shoulders with them. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: May I suggest to the hon. Member that when that is coming over the radio they may think you are talking to me. So please, talk to me. It would prevent the crosstalk. Thank you.

Mr. E. Hart: Mr. Speaker, on that very note, I am hoping that the printers certainly made a typographical mistake in compiling the draft estimate. I saw under Current Transfers and Subsidies, no allocation for funds for the National Sporting Organizations; probably they hid the figures somewhere.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister mentioned three points in his plan to develop sport. It looks okay; the points are useful but before embarking upon those plans, the hon. Member should note that those children or adults who would benefit from that programme, needs financial assistance, so that they can purchase the necessary sporting equipment. I spoke about it last year. I bought a cricket bat here. I paid \$1,000 for it, the cost of which is spiralling and almost prohibitive. Interestingly, many more athletes may—and I am using the word in a general sense—reach that pinnacle, and if they do not get some kind of sponsorship of financial assistance, they cannot make the grade; they cannot obtain nutritious diets; they do not have money to travel to training centres nor to purchase equipment for themselves. They need some kind of assistance as is done in Canada and other progressive countries, where special funds are allocated for athletes who so promise: devotion, commitment and are recommended by the respective NSOs. I do not know whether the Minister means it when he talks about scholarships for sportsmen and sportswomen, but I would hope, honestly, that he looks into that field when he is disbursing funds for sportsmen and sportswomen. In addition, our coaches are hardworking, no doubt; they are enthusiastic, they are very, very committed. I, myself, came from the noble profession of coaching, but with respect to the scientific aspects of coaching, they are deficient. I recommend that scholarships should be offered to teachers to pursue physical education courses and to coaches who may attend the course at UWI.

Last week, we received the shocking news. A 23-year old youngster joined the army, went on a 3-mile run exercise and collapsed and died. We have coaches all over the country—across the village greens—in charge of all our youngsters. If you ask some of them, at random, what is the resting heart rate of your charge? What is the maximum heart rate? They do not know. We have to go into the science. Many people exercising themselves to death; many people going to gyms and so forth, but we do not have the technical—this is the point I am emphasizing. I left the Ministry with a nice development programme, and what has happened to that—it is whittling down as everything else, just like the UNC.

The Minister should ask the national sporting organizations to name two coaches in their respective areas and offer them this kind of scholarship, and in return these people would pass on the information to other coaches so that our national sports would be under the direction of people, not only certified, but qualified, in every sense of the word, with respect to coaching.

Having done that, the next important step would be financial assistance to the National Sporting Organizations. Moneys from their fund-raising ventures are inadequate. They are trying, but it is tough. We need funds to enable them to send their athletes, at least, to regional competitions to represent our country. Many of our sportsmen continue to participate in sports for the love of it. Many more hope to represent the country because it is a national pride.

6.50 p.m.

They are prevented from so doing because the national sporting organizations cannot afford to send them, or if they are sending them it is at the last minute that funds are released, so that they will eventually go but because of the uncertainty of attending the tournaments would, understandably, perform below expectations.

Mr. Speaker, the same Panama Games I referred to earlier, on the eve of the games they were unsure of getting funds. The Ministry released some funds on the eve of the departure of the athletes. I was sitting outside and the Minister passed me and said, “Ah give dem the money yuh know.” And he feels elated about that, but that is not good enough. But then you have the Minister saying, if they cannot win medals or perform properly, they would not send them anywhere. I agree with that, but Mr. Minister put your house in order first. Big headlines in the *Newsday* of Wednesday 25, August 1999, page 63: “MINISTRY TO DRAW LINE ON SPORTING BODIES.” Tough talk; “if yuh eh perform yuh eh going nowhere.” But what are they doing? [*Interruption*] More stadia would not do it, that is what I am trying to tell you, and you do not understand it.

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Those national sporting organizations, because they are doing voluntary work, sometimes the offices of the president, secretary, and treasurer all take moneys out of their pockets. I am talking from my own personal experience, and I would hope that the Minister finds the money to provide the national sporting organizations with the necessary funds to run their coaching and international competitions. At one time Hampton Games were tops, what is happening now? All sorts of chaos and disorder, athletes running 11.00 o'clock in the night, and so forth.

Mr. Speaker this brings me to the point that many in this House would be surprised, and I am beseeching the Government to provide funds to enable the national sporting organizations to handle their affairs. I now pose the vexing question to the Minister: where is the money in the Sport and Culture Fund? [*Desk thumping*] I want him to answer that when he gets up. Is that fund now non-existent? The games from which money is derived to contribute to the fund are still being run. Up to this weekend a fellow in Couva got \$9 million, Lotto. "Dey" bring a new Game "CASHPOT", but yet the sporting organizations are not getting anything for years now. We cannot find out what is happening with the Sport and Culture Fund. Where is the surplus? Is the money now put into the Consolidated Fund? Is it earmarked for the paving of the Queen's Park Savannah? Four million and you are proud of that, and somebody is trying to defend that.

When this newspapers goes all over the Caribbean, Wednesday 25, "Savannah pitched", look at the awful sight; trying to fool people, saying that you did it for the soldiers; throw some gravel in the Savannah.

Mr. Speaker, an article of the *Newsday*, October 19, 1999 page 23 it says that soon there would be no Savannah. I do not have time to read what Mr. Modeste said, but it is unsettling. The NAR people took a sporting facility at Chaguaramas, a nice indoor gymnasium and turned it into a courthouse. They also came in Constantine Park, I know that you are familiar with the area, Mr. Speaker, and put a big building and making road signs; no respect for savannahs and the sportsmen.

When the Member for St. Joseph got up to talk, I do not know, he managed to talk about sports today. For three years he has been talking about putting a pavilion in Aranguez for the poor youths. The football gone through now, and they only have an over—35 team. In Constantine Park and Aranguez, you still have to go behind trees to urinate. Women have to hide behind cars to change their clothes in the open, but you are boasting about four stadia. [*Desk thumping*] Sportsmen are suffering all over the place, and the Government has money to spend—I will come to that just now—and it is not spending it. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, let me go straight to the issue. I am not getting vex but the Minister is kind of hard-headed, he does not listen. I spoke about some of these things last year. Mr. Speaker, I want to refer to the Draft Estimates of Development Programme for the financial year 1999/2000. Under the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, 1998/1999, the estimate was \$21,796,000; they spent \$9 million. Do you see what is happening here? Again, under Sports, Construction of Four Indoor Halls, Chaguanas, San Fernando, Tacarigua and Point Fortin"—\$18,546,000, they spent \$8, million, and the Minister sits there lounging and basking, as this big Minister of Sport, talking nonsense.

Under the head "Development of Regional and Sub-Regional Grounds", \$4 million; you just spent \$1,720,000. Construction of two 25-metre swimming pool Irwin Park and Yolande Pompey Recreation Ground, \$3,200,000, they only spent \$1 million. Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on. You are not even spending the funds, but suffering sports people and basking in your glory all about. I feel it for the sports people and that is why I am speaking like this today.

Mr. Speaker, the question I posed about the Sport and Culture Fund, tongues are wagging and the population would like to know, after all, they are the ones who benefit from the fund. We are all legitimately entitled to have an answer to the question. To compound it, I read last week that they intend to give the Arima Racing Club, the "big boys", \$180,000 for Boxing Day coming. For one day! The people who already have money they are giving them \$180,000, but the national sporting organizations, nothing for them. Surely, some of that money should be distributed to these organizations to enable them to develop their programmes. They are in dire need of financial assistance. Since last year I have been pleading for these organizations.

Mr. Speaker, I am not for a moment asking the hon. Minister to dole out money to the national sporting organizations, understand what I am saying, but there are guidelines for granting subventions to these organizations; please implement them. Give to deserving cases and not only to prima donnas. The Minister came up with this great idea to twin cricket and football. What nonsense is that? The people who have the money, he is aligned with them, but table tennis, badminton, all the indoor sports—he never attended a table tennis championship yet, but he is flying high.

On Saturday last, there was the super singles championship at the Jean Pierre Complex. I remember last year—and it sounded humourous—when I spoke about the Caribbean championships being rained out. "Rain washing out table tennis; rain does only wash out cricket!" An indoor sport! Pigeon filth fell on the—I

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spoke about it last year, but Saturday we had a repeat. The Chinese Embassy gave us eight beautiful tennis boards, we put them out Saturday for the super singles championship, rain fell, same thing happened, they had to fold them up and the game was washed out. It is ridiculous!

After you close up that facility for a whole year to refurbish, it is a vexing situation. *[Interruption]* “You doh know that?” “Yuh doh know that the Hasely Crawford Stadium and the Jean Pierre Complex were closed for over a year?” You were not the minister, but you must know that.

Mr. Sudama: Talk to the Speaker.

Mr. E. Hart: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I hope after today he would understand. They like to change things. They met things in place; we know that they have to do certain things to get their grants, I do not expect them to just come cap in hand, and they give them money like that, but they are keeping picking and choosing who to give money.

They have the audacity to talk about sport and its relevance to national development, yet they are destroying the very foundation on which national sporting organizations survive. In the past, hon. Minister, we left some things in the pipeline, and you continued with them; I applaud you for that. So right now we have some outdoor facilities where people could play football, cricket and track and field. But without a field, what about the indoor sport for the children? Is there anywhere in Trinidad that youngsters could play table tennis without paying a fee? They have to get their schoolbooks; they have to get bread from their parents. If you do that I think you know that you will get some kudos for it, rather than providing more money for facilities that are already built.

Just to throw back my mind to what happened at the same games the Minister attended. It hurts me because they left 12 athletes and officials here. Clive Paul and others could not go. We only got one medal, a cyclist won a bronze medal and they held a big party for him, but that same guy had to go to America and pay his own way to train. *[Desk thumping]* Are you proud of that? And he is keeping a big party! It is a habit they have. When Ato Bolden and other sports people do anything, they run to Piarco Airport first. *[Interruption]* What do you want Winnipeg to do? What sport did you take part in, “spectatorism”? *[Laughter]* The Minister received preferential treatment, he was in a VIP box. It is not fair to the athletes.

Mr. Speaker, the next point deals specifically with the depleted technical staff in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. I worked there for years, as a games

coach, then went back as the Parliamentary Secretary, so I understand what is happening. Mr. Minister, right now with a depleted technical staff you are shortchanging the country, and those who are shortchanged are basically in rural areas. Since I worked as a games coach in the same Mayaro district I heard my friend, who is happy for the indoor hall—, “yuh happy still?”

Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. E. Hart:—not a coach from the Ministry has gone to these areas. You have everybody working just around Port of Spain and so forth. I am glad to hear that they are building a facility at Rio Claro, because I worked there for three years. It is a wonderful gesture but if those people do not develop the love and appreciation for different disciplines of sport, that facility as well would be a white elephant. Please do not depend on Amoco. I am suggesting you ensure that during the course of the year you invite applicants to fill the various posts. Fill the posts in the Ministry man! “Yuh fill posts for your advisors though.” Later on I want to hear what kind of salary your advisors are getting and who they are; not today, some other time. Fill the posts, since the number of physical education officers and coaches have been drastically reduced.

When I was there in football, there was myself and Gally Cummings; for cricket there was myself, Theo Cuffy, Larry Gomes and Bernard Julien. What is happening now? You have brought Aleeq and Pradeep, fill the posts. The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs is talking about sport and the development of the country, but they are not really serious.

I now wish to deal specifically with the Minister’s talk about empowering the people to meet the challenges of the next century. He talked about the key to maintaining the country’s competitiveness, relevance and social welfare in education, take action to equip everyone to meet the needs of their knowledge based on the global environment for our people to meet the challenges of the next century. That sounds good, but I know that is just a lot of “robber talk”. What is happening to those teachers' colleges? Is there any change programme to meet the needs of a changing environment? Are parents, teachers and other people involved in education, being given the necessary knowledge?

I am saying that building more schools is not the answer to the question. What we need are proper programmes of teacher education, adult and child education to meet the cultural needs of this country. We have people passing our Caribbean Examination Council examination and they cannot read properly. Firms outside are telling them that they need experience. Where are they to get the experience? You have interfered with the youth camps, surreptitiously closed down camps and

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stood up in here and told me untruths when I asked about the Chaguaramas Youth Camp.

Mr. Ramsaran: What did I say?

Mr. E. Hart: “What yuh said?” I could get the *Hansard*. You must not tell untruths. Some of you are not god-fearing. The Bible itself said in Ephesians 3.18 that is why Paul encouraged us to take in solid food, to learn the breadth, and length, and height and depth of the truth. [*Desk thumping*] The truth is important. You stood here and told me no, no, no, when I enquired about the Chaguaramas Youth Camp. [*Interruption*] All right, if that is the attitude.

I will talk about YTEPP when I am speaking about youth. You had a lot to say about YTEPP. I am suggesting that there should be agencies where the students in school, particularly, at the secondary school level, should be given the opportunity to practise those particular skills, so that when they move out into the world of work, they would have some kind of experience to fill vacancies.

Mr. Speaker, physical education and sport are actually intertwined; they do not know that. There is a continuum and I would hope that in your consultation on sport development, Mr. Minister, on the implementation of the sports policy of which I have been hearing very little, you would ensure that people involved in sport, apart from those in national sporting organizations, are asked to make their contributions.

7.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, by their behaviour—last night I went into the Bible. I talked about how you would not talk to the blind people. You do not want to consult, you do not want to listen to sporting organizations.

Listen to what Proverbs 13:10 says:

“By presumptuousness one only causes a struggle, but with those consulting together, there is wisdom.”

Understand that. Talk to the people. What does it take from you to go to San Fernando and talk to the blind people? You have to talk to the Chairman of the Board first. And you put some square pegs in round holes on all those boards, you know. There are people on the Board of the Hasely Crawford Stadium who know absolutely nothing about sport. I am not against you giving your friend a little thing, but look for the correct people, a board is a serious thing; not any and everybody. You understand what I am saying?

Mr. Speaker, I would summarize my contribution on sport and reiterate the following points:

1. I empathize with the hon. Minister who has the responsibilities for two important ministries. Is he this super Minister that he could handle two ministries? He now come from Customs and just so he is handling two ministries.
2. I plug for the implementation of the physical education programme and the benefits to be derived thereof.
3. Coaching scholarships.
4. Management of stadia, board with people with varying expertise.
5. Funding for National Sporting Organization's Sport Culture Fund.
6. Teacher/adult/child education. *[Interruption]*

The Member for Nariva talks about jealousy. This present Minister came from the *Express* getting a little \$1,000 a month undermining people in the *Express*. Now "yuh" find yourself as the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives and suddenly you too get big. Eagles fly high, but they die low. The Minister made a sort of contribution that made absolutely no sense, now he is disturbing me.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to youth, a very critical area. I believe that in a population of 1,250,000, a group of 250,000 or approximately 20 per cent is a significant one and should not be neglected or marginalized. The group to which I am referring is the constituency of youths who fall within the ages of 15—24. It is estimated that of this segment of the population, approximately 100,000 or 40 per cent are in serious crisis. By this I mean that they are either on drugs, involved in criminal activities, contracted sexually transmitted diseases, are unemployed, homeless and generally unmarketable.

When, therefore, a budget like this one is presented, it confirms the benign neglect of this present political administration in the affairs of our youth in this country. How much is made available for youth and development? In the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme for the Financial Year 1999/2000*, for "Youth Development", \$3,250,000 and out of that you spend \$883,731. "Refurbishment of the Youth Training Facilities", \$1 million was put aside and you spent \$571,231; "Save the Youth in Marginalized Communities", \$600,000 and you only spent \$400,500. So when we are talking about youths and how you care so much for the youths, this is not true.

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What really are the policies and programmes that communicate to the young people that they form an integral part of this nation and that the decision makers, the planners and care givers have not forgotten that they exist? Mr. Speaker what scope is there for occupational opportunities for our young people? Some 20,000 are leaving school with the hope of entering the job market every July. What really are the employment creation strategies and for what number? Are we just forgetting our young people and creating a situation of survival of the marginalized? Is there any programme for our young people to enhance their understanding of others and develop practical relationships? What is the allocation for youth in this budget? I just spoke about it. In the four budget presentations which have been made in this regime, how many times have youths been mentioned? Does it amount to a single paragraph?

It is quite obvious that this Government cares nothing about youth and this is why we have the staggering figure that 40 per cent of our youths have lost hope and are floundering around without goal or purpose in this nation. They put aside \$3 million last year, this year it is slashed in half, to \$1.5 million. What are the realities of this Government's action with respect to youths? Only \$1.5 million to carry out all those training programmes.

Mr. Speaker, they have surreptitiously closed down Mount St. George Youth Camp. There is no Youth Camp in Tobago at all. They have closed down Chaguaramas Youth Camp and brought all kinds of lame duck excuses here, but three weeks after, the Cadets are occupying it. Double standards is the norm with them. Young people are important. They are our flowers, they are our future. They have closed down Laventille Youth Centre. Laventille—again, you have heard my colleague speak about the discrimination—they have closed down St. Paul Street Youth Centre, closed down I am talking about, shut down tight. The other Youth Centres are neglected. In fact, the few institutions for youths that have been established if they have not been shut down, they are under serious threat of closure. The Civilian Conservation Corps—I brought the question in the House which was answered—the on-the-job training, the GAPP and YTEPP.

The Minister said they merged the Civilian Conservation Corps because they wanted certificates. The Member for Arima got so hot under the collar and said we were liars and so forth. He had the gall, the temerity, and the gumption to call us liars.

Mr. Speaker, the *Newsday* of Saturday, October 16, 1999 on page 27, under the heading "Slow torture with YTEPP certificates" says:

"THE EDITOR: Once again I am confused about what is really taking place in this country. Recently, during the period of April to August 1999 I had

undergone a Typing/Receptionist course in the East Region with this YTEPP Programme. It was told to my fellow colleagues and myself that we would receive our Certificate one month prior to the completion of the course. Well I am still waiting.

Please understand me, Trinidad and Tobago, the mass majority of the individuals who venture into these YTEPP courses are unemployed and the whole purpose is to acquire a Certificate as soon as possible to become employable.

So why is this whole 'Certificate Issue' so complicated? Why when there is a Government-Oriented Association it can never be progressive? Anyway, lo and behold on television, a YTEPP representative professed that within three months a YTEPP candidate can receive his/her certificate. Along with all the 'torre' with this Certificate, I am about to put the icing on the cake. Luckily, I was advised to call and request a Certificate of Participation, because it will show evidence that I had participated in the course. Well I proceeded in calling, I gave all the necessary information, etc when it happened.

The girl anxiously told me that I would receive the Certificate of Participation by next year. Well yes! Can you believe this! As you can see all these months one will be sitting at home unemployed with no documentation that you've done a Typing/Receptionist Course. Imagine that!

This situation is very disgusting and frustrating. I am very disturbed because it seems that people in these high positions are only focused on their own lives. I encourage the powers that be to please look into this matter immediately and not allow another citizen to be tortured like this.

BARBARA WALTERS
"Tacarigua"

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

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

Mr. E. Hart: Thank you Mr. Speaker, and Members on both sides. There is the on-the-job training programme. It does not matter that you go to school and get 8 or 10 O'Levels, but if you have to go into the teaching profession and you are put into the classroom the next day without any training you are at a loss.

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Ask any teacher who was in that situation. You are at a loss, and so it is with any other job. One has to serve an apprenticeship period so we decided to embark on that programme, we had people from all different locations going through, even teachers. The GAPP Programme is tottering. We said we would take the young people and train them to see about the elderly—because everybody has to come old as long as they live—bathe them, tell them stories that sort of thing—some of you on that side could do with that right now—*[Laughter]* and that was stopped.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is the status of the National Youth Council? What has become of this avenue of youth expression and, indeed, the several youth bodies that existed and encouraged youth interaction? If I have to outline in any detail the contribution that these institutions like the national youth camps, the youth centres, and the youth organization has made to the social development of the country, I would require many days in Parliament to do so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in every village of this country there are persons who have benefited from youth camp training and are today responsible and productive citizens of this nation. At those institutions, there were not only training in vocational skills and crafts, but exposure to co-curricula activities in culture and sport, as well as leadership training, entrepreneurial skills, respect for the right of others. I want to repeat that one, some of you have none; respect for the right of others. Also, discipline, moral values and community living.

In the group and organizations, there is development of democratic principle, teamwork and understanding which we have exhibited on this side of the House. We know about that. *[Desk thumping]* They learn to communicate and cooperate and help others. The benign neglect of youth is so clear that they form no part of the legislative agenda of this uncaring—I do not know how to describe the Government—Government; leave it at that. I was tempted to say locust Government, or froghopper Government.

One area of great concern is employment. That is serious. Your heart does burn, Mr. Deputy Speaker, knowing you went to school, burn the midnight oil, “yuh” come up with “yuh” passes and expecting work and when “yuh” go, “nuthin” for “yuh”. Some young people are unemployed and in the age group that has been identified, I gather that 30 per cent of this age group are unemployed. Serious.

Drive through the villages during the day; turn down your car glass. “All yuh always have the glass up with bodyguard.” You can’t see, you have to be surrounded by bodyguard.

Dr. Griffith: Who me?

Mr. E. Hart: Yes. I tired tell “yuh,” nobody want to do you “nutten”. “You do yourself already”. Even though we know the Prime Minister and probably the Attorney General have somebody with them, but you have people all behind you guarding you, for what? Nobody ain’t studying you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the marginalization of youth gives into the area of employment and occupational opportunities. In the field of employment, young persons find themselves at a serious disadvantage. We care about youth, that is why I am emphasizing that. I worked at the ministry, I know. I like young people, I lime with them, sometimes I dress like them, I understand them.

7.20 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, banks and financial institutions generally do not consider young people as good risk. I want to repeat this because it is a serious matter. *[Interruption]* Member for Princes Town, take it easy and listen to this—you are well fortified because you have money and estate—Banks and financial institutions generally do not consider young people as good risk. In fact, for these institutions, young people do not find favour when they seek support for their projects. They are not considered bankable and would have to find a parent, relative, or a kind friend to stand security with the possibility of exploitation.

Of course, there is the Small Business Development Company and Fund Aid. Fund Aid gives relatively small loans and the Small Business Development Company is fairly limited in their guarantees to young people. Banks are really interested in their profits and young people are not given any priority in their loan portfolio.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, during the reign of the People’s National Movement, there was encouragement for young people to become involved in small business, with the creation of a soft window loan arrangement in the IDC for the youths. This needs to be re-introduced to assist this marginalised segment of the community. Mr. Deputy Speaker, is there a vision for youths in this Nation? Is there a programme for youth development? Is there a national youth policy? They are talking about it over and over again but where is it? Bring it!

Some years ago, under the leadership of the hon. Patrick Manning, the Institute of Social and Economic Research of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, was commissioned to get all the relevant data on the situation of youths in Trinidad and Tobago to have the data and statistics required for the development of a national youth policy programme. A task force was formed in

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1996—we are now in 1999—2000—and almost four years have elapsed and there is still no national youth policy. Is this Government ever going to become serious about our young people? Or are they going to continue to neglect and marginalise them until they are gleefully booted out of office? That is what they are waiting on, when they leave office then to address the youths.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this nation should want to invest in young people, for the future development of the nation rests in their hands. They are our flowers and most precious jewels. What is done with all the excess funds—I talked about that earlier on—from the national lotteries? Are the funds being hoarded while young people are starving, eking out an existence and groveling in poverty, getting involved in a vicious circle of neglect, want, poverty, crime and addiction? Time does not permit me to look at the relationship with international bodies and organisations with a youth development emphasis.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what became of our observance of the annual national youth day and the Caribbean youth day? Have they taken that away from our young people as they did with Republic Day? What about exchanges with others from across the Caribbean and the rest of world and the workshops on matters affecting youths across the globe. Perhaps, the honourable Minister can tell us what is being done for the youths by his ministry. What became of the much-talked-about District Youth Micro Enterprise Projects? How many projects have been started and how many young people are actively involved? They are bereft of ideas: Nothing they implemented for young people.

The youth are too precious to be treated so shabbily by this Government. The nation cannot afford the neglect and marginalisation. In fact, there is really no better investment than the investment in youth. [*Desk thumping*] How much are we investing?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, time is running out and I want to turn to the beautiful constituency of Tunapuna. The Member for Couva/North—he is not here now—in 1994 or 1995 he was in the United States of America on television ranting and raving about the corrupt policemen in Trinidad and Tobago and that the drug people are taking over the country. That is what the Member for Couva/North said and, today, he is praising the policemen.

The Tunapuna Police Station is in shambles. It is in a dilapidated condition. There is no sleeping accommodation—the policemen do not have anywhere to sleep. They have three toilets and only one is functional and there are also female police officers. One toilet for all the police officers. There are pigeons and filth all over the building and the stench and mosquitoes are unbearable.

I spoke about that matter last year. Two years have elapsed and it fell on deaf ears—not a nail was driven in that police station. Whenever it rains the dormitory upstairs is flooded. As one enters the charge room there is filth on the ground because the prisoners are right there—arms length—from the people in the charge room. The prison cells are right there. It stinks! Do you understand?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they boasted about the 100 Cherokee jeeps. They started off nice and in their glory. Fifteen jeeps were assigned to E-999 in the eastern region. *[Interruption][Laughter]* Presently, there are only two jeeps working and the remaining 13 are down. NIPDEC has no money to repair them. A good friend loans them an old sunny motor car. I feel it is the oldest sunny motor car in Trinidad and Tobago. *[Laughter]* The entire windscreen is gone and that vehicle is not working. This is what they are doing for the people. I am putting them on notice. If the policemen walk out on the streets do not be surprised, because they are threatening that. They are serious. This is no propaganda and they are expecting the same policemen to guard them—you especially. Treat the policemen right.

The fire station which is adjacent to the police station has a similar problem. I went to the Minister of Works three years ago and he promised all sorts of things to the firemen—leaking toilets, faulty sewer system, leaking roof and no water to bathe. They are using a little tank at the back of the building—mosquitoes like peas—the building need painting. It is looking very shabby and bad on the Eastern Main Road after the Opposition put up the nice Tunupana administrative complex, then to see the shabby Fire Station and the walls around collapsing, just like the UNC.

I want to turn to schools. The Minister came in May 1998, and I was thankful. He put me at the head table and I felt good. He gave me a chance to talk but that was since May 28, 1999, and work had already commenced. Do you know what month we are in now? A school for 250 students in the St. Mary's children home and they are suffering and this huddled in the cultural hall. Up to now they cannot open that school! The school is there and the people start to vandalize it. They do not care about the orphan children, because their children are going to school and living abroad. *[Desk thumping]* They are buying house and land abroad and changing their daughter's names and thing. *[Laughter]*

7.30 p.m.

Listen, listen, do you want to stop me from talking? Mr. Deputy Speaker, the students of St. Augustine Senior Comprehensive School, every minute they have

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to go back home because of the scent from the Hugh Wooding Law School. Now it is also Mount Hope Junior Secondary and also El Dorado Senior Comprehensive. It is the children's education we are fiddling with because of a faulty sewer system. [*Desk thumping*]

Water woes: people in Kandahar, for weeks they have no water. Every day my phone is ringing. Wharf Trace, no water—water woes. When they were over on this side they started to talk about water and asked if we cannot supply a simple community with water. Now, what is happening? Flooding—we did not have flooding in my constituency. Ata Klan sang about flooding on the main road but there is flooding all over now. Paradise West residents just paid a quarter of a million dollars for their houses and as soon as rain falls they are frightened because it is water all through and through. Do you understand?

Do not talk about employment. The Member for Naparima will bear me out on this one, and also the Member for Fyzabad. Piarco Airport is a stone's throw from my constituency. They are employing real people, plenty people. A boy from El Dorado, Gobiedan Paria, went for a job. They said, "Go to your Member of Parliament and get a letter". I gave him the letter promptly and he went. He started to work. He only worked one day and the next day they "bus he throat" because it came from a PNM Member of Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

When I came here—[*Interruptions*] Well, I do not have anything to tell Sadiq Baksh because I do not trust him but I trust the Member for Naparima. I told him about it. I gave him the boy's name. I told the Parliamentary Secretary, who does no work in the Ministry, about the incident. I also gave him two other names. I said, "Listen, my constituency has 30,000 people. If you employ two, I happy". Do you hear how much I was asking for? Two. Up to today not a drum was heard, nothing.

The Mount Hope six-month cleaning thing, ask the Minister of Health. The girl I asked you for since last year when you brought the CEO, Tsoi-a-Fatt, up to now, nothing has been done. [*Interruptions*] No, but I know, rank discrimination. [*Interruptions*] Rank discrimination. [*Desk thumping*] I want to repeat, rank discrimination. From the time they perceive you are a PNM you ain't getting no work. [*Interruptions*] You live in your ivory tower, you know. People do not see you. You could talk any nonsense. [*Interruptions*] Yeah, you are living in Cascade and representing St. Joseph. People do not see you, you know. You brought the Miss Universe Pageant here and made poor people suffer. The Tacarigua Extended Health Care Centre—Mr. Minister you are a decent man—at the back for two years now there is a swamp with mosquitoes and flies. Nobody is attending to that. It is terrible.

I want to talk about this. You know, when you were talking about the amount of money the people will get, I was glad for them, right. When you talked about the increase I was glad, when you raised your housing allowance to \$5,000.00. What about your chauffeurs? How much money are your chauffeurs getting? These poor boys are working night and day driving you up and down. Your lives are in their hands. They are working Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays yet they could barely take home \$2,000.00. Are you thinking about increasing the drivers' salaries? Are you thinking about that? You understand. The drivers are suffering and I am saying to you all, "Raise the people's money, eh". [*Desk thumping*] You could do that, just as you raised your housing allowance. See about your chauffeurs. Your lives are in their hands with all the unholy hours you are working. Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, sorry about that. [*Interruptions*] I still will tell you too because the Deputy Speaker understands it. Raise your chauffeurs' salaries. [*Interruptions*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, any time I hear the voice of the Member for Arima I more or less get angry, you know. He is shameless you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Watch your language.

Mr. E. Hart: Okay, okay, but do not let him disturb me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, no, you talk to me. He will not disturb you.

Mr. E. Hart: All right. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people in the Tunapuna constituency are crying out. We have 35 workers who have worked on the URP for two years. They worked on the Speaker's house and they worked on the link road in Macoya and up to now they cannot get paid. [*Interruptions*] It is all well and good. You see, you all are not in the real world so I come in here to just say anything. I have the list of 35 names and they ain't get their money yet. Every time they go to Sadiq Baksh it is "Wait, wait, wait, like wait Dorothy" and they cannot get their money, you understand.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You mean the Minister of Works and Transport?

Mr. E. Hart: The Minister of Works and Transport, yes. I went to him to make representation for these poor people to get their salaries. It is a difficult thing. It is terrible when you work and you cannot get paid. The cane farmers had experienced that. All over the place people are experiencing that. What is happening? But you all are getting paid every month, though. Have you ever gotten paid late yet? [*Interruptions*] Well right. Well think about—[*Interruptions*] No, but I care about the others, unlike you. [*Desk thumping*] So because I get

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paid I do not care about them? [*Desk thumping*] You must think about them. You are only changing your motor car like it is going out of style, every minute, so you ain't care, you understand.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my constituents in Tunapuna are not happy, unlike the constituents in Ortoire/Mayaro. He say he is happy and I understand why he is happy, but I am sure that the other constituents, whether it is in Ortoire/Mayaro, whether it is in Tunapuna, whether it is in Arouca North, are not happy. There is unrest out there. The people are disgruntled. The people are disenchanted. The people are frustrated, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So having said these few words I say [*Desk thumping*] thanks for having the opportunity to take part in this budget debate and I await a reply from the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. He did not want to speak before me, like the man in the garden, hiding, but sooner or later he has to come out and talk. You have to answer the question. [*Interruption*] Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Social and Community Development and Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Manohar Ramsaran): Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, I came to this debate expecting to listen to some constructive statements from the other side though I am not really surprised. I am convinced, after listening to the Members who spoke so far, that they are more interested in creating a smokescreen across Trinidad and Tobago so as to interfere with this Government's thrust to make this land a total quality nation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know that there is no answer to the budget so what do they do? They rehash the negativity that they have been instigating for the last four years and I really pity them. I do hope that the rest of the Opposition would read and maybe understand the budget and make some worthwhile contributions that are applicable to this year's budget presentation. I congratulate the Minister of Finance, Hon. Brian Kuei Tung, for his excellent budget presentation on Government's Blueprint for Human Development and Sustainable Growth. As the Minister of Social and Community Development and Sport and Youth Affairs, I am particularly pleased with this budget's emphasis on human development which will undoubtedly redound to the economic and social benefit of our people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, in listening to a few Members opposite I would like to respond quickly to them because, as the Member for Arouca North is mouthing all day, we might have a storm so we want to do quickly and get out of this place. [*Interruptions*] But indeed, I know that what he is saying would not make much sense. The Member for San Fernando East mentioned two things to

which I would like to respond and which made the *Newsday* today, "Help For Pregnant School Girls".

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Social and Community Development did a survey on the "Needs Assessment of Pregnant Teenagers and Young Mothers" in Trinidad and Tobago and this was only presented to Cabinet a week ago. The Member for San Fernando East says that when he gets into office he will implement this report. He is one year too early. We already did this. However, we would not only be encouraging, as this headline says, "Manning promises Help for Pregnant School Girls"; Mr. Deputy Speaker, we want to move away from having pregnant school girls.

A Cabinet Note recommended, and I quote from the report:

- i. Teenage girls should be encouraged and enabled to stay in school and complete their education through education programmes among pre-teens which emphasize the economic, emotional and psychological benefits of personal achievement and the importance of education as the means of achieving goals.
- ii. Parents and elders should be educated in communities on the importance of delaying the age of entry into unions and the beginning of childbearing. This could be done through an intensive Family Life Education drive targeting households and employing a combination of Information, Education and Communication techniques.
- iii. Family Planning Education strategies should be revised for teenagers who attend antenatal clinics. The survey findings indicated that a significant proportion of respondents in the counties of St. George East, St. George Central and Victoria found the services at antenatal clinics to be inadequate.
- iv. Public awareness campaigns for self development and skills training programmes which already exist in communities, such as the Child Welfare League's 'Choices' project, should be promoted.
- v. There should be increased emphasis on employment generation in the areas outside of the main urban centres and the provision of accessible and affordable child care facilities in these areas.
- vi. Family Life Education should be intensified for young teenagers at the community level with a focus on self-esteem, self-confidence and general emotional and psychological development. Persons trained in

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family life education, peer counselling, psychology and sociology will be essential to the success of this programme.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I am alluding to is the fact that the Government of which I am proud to be a part, we do not want to continue with this. We want to educate our young people and, as the Member for Tunapuna was trying to say all along—and if you listen to him—his emphasis was on keeping the whole system of handouts and welfarist attitude but this Government, we want to move away from that. We want to take our children and young people away from that welfare syndrome to give them sustainable development as described by the Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*] In this regard we are looking at all angles.

I know what got the Member vexed, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Recently there were some electricity problems in the Ministry of Sport's facility in Tunapuna and he called me in Tacarigua and said, “Minister, I want electricity. I have an important game tomorrow”. I said, “Where?” He said, “Eddie Hart Ground”. I said, “Who is the owner of Eddie Hart Ground?” He said, “The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs”. I said, “Oh, I thought it was Eddie Hart”. Within hours, with the help of the Minister of Public Utilities, he got back his electricity. So now we know that ground is not “Eddie Hart Ground” but the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. So that got him angry and he went off. Anyway, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know how it is, when you parade to be something. He said he dipped into his pocket. I will tell you that it was not his pocket.

We did another survey into the nature and extent of child prostitution, child pornography and the sale of children in Trinidad and Tobago. We have this report and this too was tabled in Cabinet recently. I mention these to you because the Leader of the Opposition, both he and the Member for Tunapuna keep talking about things about which they do not know. This Government and also the Member of Parliament for Arima alluded to the development of the young people of this country in a tangible way, in a way that will lead them with pride and dignity into the next millennium. I am proud to be [*Desk thumping*] the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs at this time, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We could go on and on talking about what is happening in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs but I want to touch on the contribution by the Member for Laventille West. You know Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I mentioned in my introduction, the Opposition is only interested in trying to create smokescreens throughout Trinidad and Tobago, trying to give the country the impression that this Government does not know what it is doing. However, I am at the ground and

the people at the ground know what is happening and when it is time to do their thing we would get—[*Interruptions*]

Best Village was, from all reports so far—it has not been completed—the best Best Village that Trinidad and Tobago has ever seen. [*Desk thumping*] We had seven categories this year. Village Olympics, the final being held at the Hasely Crawford Stadium attracted, from all reports—that is the time I was supposed to be in Winnipeg—over 10,000 people looking at a Best Village Olympics final. We introduced a debating competition, which went quite well, and the finals were held at the Central Bank auditorium.

We had the folk theatre and it was moved to Naparima Bowl, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we think that, you know—Best Village, what does it connote, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not villages? Why is it over time it was held in the City of Port of Spain? We introduced it to villages. Best Village is the name and Port of Spain is a city, the capital of Trinidad and Tobago. What we did this year was move it into San Fernando and gave more people the opportunity to participate in San Fernando. What is wrong with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Is San Fernando not part of Trinidad and Tobago? The finals were held there. From all reports, and they could be verified, you could get the figures from the Naparima Bowl, from the third day onwards the Bowl was sold out and people had to sit on the floor to take in the Best Village Folk Theatre. So check out your facts before you come to this honourable House and mislead Members.

Community festivals were held throughout Trinidad and Tobago and the goodly gentleman for Arouca North, despite the fact that he seldom speaks the truth—yes, recently there was this community festival in Lopinot and I was told again—no Ministers went, that was true, because on that day we had heavy rainfall in Central and I had to stay at home—[*Interruption*] It was not flooded—but we had one of the biggest community festivals ever held in Lopinot and the Member could attest to that. I have no problem in mentioning that. We had community festivals throughout Trinidad and Tobago—Princes Town, Rio Claro and Chaguanas. This is what we meant by taking Best Village into the villages of Trinidad and Tobago, not only Port of Spain. So if you are disappointed, I would not apologize.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

7.45 p.m.

The finals of the Folk and Food Fair, Mr. Speaker, were held at the Queen's Park Savannah—we came back to Port of Spain—and I am told that 15,000

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people attended that day's celebration. I had the honour of opening that ceremony and when I left there at 9.30 a.m., there were already close to 4,000 people in attendance. If they check their facts, they will find out what is happening.

Mr. Speaker, the Environmental Upkeep Competition was another one introduced this year and, this was, I am told, another success and we are looking at giving out the prizes. The finals for La Reine Rive will be held on November 13, 1999. We are charging a small fee, so they can attend. I was at the semifinals and I am telling you that the people who were chosen for that final will give a good account for themselves and it will be one of the best La Reine Rive competitions ever seen in Trinidad and Tobago. This is under the Ministry of Social and Community Development.

Mr. Speaker, I think that when Members get up in this honourable House they must stick to the truth because the people out there, hundreds of thousands of people, are seeing the truth about what this Government is doing to make life more pleasant for the rest of this country.

The hon. Member mentioned neglect in Laventille. If she is honest, she will tell you that anytime I go to Laventille I invite her. We have NADAPP in Laventille doing a wonderful job for the community to get young people and even the older people away from the drug menace. The Adopt-a-Community Programme was launched recently in Laventille where Angostura and the National Lotteries Control Board adopted Success Village in Laventille.

Mrs. James: That is only a small portion of Laventille!

Hon. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, we are working in Trinidad and Tobago and making this country a better place. Laventille is a part of it and we will continue to work there. This reminds me of a statement made by the Leader of the Opposition in another place. He was telling the country on FM 103 that this Government took all the resources, neglected the UNC constituencies and concentrated on the East/West Corridor to win votes on the East/West Corridor and, in the very same breath, he produced a warrant from the Ministry of Local Government saying that we fixed roads in the UNC controlled corporations. I have never seen contradictions like that before, and we keep hearing this in this Parliament. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? It is simple. It is the first time—and I have no apology to make—that the Government is working in Trinidad and Tobago and they cannot handle that. [*Desk thumping*]

I will continue making my presentation. As I said before, I would make it brief and stick to the points. People asked us about what is happening in the

Ministry of Social Development. I know the Member for St. Ann's East spoke about it. We are continuing our projects. We are into phase two of the St. Michael's School for Boys which will be completed this year and, of course, 200 male youths will benefit. The Remand Home at Aripo, as alluded to by the Member for Arima, is well underway, and it should be opened in this fiscal year too.

The Provision Hostel at Couva to accommodate young male offenders will be opened in the next couple of months. There is also the establishment of a halfway house for young people leaving children's institutions at Centeno. Mr. Speaker, this is another programme of which I am proud where people who leave institutions like the St. Michael's Home for Boys and St. Jude's Home for Girls can go. We are having these halfway houses so that children will go into them after leaving these institutions to be prepared to go into the wider society.

We will continue building community centres. We have planned for 1999—2000, 23 new community centres and 53 centres to be refurbished, and this year, I am proud of the rate of completion and refurbishment of community centres. Of course, the completion of the rehabilitation centre at Piparo is expected to be done in this fiscal year too. At the Caura health facility, we are going to increase the substance abuse ward from 16 to 45 wards. This work is already underway and should be completed during this fiscal year.

A socially displaced centre will be established in Chaguanas to complement that in Port of Spain and one which was recently opened in San Fernando. Mr. Speaker, these programmes I just mentioned will have an effect on the vagrancy population in this country because, for the first time, we are dealing with that problem seriously. We are erecting buildings, having staff in place and, I am proud to announce that the staff have been hired to deal with the socially displaced in this country. So, we are indeed working in an effort to deal with the young people, the not so young people and even the socially displaced.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to provide neighborhood daycare centre services for the elderly and introduce an adopt-a-home and elderly programme. We are going to establish community-based homework centres for children, a project which promotes intergenerational relationships and encourages respect between the age groups. We are going to introduce a community mothers project, a pilot project which will provide childcare in the community setting for the preschool age group.

We are going to expand our community-based parent outreach programme. Mr. Speaker, Literacy 2000. We will be complementing the Ministry of Education to continue to train our elderly into being literate, and this programme will continue throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The Disability Affairs Unit is a unit

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recently established to deal with disability issues in the country. We have our staff in place and we are dealing with disability in a very meaningful manner. The Attorney General's office has recently finished the children's package of bills that will deal with all the issues facing children, and these bills will be introduced in Parliament very shortly. *[Desk thumping]*

We will talk a bit about the Blind Welfare Association as raised by the Member for Tunapuna. This matter has been resolved since Friday around 1 p.m. This was a matter involving the workers and their employers, the Blind Welfare Association. The Blind Welfare Association is an NGO which is given a subvention of over \$3 million by this Government and the Blind Welfare Association employs blind people to work in their workshops. This is not a home for blind people where they are domiciled. This is where they are employed, like any other employee and they work with their boss which is the Blind Welfare Association.

More than that, the Blind Welfare Association is made up of 12 elected members by the blind people themselves and six are appointed by Government to make up 18. So, when the workers had a problem with their bosses, how could the Minister go and negotiate? Mr. Speaker, you know about bargaining, I am sure, and I could not have gone in there and negotiated with these people, but what I did—which I think was the honourable thing to do—was speak with the legal representative of the people concerned, Mr. Nizam Mohammed, and we came to an amicable solution and the impasse has ended.

Dr. Rowley: But you were playing politics!

Hon. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, sometime when people are getting old, maybe they get mad. The Member for Tunapuna said that maybe the blind people wanted to see me. *[Laughter]*

We are looking at developing programmes to continue our poverty eradication and I want to tell you that concerning the national self-help, I am pleased to report that last year 600 self-help projects were approved for funding and 462 projects were completed throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and all the moneys allocated to the National Self-help Commission were indeed used.

Mr. Speaker, social welfare continues to deal with the poor people in our country. An average of 62,000 persons benefit monthly from the old-age pension which ranges from \$520 to \$620 per month. We explained this over and over again, and I do not want to describe them so aptly, but some people on the other side cannot understand why we pay \$520 and \$620. Concerning disability

assistance grants, 3,000 people benefit from this; public assistance grants, 60,000 persons benefit from this, and we continue with our emergency grants, pharmaceutical grants, educational grants, grants to special children and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, I will turn to sport very quickly, because the Member for Tunapuna really wasted 90 minutes. He attempted to discredit the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, and I am really ashamed that he was a Parliamentary Secretary who worked for years. We continue on the programme of providing Trinidad and Tobago's young people with facilities. The Member attempted to discredit our four stadia, but I am sure that he cannot really stand up and tell the nation that he is against the four stadia in this country because they will benefit thousands of people and will create the avenue to deal with the development of our young people.

Mr. Speaker, we are looking at the National Centre for Sport Administration and I propose that these offices for our sporting organizations will be at the Hasely Crawford Stadium. I propose to name the National Sporting Organization's offices the Lystra Lewis Administration Centre in tribute to a lady who has done so much for netball and so much as an administrator in this country.

We have opened the Malick youth facility and the Diego Martin swimming pool during this fiscal year and, we are soon to open the already completed indoor sports centres at Maloney and Chaguanas, the Siparia swimming pool and, also, the National Tennis Centre in Tacarigua. Mr. Speaker, when the Member for Diego Martin East said we got no money and we achieved so much, indeed, some magic is taking place at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs.

Just to touch briefly on our national sports policy and national youth policy, I am pleased to announce that a national sports policy has been put into place and this will be implemented over a three-year period. It is a comprehensive policy. If you allow me, Mr. Jagessar was part of that committee and they went throughout Trinidad and Tobago collecting information to ensure that we have something in place over the next couple of years.

This morning I had the pleasure of opening a training programme for young people, and it was a part of the United Nations week of activities to commemorate poverty eradication. I said in part:

“It will be a difficult task and sometimes you will feel that you cannot go on. I can assure you that your toil will not be in vain, and this process which we call participatory methodology will ensure that the development plans for Malick youth facility will be guided by your needs for your sustainable development.”

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Mr. Speaker, we speak the same language. We cannot continue with handouts and allow people to be given this perpetual dependency syndrome. We want to change this. That is why I am really proud that the Minister could name his budget Human Development and Sustainable Growth.

Just to answer one more query from our goodly gentleman from Tunapuna. This administration has granted \$2,077,534 to national sporting organizations in 1998—1999, so when the Member comes here he does not understand what is happening. Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work with our young people and, as the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs and Minister of Social Development, we will continue to work with young people, the middle-aged people, the old people and all the human beings in this country to ensure that we have human development, and the key words, “sustainable growth”. I am proud to have made this presentation and let you know that the human-centred approach is the only way that Trinidad and Tobago must proceed as we enter the next millennium.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

8.00 p.m.

Mr. Martin Joseph (*St. Ann's East*): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate on the Appropriation Bill (Budget).

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Chaguanas, the Minister of Community and Social Development and the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, made a couple of comments in his contribution that I made note of. He said that this budget demonstrates, in no uncertain terms, his Government's emphasis on human development. He also talked about sustainable development. I am just picking some of the things that struck me. He also apologized. Then he talked about the question of implementation of projects and his being satisfied with the rate of completion, especially of community projects.

Mr. Speaker, I want to go straightaway at the information that was provided to us in terms of the various documents. Notwithstanding the fact that the Minister of Finance has indicated that he really does not care about the numbers and whether or not the numbers are correct, it makes no difference. I believe that the numbers make a difference, not of themselves, as my colleague from La Brea made note in his contribution, but the extent to which those numbers provide us with an opportunity to evaluate what the Government said that it was going to accomplish and the extent to which they have been accomplished and, the extent to which the Government says that it intends to do certain things. Because after all, at the end of the day, those numbers, where it is money, whether it is the

number of persons who are impacted upon in some way or the other by these government policies and programmes; that is what it is all about. So to say the numbers mean nothing; I beg to disagree.

I go immediately to the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) 1999/2000 where, in Part I, it deals with a review of the Public Sector Investment Programme 1998/1999. In the first table on that page, it provides us with the information with respect to the allocations made in the PSIP for certain key sectors, its directly productive sectors, the economic infrastructure, social infrastructure, public administration. If one looks at the social infrastructure, one would see that under “Planned Oct ‘98 to Sept ‘99” was \$394.78 million or 35.9 per cent of the allocations in the PSIP. The \$394.7 million represented 35.9 per cent in the PSIP, but how much was actually used? Only \$203.19 million or 30.4 per cent. So immediately, one sees that in terms of the use of the moneys allocated for social infrastructure, there was a reduction of at least 5.5 per cent which, again, represents the ability of those agencies responsible for executing social infrastructure programmes. One would see that it started off by not being able to implement fully the amount of moneys allocated. So that, to me, speaks volumes, it indicates the extent of the implementation. So no matter what the Member for Chaguanas said, you can see the extent to which they were able to implement.

If one goes specifically to page 19 of the same PSIP document, what is even more revealing is that it says there:

“A total sum of \$84.3 million was allocated in support of a variety of projects and programmes of the Ministries of Social and Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and specialised agencies.”

That, Mr. Speaker, if my arithmetic is correct, represents 41.4 per cent of the social infrastructure, but it continues with the other point:

“The Ministry of Social and Community Development was allocated a total of \$30.8 million to continue programmes to assist the socially displaced, substance abusers and to improve community facilities. Total expenditure amounted to \$8.3 million.”

In other words, one is seeing that it was a question of—if you could call it that—a success implementation factor of 36.5 per cent. So that, in other words, what I am saying is that notwithstanding what the Minister of Social and Community Development indicated in terms of those agencies, those government departments

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and agencies that were responsible for executing social infrastructure, they did not do as well as he is claiming.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Minister in his budget statement at page 23 indicated:

“Mr. Speaker, greater interaction among members of our communities will strengthen the social fabric. We will therefore provide communities with the means to deal with the challenges of poverty and drug abuse. Accordingly, we propose to expand and intensify our Community Development Programme. The emphasis will be on the upgrading and construction of community centres and the provision of training to enhance employability.”

I move quickly in terms of the 1999/2000 Public Sector Investment Programme. I go to page 27, Table 2, to look now at the allocation. Now, in other words, they are saying they are going to intensify and do more work in this particular area. So I go now to see what kind of allocations are provided. Interestingly enough, it makes the comparison between 1998 and 1999, it talks about the planned; it does not talk about the actual revised. So it talks about the planned, the same \$39.8 million or 36 per cent of the public sector investment expenditure. For 1999/2000, an allocation of \$716.33 million is allocated or 45.7 per cent. So we are talking about an increase of 35.9 per cent to 45.7 per cent from 1998 to 1999. Great! So we are saying now, more moneys are going to be allocated there.

But then I come specifically to see what is now going to be provided for community development, the specifics. I am going to page 38, Social Infrastructure, Social, Cultural and Community Services. It says:

“In Fiscal Year 1999/2000, a total sum of \$59.1 million is allocated to meet the investment needs of activities in these areas.”

When I look at \$59.1 million out of the total amount allocated, which is \$716.33 million, which works out to be only 8.2 per cent, I kind of wonder. I mean, if they say that they intend to provide so much more in this particular area, when you compare what was provided in 1998/1999 to 1999/2000, you are now talking about only 8.2 per cent. I am saying, “Nah, I am making a mistake”. So I come down a little lower down and I see:

“Resources amounting to \$31.6 million have been allocated to support the programmes to be implemented by the Ministry of Social and Community Development.”

So I said, “Okay, add \$59.1 million to \$31.6 million, but that turns out to be only 12.6 per cent!

Dr. Griffith: How much you want?

Mr. M. Joseph: Excuse me, what did you say?

Dr. Griffith: How much you want?

Mr. M. Joseph: [*Steups*] When you add the two sets, Mr. Speaker, it still turns out to be 12.6 per cent, which turns out to be a reduction of 28 per cent from the previous period. So I say, all the talk they are talking here about increasing and improving in terms of community and social development, the figures, as far as I am concerned, that is “ole talk”! [*Desk thumping*] Okay, because we are talking about a reduction in the allocation. So the Minister could respond to that. Mr. Speaker, that is the comment that I want to make in this area in terms of social infrastructure.

I want to focus on two other areas. The second area I want to focus on is the pension increases for government pensioners. In the budget speech, at page 23, the Minister went ahead to say, and I am quoting:

“I have already alluded to the increases in Old Age Pensions, the revision of the National Insurance System and the on-going pension reform exercise. In this fiscal year, I propose to deal with the plight of retired government pensioners.”

Let me say straight out, Mr. Speaker, and I do not like to blow my own trumpet, but if you recall in my contribution to the last budget debate I had raised the issue of the Government Pensioners Association. Permit me to put it on the record, just in terms of that contribution. I need to compliment the Government. I am going to join my friend from San Fernando West in saying that at least they picked up the plight, and then I am going to make some other comments. I quote:

“There is also a group of pensioners who have not been addressed. Mr. Deputy Speaker, permit me to indicate that group. I received a letter dated October 12, 1998 from the President of the Government Pensioners Association. This group has indicated that their pension concerns have not been addressed over a period of time. They have asked that some representation be made on their behalf. These are individuals who served government at the highest levels in the public service and yet, at the same time, they are in a situation where, given the increases in the cost of living—not only that, they receive a pension that does not take into consideration that in many instances that pension represents the only source of income.

They are at least two-person families because most of them are married. Their plight is crying out for some sort of remedy. I am hoping that group—

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because the Minister of Finance also mentions the fact that he is going to be dealing now with daily-paid workers and that there is some proposal to address the question of daily-paid workers and provide them with some pension benefits. We are asking, on behalf of the Government Pensioners Association, that their mark-up be addressed also. Hopefully it can be addressed as speedily as possible.”

So, I applaud the Government in terms of attempting to address the issue of these government pensioners.

Mr. Speaker, in addressing it, let me quote the increases that were proposed by the Minister of Finance in his budget contribution. He says:

“Accordingly, I propose to increase the basic pension of all public officers who retired on or before thirty-first of December, 1998.

Public Officers who retired between the first of January 1996 and the thirty-first of December 1998 will receive an increase of \$75 per month. Approximately 4,000 retired public officers will benefit.

Public officers who retired on or before 31st December 1995 will receive an increase in their monthly pension as follows:—

Individuals in receipt of a pension of over \$3,500 per month will receive an increase of \$150 per month. It is estimated that 352 retirees will benefit from this measure.

Individuals in receipt of a pension between \$2,501 and \$3,500 per month will receive an increase of \$175 per month. This measure will benefit 1,099 retired public servants.

Individuals in receipt of a pension between \$1,501 and \$2,500 per month will receive an increase of \$200 per month. Some 6,021 pensioners will benefit.

Individuals who are currently in receipt of a pension between \$1,001 to \$1,500 will receive an increase of \$225 per month. It is estimated that 2,775 persons will benefit from this measure.

Individuals currently in receipt of a pension of up to \$1,000 per month will receive an increase of \$250 per month. It is estimated that 5,307 retired public servants will benefit from this measure.

It is estimated that this measure will cost an additional \$35 million per year.”

8.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, interestingly enough, let us go through those bands. The estimated cost—for example, he talks about 4,000 persons who will receive \$75. A quick calculation of that group means that it would cost \$3,600,000. For the second group, which is 352 persons, who will receive \$150 per month, that is estimated to cost \$633,600. For the group of 1,099 persons who will receive \$175 per month, that will cost \$2,307,900. For the group comprising \$6,021 persons who will receive \$200 increase, it is estimated to cost \$14,450,400. For the group of 2,775 persons who will receive \$225 per month, that is estimated to cost \$7,492,500. The final group of 5,307, who will receive \$250 per month, that is estimated to cost \$15,921,000. When one adds that up—unless again, I could make a mistake somewhere—that comes up to \$44,450,400. In this budget document, it was said that is estimated to cost some \$35 million. Mr. Speaker, perhaps I could make a mistake but you are seeing—an out of approximately—if I round it off—some \$10 million. So I started by being a little concerned that the numbers, again, are not matching.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier on, one has to at least appreciate the fact that the Government has attempted to address the measures. I must admit—again, I have been in constant contact with the Government's Pensions Association and they are not satisfied with these increases, because when they look at the increases, it says something.

First of all, those groups at \$3,500, the increase really represents 4.28 per cent decreasing as the pension increases. Those in the \$2,501 category, the increase is 7 per cent, decreasing to 5 per cent as one reaches the \$3,500 upper limit. Those at \$1,501, the increase is 13.32 per cent, decreasing to 8 per cent as they go to the \$2,500 limit. Those at \$1,001, the increase is 22.4 per cent, decreasing to 15 per cent as they go to the \$1,500 limit.. With respect to the last group, those at \$1,000 and below, the increase is 25 per cent which decreases to 15 per cent as the pension goes to \$600.00 plus \$100.00.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Joseph. Hon. Members, the sitting would be suspended for dinner now and we would return at 8.50 p.m.

8.20 p.m: *Sitting suspended.*

8.50 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Martin Joseph: Mr. Speaker, before we took the break, I was making the point about the analysis of the increases as proposed in the budget, what it really means in terms of actual percentage increases. There is also the other concern

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stemming out of statements made by the Minister. Let me go back and quote, again at page 24 of his budget document. He indicated:

In addition, the COLA payments to retired public officers are frozen at the level paid at the time of their retirement. This has resulted in five different levels of cost of living allowance being applicable to government pensioners.

I propose to rationalize and simplify this system. Government pensioners, who retired on or before December 31st 1998 will have their existing cost of living allowance consolidated with the revised basic pension.”

Mr. Speaker, the government pensioners are concerned as to the fact that a proper rationalization—and I am quoting a document, which they provided to me—however, would involve—. Sorry, let me just go back a bit. Let us look at the COLA rationalization and simplification. Since these sums are already being paid, consolidation should not mean additional cost. Proper rationalization, however, would involve the upgrading of all COLA levels up to the level of the highest rate being paid presently then consolidated. So they are all suggesting that with respect to the rationalization and simplification of the COLA that this approach be used.

They also expressed another concern, and I quote again from the budget document:

“Mr. Speaker, I propose also that those persons who benefit under the Widows and Orphans Pension Scheme be afforded the same facility.”

We do not know if it is the same facility as it relates just to the COLA or the same facility as it relates to everything that went before. So that some sort of explanation would be required.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is necessary for me to place on the record these two letters: the first is dated August 5, 1999, addressed to the hon. Minister of Finance, and the second is dated August 20, 1999, addressed to the Minister of Public Administration. If only to show what the Government Pensioners Association is suggesting is an appropriate means of dealing with their pension issue.

The first letter is dated August 5, 1999. I am just going to pick out some of the parts from the second paragraph:

The Hon. Minister of Finance, Ministry of Finance, Eric Williams Finance Building, Independence Square. You further stated that relief for Government Pensioners would be provided in the next Budget. In this connection, the

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GPATT reminds you that the pensions of retired public officers were last reviewed in 1986 in respect of officers who retired up to 31 December 1983.

The cost of living has risen tremendously over the past fifteen and a half years so that pensions at 1983 levels are now totally inadequate.”

I skip to the proposals that they made:

“To assist in making your promised review meaningful here is a brief history of the salary reviews done for serving officers since 1.1.1984:

1-1-1984 to 31-12-1988	The Special Tribunal gave no salary increases.
1-1-1989 to 31-12-1989	The Special Tribunal consolidated COLA at 31-12-1988 with salaries, gave a 2% increase and new COLA.
1-1-1990 to 31-12-1995	The CPO negotiated a ‘buyout’ of \$4000.00 in lieu of salary increases to be paid in bonds.
1-1-1996 to 31-12-1998	The CPO agreed to consolidate COLA at 31-12-1995 with salaries, gave an increase then started a new COLA.

Despite the commitment cited above pensions were not reviewed.

The Government Pensioners’ Association seeks equality of treatment for retired public servants as follows:

1-1-1984 to 31-12-1988	No increases.
1-1-1989 to 31-12-1989	COLA at 31-12-1988 consolidated with pensions, a 2% increase in pensions and a new COLA.
1-1-1990 to 31-12-1995	A ‘buyout’ of \$4000.00 in lieu of pension increases but with half paid in cash and the balance in two tranches of bonds for two-year periods.
1-1-1996 to 31-12-1998	COLA at 31-12-1995 consolidated with pensions then a 5% increase in pensions and a new COLA.
1-1-1994 to 31-12-2001	Review after the review of serving officers’ salaries.”

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Mr. Speaker, I am placing on the record the proposals made to the Minister of Finance by letter dated August 5, 1999.

They also wrote the Minister of Public Administration on August 20, 1999. I am just quoting little parts because it is important:

“GPATT has recently forwarded to you a copy of the proposals that it sent to the Honourable Minister of Finance confidently expecting that you would support them in discussion with your colleagues, especially in the issue involving long retired public officers.

There are, however other pressing concerns of GPATT which do not fall directly within the ambit of the Ministry of Finance which it hopes that you, as Minister of Public Administration, will address expeditiously. These are:

- (1) When a retired male officer remarries, his new spouse is not covered by the Widows and Orphans Fund, although his contributions remain in the Fund, coverage is limited to the first wife who may well be dead. While the number of such cases may be small, the injustice and hardship is very worrying and there is an urgent need for an amendment of the Widows and Orphans Pensions Act: Ch. 23:54, to remedy this shortcoming.
- (2) Retired public officers, as do all pensioners, above a certain level of income, pay income tax on their pensions, the GPATT contends that not only did such persons pay income tax during their working lives and now pay Value Added Tax (VAT), which is a regressive tax, on their reduced incomes, but additionally they are faced with ever increasing medical expenses. In the twilight of their lives, the payment of income tax, along with VAT is an imposition. GPATT requests that income tax on the pensions of public service retirees be removed or substantially reduced.”

These were the other issues raised by the pensioners seeking some sort of redress.

One other issue they raised, Mr. Speaker, they said that the consequences of the harmonization which took place May 2, 1999, of NIS and public service pensions plans from May 3, 1999, is that all public service retirees will have their pension computed on the basis of salary and length of service reduced by the amount of their NIS pension, which will then be added to that reduced pension. In short, such retirees will effectively lose their NIS pensions.

Mr. Speaker, let me sum up by saying that they have appreciated the efforts being made in terms of addressing their plight, but they are also saying that, given

the circumstances in which they find themselves, this matter needs to be addressed in the way in which they have suggested.

Let me deviate a little and talk about why it is important that we pay some attention to the pension of these former public servants. Pension forms part of the overall remuneration package that is provided to public officers. Perhaps one of the reasons we are failing to attract and retain the level of public officers that we have, hitherto, been able to attract and retain, has to do with the whole level of compensation of which pension is just one part, which leads me to endorse a statement made by the Member for San Fernando East, the Leader of the Opposition, in making his contribution, that the time has come for us to look at the salaries now being offered to public servants.

Public servants last got a salary increase, if my memory serves me correctly, in 1983. I also support the statement made by the Leader of the Opposition in his address, when he called on the Executive to implement the recommendations of the Salaries Review Commission, outside of those of politicians. In not implementing the recommendations, we are, in essence, stalling senior public servants, especially permanent secretaries, from getting their increase. More importantly, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that it would also allow the Government to embark on a job evaluation exercise, because once you implement those salaries, it is necessary for us to determine the relative worth of all the various job in the public sector.

I think I heard the Minister of Finance in his presentation, making some point about the need to do a job evaluation exercise. I think that there is an urgent need. First, of all, I am calling, again, echoing the sentiments made by the Member for San Fernando East, that we ought to implement the recommendations of the Salaries Review Commission.

The Government has taken almost a kind of a cowardly approach to this. It is their responsibility and their call to implement but they want to play politics with this in such a way that they have asked for the matter to be dealt with in a way that not even the Constitution allows for it.

9.05 p.m.

When the Member for Couva North, the Prime Minister, laid the findings in the House he talked about a unanimous approval of the recommendations of the Salaries Review Commission. Never in the past has it been done, so the Executive is shirking its responsibility of implementing. So we say, implement the recommendations of the Salaries Review Commission, especially those relating to

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our senior public servants, the permanent secretaries and all those other people. If you do not want to implement the increases recommended for the politicians, then you can put that aside. I am saying, the longer you take to do that, the more questions of properly remunerating the contributions made by these senior public servants that are denied.

Mr. Speaker, it causes me to ask a question: Is it a deliberate policy of this Government to take a particular approach as it relates to public servants? The reason I am asking this, we have noticed with the coming of this Government, an increase in an area of recurrent expenditure called consultancies. We know that it is necessary in the scheme of the everyday operation of the various departments and agencies to employ the services of consultants. The extent to which we have seen an increase in the number of consultancies being provided in the various Government departments and agencies causes one to wonder.

Mr. Speaker, I took the time to look at consultancies and other contracted services as an expenditure Head in various departments. I took into consideration that Head as it relates to salaries and travel. I did not take it as it relates to contracted services for security, I did not take it with respect to other types of contracted services, but specifically to look at personnel that are being utilized under consultancies because I am wondering the extent to which the Government is now using the services of consultants and contracted personnel as a means of getting into those departments, persons whom I guess they want, at the expense of the public servants. I will tell you why.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is on the record—you will recall bringing to this Parliament and I quote:

“CABINET MINUTE NO. 2868 OF OCTOBER 29 1998

Procedure concerning the Employment by Ministries/Departments of Persons on a temporary Basis

Note PA (98) 69 was considered.

Cabinet agreed that:

- (a) Ministers be fully informed and their prior approval obtained before Ministries and Departments engage persons on a temporary basis to fill positions that are either established, temporary or contract;
- (b) Ministers submit for the information of Cabinet, bi-annual reports in respect of persons engaged on a temporary basis in their respective Ministries.”

Mr. Speaker, as I say, it is extremely instructive. Just pull some ministries and you will see the extent of the consultancies. Take the office of the Prime Minister actual for 1998 January to September. Remember in the debate we were told to “look at the documents, look at the figures, you do not expect a budget presentation to identify everything.” So we looked as the Minister suggested. Actual, January to September 1998, \$925,763.00. Estimates for 1999/2000—and remember, this is an election year now—\$3,852,000; remember also, that I am only pulling those that relate to salaries, travelling and so forth. I am not pulling out those that relate to contract for janitorial services, I have not pulled out those that relate to contract for security services.

The Ministry of Finance actual for January—September 1998, \$1,126,516. Estimates for 1999/2000, \$2,699,300. The Ministry of Planning and Development has a small amount, \$451,000 non-actual in 1998, but \$451,000 in 1999/2000. The Ministry of National Security, \$2.9 million in 1999/2000 and we go on and on.

Mr. Speaker, the point is that when you look at the actual for January—September 1998, consultancies of the kind I just identified, amounted to \$49,697,292.00, and again I just pulled out those areas of consultancies that dealt with personnel, persons working under those consultancy arrangements. The estimates for 1999/2000 \$97,759,243 are almost double and this is where you are going to be hiring your friends, bringing in certain kinds of persons in employment. I am raising that in the context of what we are doing to public servants who are in the employ of these ministries and for whom the whole issue about redressing their remuneration packages is not being addressed.

Mr. Speaker, I now go to the third area on which I intend to spend time—pension reform. At page 32 of the 1999—2000 Budget Statement, the Minister of Finance indicated:

“Mr. Speaker, we have already addressed Phase 1 of the Pension Reform Exercise. We made the National Insurance System more relevant to the needs of its clients by increasing the benefit and contribution levels. We increased the benefit payments under the Old Age Pension Programme. We harmonized the National Insurance system with other private pension plans and the Old Age Pension Programme.”

Again, alluding to the fact that Phase 1 of the pension reform exercise has been successfully completed, while the National Insurance contribution and benefit rates were adjusted in May 1999, this increase came some three years after the fifth actuarial valuation of the National Insurance system which was done as

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at July 1, 1995. The recommendation of the actuaries that the valuation be done on a timely basis and the recommendations implemented is important because the length of time it takes for the implementation of the recommendation of the actuarial review, pensioners who are waiting for the Scheme to be adjusted in a particular way are left at a disadvantage and this showed itself up clearly this round.

While old age pensions were adjusted in two consecutive years, the adjustment of the National Insurance took a longer time. It was not adjusted in a timely basis like the old age pension and there was a situation where there was a certain amount of ambiguity that pensioners experienced. You would recall in the last budget, the Minister gives the impression that most persons were going to benefit from this harmonization and they would receive \$620 per month. For a while there were many pensioners who were not in receipt of that \$620 because they were not sure as to how it was going to be implemented.

What is even worse was that there are some people who are still not in receipt of their \$620 and still the National Insurance Scheme has not been able to address, in a meaningful way, the concerns raised by some of these people. It is not surprising because the National Insurance Board does not seem to be concerned so much with the plight of the poor and the pension users. They are no longer concerned with that. It seems that the leadership for the National Insurance Board is now focused on bigger things.

Mr. Speaker, in my last budget contribution, I was echoing the sentiments then raised by the Member for Diego Martin East where he was showing the relationship between the chairman of the National Insurance Board and his responsibility at NIPDEC and he also talked about the CEO, Mr. Trevor Romano, and concerns were raised there. Lo and behold later in the year, right in this Parliament, it was revealed that the same CEO of the National Insurance Board was collecting a small stipend of \$15,000 per month extra for his contribution to NIPDEC and what NIPDEC was doing in relation to the Airports Authority.

Mr. Speaker, when NIB ought to be focusing on regularizing or addressing some of the pension issues that are being raised, it does not care about that. It does not seem to care about that at all. The leadership necessary is not being provided by the executive of the National Insurance Board. It seems that more time is being spent on its responsibility with respect to NIPDEC and the Airports Authority, almost as a reverse Robin Hood as my friend is reminding me. This brings another issue also.

Mr. Speaker, the recommendation of the actuaries at the fifth actuarial valuation talked about the National Insurance Board's investment. We had also raised that point. At the time, they had just fired the financial comptroller for some kind of investment with Huggins Building. We raised all those things in the last budget debate. They fired him and accused him of making a bad investment with the Huggins Building, but it was not him. It is the same way they fired the audit manager at NIPDEC because they complained it was he who was responsible for leaking or determining the matter of the salary.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for St. Ann's East has expired.

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

9.20 p.m.

Mr. M. Joseph: Mr. Speaker, I was making the point and I think it is important. The actuaries also raised the question about the investments that National Insurance Board engages in. When we look at some of the questionable investments, one is concerned as to whether or not the National Insurance Board would be in a position, when the time comes, for it to pay the pensions of person who would be expecting to receive those pension payments.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister boasts also about—apart from harmonizing NIS and old age pensions—harmonizing the National Insurance Scheme with other private pension plans. That was done—if I could characterize it—in a sleight of hand manner, almost like a thief in the night, that little or no participation, in terms of discussions came from concerned social groups, especially, labour.

I recall the Member for Diego Martin East raising this whole question about the approach being used for the harmonization. I also remember the Minister of Finance talking about how difficult it was going to be, in order for them to treat with each individual's private pension and those private pensions that exist in the workplace, so that the easiest thing to do was to come and pass legislation.

What that in essence does is, that those existing private pension plans that were the results of negotiations between employer and employee with just be the pas of a pen. Some of those private pension plans can be considered to be redundant and, perhaps, not in the best interest of some of those employees who belong to some of those private pension plans. So that while the Minister was boasting about the fact that phase one has been successfully implemented, we are saying that we beg to disagree because in phase one, there is still the ambiguity

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with respect to the harmonizing of NIS and old age pension, in terms of the receipt of \$620.00 and also the harmonizing with respect to national insurance and private pension.

The Minister went on to say that phase two of the programme will provide for the introduction of a defined contribution pension system and it will also provide for individual pension accounts and the greater mobility and transferability of these accounts. It will provide for increased supervision and regulation of the industry and this phase of the programme will be implemented in the next fiscal year.

Basically, what was being contemplated in phase two is a move to what is referred to as "the defined contribution pension system." As you know, this defined contribution pension system is fraught with weaknesses. An individual placing contributions into this system runs the risk of having a lower value of pension benefits on the basis of such things as stock market performance, interest rates, *et cetera*.

For example, if an individual is to retire, when the returns on investment made by his pension management committee are low or negative, this is the pension that he or she will receive for the rest of his or her life. If you extrapolate this scenario to low wage earners whose pensions are already lower because of the low earnings, the defined contribution pension system presents a great deal of financial risks for that individual.

Mr. Speaker, the administrative costs of the defined contribution pension system has been shown to be much higher than the defined benefit of the National Insurance Scheme. A recent study conducted by the World Bank on defined contribution pension system in the United Kingdom suggests that an individual stands to lose between 40 to 45 per cent of the value of his or her contributions to administrative expenses.

There is another concern with this defined contribution pension system and that is, there is no risk sharing. If a low wage individual contributes for 10 years to age 30 and should die by reason of an accident or becomes disabled, his accumulated balance in those accounts may not be enough to provide for survivors or pension for himself. So there are concerns with respect to this approach. There are those who believe that this is just a red herring, and the whole intention is to really dismantle the National Insurance Board because there are people who are interested in putting their hands on the moneys of the National Insurance. Some of them see the National Insurance Scheme as a cash cow.

Mr. Speaker, there are serious concerns being raised as to what is going to happen with the National Insurance Scheme under this phase two. We had

discussions here about the so-called Chilean model and the implementation of it, so that there are concerns being raised with respect to phase 2. Again, whether or not, the leadership of the National Insurance Board is concerned with any of these issues: it seems that the National Insurance Board just goes along with whatever the executive, especially, the Minister of Finance seems to raise.

So it seems as if the National Insurance leadership is not concerned with the pensioners but that is why it exists. They also do not seem to be concerned about the employees of the National Insurance Board, who are also responsible for assisting in the management of the system. [*Desk thumping*]

Presently, there is an ongoing negotiation for salaries and wages for the National Insurance Board. There is a situation where the senior managers of the National Insurance Board—I understand the salaries of top management ranges from \$16,000.00—\$26,000.00 per month plus stipends and this group does not include the Chief Executive Officer. I guess he is in a category separate and apart. There is a salary proposal from the representative union, the Public Services Association, asking for 15 per cent increase over a three-year period. The Board is proposing 6 per cent increase and a \$40.00 fixed COLA. We are talking about people whose average salaries—for example, CLERICAL OFFICER 1—\$2,526.00 to \$2,655.00, this is 1995 salaries; CLERICAL OFFICER 2—\$3,132 and a compliance officer about \$4,144.00 per month.

Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that senior managers received almost 100 per cent increase in their salaries. So it is against that background that you have a problem existing in the National Insurance Board with respect to the kind of absurdity, in terms of what senior management has given themselves and what they are willing to offer to the National Insurance Board employees.

9.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister also gave an indication of the possibility of him finding some regulatory umbrella—for want of a better word that is how I am characterizing it—under which all insurance companies and other financial houses will be regulated. We wish to express some concern about such an approach. It is suggested that separate pension legislation is needed to govern the operation of private pension plans, separate and apart from those governing Government pension plans. I mean, Mr. Speaker, can you see the Supervisor of Insurance enforcing rules against the Government with respect to their pension plans? I mean, that is questionable.

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Secondly, it is suggested that the National Insurance Board is really intended to operate almost, well, as an independent entity, independent from—almost like the Central Bank—and it was not expected that there will be such Government interference in the operations of the National Insurance Board. I said earlier on the Government is behaving as if the National Insurance Board is a cash cow, you know, and the intention is to use poor people's money to do all sorts of things as we see being done now.

As I indicated earlier on, the concern is, when the time comes, whether or not the insurance system will be able to make the kinds of payments necessary to those pensioners. We also say that, in light of the proposals being made by the Government Pensioner's Association, we think it is absolutely necessary Government find a revenue base that will allow them to pay pension, I mean good enough pensions otherwise. As I said earlier on, the ability to attract and retain persons in the Government service is seriously compromised when one sees precisely the kind of remuneration that is currently being paid and the kinds of pensions public servants can expect to get when they leave the service of the Government.

Mr. Speaker, there is one other area to which I need to pay some attention. I will be remiss if I did not raise it. The Government Pensioner's Association also talked about the plight of a small number of pensioners who number about 100 or so. Let me go back and quote the letter written to the Minister of Finance on this matter. It states:

“That Government is aware of the financial hardships faced by retired public officers as shown by a Cabinet decision reported in the *Independent* of 09.05.1998, to introduce a health plan for former presidents and prime ministers which provides them with medical benefits similar to those that they received during their active service. This decision took into consideration the continually increasing cost of medical services and the diminishing values of the pensions received by these officers.

Such a consideration surely applies even more forcibly to aged retired public servants existing on pensions last reviewed with effect from 31-12-1983; they too suffer from ill health and have to access increasingly expensive medical services.

The plight of one such retiree is instructive, Dr. C.V. Gocking's status was featured in an article in the *Sunday Express* of 01.03.1996.

This gentleman who was largely responsible for the introduction of free secondary education in this country retired in 1966 from the post of Chief

Executive Officer. He is about 93 years old, diabetic and blind, his wife does not receive a pension and he does not receive National Insurance, and both of these retired persons require daily medication.”

He goes on to talk about the fact, Mr. Speaker, that there are a few others like them and he is also asking that consideration be given to some of these. The Association says the pensioners, of whom there are less than 100, do not qualify for any kind of pension but yet, at the same time, they made invaluable contributions to the development of this society. Mr. Speaker, I believe that we have a responsibility in all conscience to address the plight of some of these persons and I am asking the Minister of Finance if he can make an effort to do such.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn my attention to matters involving the constituency which I have the honour and privilege to represent in this Parliament, the constituency of St. Ann's East. There are three vexing issues that confront the constituents of St. Ann's East. One deals with the question of water, or should I say the lack of water in some instances; the second one deals with the question of drainage and the third deals with the question of roads. In the last budget the Minister of Public Utilities indicated that the question of an inadequate water supply for the Santa Cruz Valley was going to be addressed.

I have indicated that we have the situation where Santa Cruz Valley has a sufficient water supply to satisfy its requirements and export some of the water to the rest of Trinidad. However, we had this situation where water was coming in from Caroni into Santa Cruz and the situation was that we were getting water three nights a week, I think Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, then we had a serious problem when it was unpredictable as to when water was going to be supplied.

I was told there was an area called The Meadows where a well was going to be dug to see the extent to which water was going to be available. I think three point something million dollars was allocated to that and La Fillette because I remember coming to this Parliament and asking a question as to how much was going to be allocated where. That is how I was able to get the information about \$1.3 million. I kept in touch with the Ministry of Public Utilities and we got information about a well being successfully dug and it was just a question of putting in the infrastructure. My understanding is that we were going to get water before the end of 1999.

I hope that when the Minister of Public Utilities responds he is going to be able to tell us what the situation is. I heard the Member for Arima boasting that

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the La Fillette situation is supposed to come on stream sometime and he already was able to give a date. I hope I will be so fortunate to get a date as to when people in Santa Cruz would get relief as it relates to an adequate water supply. I think it is unfortunate because I understand studies were done with respect to that whole drainage basin in Santa Cruz.

I mean, we have enormous amounts of water, enormous. We have water, Mr. Speaker, enough for us to be self-sufficient and I think it hurts for us to be relying on water from some other place when we can provide for ourselves and also provide water for the rest of the country. You know, as I say that I smile because even as I think about that I am forced to ask, why do we really need a desalinization plant? However, that is another matter.

I come to drainage. Mr. Speaker, you know I noticed in the PSIP that lump sums of money are allocated with respect to drainage, river cleaning and river clearing, but it is not disaggregated in such a way that one has any idea as to how and where it is going to be allocated. We have a problem in Santa Cruz again where the amount of flooding that is taking place there—of course, you know we had an unnatural rainy season this year so that the enormity of the flooding in that area has increased.

What is required, and I had raised it the last time with the Member for Oropouche, the Minister of Planning and Development, is the need to include—I raised it in the last budget—the clearance of the Santa Cruz River. I had asked a question here because there are moneys allocated for clearing of the San Juan River and I would ask whether or not the Santa Cruz River, as a tributary into the San Juan River, was also going to be cleared. I think I was told during the last budget debate, no.

Mr. Speaker, the Santa Cruz River needs to be cleared. There are some other works that need to be done. I have been attempting for the whole of this year to get the Minister of Works and Transport to visit to see the extent of the problem in Santa Cruz. Nothing doing. No matter how much I call, no matter how much I write, no matter how much I appeal, absolutely nothing. So that when we stand here and other Members raise the same plight they say, “Oh, that is not so”. That is so.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, there are a few Ministers, I mean—and I have to admit that the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and the Minister of Health, those are the few ministers to whom one could talk and to whom one could bring a matter. It is not any personal matter, you know, it ain't

nothing involving yourself, you know, it is constituents whom one represents and one has to go cap in hand, one has to beg, one has to be on one's knees, and I find something has to be wrong with that. Something has to be drastically wrong with that.

I said, you know, thanks to the Minister. I mean, the other day I had to tell him thank you. He said, "Martin I just doing my job". I say, "Well, talk to your other colleagues, nah, and let them do their job, nah." It is the same thing with the Minister of Health. So that, Mr. Speaker, again I am putting on the record. I have tried every way possible to get the Minister of Works and Transport sometimes just to come to see the extent of the problems. There are two bridges in La Canoa which are falling apart. He just would not come at all.

So that we have this problem with drainage which then also leads to the whole question of roads again in this area. There are three mines in our area from which they are digging—they are taking fill out, especially for the airport. Those roads were not built to take that tonnage and they are just breaking up. Again, no matter what one does, no matter how much one tries, one gets absolutely no assistance whatsoever from this Minister of Works, you know, under whose purview drainage also falls.

I see in the 1999/2000 PSIP, page 31:

"An allocation of \$1.8 million has been provided for the following activities for Fisheries Development:-

- rehabilitation of Fishing centres..."

Mr. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources—and I just am pulling out the part that is of interest to me, Maracas, Maracas Bay. All right, I mean, there is a serious problem with respect to those fishing facilities and I see \$1.8 million allocated for San Fernando, Ortoire, Maracas and Toco. So I will be interested to see how much of that will be provided to upgrade our fishing facility at Maracas.

Under "Tourism" on page 34 it says:

"A provision of approximately \$20 million will be utilised in 1990/2000 for the continued development of the tourism sector into a significant employment generator and foreign exchange earner. In furtherance of this thrust, TIDCO will invest \$14 million in tourism-related activities. Specifically, these resources will be used to:-

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- complete outstanding works in Trinidad and Tobago, under the IDB-assisted Tourism Action Programme including the rehabilitation of..."

and I see Maracas Beach, you know, so I am hoping that—because I have been having discussions with TIDCO—this will be realized and some moneys will be spent on improving the Maracas Beach facilities.

- continue the development of facilities at popular local tourist destinations at...Maracas Waterfall;"

So we see Maracas Waterfall also in the Maracas, St. Joseph area so I am hoping also that we will see some developments taking place in that regard.

Mr. Speaker, I make a final point. My colleague from San Fernando West raised the point about Members of Parliament in the past being able to send mail to their constituents by utilizing a facility normally provided to Members of Parliament. I understand that with the coming in place of TT Post that facility is no longer available. To me it seems as if that is only one of the, well, facilities that we previously enjoyed that is now being removed. I think I must put on record the question about the stationery and other normal things with which we are provided to manage our constituency offices.

9.45 p.m.

The Government provides us with computers, fax machines and other such things. We appreciate that, but some of those things are becoming dinosaurs because we are not getting the material to keep them running. I cannot remember the last time we got supplies. The poor staff at Parliament. We keep calling them and asking, "What is happening to the supplies?" They are very diplomatic, they give us all kinds of reasons, but the reality is that, clearly, funds are not being provided so that Members of Parliament can adequately discharge their responsibility.

I am saying that they gave us a double whammy! For whatever reason, we have to go cap-in-hand to the Ministers to get them to even come to see some of the problems in the constituency to offer some help, but I think I should mention the Minister of Education because when there was the fire at the St. Joseph Presbyterian School he came forward. So, we are getting it from there and also in terms of the supplies needed by Members of Parliament to discharge our responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, let me conclude by saying thank you for the opportunity to participate in this debate. I hope that I have properly represented the members of

the Government Pensioners' Association of Trinidad and Tobago whose situation needs to be addressed in a meaningful way. I hope that concerning the whole question of the Government approach to the pension reform, the Government takes into consideration some of the concerns about what is really taking place out there.

Concerning the so-called budget theme "A Blueprint for Human Development and Sustainable Growth" and some of the things we are seeing contained in this budget, nothing can be further from the truth. This certainly is not a blueprint for human development and sustainable growth and it needs to be called something else.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Education (Dr. The Hon. Adesh Nanan): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a privilege to join this debate. The allocation for the 1999—2000 financial year to the Ministry of Education is \$1.4 billion. The Public Sector Investment Programme for the Ministry of Education is \$194 million.

This Government recognizes that at the centre of the education system is the child. The education system is not for the benefit of contractors, publishers, caterers authors, principals, teachers, or civil servants. The education system is for my young friends, our students and our future leaders. However, we recognize that our principals, teachers and students must be in an acceptable and safe environment, hence our upgrade of infrastructure and our security improvements.

Mr. Speaker, the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna spoke this evening about the primary school at Tacarigua and a delay in the opening of that particular primary school in terms of construction, but, I would like to inform the honourable House this evening that the St. Mary's Anglican Primary School, the Guayaguayare Roman Catholic School and the Reform Presbyterian School were part of a Fincor project.

The St. Mary's delay is a few months, but the St. Mary's Anglican Primary School, the Reform School and the Guayaguayare RC School projects were supposed to begin in 1991. When I came into office in 1995 I put that as top priority. The Guayaguayare School is finished, the Reform Presbyterian School is finished, and soon, the St. Mary's Children's Home Anglican Primary School will be finished. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, in 1991 it was supposed to be started under that administration. [*Interruption*] I am hearing the Member for La Brea speaking this evening, but in his very contribution he was very silent on the design for Vessigny School, which

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is in the PSIP, and the Sobo Government Primary School. The Member for St. Ann's East spoke about the Maracas Presbyterian School; the Member for Diego Martin West, the Carenage Boys' Government School is almost nearing completion and I have a completion date for that. The Member for Diego Martin East is complaining, but when we opened the River Estate/Patna School, he was right there with me when I cut the ribbon. *[Desk thumping]* He said that he built the school.

I can go down the road. The Member for Laventille West was smiling when we opened the Beetham Estate Government Primary School built by this administration. *[Desk thumping]* Of course, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, my good friend on that side, I am sure he was smiling when he saw that the Success RC School actually received the computers. *[Desk thumping]* The Member for Toco/Manzanilla—another good friend of mine—spoke about the Valencia South Government Primary School constructed and opened under this administration, and he is also smiling there.

There is no nepotism or favouritism under this administration. We are building schools throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and they are all benefiting, and that is why they are all smiling here this evening. *[Laughter] [Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: In fact, Mr. Speaker, education is a great equalizer. It cuts across Government and Opposition, as I have demonstrated here. *[Desk thumping]* Our revolution in education encompasses for the benefit of our students, our future leaders, upgrades in preschool education, primary school education, secondary school education and tertiary education. Our policy is that no child must be deprived of an education.

Preschool education, or the more modern term, early childhood care and education, is a top priority in the realm of a strong foundation for our education system and, I have several questions to ask tonight. Why could not the Minister of Education in the previous administration give two chances at the Common Entrance Examination? It did not take a rocket scientist to do that, to give the child a second chance. Why could it not be done at that time? We have done it! This administration gives two chances at the Common Entrance Examination within a specific age limit. *[Interruption]*

I am hearing some noise from the Member for Diego Martin West and I am sure he is going to make a very sterling contribution, so he should wait. Another important area—it is a pity that the Member for Diego Martin Central is not

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here—is why could not more post primary places be provided? We provided them. In fact, when I came into office in 1995 there were 1,400 places; today there are 6,170 places. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Maharaj: PNM did not do that in 30 years!

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: We did not need a budget of \$1.4 billion. We used what we had. We built post primary centres—and I have the information here which I will give tomorrow—and upgraded post primary centres, as well as hired more teachers. We have been able, because of providing more post primary places and teachers in our post primary centres, to ensure that every child who wrote the Common Entrance Examination in 1997 was placed in either a secondary school, a post primary centre or a post primary class or, because of the exam, they could have repeated. So, no child was left out of the system. [*Desk thumping*]

ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I am indebted to the hon. Member for Tabaquite for giving way to interrupt his contribution to move the adjournment of the House. I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to tomorrow, Tuesday, October 19, 1999 at 10.00 a.m. May I announce that I spoke to the Acting Opposition Chief Whip, the Member for Diego Martin East, and I indicated to him that in the light of the status of the debate we will be going late tomorrow, possibly midnight or 1.00 a.m. in an effort to try to finish.

Thank you very much.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 9.57 p.m.