

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Wednesday, October 20, 1999

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**PAPERS LAID**

1. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of Caroni County Council for the year ended December 31, 1987. [*The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of Caroni County Council for the year ended December 31, 1988. [*Hon. R. I. Maharaj*]

*Papers 1 and 2 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.***ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS**

**The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Speaker, I respectfully request that the statement of the hon. Prime Minister under this item on the agenda be deferred to a later stage in the proceedings.

*Agreed to.***APPROPRIATION BILL  
(BUDGET)**

[FIFTH DAY]

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

That the Bill be now read a second time.

**The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung):** Mr. Speaker, as I started last night and indicated in my winding up, I would like to thank the people of Trinidad and Tobago very much who took the pains to come forward and make recommendations as input to the various budgets which I have presented to this honourable House.

I think I can take some satisfaction in saying that of the five budgets I have presented to this honourable House, no one can say that there was any pain inflicted as a result of the measures taken in those five budgets. Absolutely no pain to anybody in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*]

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. B. KUEI TUNG]

*Wednesday, October 20, 1999*

As a matter of fact, the general reaction to the budget has been extremely positive and has certainly been very encouraging to me, as I went about trying to explain to the people of Trinidad and Tobago what this budget has been about.

Mr. Speaker, the general feedback I have got is that we have done a good job doing the people's work. As one Minister on this side said, as much as 63 per cent of persons in a recent poll have indicated that they are satisfied with the work and the performance. *[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please!

**Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** As I indicated in my budget presentation, we have strengthened the economy, and that was not disputed by the Opposition Leader in his address; we have achieved continued growth: that was not disputed in his address; we have increased the country's foreign reserves: that was not disputed by the Opposition Leader in his address: *[Interruption]* we have reduced the foreign debt, and that was not disputed either.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please!

**Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** We have reduced inflation to its lowest point in decades. *[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. Manning:** No. That is a lie.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, if you wish to vote that we should continue in this way, we can, but in the absence of my putting that to the vote, I suggest that we conform to the norms.

Please, you have had your say, the Minister of Finance is now responding and I ask you please to hold your fire.

**Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** We have brought down the unemployment rate to its lowest level in generations. That they cannot dispute either. *[Desk thumping]* But then, Mr. Speaker, the people of Trinidad and Tobago are obviously very satisfied with what we are doing. We have reduced taxation and changed the whole tax structure, as a result of which, because of the many tax measures we have taken, we reduced corporation tax; we lowered the corporation tax rate on small business; we reduced business levy; we increased the business levy threshold; we removed tax on dividend income; we reduced tax on interest income; we increased the VAT threshold; we reduced the number of tax brackets for individuals; we reduced the tax for individuals earning high income from 33 per cent to 28 per cent; and from 38 per cent to 35 per cent; we increased the basic tax

allowance for individuals and we allowed individuals earning \$50,000 and less, the option of not filing a tax return.

Mr. Speaker that meant that the days for tinkering and tampering with the tax system are over. They are over because we no longer have the luxury of being able to finagle with the tax system by introducing things like deeds of covenants, by increasing this allowance, and by reducing this allowance which were the things the old administration used to do to say: "We are in control, we are on top. We bring more pain to you." This Minister of Finance had one objective, and that is to bring the people of Trinidad and Tobago at the centre of every budget. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, immediately the Opposition Leader's reaction was: This is no budget. Mind you, he took two hours to reply to the no budget. If I had spoken for a little longer and put more in it, I suppose he would need five hours to be able to criticize the budget. He asked: where are the details? Well the only people who cannot see the details are those on that side.

Mr. Speaker, this is what Dr. Ronald Ramkissoon had to say in the *Newsday* of Wednesday, October 13, 1999. Dr. Ramkissoon is the senior economist at the largest bank in Trinidad and Tobago, Republic Bank. He says:

"...there is a lot of information contained in the accompanying budget documents for those who have access to them or the time to read them.

'Many of the questions that are raised during the debate, in and out of the Parliament, are answered in the thick set of budget documents...'"

He went on to say:

"We cannot fault the minister for not going into those details in the national budget...

If too much is asked of a budget, we will always find it wanting. And while all the issues being raised are important, I am not so sure that we can find them all in a budget presentation."

Where are the details? The details were provided. I laid as many as eight or nine documents in this House on the same day.

He goes on to say:

"But the point is, many of the figures we ask for are in the documents."

This is an economist, Mr. Speaker, a highly recognized economist who works for the private sector. He does not work for the public service, he works for the private sector.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. B. KUEI TUNG]

Wednesday, October 20, 1999

Then the Opposition Leader says the figures are not correct. I could understand him saying that the figures are not correct. As a matter of fact, he has a problem with figures that look too good. Do you remember the time when the Minister of Finance under his administration got a higher rating than him? He said the figures were wrong too. *[Desk thumping]* He could not believe the numbers because as long as they are not of his making, as long as he is not the one in control of them, they have to be wrong.

This is what his Minister of Finance says:

“The economy is in reasonably good shape.”

**Hon. Member:** It is your Minister of Finance. He told you about the election.

**Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** My Minister of Finance? I am quoting from the *T & T Mirror* of Sunday October 17, 1999. It says:

“The figures quoted by Mr. Kuei Tung are creditable figures. They have been audited by the IMF.”

I did not say it, your Minister of Finance said it.

Mr. Speaker, the next “ole talk” they are pushing is that I said, I am not interested in figures.

**Hon. Member:** But you said that.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please.

**Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** I think that people who know me on a close personal basis will know that I am not interested in figures. *[Laughter]* Some of the best figures I have seen around me, Mr. Speaker, and in Trinidad and Tobago too. *[Interruption]* So when I said—the figures are not mine, that is taking it to the extreme. I never said the figures are not mine, I never said that I will not accept responsibility for the figures. I said I do not sit and calculate figures, I do not create figures, and I do not manipulate figures.

This morning I heard the Opposition Leader saying that the Central Statistical Office has been moved from the Prime Minister’s Office to the Ministry of Finance. That is wrong. He continues to have wrong information. He continues to be devoted to misleading the people of Trinidad and Tobago, but I am telling you that the Central Statistical Office is in the Ministry of Planning and Development. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** I beg the Member for San Fernando East, the Member for Diego Martin West, and the Member for Diego Martin East, please do not use this opportunity for what you are doing. I ask you please, cool it.

**1.45 p.m.**

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** Mr. Speaker, what I have said in the past is, that whilst the figures are important, a budget is not about numbers or figures; a budget is about the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]. So why are they trying to misrepresent what I have said? Is it because the thread that runs through every one of the five budgets that I have presented clearly put people on the centre stage?

Let me just mention something that was recently given to me dated October 14, 1999. This is from a gentleman who is the special adviser to the administrator and architect of the *Human Development Report*, a report that has been used widely in Trinidad and Tobago and published by the United Nations Development Programme for sustainable human development. He said:

“To the best of my knowledge, this is a first—the first time a national budget has been specifically described as a blueprint for human development in line with what we have been advocating over the years in UNDP’s Human Development Reports.”

Mr. Speaker, a first. [*Desk thumping*]. Not a first in Trinidad and Tobago but a first in the world as far as the United Nations Development Programme is aware.

“The budget is presented in a way which makes it possible to relate its human goals to the human challenges facing Trinidad and Tobago at present...the Government can build on the past achievements and further advance and monitor progress towards sustainable human development for all. Thus, the already impressive standing of Trinidad and Tobago worldwide both, in terms of the overall human development index (HDI) as well as in terms of the human poverty index (HPI) will undoubtedly climb even higher.”

Mr. Speaker, this is not my making. [*Desk thumping*] How do you dispute these facts?

Yesterday, the honourable Minister of Planning and Development started to read some excerpts from the bulletin of the Central Statistical Office, which today is a public document. It is a document that is published on a regular basis. The Central Statistical Office has been charged with the responsibilities of providing the statistics for Trinidad and Tobago for many years and for many administrations. I think it is unfair, for those on the other side to suddenly say that the Central Statistical Office is lacking in integrity.

Mr. Speaker, in the *Guardian* newspaper dated Tuesday October 19, 1999, the Acting Director of the Central Statistical Office, Mr. Matthew Ramsaroop—and

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. B. KUEI TUNG]

Wednesday, October 20, 1999

let me declare that I have no idea what the gentleman looks like and I have never spoken to him in my life. I do not understand how the people on the other side could say that I am busy trying to control and manipulate and so on. I do not even know the gentlemen. The article states:

“Acting Director of the Central Statistical Office (CSO) Matthew Ramsaroop yesterday defended the integrity of his agency and the method by which it collects data for the national accounts.

‘Definitely not!’ is how Ramsaroop responded to charges by Opposition Leader Patrick Manning that the Government was manipulating the CSO figures.”

Today, the Central Statistical Office has put out its bulletin, dated Volume 16, No. 59 dated September, 1999. Mr. Speaker, there are those on that side who aspire to be in Government, and what they do is that they read numbers so badly that they fail to recognize small print. There is a little print that explains the numbers that were on Appendix 9 that the Leader of the Opposition made such heavy weather of. He said that the *Review of the Economy 1998—1999* says in 1999p. There was 1992—1997 actual numbers; 1998r, which meant they were revised and 1999 had a ‘p’, but he chose to ignore the ‘p’ which meant:

1. That it was provisional, and
2. They were population figures of mid-year estimates. They were labour force and employment data related to the period and it clearly states October, 1998 to March, 1999.

It was there for everyone to see. I did not put in my numbers and documents. I put in public documents which were published by the Ministry of finance. But they have not taken the pains to read their documents carefully. They were anxious. As a matter of fact, they said that they wanted to debate the budget the same day. We give them a week and they still come unprepared. I do not know what more we can do. [*Desk thumping*].

Mr. Speaker, I am quoting now from the Central Statistical Office bulletin from the Ministry of Planning and Development Central Statistical Office Volume 16, No. 59 and it says:

“For the second consecutive quarter of 1999 the total Labour Force of Trinidad and Tobago remained at a constant level...The number of persons with jobs increased by approximately thirteen thousand (13,000) from four hundred and eighty five thousand (485,000) in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter, 1999 to four hundred and ninety eight thousand (498,000) in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter, 1999, or by 2.7%.”

It goes on to say lower down:

“Owing to the significant decline in the ‘Total unemployed’ component of the Labour Force and, simultaneously, the significant increase in the ‘Persons with job’ component of the Labour Force, total unemployed as a percentage of the total Labour Force (the unemployment rate) declined from 14.1% in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter, 1999 to 11.7% in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter, 1999.”

**Mr. Valley:** I just want to ask one question. Mr. Minister a while ago you stated that the provisional figure as at March was 14.6 per cent, according to the same Central Statistical Office report. You have just quoted the same Central Statistical Office report as stating that there was a decline from 14.1 to 11.7. Could you tell me how it moved from 14.6 to 14.1?

**Mr. Manning:** Go on let me hear.

**Hon B. Kuei Tung:** It is quite easy. Again, they have great difficulty in understanding numbers. I told them that they would have to wait until 2050 before they are fully prepared to take over this Minister of Finance work. *[Laughter]* I may have to give them even more of that.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot succeed at everything that I do. The simple answer to that is, as I said, the *Review of the Economy* showed estimates. The Central Statistical Office was given the actual figures as at the end of the first quarter. There is a big difference between a projection and an actual figure. Even the man in the street understands that there is a big difference between doing a provisional and giving an estimate as to what it will end up at one quarter and the actual. The Deputy Director of the Central Statistical Office is quoting actual numbers as at the end of the first quarter, and the actual numbers at the end of the second quarter.

Mr. Speaker, so you see, they would seek to take away from what we have achieved because they know that they cannot argue with these numbers. What they seek to do is not to say that things are going well. Not once has the Leader of the Opposition attempted to say that things are going well. The people of Trinidad and Tobago are the ones who are feeling the benefit of that. So what we want to do therefore—I have said that in the budget and I am quoting again:

- “1. ensure the sustainability of the growth process,
2. promote a greater diversification of the economic base,
3. establish a dynamic and energetic business climate conducive to both local and foreign investment,

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. B. KUEI TUNG]

*Wednesday, October 20, 1999*

4. keep inflation to a minimum and under control,
5. create employment opportunities,
6. increase the country's foreign reserves to better allow us to cope with unforeseen events, and
7. maintain the stability of the exchange rate."

Mr. Speaker, that is what the budget was about when I announced it. So you see, from every quarter and everywhere, we have seen the kind of congratulations that have been offered to the Government, with respect to the reaction that we got from the budget. One that I thought that was particularly interesting was written in the *Express* on Saturday, October 9, 1999, one day after the budget was announced.

I say this because I, myself, could not have captured it better. The said headline says: "Steady as he goes. The article states:

"HE did not go up, he did not go down.

Finance Minister Brian Kuei Tung adopted a steady as he goes approach for Budget 2000.

No new taxes.

No increases in taxes.

No VAT increase.

No rise in licences, fees, duties.

Kuei Tung said he had sought to protect the longterm interests of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And the budget was for the man in the street and the grandmother at home."

That is one person's comment on the budget which, as you know, as I said, had gone a long way in meeting the aspirations of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

**1.55 p.m.**

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, this budget debate is a sort of anticlimax. I say it is a sort of anticlimax because the others on the other side really did not make a case for anything to which I could have responded. They instead agreed that the budget was a good budget. They said so literally by the fact that they were not able to criticize any element of the budget in a constructive way. Instead, we heard about figures and I am sure that now I have been able to put to rest the fact—



**Mr. Panday:** The man in dark shades.

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** But those are things, Mr. Speaker, we have been hearing for the last five years. For every budget there was the same criticism. Four years ago we heard the same things. Three years ago we heard the same comments. Two years ago we heard the same comment and so it is. We get the same tired contributions being made by that side whilst, in the meantime, the people of Trinidad and Tobago are recognizing the efforts that this Government is making towards uplifting the standard, as well as increasing the quality of life of the average Trinidadian and Tobagonian.

I said in my budget, and I would like to repeat this, because I think this clearly sums up how we feel about it. We said that our budget is about:

- “1. Addressing the crime situation in order to bring a greater sense of security and safety to our citizens.”

We said that our budget was:

- “2. Meeting the health care requirements of the nation.”

We said that the budget was:

- “3. Eliminating the waiting list for specialist surgical procedures for our children and senior citizens.”

We said it was:

- “4. Making more prescription drugs available at our health institutions.”

Mr. Speaker, clearly the people have bought in, and so too have Members on that side, as to what we are doing with respect to our budgets. It is a pity that this budget has got such wide acceptance, the Opposition has felt they have little or nothing to say. As a matter of fact, my good colleague, the Member for Diego Martin Central, failed to make an appearance. [*Desk thumping*] You have a budding Minister of Finance who has absolutely nothing to say on a budget. That must be, in itself, the best—[*Interruption*] But the Opposition Leader took two hours to respond to nothing. So how could we have a situation where the Minister of Finance in waiting has absolutely nothing to say about a budget? [*Interruption*]

So that, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion let me begin—

#### ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

**The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Speaker, before the hon. Minister moves the second reading of the Bill, may I request that

*Arrangement of Business*  
[HON. R. L. MAHARAJ]

*Wednesday, October 20, 1999*

the statement of the hon. Prime Minister be taken at this stage in relation to what we had—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, could we please have the statement after the second reading of the Bill?

**Mr. Panday:** No.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, what has happened is that with item J on the Order Paper, which is “Statements by Ministers”, there was agreement with respect to that being deferred to a later stage of the proceedings. If there is no agreement as to the stage at which it should be taken, which the Government suggests is now, I am prepared to put it to the vote. So that, if both gentlemen would care to go behind the Chair, I am quite prepared to wait for you. Please consult and let me know.

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, I just wanted—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** No, no, no, the whole point is that this is not an opportunity for debate.

[*Discussion behind the Chair*]

**Mr. Speaker:** There is no agreement?

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, this is—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** No, no, no, one second, please. If there is no agreement I will put it to the vote.

*Question put.*

*The House divided:*           Ayes 19           Noes 14

**AYES**

Maharaj, Hon. R. L.

[*Interruption*]

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

**AYES**

Maharaj, Hon. R. L.

Panday, Hon. B.

Persad-Bissessar, Hon. K.

Lasse, Dr. The Hon. V.

Humphrey, Hon. J.  
Sudama, Hon. T.  
Maraj, Hon. R.  
Rafeeq, Dr. The Hon. H.  
Khan, Dr. F.  
Assam, Hon. M.  
Job, Dr. The Hon. M.  
Singh, Hon. G.  
Nanan, Dr. The Hon. A.  
Partap, Hon. H.  
Mohammed, Dr. R.  
Singh, Hon. D.  
Ramsaran, Hon. M.  
Sharma, C.  
Ali, R.  
**NOES**  
Valley, K.  
Manning, P.  
Rowley, Dr. K.  
Imbert, C.  
Robinson-Regis, Mrs. C.  
Narine, J.  
Hart, E.  
Bereaux, H.  
Joseph, M.  
Sinanan, B.  
Boynes, R.

Hinds, F.

Williams, E.

Nicholson, Miss. P.

[*Interruptions*]

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

*Question agreed to.*

#### CABINET RESHUFFLE

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Basdeo Panday):** Mr. Speaker, we have come almost to the end of the budget debate on the budget for the year 1999/2000, possibly the last budget of this Government. Much has been said during the budget debate, but there is one comment on this budget made by more than one organization which, I think, is not only relevant but crucial and critical and that is the question of implementation. For example, although there had been a great improvement in the implementation of the planned investment, particularly the PSIP, over that which was achieved by the former regime, I am convinced we can do better. So, Mr. Speaker, in addition to the revenue shortfall, one of the major constraints to implementation has been the bureaucratic bottlenecks in a system that is patently outdated. Despite the best efforts of some of our public servants they remain shackled by a dysfunctional system.

Something has to be done about the irrelevant bureaucracy, the archaic system of procurement, the antiquated tendering procedures and the vexed question of human resource management in the Public Service, the Teaching Service and the Police Service. I am conscious of the fact that to give effect to a meaningful overhaul of the system would require constitutional changes and, at the present time, we do not have the required majority to effect such changes. That time will, of course, come. We expect to have that majority in this House after the next elections. [*Desk thumping*] However, in the meantime one must do something to speed up implementation of our plans and programmes. Since I cannot change the bureaucracy I intend to pierce it and penetrate it. If I cannot remove the bureaucratic constraints then I must go over it and under it and through it and around it. [*Desk thumping*]

In order to achieve this I intend to appoint Mr. Lindsay Gillette, a well-known businessman from the private sector, as Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister with Cabinet rank, responsible for such functions as the Prime Minister may assign to him from time to time. [*Desk thumping*] In other words, Mr.

Speaker, the Hon. Lindsay Gillette will be a troubleshooter, moving from Ministry to Ministry, dynamiting the log-jams, breaking the bottlenecks, unlocking the floodgates and so freeing up the system on a case-by-case basis. Whenever I discover that a project is stalled for one reason or another, Minister Gillette will be sent to investigate and to take such steps as are necessary to get things rolling again.

I intend also to make the following changes in the Cabinet. The Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar will assume the portfolio of Minister of Education. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*]

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

**Hon. B. Panday:** Consequently, the Ministry of Legal Affairs will revert to the Attorney General. [*Desk thumping*] Dr. The Hon. Adesh Nanan becomes the new Minister of Tourism. [*Desk thumping*] The Hon. Trevor Sudama becomes the new Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. [*Desk thumping*] Dr. The Hon. Reeza Mohammed assumes responsibility for an enhanced and expanded Ministry of the Environment. [*Desk thumping*]

In addition to his portfolio as Minister of Finance, the Hon. Brian Kuei Tung will assume responsibility for the Ministry of Planning and Development. [*Desk thumping*] Consequently, Dr. Vincent Lasse, who is already Minister in the Ministry of Planning and Development is elevated to Cabinet rank. [*Desk thumping*] In addition to his functions as Minister for Tobago Affairs, Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job assumes responsibility as Minister in the Ministry of Finance. [*Desk thumping*] The Ministry of Information and Communication moves to the office of the Prime Minister, so that Dr. The Hon. Rupert Griffith can concentrate on the critical areas of training and distance learning. Sen. the Hon. Vimala Tota-Maharaj will be appointed Minister in the Ministry of Health. [*Desk thumping*]

The purpose and intent of these changes are to effect greater and faster delivery of goods and services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, whose purpose we serve. It follows, therefore, that further changes will be made as and when necessary. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**2.10 p.m.**

**APPROPRIATION BILL  
(BUDGET)**

**Sen. The Hon. B. Kuei Tung:** Mr. Speaker, let me conclude by giving my thanks to the people of Trinidad and Tobago for all the input in helping me to

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. B. KUEI TUNG]

*Wednesday, October 20, 1999*

formulate the budgets, in general, but, in particular, I would like to extend my very sincere thanks to the many public servants who have assisted me, particularly those in the Ministry of Finance.

With these very few words, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the second time.*

**The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Brian Kuei Tung):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now resolve itself into Finance Committee to consider the Bill clause by clause, as well as the Estimates.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, this House shall now go into Committee, but before we do this, I wish to announce that the Standing Orders provide that when the House goes into Finance Committee, it is absolutely essential that the public gallery be cleared. Therefore, I ask that the gallery be cleared and you remain out until such time as that is through. The House shall now go into Finance Committee.

**2.12 p.m.:** *House resolved itself into Finance Committee.*

**2.28 p.m.:** *House resumed.*

*Bill reported, without amendment, read the third time and passed.*

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now stand adjourned to Friday, October 29, 1999 at 1.30 p.m. On that day, the Government intends to debate item Nos. 3 and 4 on the Order Paper being an Act to amend the Environmental Management Act, and a Bill entitled an Act to provide for the regulating and keeping of dangerous dogs which present a serious danger to the public.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 2.30 p.m.*