

*Leave of Absence**Friday, January 21, 2000***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, January 21, 2000*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to advise that I have received communication from two Members of this honourable House who have asked to be excused from today's sitting. These are the Member for Arouca South who has asked to be excused from today's sitting, and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West who has asked to be excused up to February 12, 2000. The leave of absence which they both seek has been granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Accounts and Financial Statements of the Programme of Institutional Strengthening of the Women's Affairs Division of the Ministry of Culture and Gender Affairs for the year ended December 31, 1995 as required by Non-Technical Cooperation Agreement ATN/SF-4348-TT between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Inter-American Development Bank. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj)*]

To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

2. The Copyright (Customs) Regulations, 2000. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
3. The Fifty-Seventh Report of the Salaries Review Commission of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT**Presentation**

The Minister of Tobago Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of Finance Planning and Development and Ag. Minister of Finance (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the Second Report of the 1999/2000 session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the expenditure from the Public Revenue which were not included in the Annual Estimates 1998/1999.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, there are three questions by the hon. Member for Diego Martin West. I have explained to him the reasons the questions could not be answered today and he has kindly agreed, subject to the approval of the House and yourself, for the answers to these questions to be given in two weeks' time.

Question put and agreed to.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

**Establishment of Financial Rules
(Tobago House of Assembly)**

- 11.** (a) Does the Government of Trinidad and Tobago intend to comply with the requirements of the THA Act No. 40 of 1996 and establish Financial Rules for the Tobago House of Assembly?
- (b) If the answer is in the affirmative, would the Minister indicate how soon action will be taken to effect these regulations to ensure that public funds are properly protected in Tobago? [*Dr. Keith Rowley*]

**Caroni (1975) Limited
(Total Acreage of Lands)**

- 12.** (a) Could the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources state the total acreage of lands currently owned by Caroni (1975) Ltd.?
- (b) Could the Minister also indicate the total acreage under cane cultivation for:
- (i) mechanical harvesting;
- (ii) non-mechanical harvesting?
- (c) Could the Minister further state the total acreage utilized for various purposes other than cane cultivation? [*Dr. Keith Rowley*]

Ferry Service between Trinidad and Tobago

- 13.** (a) Is the Minister of Works and Transport aware that the present cargo ferry service between Trinidad and Tobago is quite inadequate?
- (b) Could the Minister state whether the Government is negotiating or contemplating entering into any arrangement for any private entrepreneur to supply this service?

- (c) If the answer to (b) is in the affirmative, could the Minister state what procedures are in place or are intended to ensure transparency in the selection of a suitable private ferry service operator? [Dr. Keith Rowley]

Questions, by leave, deferred.

FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION 1998/1999) BILL

Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum of the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 1998/1999. [*The Minister of Finance, Planning and Development*]; read the first time.

Motion made, That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings. [Dr. The Hon. M. Job]

Question put and agreed to.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

(Adoption)

The Minister of Tobago Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of Finance Planning and Development and Ag. Minister of Finance (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following motion standing in my name.

BE IT RESOLVED that this House adopt the Second Report of the 1999/2000 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the expenditure from the Public Revenue which were not included in the Annual Estimates 1998/1999.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met on Wednesday, January 19, 2000 and agreed to a number of proposals relating to the 1998/1999 accounts.

These proposals included the write-off of overpayment of salary in the sum of \$11,070.97 under the Ministry of National Security and the variation of the 1998/1999 appropriation in the sum of \$204,889,158 under a number of Heads of Expenditure.

During the Finance Committee, various issues were raised by Members. The Chairman responded during the meeting to some of the issues raised while he promised to supply responses to others. I am pleased to report that the promised responses have been circulated to all Members.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance Committee approved the write-off of the overpayment of salary in the sum of \$11,070.97 under the Ministry of National

Security and the variation of the 1998/1999 appropriation in the sum of \$204,889,158 to bring to account the value of various non-cash mechanisms utilized by public sector employees in order to off-set arrears owed to them by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

The total value of the mechanisms accessed in 1999 which are to be brought to account is \$522,244,000. The amount available in the 1998/1999 Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure to bring to account the value of these mechanisms is \$317,354,842 which comprises the original allocation of \$300,000,000 and a virement of the sum of \$17,354,842.

Given the nature of the transaction and the options, including non-cash mechanisms, which were available to the public sector employees it was not possible to make an accurate assessment of the value of bonds that would be issued in 1998/1999.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that Finance Committee approved the transfer of the difference in the sum of \$204,889,158 as follows:

Heads of Expenditure	Increase \$	Decrease \$
18:Ministry of Finance	204,889,158	—
03:Judiciary	—	4,579,158
13:Office of the Prime Minister	—	1,200,000
20:Pensions and Gratuities	—	16,000,000
22:Ministry of National Security	—	11,382,000
25:Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources	—	20,820,000
26:Ministry of Education	—	35,000,000
28:Ministry of Health	—	17,805,000
36:Ministry of Housing and Settlements	—	7,331,000
42:Ministry of Local Government	—	3,435,000
43:Ministry of Works and Transport	—	46,903,000

Heads of Expenditure	Increase	Decrease
44:Ministry of Public Utilities	—	23,234,000
50:Ministry of Tourism	—	9,566,000
53:Ministry of Information, Communications, Training and Distance Learning	—	7,634,000
TOTAL	204,889,158	204,889,158

The explanations for the significant savings are as follows:

Head 03: Judiciary—\$4,579,158: The sum of \$5 million was provided in the 1998/1999 Development Programme Estimates in respect of the Judicial Sector Reform Programme to be financed by the World Bank.

The delays in finalizing the scope of the project resulted in the delays of the processing of the loan. As a consequence the loans funds were not available for the financing of the project.

Head 13: Office of the Prime Minister—\$1,200,000: Savings were realized, as the provision for the payment of increments was more than adequate to meet payment to all eligible employees.

Head 20: Pensions and Gratuities—\$16,000,000: By first supplementary general warrant dated 1999 August 17, pensions and gratuities were increased by \$88,077,833. However, this additional sum was in excess of the obligations and savings in excess of \$16,000,000 were realized.

Head 22: Ministry of National Security—\$11,382,000: The provisions for the payment of Government's contributions to NIS and increments were more than were required to meet the commitments of the Ministry.

Head 25: Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources—\$20,820,000 Recurrent Estimates—Personal Expenditure \$6,875,000: Savings were realized, as the provision for the payment of increments was more than sufficient to meet amounts due to eligible employees, and as a result of the non-filling of vacant positions.

Development Programme Estimates National Resources and Environment Management Programme, \$1,200,000: This programme was established to finalize preparations for National Parks and Watershed Management Programme.

A Project Implementation Unit was established and a project document prepared for loan appraisal pending the enactment of the relevant legislation.

Savings were realized as the staff for the project only came on board in June of 1999 and the required legislation was not passed.

1.45 p.m.

Agriculture Sector Technical Assistance Programme \$9,945,000: The overall objective of this programme is the preparation and finalization of the Agricultural Sector Reform Programme. A contract was awarded for sector policies and public administration reform and negotiations are ongoing for the award of contracts for the other components of the programme. As a result of the delay in the award of contracts, expenditure has not been significant and savings have, therefore, been realized.

Agricultural Sector Investment Programme \$2,800,000: The start-up of the programme was delayed, as negotiations between Government and the Inter-American Development Bank have not been completed. As a consequence, the above savings of \$2,800,000 were realized.

Head 26: Ministry of Education \$35,000,000: Funds were provided in the 1998—1999 Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the establishment of computer-aided instructional management systems in all primary schools. A survey of 486 primary schools was conducted and contracts were awarded for the provision of computers in 35 schools. Savings were realized as a result of the delay in the award of these contracts.

Head 27: Ministry of Health \$17,805,000: The provision for the payment of increments was more than sufficient to meet amounts due to all eligible employees and, therefore, there were savings to the tune of \$17,805,000.

Head 36: Ministry of Housing and Settlements. Brothers Garth Housing Development \$3,962,000: Savings were realized due to the delays in pre-construction activities including the pre-qualification procedures and the preparation of tender documents for the commencement of construction of the Brothers Garth Housing Development.

Savings were realized due to the delay in the award of contracts concerning the computerization of the National Housing Authority's operating systems to the tune of \$1 million.

Strengthening of Land Administration—Land Tenure Rationalization \$2,300,000: This project relates to the land strengthening of the Lands and

Surveys Division. The program one of institutional strengthening involved the award of a number of consultancy contracts. Savings were realized due to the delay in the award of contracts.

Head 42: Ministry of Local Government. Recurrent Estimates—Personnel Expenditure \$1,086,000: The provision for the payment of increments was more than sufficient to meet amounts due to all eligible employees, which accounts for this saving.

Development Programme Estimates—Public Buildings \$2,349,000: Savings were realized, as the pre-construction activities were not completed to fully implement the upgrade to the main building at Kent House.

Head 43: Ministry of Works and Transport: Recurrent Estimates—Personnel Expenditure \$8,108,000: Savings were realized, as the provision for the payment of increments was more than sufficient to meet amounts due to eligible employees.

Development Programme Estimates—Roads Rehabilitation Programme \$38,795,000: This programme consists of the reconstruction of the Solomon Hochoy Highway. A contract for the civil works was awarded to the Spanish firm of Comylsa Lain. Government terminated the contract in May, 1999 due to the lack of progress in the implementation of the project. A new contractor is to be engaged. Savings were realized due to the delay in the implementation of the project.

Head 44: Ministry of Public Utilities. Recurrent Estimates—Personnel Expenditure \$4,357,000: Savings were realized, as the provision for the payment of increment was more than sufficient to meet amounts due to all eligible employees.

Development Programme Estimates—Water Resources Management Strategy \$3,311,000: This project formed part of the World Bank funded Water Sector Institutional Strengthening Project. During the fiscal year the project was completed. Savings were realized as the provision was in excess of requirements.

Postal Sector Reform Project \$12,166,000: The project is funded by the World Bank and the loan agreement was only signed in June, 1999. Savings were realized, as a level of expenditure was less than anticipated due to the late start of the project.

Water Supply and Sewage Rehabilitation project \$3,400,000: Savings were realized, as the proposed loan from the World Bank did not materialise.

Head 50: Ministry of Tourism \$9,566,000. Tourism Action Programme \$5,256,000: This programme is partially funded by the Inter-American Development Bank and provided for a feasibility study for a culture theme park, the land use planning study for the North Coast, and tourism related projects. The delay in the award of contracts for the studies resulted in savings during the fiscal year.

Tourism Development Support Programme \$4,310,000: This programme provides for the development of community-based tourism. Savings were realized due to the delay in the implementation of the projects.

Head 53: Ministry of Information, Communications, Training and Distance Learning \$7,634,000. Recurrent Estimates—Personnel Expenditure \$1,726,000: The provision for the payment of increments was more than sufficient to meet amounts due to all eligible employees.

Development Programme Estimates—Educational Services \$1,000,000: Given the status of the project, no funds were released for the purchase of books for the National Library, thus causing the savings of \$1 million.

Y2K Compliance \$3,908,000: Savings were realized due to the delay in the award of contracts for the acquisition of computer hardware and software.

Public Buildings \$1,000,000: Savings were realized as the construction of the Chaguanas Library was delayed pending the securing of accommodation for the Post Office and the Insect Vector Divisions, which occupied office accommodation at that location.

Transfer of funds between Sub-Heads under the same Head of Expenditure: Mr. Speaker, in addition, Finance Committee noted the transfers of funds between sub-heads under the same head of expenditure which were approved by the Minister of Finance. You will recall that with effect from August 1, 1988, Cabinet delegated its authority to approve the transfers between sub-heads to the Minister of Finance when it agreed, inter-alia, as follows:

Transfers of funds:

Request for transfer of funds between separate sub-heads under the same head of expenditure should no longer be submitted to the Cabinet but can be decided by the Minister of Finance on the advice of the Budget Division.

Based on this authority, the Minister of Finance approved the transfer of funds in the sum of \$133,224,029 between sub-heads under the same head of expenditure.

It should be noted that transfers approved by the Minister of Finance are based on notes submitted by the respective Ministers requesting transfers between sub-heads. These transfers are requested to reflect the change in circumstances in ministries and departments and a consequential re-ordering of priorities. Explanations as to the reasons for the transfers have been provided to the Members of this honourable House.

In conclusion, I wish to re-emphasize that the variations in the allocation of Heads of Expenditure would not increase in the 1998—1999 Appropriation, which has already been approved by Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a brief intervention on this matter for two reasons: I am disappointed that a couple of specific answers which were requested from the Government were not forthcoming in the Minister's written presentation. I just want the House to note what this ritual means because, this exercise which we go through every year is probably the best litmus test, which will allow us to determine whether, in fact, the appropriations of Parliament are being utilized in a way to bring about change.

1.55 p.m.

At the time when the national budget is presented and allocations are made for a variety of purposes, there is usually jubilation from some quarters, commendation from some quarters and disappointment from some quarters. However, when one looks at a listing like this and sees \$204 million being vired from areas where they were meant to be spent for specific purposes and spending for those purposes was not realized on what is, in effect, a static part of the bureaucracy, one is made to understand right there, Mr. Speaker, that we have not brought about the kind of change that we thought we would have brought about when the budget was presented. Let me explain, Mr. Speaker.

Very early in the life of this Government the Prime Minister in this House made an intervention and drew to the attention of the national community the fact that an inordinate amount of Government's revenue was being used up by the public service and he and his Government would do something about that. That was change that was promised by this Government. There was a certain amount of congratulation meted out to the Government for wanting to tackle that, Mr. Speaker. However, this singular instance today points out not only has the

consumption by the public service not been curtailed in any way, but we are seeing, for a variety of good reasons, that the public service is, in fact, costing us more.

This is \$204 million specifically and solely for payment to the public service. That would not have been a problem, Mr. Speaker, if the Government had used its increased unbudgeted revenues to pay the public service, because the economic circumstances, especially the price of oil and so forth, have been favourable in recent times and there have been unbudgeted revenues coming to the Government. Instead, what we are seeing here is that, in order to meet the demands of the public service on this specific item, the Government has available to it, and is taking, funds from other areas which it is using to pay this unbudgeted item or the excess above what it had budgeted.

What that means is that we have the same public service, yes, doing the same thing, yes, but if we look at the Judiciary we would see the change we wanted to make in that area of the public service under the heading of strengthening of the institution, that is where the mundane was going to be changed to something else. There were things that had to be done and things noted that, if done, would improve the functioning of that division. That is where we did not get action. The moneys that were earmarked to be spent to improve that area were not spent, those funds are now called savings and are being used to fund the static public service.

Mr. Speaker, I only hope that the reason this was not done has nothing to do with the fight between the Attorney General and the judicial arm of the state. I have read in the newspapers from competent authorities that there are difficulties with respect to accessing funds. I hope that the fact that these funds were not expended, as budgeted and approved by Parliament, is not as a result of that debate that is taking place with respect to the threat to the Judiciary. I say no more on that, Mr. Speaker, for the moment.

Another thing is, I had specifically asked the Government to tell us today, because they could not tell us on Wednesday, what is the situation with respect to the tardiness of the Government in hiring new police officers. Last Wednesday when we discussed this matter all elements of the Government expressed surprise at the statement that new police recruits had not been taken into the barracks for some time. I was surprised that the Government was surprised at that because I would have thought that a Government that claims to have crime and the management of the crime situation and the support of the police service, such a

Government would have had recruitment of policemen and replacement of retiring officers high up on its priority list. Yet, I am surprised that the Government is surprised that someone is saying to the Government, “What has happened to the recruitment of young police officers?” However, I see in this Bill \$11 million being called savings and being used to fund this item of public service payment.

Now, I can take it at face value, Mr. Speaker, as said by the Minister, that this had to do with overbudgeting for increments. With all due respect, when I listened to what the Minister has said about the so-called savings in agriculture, I am wondering if the same thing applies to national security. When the Minister comes here and says that in agriculture, which has shown a significant decline in recent times, we have moneys approved by the Parliament for expansion in our agricultural effort and we are now talking about \$20.8 million of available but unexpended sums—not being spent and to take the Minister’s word, because negotiations with the IDB have not been complete—Mr. Speaker I want to challenge that statement.

One does not have money available to one from the IDB before negotiations. That is a Government sleight-of-hand. It sounds good. It is not true. Until one completes negotiations with the international agencies one has no funds coming. On this specific situation, Mr. Speaker, these funds have been available to the Government since July of 1996. The reason the Government has not been able to draw down the funds available so as to spend these matching counterpart funds is not because of any negotiations with international agencies, it is because the Government has not been able to meet the conditionalities of the agency, to which the Government agreed, when the negotiations took place way back then.

It is, therefore, quite misleading for the Minister to give the impression that some negotiations are taking place and we have these funds and, as a result of these negotiations not being concluded, the funds could not have been expended. The real story is that the Government has drawn down the first tranche in 1996 and there are conditionalities, especially to do with Caroni (1975) Limited, which the Government has resolutely refused to comply with. As a result of that, the Government cannot continue to draw down the remaining funds from the bank, therefore the budgeted counterpart funds could not be matched and, therefore, they are now being called savings. This is not a saving, Mr. Speaker. It is a flag raised for incompetence. [*Desk thumping*] This \$20 million that should have been spent in the agricultural sector in a year approved by Parliament to be spent for a

Finance Committee Report
[DR. ROWLEY]

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specific purpose, the Government has not been able to spend because the Government has not met specific conditionalities.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the Schedule you will see a decrease of \$875,000.00 under Head 8 going to the Subhead "Minor Equipment Purchases" at the Elections and Boundaries Commission. I am wondering because many persons have reported to me and my colleagues that they are having tremendous difficulty in getting their new ID cards. Even after they have been advised by the commission that their cards are to be changed at a particular date, they comply with the request of the commission and they are not able to get their ID cards.

In recent times they have been told that there is some problem with the equipment. I do not know if it has to do with this minor equipment purchase but, if it does, I am wondering whether, in fact, we have left the commission to wait until savings are made from personnel expenditure to treat with minor equipment purchases before supplying the electorate with the quality of service that they ought to receive at an institution like the Elections and Boundaries Commission. I fear that when the election is called there is going to be confusion because many persons who should have had their new ID cards would not have had those cards, through no fault of their own.

What is worse, Mr. Speaker, we have been saying in and out of this House that this Government intends to tamper with the free and fair electoral process. As we compare the electoral lists between two reportings, in one constituency we have seen an increase of 3,000 names which we are checking and questioning. We expect the commission to check those names thoroughly because this Government, as part of its strategy, is moving people from areas where they believe they are secure to areas where they think they can become secure. The only way the commission can check these things is to have the required staffing to check persons, the *bona fide* registration, to make sure that people live where they say they live.

I am concerned when I see for the commission, under personnel expenditure, a reduction of almost \$1 million. Funds that should be spent on personnel to check these names and to check these lists to make sure that our electoral process is not undermined by this Government, I am seeing that being called savings and being shifted to minor equipment purchase. I am concerned about that, Mr. Speaker. I know that the Government is well-heeled with funds. We cannot match the Government and its supporters in funds. I understand that they made a downpayment to Carville of \$1.2 million to create a scandal of some sort that will

affect the PNM. We are waiting to see that one. However, we are concerned about public expenditure where the commission has to act as a public agency. *[Interruption]* Your image? You will need \$1.2 billion to change your image.

Mr. Speaker: Order please, order!

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, another problem I have is that every Government Ministry and department has personnel whose duty it is to monitor the flow of funds continuously. I fail to accept that it is only at the end of the year, when we are closing the accounts, that the Government is seeing that of the \$50 million earmarked for computers in schools, only \$15 million could have been spent. So only at the end of the year when its accounts have been closed does the Government realize that it has \$35 million which had been earmarked for computers, now called savings, and which now can be used to make up this \$204 million.

Mr. Speaker, halfway through the year or even three-quarters of the way through the year the Government would have seen that it would not be able to spend this money. One of the most important reasons why this \$35 million could not have been spent is not because computers were not available. The two main reasons are, one, many schools were not sufficiently secure to receive computers. They had no secure rooms to receive computers. Worse, in some of the schools there was no person who was properly trained in computers to transfer that knowledge to students and we said so in the budget debate. We said that you should make provision to improve computer literacy among the teachers and you should also, as a matter of course, in parallel, make provision for creating secure computer rooms in schools.

2.10 p.m.

All they did was to budget for the computer because all they were concerned about was giving the illusion that they were providing computers. So, we had \$50 million, a lot of cheers and pats on the back. We are becoming computer literate! Y2K compliant! And they are spending \$15 million out of \$50 million and they come here and talk about savings. This is not savings! This is bad management! Bad planning! *[Desk thumping]*

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, I say nothing about the Ministry of Health because the very idea of a \$17 million reduction from the Ministry of Health is a matter of life and death. With all due respect to my friend from Caroni Central, for whom I have tremendous regard, whenever I see 17 cents reduced from the Ministry of Health for whatever reason, I am concerned, because we are in such a situation

with health that I am unimpressed by a one-day tour of the Minister of Health and the Minister of Finance who go into the institutions and suddenly discover that nurses had a problem.

Mr. Speaker, I do not have time to even begin to tell you what is happening at Mt. Hope because that is a whole debate by itself. I just want to alert you that Mt. Hope Medical Hospital is virtually limping along from day-to-day, and I suspect that the Government has some ulterior motive either to run Mt. Hope down and give it to its friends in the private sector where it will become operative to its full potential or to operate Mt. Hope as just another General Hospital. That is a fact. Anybody who does not believe me, find out what is going on at Mt. Hope. Do not listen to anybody in the Government.

Mt. Hope was meant to provide the nation with a level of health service to which we aspire. Mr. Speaker, what is going on there now, how it is being funded, how it is being managed, some of the stories are quite disturbing. There are people in Mt. Hope, nobody knows the rationale for the various hirings and payments being made to people. The question of the CEO is a problem for the doctors working there. Find out who is the CEO. Find out how he functions. Find out if that is the best arrangement for Mt. Hope. Find out how patients are being treated there. Find out what services are being provided there. Find out how many pieces of expensive equipment to provide basic health support are nonfunctional at Mt. Hope! If one gets the facts, one would be scandalized, but the facade is there and the Government goes merrily along and tells us about \$17 million in savings from the Ministry of Health, which is now being used to fund a shortfall to pay public servants a \$204 million entitlement.

The only good news I see in here is a reduction of \$345 million in Local Government because that could easily have been stolen in one night. *[Laughter]* The fact that it was not stolen, we should say thank God for small mercies. The Ministry of Local Government, in which the Unemployment Relief Programme resides, is an area of lawlessness, theft and corruption which this country can ill-afford, and if they have done us the small mercy of not removing the \$3.4 million, I say thank you for that, but what about the rest?

The granddaddy of it all is the Ministry of Works and Transport. My friend from Tobago East very glibly reads the public servants' brief telling us that with respect to Comlysa Lain, the contract was terminated and, as a result of that termination, no new contract was awarded. So, the \$46 million that should have been spent, we now have as savings.

Mr. Speaker, my friend from Naparima lives in south. He passed there for two years along with the Members for San Fernando West and San Fernando East. I passed there and saw the monumental incompetence that passed for that construction project on the Solomon Hochoy Highway. It was the single largest road construction project embarked upon under this Government, and it has been a singular disaster! [*Desk thumping*] Not only was the work badly done resulting in the grant-to-date fund being threatened to be withdrawn; the work had to be done over.

Right now, the little piece that has been done is an automatic "jooking" board. As one drives down there, I must say the road is positively dangerous. [*Laughter*] When the Government belatedly had to fire the contractor, it took no expeditious tests to have the contractor replaced so the work can continue. So the counterpart funds that should have been spent to have that road project being moved along expeditiously, that was not done. The work that was done was improperly done.

The work is not being done and the money to be spent on the road, the Parliament is being told it is savings. What savings? It is gargantuan incompetence and nonperformance. That is what this represents. That is why I say that this is the yardstick and the litmus test to use to find out whether the Government has brought change to the country! If this money was spent properly on the budget as identified by the Parliament, we would have changed the condition of the North South Road. That was not done!

If the \$17 million was spent on health, we might have brought change somewhere. That was not done! The other moneys have been spent. The mark-time-in-the-same-place moneys; the recurrent expenditure moneys. Those have been spent. They do not bring about change and improvement. They bring about maintenance of the status quo. We are not arguing with that. In fact, in some areas there is deterioration. These moneys—if one looks at virtually every single one of them, one would find that there were initiatives to be funded to bring about perceived improvement in governmental service in the country. That was not done.

A simple thing like the Ministry of Tourism, there were programmes, public awareness and small programmes here and there, and there was \$9.5 million available to do those programmes. We put man on the moon 30 years ago—the Mars lander. This is not putting man on the moon. This is a simple programme or two as part of support for the tourism initiative. They have the money, they say, but bungling within the governmental system, and it is not done as the Parliament

expected. Then they come here and very glibly say to us, “\$9.5 million of programmes in the Tourism Ministry was not spent, so be thankful. We have savings”.

What was spent was \$8 million for a three-night fete at the Savannah for World Beat. We got that. And even that, when one looks at it, one knows what it was. General fete! Nice stage! They spent \$8 million, but the \$9 million programme to support the tourism industry was not spent. We got \$40 million worth of Ringbang in Tobago and some persons are too big to account for that. *[Laughter]* Nobody knows where the money came from, who got it, but what the Government tells us is that “Tobago not talking to us”. *[Laughter]*

I want to say something to this Government on that score. If they take the position that because they are incompetently managing the national portfolio they have lost the moral authority to manage the Tobago expenditure, I want to tell this country that the future of Trinidad and Tobago is at stake. I do not know if the Hansard Editor picked it up this evening. It might have been Freudian, but when my friend from Tobago East started reading his text, he spoke about the “Republics” of Trinidad and Tobago. Did you hear it?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Dr. K. Rowley: That might have been a Freudian slip. So, we have two republics here: one in Trinidad and one in Tobago. If that is this Government's thinking, the people of Tobago better be warned and the people of Trinidad and Tobago better understand that the incompetence of the central government poses a threat to the unitary state of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, I think that while there is not very much we can do about this, the Government has committed itself—and we support that commitment—that public servants should be paid what is owed to them. So make no mistake about it. I do not want anybody on the Government side to respond to me by saying that public servants should not be paid. Public servants should be paid.

I go further. There are some public servants that the Salaries Review Commission made recommendations for, and this Government is deliberately, for reasons best known to it, not taking action under the guise that they are hiding money from the Opposition. We have said to them, “Pay the other people and do not pay us. What are you waiting for?” They want to spite judges, permanent secretaries and whoever, but we are saying that public servants need to be paid their moneys. It was the Prime Minister who said to them—and we supported that—“A debt is a debt and must be paid”, albeit late.

Mr. Speaker, we should take no comfort in the fact that they are being paid from moneys that were allocated and approved by this Parliament for a number of purposes which are equally important to the service of people of Trinidad and Tobago. We must take no comfort in the fact that the Minister of Finance, in closing the accounts of the last financial year, is doing so on the basis of nonperformance in areas where we thought that performance would have been had, and such performance would have contributed to an improvement in the quality of life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

If we go down the entire list, we would see: Judiciary, \$4.5 million of improvement, not being able to be carried out. The Office of the Prime Minister, \$1.2 million. That is travel that was not executed because his itinerary was full. *[Laughter]* He is only travelling for 51 weeks of the year, so this is one week's travel and we are thankful for that.

With respect to pensions and gratuities, we are told that the people who have problems in receiving their gratuities, it is not as a result of a shortage of money. We are grateful to hear that, but we think that at the end of the day, those persons should not be in that position, and wherever there are those bureaucratic constraints, the Government should seek to expedite. That was discussed in committee and we got the assurance from the Government that they would look at such things and we take them at their word. There is no shortage of money for pensions and gratuities, so surpluses are going across to pay public servants.

With respect to the Ministry of National Security, I do not believe that this is entirely as a result of increments or NIS benefits, and I am concerned that for the second time, I am asking the Government to explain why there was a disruption in the recruitment process for young policemen. Nobody has yet said anything. I hope that before the debate is over, some Government official will tell us why there was hiatus in the hiring of young policemen and how that affected the crime situation.

With respect to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine resources, well we know that was a lost cause. We have seen the spectacle of my friend from Princes Town who has a very strange logic. When he was the Agriculture Minister, he had the portfolio for forestry. Now that he has been promoted to the Ministry of the Environment, he is making a spirited case that forestry belongs in the Environment. I am wondering why that was not so when the Member for Point Fortin had the Environment portfolio. Is it that my friend from Point Fortin has no interest in selling teak? I do not know, but I understand that the Prime

Minister has seen through that and has decided not to expand the portfolio of my friend from Princes Town.

With respect to the Ministry of Housing and Settlements, I heard recently from a Government spokesman—it was being said at a party gathering somewhere—that this Government built a large number of houses somewhere. I wonder if someone from the Government could tell us this afternoon where those houses are, because we have been looking for them and cannot find them. If they could tell us where the Government built those 7,000 houses they were talking about and they have savings of \$7 million, we could congratulate them, but as of now, we really cannot do that.

Mr. Speaker, at the moment, Government's revenue is relatively good. In the current financial year, we budgeted for oil at \$16 or \$17. As of today, oil has been running consistently about \$8 or \$9 above that, so we expect that Government revenues for this financial year would be significantly higher than budgeted.

2.25 p.m.

But I can guarantee you, Mr. Speaker, that if you are with us the next time this exercise comes up, we will be telling the country—as we report on the last financial year 1999/2000—that a similar situation exists. Because, even as I speak, there are funds appropriated in all of these ministries, in a very similar manner, to provide services and goods for the current moment, and those funds are not being expended as the Parliament expected when the budget was read last December. This is a ritual, and until such time as we can remove the constraints to allow the budgeted expenditure to be expended in the manner that the Parliament anticipates, the budget exercise would create a fair amount of hope at the time when it is read but, at the time of reporting, we will continue to see significant shortfalls in performance and get a lot of spin from the Government about savings here and savings there and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot do anything about this now, we have to close the accounts. We are faced with a *fait accompli*. This is about time past. I think the Government should simply take note of this and see to what extent it can accelerate its delivery in the current arrangement so that at the end of the current financial year, we are not faced with these statements about savings and who did not do what and half-truths about incomplete negotiations and so forth—attempting to justify why we have not delivered the service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as the Parliament had so intended.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Hon. Trevor Sudama): Mr. Speaker, as I listened to the Member for Diego Martin West in his usual style, barking and snarling at the Government, I merely wish to remind this honourable House that the Dangerous Dogs Bill is before the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and it does impose an obligation on owners to exercise some control over these animals. I particularly address the Member for San Fernando East. Because what we have had here is an exhibition of pure unadulterated noise being created in this Parliament.

Dr. Griffith: And barking.

Hon. T. Sudama: And barking you said? Barking, without any substance. I want, this afternoon, to put the record straight and to start off with the agricultural sector, about which something was said and for which the Member for Diego Martin West was responsible for four years under that previous PNM administration.

Mr. Speaker, let me start off with this whole question of why moneys could not have been expended which were voted in the 1998/99 budget and indicate that there are procedural exercises which have to be engaged in before one can spend money. For example, in the reduction of expenditure under personnel administration; it is not as if the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, by the flip of a finger, can decide to expend money for the purposes of recruiting people. That has to be an exercise which has to be done through the Public Service Commission of Trinidad and Tobago.

Do you recall when we came here and spoke about the delays which were incurred as a result of the procedures we had to go through in order to get approvals for recruitment, employment and expenditure, the PNM government raised opposition?

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources for giving way. I wonder if the Minister would care to tell this honourable House of the number of persons employed today in the public sector on contract, and in particular, how many such persons are employed in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs?

Hon. T. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, if the Member for San Fernando East wishes to ask a question of the Attorney General, let him file a question directed to the Attorney General. I am speaking about the agricultural sector. If the Member wants to file a question or ask me a question on the agricultural sector, I am here to answer him. The Member should not bring all sorts of irrelevancies into my

contribution. On the next occasion, when the Member interrupts me to give way, he should make sure that he asks something sensible or else I would not be giving way.

Mr. Speaker, we all know if persons are going to be employed on the establishment, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago cannot do that without going through the procedures and getting the approvals, and the Public Service Commission—having done their interviews and so forth—will then give the approval. If that is not forthcoming within the time span for which we have made provision, one just cannot be employed. Yes, one can employ under contracted positions, but where there are establishment positions, that cannot be done.

Since, of course, it was not possible to do that within the time frame, those moneys which were provided for could not be expended. That is the simple explanation and it goes to the root of the problem of the structures we have in place to deal with administration in Trinidad and Tobago, particularly with respect to the recruitment, transfer and discipline of public servants in this country. The Opposition knows it in their hearts but they come here to try to take political advantage. They try to make electoral gains out of the fact; that this money could not have been expended.

Then we have the other expenditure which could not be made under payments for increments for wages and salaries. Mr. Speaker, the current rule is that the Government pays increments on the basis of staff reports. If those staff reports are not forthcoming, there would be no basis to make payments for increments. We have had serious delays in having staff reports come up to the ministries in order to have them evaluated for the purposes of paying increments. This is why we have savings under the heading: “Payment of Increment—Salaries for \$2.9 million and Payment of Increment—Wages for \$1.4 million.” I hope I have given some explanation as to why those savings were necessitated.

Let me come to the main issue before us, which was adverted to by the Member for Diego Martin West. The Member comes here, year after year, to talk about the inefficiency in the agricultural sector, the administration of that sector and, of course, the lack of expedition in the execution of the Agricultural Sector Reform Programme and of the Agricultural Sector Technical Assistance Programme. I want to put this matter in perspective, Mr. Speaker, once and for all so that the Member does not come to this House to mislead this House, to create all sorts of red herrings here with respect to the Agricultural Sector Reform Programme.

The first point I wish to make is that the Agricultural Sector Reform Programme loan was negotiated by the PNM government. All the conditions pertaining to that loan were agreed to by that PNM government. When this Government got into office, at the end of 1995, those negotiations were virtually completed: it was a question of signing.

However, when we came into office and we looked at the onerous nature of these conditions, our first response was that really we should not go with this loan with those conditions at all. We should not go. I would elaborate these conditions later on, what they agreed to.

2.35 p.m.

The choice that we faced at the end of 1995, the beginning of 1996, was whether to renegotiate this loan—which would have taken us the better part of two years for renegotiation—or whether we could have gone and accepted these conditions. As we went into implementation, we asked, on those occasions, for a review of those conditions which were considered to be extremely onerous. This is the dilemma we faced. We felt that perhaps we should go along—despite the onerousness of those conditions agreed to by the then PNM government—in the interest of time because we did not want to spend another two years to renegotiate this loan. The agricultural sector programme was important and we had to get things going. Therefore, we went ahead early in 1996 and signed the loan, but we signed the loan knowing fully that this was a difficult loan to execute given the nature of the conditions which were agreed to by the then PNM government.

Mr. Speaker, let me outline some of those conditions to which they had agreed, and which we, by and large, met and we are now in the final phases of accessing the second tranche of this loan. Listen to what they agreed to and, in the three years since the signing of the loan, we have been able to meet these conditions. The loan had asked that we have an appropriate enabling environment, that is an enabling economic environment. As you know, Mr. Speaker—a matter to which I will come later—this Government has performed in the economic sphere like no other government has performed in the history of Trinidad and Tobago in the last four years. I will elaborate on that a little later. So we have satisfied that condition of creating the proper enabling environment in the economic sphere. That has been done. The Inter-American Development Bank has been fully satisfied.

We have brought to this Parliament some very complex Bills: the Land Registration Bill, the Land Adjudication Bill, the Land Tribunal Bill and the

National Parks Bill. The condition was to formulate these Bills and bring them to Parliament; we have done so. The condition also was to table in Parliament the Planning and Development of Land Bill, another very complex Bill; this has been done, the condition met. We have strengthened the institutional framework for lands and surveys; that has been done. We have done the preliminary work as required for modernizing the Land Registry—another condition. All that I am listing are conditions to which they agreed.

We have provided the mechanism for import and export of goods through the ASYCUDA system; that has been completed. We have modified the legislative laws relating to customs reform; that has been done. We have put into place anti-dumping and countervailing duty regulations; again, done by this Government. We have put in place measures concerning rice, pork, pork products and poultry; we have met those conditions. We have put in place common external tariffs and surcharges.

We have provided standard agricultural leases under the conditions for this loan. We have completed an environment action plan relating to an integrated pest management programme; that has been done. We have executed an environmental action plan with respect to the rum distillery and the safe methods of effluent. We have strengthened the Lands and Surveys Division, institutional strengthening, under the conditions we are required to do so. We are now in the final process of addressing the Agricultural Development Bank and that is to be dealt with shortly. We have done all the work to approve a land subdivision code. We have given approval to the Forest Resources Bill. We are meeting the conditions with respect to constraining the level of subsidies to 10 per cent of the GDP of the agricultural sector.

Mr. Speaker, he talks about not being able to satisfy the Inter-American Development Bank. We are in the process of divesting towards making Caroni (1975) Limited more viable in the matter of years, 2,000 acres of Caroni's lands, that is a requirement to which they agreed and with which we are now complying. Because once we divest the rice and the citrus subsectors, we will have obtained that objective of divesting these 2000 acres of Caroni's lands, that condition has been met.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, one other condition there is to approve the Agricultural Small Holdings Bill, which we are bringing to Parliament shortly, in order to be able to accelerate the process of divestment of lands, whether it is Caroni's lands or whether it is state lands. We are in the process of regularizing and divesting 7,000 acres of state-owned land. For that purpose we have set up in

the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources an accelerated Land Distribution Unit, which is now fully functional. You will see in the days ahead that we will be distributing and handing out leases on a regular basis in order to meet this condition.

When it comes to the issue of the Planning and Development of Land Bill, that came before this House in the last term, last year and it lapsed. We have brought it back and it is now before a select committee. As soon as that Bill is passed into law, we will then put in place the national physical planning commission and that commission will deal with approvals for development in all areas relating to land. It is only a matter of time.

Now, with respect to the state enterprise, Caroni (1975) Limited, completing and creating conditions for its viability, Mr. Speaker, as you know, we have decided to divide the activities of Caroni (1975) Limited into various sectors. Those will be divested. We already have an advertisement out where the rice, citrus and distillery activities of Caroni (1975) Limited will be formed into strategic business units. We have invited participation of the private sector to the extent of 49 per cent in these units and also we have laid conditions with respect to employment levels with respect to the leasing of the lands and so forth. As soon as we get proposals coming in and evaluate those proposals we will start to implement the objective of getting Caroni (1975) Limited a viable proposition through private sector participation.

Currently, just before I came to Parliament I was in discussion with the Inter-American Development Bank. Once they are satisfied that the plan of transformation that we have for Caroni (1975) Limited is credible, viable and is likely to bring the results that we anticipate, then indeed, they will give us an okay that we have met that condition with respect to bringing viability into Caroni (1975) Limited.

There are a few other minor things like environmental action plan and so forth and these will be accommodated very soon.

Now, with respect to the technical assistance programme, here again we had this problem where this Government agreed to things which we felt, in some instances, were rather unnecessary, but of course we were tied by the legality of the negotiations that went before. Under the technical assistance programme we had to satisfy three areas.

We had to satisfy the area of having an agricultural sector policy in place for market-oriented development, and also, for public administration reform—that

means the reform of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, reform of the structure and so forth.

Then, the other area was a land-use policy and administration component. Now we have had land-use policies in this country galore. We have had study upon study, but they had to go and agree that we needed a further land-use study in order to comply with the conditions of accessing this loan.

Then we had another one about agribusiness development, on which so much work has been done in Trinidad and Tobago about the options, and yet they agreed to that in their negotiations.

These three elements of the technical assistance programme had to be dealt with and we had to go out there and advertise. We had to provide the terms of reference which had to be agreed to by the Inter-American Development Bank. When we advertised and we got in proposals, the evaluation had to be agreed to and the final choices had to be agreed to by the IDB through a no-objection. When we went out and did the first exercise, we found that one of the firms which offered the best proposal seemed to have a conflict of interest and this was objected to. We went out again and we redid the exercise and now we have in place consultancy firms to carry out these three elements of that technical assistance programme: agricultural sector policy and public administration reform; this is going to be done by the Texas A&M University system, and this contract could only have been issued at the end of September, 1999. The land-use policy and administration component, the revised work plan was completed and submitted to Government only at the end of November, 1999. Therefore, after we look at it we will give the go-ahead for that consultancy to proceed.

Again, with the agribusiness development, the selection of firms was targeted to be November 12; that has been completed. In fact, we have already signed that contract and the work is proceeding.

Of course, I outlined what we are going to do with respect to Caroni (1975) Limited to meet the conditionalities involved with respect to second tranche availability.

So Mr. Speaker, I hope that after this explanation here this afternoon the Member for Diego Martin West would not come back here to delay this House with his nonsense about inability to execute this loan, how we are being tardy, how we do not know what we are doing and so on and so forth.

I recall a loan called the Investment Sector Loan that they signed in 1992—that former government. When they signed in 1992 they drew down the first tranche and signed. They had two other tranches. When we went into office at the end of 1995 they could not have met any of the conditions to sign for the second tranche to get a second tranche drawdown, let alone the third tranche. It was this Government that had to expedite the fulfilling of those conditions so that in the third quarter of last year we were able to meet both second and third tranche conditionalities, which they could not have met the three years they were in office.

2.50 p.m.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Minister for giving way. I noticed in the long list of conditionalities there was no mention made of the specific conditionality for the reduction of operating cost at Caroni (1975) Limited, I wonder whether that conditionality has no longer existed. If so, what was done in 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999 to meet those conditionalities so that moneys could have been drawn down?

Hon. T. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, again, the hon. Member does not understand finance or economics and so forth. The condition was to make Caroni (1975) Limited financially viable; and financial viability meant that your income had to exceed your cost, and once you undertook to have that ratio in place, the question of what your cost—well, certainly, you have got to reduce cost if your income is not increasing, but involves both a plan to increase income and to reduce cost. So that it was not just a cost reduction exercise, it is a question of making Caroni (1975) Limited viable by diversifying and increasing your income available in one regard and constraining or, in fact, reducing your cost in another respect.
[Interruption]

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Minister again for giving way. Given the fact that Caroni (1975) Limited's income—in the period that we are talking about—has been substantially reduced and that the costs have been increased, what is the position with respect to that particular conditionality now?

Hon. T. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, the question is that we are still in the process of convincing the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) of the plan we have for making Caroni (1975) Limited financially viable. We did not have to meet that condition in 1996; that is when we signed the loan. It is a process. We, in fact, met a condition where the labour force has been decreased by 650 persons. That has been met. That is only an element of the overall conditions to make this

organization viable. We have plans in place—which, of course, we would be advising the country of what we are going to do with respect to a plan for voluntary separation; with respect to a plan for alternative options; with respect to a plan to get people into small-scale and agricultural enterprises and so forth, in order to meet the conditions substantially with respect to Caroni (1975) Limited.

I just want to tell this honourable House that is in train. But given the performance of that Government, from 1991 to 1995, they should be the last persons to come here to complain about now we are meeting conditions, and inability to do things and to get action in train, and particularly, that former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. The performance of the agricultural sector, between 1991 and 1995, was such that the hon. Member for Diego Martin West should be ashamed to get up in this honourable House to talk about agriculture and agricultural improvement and agricultural production. He came here to talk about what that government did and what we did not do and so forth.

I want to make the point that the management of the finances of a country is not done in isolation; yes, you need to manage, you need to observe the financial procedures and rules in managing your finances. You ought to manage in a way that you operate with a surplus or you minimize your deficit; that fiscal policy has to have certain objectives and so forth in the management of the finances of a country. One has to follow the Exchequer and Audit Act and so forth, but that is not done in isolation. You manage the finances of a country in order to facilitate the development and improvement of the economy. And we have managed the finances in a way that has produced those results of development and the advance of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, let me put it on the record of this Parliament as to what the management of the finances of this country—we are not talking about shifting some money from under this Head and putting it under that Head, and this is what they are concerned with at this micro level, that we are doing things which are not acceptable to them and so forth. That is an irrelevance. We have got to close the books and this is what we are doing. Overall, when you look at the management of the finances of Trinidad and Tobago under this Government, you will see what we have achieved by certain indicators in the economy. I want to put this on the record as to what the management of finances by this Government has done for the economy and for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and allude to some critical statistics here.

When we came into office in 1995, at the end of it—that is the other regime, the PNM regime was in place—we met an inflation rate of 5.3 per cent, and in 1999, that has been reduced to 4.4 per cent; a measure of the control we have exercised over the liquidity in the system. While we have exercised that control we have also been able to increase production and economic growth.

Unemployment; a critical variable, when they were in office in 1995 unemployment was a figure of 17.5 per cent. Today, and at the end of the third quarter last year, unemployment reached the figure of 11.7 per cent, one of the lowest rates in almost two decades under a UNC regime. It seems as though they want to deny those statistics and I am told that the unemployment rate is on the decline.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to real GDP growth, based on our management of the finances, in 1995 that was 4 per cent; by 1999 the real GDP growth was carded to be 6.9 per cent; a rate which has not been achieved since the oil boom days of the mid-70s under this UNC Government. Per capita income in US dollars, in 1995, it was US \$4,268; in 1999, it was US \$5,074 per capita; and the gross domestic product increased from a total of US \$31,697 million in 1995, today it has increased to US \$41,044 million, a \$10 billion increase in the short space of four years under the watch of the United National Congress!

Gross international reserves is another indicator of the management of the economy and the handling of the finances, to impact upon the external relationships of the country. Gross international reserves increased from \$62 million in 1995 to \$1,303 million in 1999. This was a two-fold increase in a matter of four years, and this meant that we were able to increase the import cover for our goods and services from 3.7 months to 6.2 months, almost doubled the import cover in a matter of four years.

3.00 p.m.

The net foreign exchange reserves increased from \$460 million to \$1,016 million, that is about two and a half times the increase in the net foreign exchange reserves. Regarding our public sector external debt, they talked a lot about external debt, how we are borrowing money and burdening the country and future generations. Well, I want to tell them here this afternoon, that when we came into office, at the end of 1995, the public sector external debt was \$1,905 million and in 1999 we were able to reduce that to \$1,514 million, a reduction of US \$400 million in four years.

So, if that is mismanagement of the finances and, indeed, mismanagement of the economy, I would like to ask them: what is management? What is a comparable period of the People's National Movement's administration to talk about management in these terms? To what could they compare their own performance in the 34 long years of providing the stewardship of this country? What have they done?

Concerning the fiscal deficit as a percentage of gross domestic product, whereas that was 2 per cent in 1995—and this is a measure of the financial management—their fiscal deficit as a proportion of gross domestic product was 2 per cent in 1995, this Government has reduced that to 0.1 per cent in 1999.

Mr. Speaker, I could go further and elaborate on our fiscal, financial and, indeed, our economic performance, quoting from a review of the Central Bank economic bulletin for the third quarter of 1999, to confirm all these figures that I have been quoting, to confirm that this economy has been prudently managed financially and that it is on the right track for growth and expansion and, indeed, of development. I would just quote a few lines from this bulletin to indicate how we have done in the last four years because, as you know, we have to account for our performance and this is the year of accounting and accountability. We have to tell the country; we have to start now in order to overcome all the negative propaganda coming from the Opposition and the media combined, to put this Government in a very bad light, with your own agendas, of course.

This is what the Central Bank's economic bulletin of the third quarter has to say:

“The Trinidad and Tobago economy continues to perform well with real economic growth in 1999 expected to approach 6 per cent. In the third quarter economic activity expanded by 2 per cent, following growth of 1.3 per cent in the previous quarter. This brought the year-on-year rate to 5.7 per cent. At the current rate whole-year economic expansion is expected to attain its highest level since the nineteen seventies and far exceed the average of 3.5 per cent over the last five years. To put this performance further in perspective, one notes that the International Monetary Fund at the end of the third quarter forecast growth of 3 per cent for the world economy in 1999.”

What we are achieving here in Trinidad and Tobago is twice the projected growth rate for the world economy. When you compare it with what is happening in the region—

“Furthermore, forecasts for Latin America and the rest of the Caribbean suggest little or no expansion in economic activity.”

Therefore, it is on this basis that we have been called a tiger in the sea of pussycats.

The report continues:

“During the third quarter growth was led by an increase of 3 per cent in the non-energy-based industries...”

That is very important.

“while in the energy-based industries a marginal decline of 0.3 per cent was observed. Activity picked up impressively in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors after dismal performances in the previous quarter.

The continued gains in economic activity were accompanied by steady reductions in the level of unemployment. This was highlighted in the second quarter when the rate of unemployment moved to 11.7 per cent from 14.1 per cent at the end of March, the lowest level since the early nineteen eighties. This substantial reduction partly reflected a marginal increase in the labour force in the face of significant job growth.”

This is as a result of the policies and programmes of the United National Congress Government.

“Meanwhile, inflation remained in check with an increase of 0.7 per cent in the third quarter, which brought the annualized inflation rate to 2.2 per cent.”

A 2.2 per cent annualized inflation rate is historical and compares with all the major industrialized countries that have been able to keep their inflation in check. We did this by controlling the liquidity in the financial system.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, it continues:

“However, non-oil revenues also exhibited strong growth of almost 17 per cent...”

Where in the past under the PNM regime we had to rely substantially on oil revenues for our incomes, “non-oil revenues exhibited strong growth of almost 17 per cent”.

“and in particular, non-tax revenues rose significantly partly on account of higher dividends from the state enterprises.”

We were able to make a turn around in the state enterprises in order to secure from them higher returns for the Government.

The report continues:

“At the end of September the government returned to the international capital market after an absence of three years with the successful placement of US \$230 million Eurobond.”

Just to show that the international community is satisfied; they are happy with the performance of this economy.

“This followed the upgrading of the country’s debt rating by the rating agency Standard & Poor’s on September 13, 1999.”

It is internationally accepted that this country is doing well under this Government.

“However, looking at the picture for the first half of the year...”

That is 1999—

“indications are that in 1999 the balance of payments has begun a structural change characterized by the reversal or reduction of the large current account deficits of the last two years and the reduction of the importance of direct foreign investment in financing.”

A structural change in our balance of payments, something that a PNM regime could not have achieved in the 34 years of its existence, has been achieved in four years.

“The current account registered a reduced deficit of US\$78.9 million compared with a deficit of US\$323.6 million in the first half of 1998.

At the end of October 1999, net international reserves amounted to US \$897.5 million, an increase of US\$132 million from the end of 1998.”

This, of course, is reflected in an improved import cover for this country’s imports.

Mr. Speaker, I have decided to put these economic facts before this House and, indeed, before the country, because when we go to the country, as we are doing now, one of the planks of performance will be on the economic front. They cannot say anything about our economic and financial performance. What could they say in the light of this overwhelming record of success, this significant performance? What could they say?

All they are talking about is corruption, discrimination, and the alleged breaking of the law. That is all they can talk about, and race, of course. When I say discrimination, that is inclusive of the race factor which they believe they will use to maximum advantage in this coming election in order to consolidate their dwindling base of support. They have nothing to go on.

They cannot talk about their performance; a dismal economic performance under the People's National Movement administration. When they talk about breaking the law and standards of governance—the Member for San Fernando East declared a state of emergency to lock up one person, to deny the freedom and rights of one person in this country. And they talk about breaking the law! Never in the history of this country has that ever been done—has this Member for San Fernando East been so ill advised to act in a manner to deny a person their constitutional right by declaring an unjustified state of emergency. What a sordid performance on the part of that past PNM administration led by the Member for San Fernando East.

If they feel they can come with all these spurious allegations in this coming year to attack this Government, I want to warn them that the campaign has started already. They had better be warned, it has started already and it is my job—

Mr. Speaker: I will use this opportunity to advise the members in the press gallery that they are not part of this Parliament and are strangers. Just as nobody in the other benches could hold meetings and be getting up and talking and the like, so too, you are not exempt from it; it is wrong. I ask you please, do desist. I suggested to the Marshal that he go up and indicate this to you, obviously you have not taken him on. I ask you please, could you have a certain decorum from the press benches upstairs. It is not on, that you can hold meetings or do as you are doing: walking around and standing while this House is in progress. It is not on. I ask you please to desist.

Hon. Members the speaking time of the Member for Oropouche has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. T. Sudama: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I was about to wind up my contribution, but I am thankful for the additional time, which has been afforded to me on this very important occasion of a debate on the expenditures of the Government for the fiscal year 1998/1999.

In conclusion, having dealt with the economy at the general level, the macro level and having given an indication of our sterling performance over the last four years, including the financial management of the public sector, I want to indicate that for my own Ministry, which came under scrutiny earlier from the Member for Diego Martin West, we are putting many measures in place in order to put greater emphasis on the agricultural sector, for the purposes of diversifying the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and for creating greater employment in that sector, in order to further relieve the unemployment situation.

We are putting measures in place to expand our exports, we are putting measures in place to increase agro-processing activities, to increase the efficiency of our production and at the heart of this, of course, is what we do with Caroni (1975) Limited which consumes so much of our resources as an agricultural enterprise. No reform of the agricultural sector of Trinidad and Tobago could be accomplished without dealing effectively with the fortunes of Caroni (1975) Limited with its role in the agricultural economy.

3.15 p.m.

As I said, no previous administration had the courage to tackle in a fundamental way these problems which this organization, and indeed, this industry represented. We have decided that we would do this because it is a historic legacy that we have to confront and we are doing it, but we are doing it in a humane way and in a way which accommodates the needs and interests of all concerned.

We are not going to make alarmist statements as have been made by the Member for San Fernando East that by the end of December 1999, Caroni (1975) Limited would have been closed down. We are at the end of January 2000 and it is still alive and functional, and the employees, in fact, have been given an increase in their salaries and wages. That shows how the other side, and particularly, the Member for San Fernando East wish to create confusion and mischief in this country for which he has been characterized in the past in order to promote and foment protest in certain parts of this country, and deliberately so.

I tell him that he should desist if he wants to aspire again—which is a hopeless aspiration—to high office, he should desist from creating this kind of mischief in the land. It is an obvious and clear attempt to instil social and political malaise in Trinidad and Tobago.

I affirm to this House that we have decided to take firm action to bring Caroni (1975) Limited into a financially viable status. We have looked at all the

surrounding factors, and perhaps destiny has placed it on the shoulders of this Government to deal once and for all with that nagging problem which has bedevilled previous administrations.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Oropouche for giving way. Before he takes his seat, will the Minister be kind enough to tell us exactly what action they are taking and propose to take with Caroni (1975) Limited?

Hon. T. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, I did not want to prolong my contribution, but I will give the Member for San Fernando East a few highlights of what we are doing with respect to Caroni (1975) Limited. As I indicated, we are dividing Caroni (1975) Limited into strategic business units and we are inviting private sector participation in these units but, critically, we are inviting private sector management into these business units. So what we want to have as we undertake this exercise in a phased manner is efficiency of operations, and elimination of waste and mismanagement. We would have accountability, and that has been one of the problems which has bedevilled the operations. We would do it in manageable proportions as we divest activity by activity, but the crucial thing is, of course, what we do with the cane cultivation and cane processing activities of Caroni (1975) Limited.

With respect to cane cultivation, we have already said we would be looking to reduce the cost of cultivation by increasing productivity and getting more and more of the canes cultivated by private farmers and we have already decided that as necessary. We would divest lands to the private farmers for them to engage in a larger proportion of sugarcane cultivation thereby, of course, reducing costs.

Mr. Manning: Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for giving way for yet another time. The Member talks about increasing productivity at Caroni (1975) Limited. Could he be kind enough to let us know how he proposes to do that, and secondly, does the Government in its new approach to Caroni (1975) Limited take into account the possibility that preferential access to European and American markets may be a thing of the past not too long from now? What is the Government's view on this matter?

Hon. T. Sudama: Mr. Speaker, given the number of questions directed to me, maybe I can invite the Member for San Fernando East to come to my office and spend a half day with me and I would outline the plans and programmes for Caroni (1975) Limited. Anyway, I will briefly answer him on the question of access to preferential markets.

Mr. Speaker, yes we see what is coming long term on the horizon with respect to preferential markets and the debates which are now going on in the World Trade Organization. However, we have been assured that with respect to the agreement under the Lomé Convention that the European Community is going to continue at least for a period of five years to have us access their market at the preferential prices and in quantities that we can supply. That preferential market is open to us for five years or more which gives us the opportunity to attempt to put our house in order within that period. Furthermore, what we provide to the American market is a small amount.

I advise the Member for San Fernando East that we have had many demands coming from the Caribbean countries, the small islands and those which do not provide sugar for our sugar, so we are trying to exploit those markets. With respect to our own domestic market, as you know, we have made a special arrangement. We have given a special concession to our local manufactures to sell sugar to them at a certain price. Apart from that, for the domestic market in Trinidad and Tobago, we continue to supply sugar at a retail price in Trinidad and Tobago which is the lowest in the Caribbean apart from Belize and Guyana. The lowest you can get sugar for in the whole Caribbean and indeed in North America, is in Trinidad and Tobago. There is room for expansion of our markets and we are not terribly worried about the market situation, what we are worried about is producing sugar at a competitive cost. I was elaborating on how we intend to reduce costs.

Transport from the fields to the factories is where we are going to reduce cost. By getting people to organize more and more of their transport to get it into the factory and by doing so, improve the sucrose content of the cane and the cane to sugar ratio. If you allow canes to be in the field and there is too much time expiring between field and factory, the sucrose content of the sugar is reduced and that affects the cane to sugar (cts) ratio.

I am trying to educate the Member, Mr. Speaker. I should not be taking the forum of this Parliament to educate the Member for San Fernando East to try to reduce his ignorance on so many matters. At the factory level we have put processes in place to increase productivity both in the milling and the processing stage of Caroni (1975) Limited, and of course, marketing is at the end. Because of improvements we have done to the Ste. Madeleine factory, instead of grinding 375 tonnes per hour, that factory has the capacity to grind 800 tonnes per hour and, therefore, if we increase the milling capacity as we have done and put all the things in place we would be able to reduce our cost by greater milling efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, what I am trying to say is that we have looked at all the factors with respect to the viability of Caroni (1975) Limited increasing its efficiency in all the respective areas of operations, and it is through those means we hope to reduce costs and diversify and increase our revenues because we have not dealt with the by-products such as bagasse or molasses and all the other things we can make with molasses quite apart from rum and all the other chemicals that could be obtained from the processing of the by-product. All these factors have been taken into account so that overall we create a viable entity called Caroni (1975) Limited.

As we are on that point, I did not intend to be this lengthy, but since I am provoked into providing explanation I also want to inform the Member for San Fernando East that his plans for Caroni (1975) Limited are way off. I think he said—and the Member for Princes Town reminded me—that he plans to grow beet in Trinidad. Everybody knows that beet, by and large, is a temperate country crop, but to grow beet in the tropics it would cost twice as much in order to prepare the land to grow beet in the tropics, but the Member wants to grow beet in Trinidad and Tobago to produce sugar. I do not know who advises him.

The next thing he wants to do is automate the two factories. Do you know what automation involves? Displacement of labour. That is automation. When you automate the factories, if it were employing 300 persons, it will probably employ 30 as a result of automation. He has not told this country what he would do with the 270 workers, I am just using a figure. The Member wants to automate Ste. Madeleine and Brechin Castle factories without telling us what he would do with the displaced labour. Then he wants to introduce mechanized harvesting.

Mr. Speaker, mechanized harvesting is not an option for the vast majority of the fields at Caroni (1975) Limited, because of its topography. The sector that is mechanized in Caroni (1975) Limited's reaping, is such that when the canes are cut, there is so much extraneous matter in the cane that it increases the cane to sugar ratio substantially and, therefore, if you want to further increase that, then you will mechanize the whole of Caroni (1975) Limited's reaping operation. So I advise that whoever is giving the Member advice is totally off course.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, they have been ill advised in the past and I am pleading with them, do not be ill advised again. As I said, your aspirations which are rather not on the cards, would further be removed from reality. So that they should rethink their position with Caroni (1975) Limited. Even the lowliest worker in the sugar industry understands that the proposal that the PNM has for Caroni (1975) Limited

and the sugar industry will mean the demise of their employment opportunities and, indeed, the demise of the industry. They understand that. So if the Member for San Fernando East is trying to throw a line out to them to seek their support, they are barking up the wrong tree.

I hope that I have sufficiently elaborated on the issue of Caroni (1975) Limited here in this House today. There will, of course, be further elaboration as we proceed in our programme of restructuring Caroni (1975) Limited and bringing it into a viable entity. But for today, let me just conclude by saying that the world knows that under this UNC regime, Trinidad and Tobago has done well. Its economy has prospered; its financial management has been quite outstanding to the extent that our investment-rating grade has been increased. The International Monetary Fund is very happy with the management of our economy and of our fiscal position.

The Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank and so forth are quite happy with the enabling environment which we have created for future growth and development of Trinidad and Tobago. On that basis alone, we can go to the country positively and expect their fullest support.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin East*): Mr. Speaker, I have noted that the change of portfolio for the Member for Oropouche has brought about an increase in his ability to put people to sleep. I noticed, within the last hour or so, a number of persons nodding off during the presentation of the Member for Oropouche. What is interesting as well is that the Minister parrots out these figures for economic performance, unemployment and foreign reserves. Nobody believes these numbers that the Minister has given us.

Mr. Speaker, when one sees the problems that people are experiencing in this country, who on earth would believe that unemployment is now at 11 per cent? I mean, when I see people in my constituency office on a weekly basis, over the last four years, the numbers of destitute and very poor people who have come to see me have increased tremendously, and anyone of my colleagues could say the same thing. Everybody has had the same experience.

Mr. Speaker: Order please.

Mr. C. Imbert: This nonsense that the Member for Oropouche—this fairytale about things are so nice and rosy in Trinidad and Tobago. When you look at the papers every day, murders, killings, crime on the rampage and people are

desperate in this society, but we hear these ridiculous figures about prosperity, economic growth and that the per capita gross domestic product has gone up. What utter rubbish! This is not what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago. What has happened is that we are entering the fifth year of the UNC administration, and it has now become apparent to everybody that nothing is working. Nothing is working in this country! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, this administration has spent four years talking and talking and talking, while the infrastructure has deteriorated; while the social fabric of this country has deteriorated; while crime has reached an all-time high in this country; while a health care system is on the brink and even this Bill that we are debating today—they do not deal with the issues. When one looks at the reality of what we are debating.

There is a variation of appropriation to increase the expenditure in the Ministry of Finance by approximately \$205 million and reduce expenditure in ten or so ministries by the same \$205 million. But there is no value added by taking this \$205 million out of all these ministries and putting it into finance. There is no value added.

Mr. Sudama: Value added in the economy.

Mr. C. Imbert: Nothing has been done and, you see the issues that were raised in the finance committee—and let me deal directly with this question of roads. A question was raised as to these alleged savings in the Ministry of Works and Transport on roads, where the roads rehabilitation programme was reduced by approximately \$39 million! The reason given—the Government terminated the contract of the Spanish firm in May, 1999 and a new contractor is to be engaged.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Works had available to it \$39 million which it could have used to fix the roads in Maraval, Arouca, San Fernando, Arima, Port of Spain, Santa Cruz and the roads all over Trinidad and Tobago—\$39 million! It is not as if the Government did not know. The Government knew when it terminated the contract of the Spanish contractor that \$39 million dollars would then become available within the Ministry of Works and Transport to fix other roads in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, every other Minister of Works and Transport, since independent Trinidad and Tobago, has sought when projects and programmes realized surpluses and savings, to adjust that within the Ministry and put it into productive use, so that there is value added. But what did the Government do? The Government had \$39 million to spend on roads in the Ministry of Works and

Transport and they took it and put it in the Ministry of Finance, no value added. They have done nothing.

Mr. Speaker, as I drive down Saddle Road every day, I have been looking at a huge pot-hole at the intersection of Saddle Road and Long Circular Road now for a month, at one of the busiest intersections in Trinidad, the intersection of Saddle Road and Long Circular Road. Fifteen thousand cars a day pass that intersection and there are gaping holes at the traffic lights for one month. This matter has been brought to the attention of the Ministry of Works and Transport almost on a daily basis and that is just one road. I could talk about St. Lucien Road in my constituency. I could talk about Morne Coco Road. I could talk about the Diego Martin Main Road and I am sure that everyone of my colleagues on this side has these experiences where you look at the public infrastructure deteriorating and then you find out in the Variation of Appropriation Bill that \$39 million allocated for road repairs is sent off for some Book Entry in the Ministry of Finance to add no value to the economy, to do no work, to produce nothing and to improve nothing, in terms of development in Trinidad and Tobago. That is what this Bill is all about. There is no value added to deal with a salary problem created by—and I am not pounding my colleague from Tobago West—the former NAR administration when they cut Cost of Living Allowance and salaries back in the 1980s. *[Interruption]* It is a fact.

Mr. Speaker, so we have settlement of arrears to public servants. There is a shortfall of \$205 million and the Minister of Finance, in his normal way, under-allocates funds. He allocates \$300 million, the actual arrears \$505 million, so there is a \$205 million gap and what does the Government do? The Government goes through the entire productive sectors of all the areas in each Ministry where they could improve the quality of life of people in Trinidad and Tobago and take it out. Thirty-nine million dollars out of roads and \$35 million out of computers in school. All of these areas where value would have been added.

3.40 p.m.

Instead of finding the money elsewhere, the \$100 million that was spent on the Miss Universe pageant could have gone to fund public servants' arrears because, as my colleague from Diego Martin West has pointed out, these people must get their money. They are entitled to this money. They have been waiting for it for a long time. In 1995 the Member for Couva North said a debt is a debt and it will be paid in cash but, of course, they got no cash. They just went right back to the system of bonds and so forth that was in place before that and we find ourselves now, in the year 2000, in the position where these people have not got

the cash they were promised in 1995 and we have to deal with all these various mechanisms to settle these long, outstanding arrears to public servants. The solution is, take it out of the productive sectors. That is Government UNC style.

If I go through each item here, we see what they have done and the reasons given do not make any sense. Look at this situation with the Ministry of Public Utilities. There has been a burst main on my road now for two months. Thousands of gallons of water are going down the road. We sent letters to the Minister of Public Utilities and we called the WASA people and so forth and water is just gushing down the road and that is just one road. I am sure there are thousands of situations like that in Trinidad and Tobago. Every one of us here, as we drive to and from our daily business we see leaks and we see them existing for six months and nine months and one year and that is what is going on in Trinidad and Tobago.

However, in the Ministry of Public Utilities, money allocated for water and sewage and money allocated for water resources management cannot be spent. It does not matter. You could take that money and fix the leaks. You could take the \$3 million for water resources management and, instead of sending it to an item where there is no value added, you could fix the leaks on my road. You could fix the leaks on Saddle Road. You could fix the leaks in San Fernando and in Arouca and in Tunapuna and in Tobago. You could take the money that was here and reallocate it within your Ministry. That is what other Ministers of Public Utilities have done. When you have savings in your Ministry in your development programme and in your recurrent programme and so forth, you manage it in a way where, if you cannot finish a particular programme over here you take it and you put it into productive expenditure over there. *[Interruption]*

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

You could talk. Mr. Deputy-Speaker, they could talk, but people are watching, you know. You see, when the people drive down the road and they watch that pothole for two months and they watch this burst main for six months and then they read an ad in the newspaper about water for all in the year 2000, who are they fooling, Mr. Deputy Speaker? *[Interruption]* Yes, you are getting it in the drain. That is where you are getting water for all, out of the leaks and into the drain. *[Interruption]* That is where you are getting it, in the canal. It is water for all in the canal. That is what is going on, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Look at the tourism action programme. Out of the \$9.5 million allocated for tourism—and they have a new Minister, poor fella—\$5.2 million was allocated

for the tourism action programme and they could not spend a cent. The Member for Oropouche has said that it was because of the bureaucracy, because there are procedures in employing the people on the establishment, this is why they could not employ people and this is why there are savings. It is not true. In this tourism action programme you are talking about hiring people on contract. It has nothing to do with the people on the establishment, on the permanent list in the Ministry. Delays in the awards of contracts—tourism development support programme—delay in the implementation of projects. This is why they have these imaginary savings.

It is amazing that people could come here and boast about non-performance, because that is what it is all about. When you are supposed to spend \$4 million for a tourism development support programme to enhance our tourism infrastructure for training, to assist persons involved in tourism and so forth and you do not spend one cent, then what you have done is not performed. It is the same thing with the tourism action programme, the land use planning study for the North Coast and the culture theme park, all tourism-related projects.

Dr. Nanan: Would the Member give way? I just wanted to correct that for the record, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The feasibility study for the culture theme park was done, the land use planning study for the North Coast was done and the technical support units were paid.

Mr. C. Imbert: Poor fella, Mr. Deputy Speaker, poor fella. He just took over the Ministry so he does not know what is going on, just like when that hon. Member was in the Ministry of Education he did not know what was going on. He spent four years and built hardly one school. However, we have the explanation for significant savings coming from the Ministry of Finance, read out verbatim by the Member for Tobago East and what does it say?

“Tourism action programme

This programme is partially funded by the Inter-American Development Bank and provided for a feasibility study for a culture theme park, the land use player planning study for the North Coast and tourism related projects. The delay in the award of contracts for the studies resulted in savings during the fiscal year.”

I mean, why does he even bother to get up and speak? Anyhow, let us move on, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I have a real problem when we are debating matters like this. When we look at interest on overdraft, for example, on item 18, subitems 1 and 7—the provision in

the estimates for interest on overdraft was \$5 million but the actual expenditure was \$60.9 million. What does that tell you? If the provision was \$5 million and the actual expenditure was \$61 million the overdraft was 12 times larger than it was supposed to be. This is why I cannot believe anything this Minister tells me.

When one looks at the public debt, for example, and when one looks at the budget presentation in this House by the Minister of Finance, out of every dollar earned by the Government in tax revenue and so forth, almost 40 cents go to debt service and will go to debt service in the current fiscal year. Our debt service is now \$4 billion a year. That is what will be spent in the 1999/2000 fiscal year, \$4 billion on debt servicing, almost 40 cents on every dollar earned by the Government, and our total debt has gone from \$18 billion to \$22 billion since the UNC came in. [*Desk thumping*] They cannot fool anybody.

When one looks at the debt service allocation in the budgets of this administration over the last four years and it is added up, somewhere in the vicinity of \$16 billion has had to be spent for the last four years on repaying this fantastic debt that these hon. gentlemen have been building up. You see, what they are not telling you is they are going on the local market and they are borrowing money hand over fist so that they are doubling and tripling the debt locally. You see, when they cannot get through with their foreign loan programmes, when they have to shelve the World Bank WASA programme, they go on the local market and borrow \$600 million. They are not telling you this. You see, the Member for Oropouche would not tell you all of this. He would not read out the figures for the local debt, that they have almost tripled it since they came in.

The other problem is, what are they doing with the money? I come back to this water thing. I mean, in the area of Paramin in my constituency, they have not had a water supply for four months. I have to look in the newspapers and listen to the radio about “water for all” and hear about the south water programme and the fact that they borrowed \$100 million and somebody in some area is getting water but my tap is dry and my constituents’ taps are dry in River Estate, in La Seiva, in Haleland Park, in Maraval, in Paramin, in Long Circular, in Belle Vue, in Debe and in Dundonald Hill. There is not a drop of water. There are leaks all over the place—leaking valves, defective pumps. Nothing is being done by this administration, but you see, expenditure is taking place.

That is the other reason I do not think anybody is taking seriously persons such as the Minister for Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources because when

he talks about inflation being 3 per cent, or whatever it is, one has but to go into the supermarkets to see differently. When one goes to the supermarket and looks at the price of food, one cannot tell John Public that since 1996 to now the price of food has not doubled or tripled. In 1996, if you went to the supermarket you might have had to spend \$200, but one now has to spend \$400 and \$500 to purchase the same items. That is what is going on. You could pull out all kind of figures you want, it is the grocery bill which is the reality, you know.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not what Members on that side say. They cannot fool anybody. They know that when they went to the grocery four years ago they spent \$200 as compared to spending now \$400 for the same items. That is a fact of life. You cannot fool anybody with that. When people have been unemployed for years and years under this administration and you tell them that, “things good”, “things rosy”, “things nice”, “unemployment now at 11 per cent”, “computers in schools”, “economy is booming”, you know, “We are doing this and we are doing that”, and you are telling that to a fella who has not had a job for three years under this administration, you are talking about people who are eking out a subsistence living under this administration.

All of your “ole talk” falls on deaf ears, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because you have a situation in this country where the standard of living of your average citizen has deteriorated and deteriorated significantly over the last four years. [*Desk thumping*] People just do not have the money any more to buy basic necessities or to even spend on additional items such as entertainment and so forth. They just do not have it any more. People in Trinidad and Tobago under this UNC administration are struggling to survive.

Again, when I look at what we are debating here today, when this administration comes into this Parliament with a budget and they say they are going to do so many things, such as, they are going to put 500 computers in schools and you see a headline in the newspapers next day, “The so and so group from somewhere applauds the Government for its bold initiative in providing computers in schools,” then the next 12 months pass and not a single computer is placed in schools, it is just mamaguy. One has to wonder, was there ever any intention to do these things, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

When we go through this Variation of Appropriation we see all of the things that should have been done that have not been done. Look at the first item, Judiciary:

“The sum of \$5 million was provided in the 1998/1999 Development Programme Estimates in respect of the Judicial Sector Reform Programme...

Delays in finalizing the scope of the project resulted in the delays of the processing of the loan.”

That is just bureaucratic double-speak for they did nothing. Come on! This is the Attorney General’s business. *[Interruption]* Yes. Who accesses the loan? *[Interruption]* You have done nothing, absolutely nothing. Then—*[Interruption]* Yes, that is all right. That has nothing to do with this. When one looks here at the national resources and environment management programme, the staff for the project only came on board in June of 1999 and the legislation was not passed.

3.55 p.m.

We are looking at an Attorney General who wants to come and pass 10 Bills in one sitting. All kinds of nonsense! All kinds of foolish Bills and unnecessary legislation, but one of the reasons for the failure of this programme is that the legislation was not passed. They have us here two o’clock in the morning debating all kinds of stupidity, but things like this to manage the environment, they cannot bring the Bill to Parliament and deal with it. That is why they cannot spend the money and the environment is in such a terrible state in this country.

With respect to the Agricultural Sector Technical Assistance Programme, we heard from the Member for Oropouche and he has just gone into that Ministry. Just like his predecessor, there is a lot of talk. “We will do this and we will do that!” Caroni (1975) Limited has lost \$500 million under this UNC administration. They have lost \$500 million down the drain; maybe more. It may be approximately \$700 million which has been squandered, and I understand that Caroni (1975) Limited’s debt was zero. It was liquidated in 1995, but it is now \$1.5 billion!

So, we have one Minister who talked and talked for four years; the sugarcane production is the worst in the last 25 years; he tried all sorts of “simi dimi” with pest control and killed all the sugarcane in Trinidad and Tobago and brought some kind of bogus equipment from some other country that does not work. He just threw money away and we ended up in a situation with an inefficient organization, losses of hundreds of millions, debt of the organization increased to over \$1 billion and then he hands it over to another Minister who starts the whole ball rolling again. “We will do this and that, and your plan cannot work” and so forth.

One thing is certain, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is nothing that this administration can point to in terms of dealing decisively with the problems of Caroni (1975) Limited in the last four years. All they have done is sunk that

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organization further down into the ground. [*Desk thumping*] One cannot point at one indicator which will show improvement in that organization. Nothing has happened there, except that it lost money, it needs money, they are on strike, the cane is being eaten by froghopper, man stealing, a new CEO came in and said there were a set of dinosaurs in that place. That is all that has happened in that organization over the last four years. A colossal failure!

We have to come in here and listen to the Member for Oropouche tell us that they did not like the conditions in the agricultural sector loan so they had a dilemma. Should they renegotiate the loan or should they sign it? If they renegotiate, it will take two years. If they sign it, they might be able to renegotiate later on. So, they sign it. Four years have passed and they have done nothing. Why did they not renegotiate the loan? They would have saved two years. They have taken four years and achieved nothing. It probably would have just taken six or seven months to renegotiate the loan. That is a PNM milestone. The UNC administration might have taken five years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, “The start-up of the Agriculture Sector Programme was delayed as negotiations between Government and the IDB have not been completed”. How many times have I seen this in Public Sector Investment Programme reports from 1996 to now? Every year we read it. They could not do the drainage programme because they were renegotiating the loan and delays in the implementation were experienced. In 1996 it was in the book, as well as 1997, 1998, 1999 and we will see it in 2000, too: they could not implement the comprehensive drainage and flood control programme because they were negotiating it with the World Bank and delays were experienced. So, they spent five years and all that has happened with drainage in Trinidad and Tobago is more flood! That is all.

If we look at the record of this administration in that sector, for example, all that has happened in the water and flood control sector is more and more floods. That is what has happened, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You see, I do not know what they are going to account to the people with. Are they going to tell the people of Caroni that “under our administration they had the worst floods in Caroni in 50 years”? Is that what they are going to tell them? “Under our administration, they had 10 feet of water in their houses instead of two feet”? Is that what they are going to tell the people of Caroni? That is what they will have to say.

Are they going to tell the workers, “Under our administration, more crops were destroyed and there was more prevalence of insects and pests than for the

last 20 years”? That is the kind of accounting they will have to do if they are going to be truthful. That is what they are going to have to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is what they will have to do. You see, time has run out on them. They cannot talk anymore. This is the year for action and they are going to achieve nothing. *[Laughter]*

The people are already fed up. They are absolutely fed up of this administration. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they have spent four years listening to a set of old talk and yet, nothing has improved. When they go and ask people for their vote, they cannot come by me! They cannot come in my constituency where people have seen a fine road system put in place by the PNM systematically destroyed through neglect. There is bush growing on the side of the road for three years. Three years! There is a situation where there has been absolutely no maintenance whatsoever, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *[Desk thumping]*

One calls the Ministry of Works and Transport and what do they tell you? “We received no releases”. From January, 1999 to October, 1999, no funds were released for essential expenditure in the Ministry of Works and Transport to repair vehicles, or to even put gas in the trucks or to buy tools and so forth. Not a cent was released in that Ministry from January to September 1999! When one calls them, they say they cannot even send the gangs on the road because they do not have a vehicle to send them. This is the reality. This is why things are so bad in this country. This is why the infrastructure is in such a terrible state, because the Members on the other side are more interested in playing games. The Minister of Works and Transport is vex because the URP was taken away from him and given to the Minister of Local Government. He spends all his time terrorizing and undermining the Minister of Local Government instead of dealing with real problems. *[Desk thumping]*

There has not been a single piece of drainage improvement work, and I am speaking about my constituency—I cannot talk in specific terms about others; but not a single piece of significant drainage work has been done in my constituency since 1995!

Mr. Partap: Bad representation!

Mr. C. Imbert: No. It is all over the country. That is why it floods in Chaguanas. Because they are just talking and not doing anything. Not a single piece of significant drainage work has been done in my constituency over the last four years. No significant expenditure on roads.

Look at the Maracas Road, for example. Again, this Government does not understand maintenance. There is a contractor coming in and giving them a six for a nine on the North Coast Road. The Ministry is demoralized. The good people have left the Ministry and gone out, so they do not even know that they are getting substandard work, and then when the road is finished, there is no maintenance. Why do they think there are 67 landslides from the Saddle road to Maracas beach? No maintenance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There is this road built by the UNC. Millions of taxpayers' dollars were spent on that North Coast Road under the UNC administration. They are just cutting away the hillsides and there are little drains. What do they expect? No maintenance, no gangs out there to clear the watercourses. No gangs to make sure that the drainage systems for this road are in place. So what do they expect? That is why there are 67 landslides between the Saddle Road and Maracas beach. What is the Government doing about it? That is one of our major—if not our major—tourism areas. Maracas beach in the North Coast is one of the major tourist attractions in Trinidad and Tobago, but there are 67 landslides and what are they doing about it? Absolutely nothing, Mr. Deputy Speaker!

If they believe that in this year 2000 when the general election comes that the “fella” who lives in Las Cuevas—and all the way along from Maraval to Blanchisseuse and so forth—and has had to negotiate these 67 landslides, because they are not going to fix them this year—and more and more will occur. A friend of mine told me that he went to the beach two weeks ago, and while he was there, another one occurred. Rain was not even falling.

If they believe that people will be seeing these things and think highly of the UNC administration, they have another think coming. Do they believe that the persons who live on my street driving down and watching a burst main sending out hundreds of gallons of water every day for two months do not know that the Water and Sewerage Authority is well aware of it but is doing nothing about it under the direction of the Ministry of Public Utilities? We contacted the Ministry directly and they said, “Yes, we will file the report”. Yet, two days later, more water flowing down the road! Call them and they say, “Yes, we will file the report”. And that goes on and on and on.

If they believe that people are seeing these things and will think highly of the UNC, they have another think coming. They could be flippant about it, but the fact of the matter is that they have failed. They have spent four years fooling around, talking, mismanaging this country, and they have failed. They have one year to clean up their act and they are not going to make it!

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

So, whenever there is a debate like this, Mr. Speaker, I see that money was allocated for a number of useful and important things; things that would help the people of this country: computerization of NHA's operating systems.

Have any of you ever gone to the National Housing Authority to try to access information? I notice the Member for Caroni East is laughing. It would take a person about three weeks to find out the records of a particular house and so forth.

4.10 p.m.

The sum of \$1 million is allocated for the computerization of the National Housing Authority's operating systems. Savings were realized, due to the award of contracts. This is nothing to be happy about. With respect to the strengthening of land administration, savings were realized due to the delay in the award of contracts in the Lands and Surveys Division.

A lady came to my office yesterday. She showed the correspondence from Lands and Surveys Division dating back six years. Six years this poor unfortunate lady was trying to access information, from the Lands and Surveys Division, about a particular parcel of land so that she could apply for an easement to get access to her humble abode. Six years! She showed me this thing, and the Government has \$1 million allocated to computerize and strengthen the land administration, but savings were realized due to the delay in the award of contracts.

Mr. Speaker, this, as my colleague from Diego Martin West has indicated, is an admission of failure. That is what this is all about. It is an admission of failure and this is how the Government is running the country.

I think there is something in the Ministry of National Security—I saw something about E-999. I have seen people from E-999 killing people now, under this UNC administration. People, who are supposed to protect and serve, are going into people's houses and killing them—murdering them!

There are so many new things that have come to pass, under this administration, that are new features in the life of our country. Assassination, Mr. Speaker, political assassination is now on the national agenda. Under this UNC administration, political assassination, no—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: With the greatest deference, we are getting away from the business at hand. How does political assassination get into this? I ask you, please, let us focus on the matter at hand.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, very much. The issue on hand, Mr. Speaker, is crime. The issue that struck me is this unfortunate Special Reserve Policeman who had some emotional problems went, while on duty, to another unfortunate person's house and ended up shooting that person and a relative.

Mr. Assam: And you are boasting about it.

Mr. C. Imbert: No. This is where this country has come, because of priorities. When the Government takes \$100 million and waste it on a one-night-stand in Chaguaramas in this period—[*Interruption*] \$100 million, \$200 million, \$120 million, \$80 million same thing—a waste of expenditure. When the Government takes that colossal sum of money, and it realizes that that money could have been spent in counselling—the modern age is complex and, many of these crimes are being committed because people are succumbing to pressure or the environment in which they grew up was not suitable and so forth, and they are cracking under the pressure.

The Government could have taken \$1 million out of that \$100 million spent on that one-night-stand and used it to increase the allocation in the Ministry of National Security for training and counselling police officers. That is what the Government could have done with that money.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Imbert: While the Member for Oropouche talks about growth and development and so forth, all of these matters of which I am speaking have an effect on the national psyche.

When one cannot get water for two months, or one has to drive down a road and dodge the same pot hole for two months, or one has to be concerned about leaving one's home—bandits are going to break in at any minute in broad daylight—all of these things have an effect on their national psyche. It increases the stress level of the ordinary citizen. It reduces productivity.

The whole purpose of a government is to improve the standard of living and to make things easier for people. The Government is supposed to ease the daily problems that people have, not exacerbate them. The failure of this administration, in terms of its lack of priorities, is because of its mismanagement, non-performance, lack of attention to basic amenities and its tendency to get carried away with extravagance.

My colleague spoke about the World Beat Concert where \$8 million was spent. It came and went. What did we benefit from that? It is just like this concert in Tobago, this \$41 million concert. What did the people of Tobago or the people of Trinidad—what was the benefit derived from that \$41 million? Instead, the \$41 million could have been spent on much more important things. I cannot speak for Tobago, but I am certain that there are so many basic amenities that could have been improved. The health-care system, the education system, the road infrastructure or the water supply system in Tobago, could have been improved significantly with that \$41 million.

The UNC administration does not understand what it is doing. By its complete lack of performance it is just increasing frustration in the society. I am sure my colleague from Tobago East will not agree with me because he has other views. But you see, many of these crimes and many of these domestic problems and domestic violence are a direct consequence of the failure of the UNC to provide basic amenities for people of this country.

Mr. Assam: In four years?

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes! Mr. Speaker, when we demitted office in 1995, we handed the Government a functional economy. We handed them a number of plans and programmes. All the Government had to do was take it and run with it. [*Desk thumping*] They got it on a platter: a diversified economy. That is what the Government got on a platter. There are no new initiatives. The other side cannot point to any significant new initiative, none, in no sector—[*Desk thumping*] the health sector or the education sector. None! The energy sector—there is nothing that the Government can point to. What the Government did, they came in and met a series of programmes in place and they have bungled all of them. The PNM had a Health Sector Reform Programme, an Education Sector Programme, an Infrastructure Programme in many areas: roads, drainage, water supply and so forth. The Government bungled it all. They completely bungled it. That is what has happened. Then people realize that instead of getting a change all they got was exchange—that is all they got—and poor exchange at that too. That is all they got.

4.20 p.m.

I mean, look at the accidents on the roads, look at the road fatalities; the highest figure for road accidents, I would say in the 15 years, are occurring under the UNC administration. The normal road fatality figure under the NAR and under the PNM was 120 and that sort of thing, now we are hitting 150 and 160; 160

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people are being killed on our roads. People comment on how our driving standards have deteriorated.

One of the things which the NAR administration introduced and which we continued, which was a very good thing, was a comprehensive road and traffic safety programme. Every year there was a series of programmes on the television, in the newspapers, a whole national awareness programme on road safety. And it works! You see, you spend \$100,000 or \$200,000 on something like that, on a national road safety programme, public awareness and so on, trying to get people to change their driving habits. A little drop in the ocean, \$200,000 or \$300,000, and you see the road fatality figure come down, the number of accidents in the country comes down; that is what Government is all about. You see, these things, for some reason, are beyond the capability of this administration, they are totally beyond them.

I look at the education sector. I mean, they had to get rid of that poor fellow who was there. The number of times I heard about how Common Entrance Examination will be gone this year: it will go in 1999, it will go in 2000, but the way we are going Common Entrance Examination will go in 2010. Why? Lack of application. It is just a set of talk and believing their own propaganda, fooling themselves to believe their own propaganda.

So they came here in 1996 and talked about all the schools they were going to build, they do not build one. They came in 1997 and they told us we are going to do this, and they do nothing. The same thing occurred in 1998 and 1999. Now we are into 2000 and I understand there is some mad scramble. They want to build 10 schools in seven months. The Carenage Boys' School has taken four years to build under this administration! A simple primary school took four years to be built under the UNC, but they want to build 10 secondary schools with thousands of students in seven months. Ridiculous!

This is what we are going to see in this election year, you know. We are going to see scrambling. They want to build four football stadia in seven months. It is not going to happen. All we are going to see is a set of carrying on and bacchanal and attempts at public relations and propaganda and so forth, while people become more and more frustrated with their daily lives. That is what is going to happen.

Mr. Speaker, I see that the administration is spending—what is it—US \$100,000 or something, \$1 million on some image consultant. Well, you could put a pig in a jacket and tie but he is still a hog, you know, Mr. Speaker. *[Laughter]*

That is the kind of thing my colleague from Diego Martin West would say. I mean, it is not going to work.

You know, Lloyd Best has been saying something for many, many years. He was talking about people going into Government in a collapsed state. They collapse before they get into government. I am reading this thing and not really paying much attention to it, but I am convinced of it now, that this administration went into government in a collapsed state, pre-collapsed. *[Desk thumping]* I believe what Lloyd Best means when he says, if you go in there and you are already collapsed you could never recover; you just stay there wallowing around and just going through the motions, but you never achieve anything meaningful and significant.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge the Government—they have 11 months to go, they have about a year. Who knows? When the moon and stars and the soothsayers and thing do their religious ceremony and the “fella” pull out this and that and he say, “All right! June 5”, *[Laughter]* because the moon, the sun, Saturn, Neptune and Mercury are all in alignment and whatever. In the little time that they have left, I advise the Government to make an effort so that people will not have to suffer in 2000 the way they have suffered over the last four years. Make an effort to do something so when you leave office, at least in your last six months you did something, something that people could recognize instead of just all of this “ole” talk, and these promises and so forth.

You know, it is a very strange approach to governance in this country. The person who normally occupies that seat, the Member for Couva South, wants to increase his *curriculum vitae* so that he will count: the Attorney General from 1981—86 passed 132 bills; from 86—91, 135 Bills; from 91—95, 110, but he wants to do 227. It is a very strange approach to governance.

All of these Bills do not make any sense. In the documents before us they could not get the environment management programme going because the legislation was not passed. *[Desk thumping]* Something important like that. If you have to access loan funding from an international agency, it is a prerequisite that you pass the legislation. But we are here with dog Bill and all “kinda” thing in the Parliament, all “kinda” foolishness in this Parliament and you cannot deal with important legislation like that.

I have a very serious problem, but I am also confident that the people of this country are not stupid and they are simply waiting. It is only a matter of time. *[Desk thumping]* More and more, I am surprised at the number of persons who

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did not traditionally or openly support the PNM in the past who are coming forward now and wants to join the PNM and they want to work with us. Persons who were political activists for other political parties in the past, they want to band together with the PNM to see the back of this non-performing administration. *[Desk thumping]* The sooner we dispatch them the better for all of us, *[Desk thumping]* so we could get back to the proper administration of this country and we would not be distracted by three weeks of which Minister will get locked up and who police looking for and this one in the clear and not in the clear and so forth.

That is a national distraction, Mr. Speaker! That is what the national agenda is all about, that the Prime Minister so cannot control his Ministers that they have to find themselves in such trouble that this is the subject of editorials every day for three weeks. While no water in the pipes, potholes in the roads, people breaking into people's houses, people cannot buy food; that is what is important in this country. Flooding all over the place, the whole system, the whole fabric of society is breaking down. That is what we should be focussing our attention on, but we cannot, because every week one of them does some nonsense! *[Laughter]* And next week would be somebody else. A different one! *[Desk thumping]*

So I am appealing to the Government, you are a Government, you are not a pick-up side, you are not a J'ouvert band, a collection of clowns that give us merriment and amusement everyday. That is not your purpose. You are there to improve the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Desk thumping]* I am appealing to the Government; I do not want any more scandal this year. I do not want to hear who killed who and who whatever. I want you to work.

Mr. Speaker, I close by saying that I hope on the next occasion that we debate a variation of appropriation that we will see that \$3 million was allocated to upgrade the sewerage system at Beetham and for some reason it was allocated to upgrade the sewerage system in Santa Cruz; or \$39 million was allocated to do the Solomon Hochoy Highway, that project could not come off, so they took \$7 million and they fixed the Eastern Main Road and \$5 million and fixed the Southern Main Road and so forth. That is what we are supposed to be debating here. We are supposed to see useful reallocation of expenditure, where money was allocated for a proper purpose and is put to productive use.

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

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

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.05 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Hon. Mervyn Assam): Mr. Speaker, I wish to join in this debate on the Motion:

Be It Resolved that this House adopt the Second Report of the 1999/2000 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the expenditure from the Public Revenue which were not included in the Annual Estimates 1998/1999.

This particular Motion is almost like an annual ritual. Simply because—whether it is in the public or private sector domain—budgeting is a very imprecise discipline. There are many areas that are not capable of being accurately predicted or in which there are changes during the course of any financial year, or that circumstances may change because of the impact of local, regional or international influences, or because of climatic conditions. As the Member for Diego Martin East said, there was an enormous amount of rainfall this year, and the rainfall could not be attributed to the Government, it must be attributed to changing international, global weather patterns.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, today is January 21, and we had heavy rainfall up to yesterday and we are supposed to be in the dry season. This tells you exactly how weather patterns have changed and continue to change, because of man's interference with the ozone layer and all the other scientific interventions of man. So that when we come here to do this exercise, which incidentally we had to do when the last government was out of office in 1995, we had to come in 1996 and do the same Variation of Appropriation left behind by the former Minister of Finance of that former administration. So that, today, when you listen to the Member for Diego Martin West and the Member for Diego Martin East raving and ranting about incompetence and monumental failure on the part of this Government, it is really in my opinion, most unfortunate.

Mr. Speaker, you know we are in a new century, and I see the Member for Diego Martin East has assumed a new kind of attitude. In the last four years he was abrasive; he was contentious; he was hostile; he was, to say the least, someone who bordered on the offensive, but you know this afternoon he changed that style altogether. For this, I wish to congratulate him and I hope he continues, for the rest of this parliamentary session, with that restrained attitude. I hope the other hon. Members opposite would adopt the same kind of attitude. But he has changed his style to one that is, in my opinion, lacking in credibility. To me, that is a very dangerous kind of trajectory for any Member to pursue. He was so wild

in his hyperbole; so wild in his exaggeration. He included so many figures that even your imagination could have been blown when the Member for Diego Martin East said that food prices have increased between 1996 and 1999 by 200 to 300 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Member for Diego Martin East believes nothing. He does not believe anything! I know that. He does not believe that the inflation rate is 2.3 per cent; he does not believe the unemployment rate is 11.7 per cent; he does not believe in the retail index, which indicates the increase in food prices; he does not believe, in terms of the rate of growth of GDP. He believes nothing. I do not know which document that must be produced by which authority in this country; whether it is the CSO, the Central Bank or whichever authority, that would convince the distinguished Member for Diego Martin East, that the figures which this Government and Ministers of this Government present in this distinguished House are not of their making. We do not pick figures out of a hat, we do not fabricate figures, we bring figures to the Parliament on the basis of information supplied to us by the institutions that have been mandated to provide these statistics and analyses.

Therefore, it is most unfortunate because he was in Government. He spent a little less than four years as a Minister, and just as he had to rely on those figures, those statistics, those officials and their analyses, we, too, are in the same situation that we have to rely on these things. When he gets up and questions the authenticity, accuracy and reliability of these figures, in a very real sense he is attacking the professionalism of the public service. That is what he is doing. When he thinks he is attacking us, he is really attacking the professionalism of the public service.

Mr. Speaker, I was also amazed that the Member for Diego Martin East, a former Minister of Works and Transport, who was responsible for the development and maintenance of the infrastructure of this country, not only the constituency of Diego Martin East, could say today—which, to me, is a serious indictment on the quality of work or lack of work which he performed during his tenure in office—that the whole set of infrastructure in the country is collapsing and crumbling. You mean in the short space of less than four years if the hon. Member had done proper road work; proper drainage; proper side walks; that they would collapse in less than four years? I find that rather amazing for any child, even in kindergarten, to believe. I cannot believe that he could be for real.

Do you know something, Mr. Speaker? I had the great opportunity to see—my time is taken up in so many other areas that I do not have time to look at

television, but the television is on when I am at home doing my business; some time in the morning when I am getting ready for work or, at night I may put on the television while doing other things—the Member for Diego Martin East advertising with other people about the amount of water that WASA was supplying to his constituency. Today, the distinguished Member—I cannot say honourable: it has to be distinguished in how he puts across his innuendoes and half-truths; he has to be distinguished in that—comes and says that there is no water in any part of his constituency! He said so today. He was advertising on the television how much water was flowing through the pipes of his constituency and congratulating the Ministry of Public Utilities and WASA for this outstanding achievement.

Do you know I have often had to chide the Member for Diego Martin West for that sin of ingratitude that I saw infecting the Member for Diego Martin West and it is also infecting the Member for Diego Martin East. He blamed this Government for not having achieved some of the things that we said that we were going to achieve in the budget of 1998/1999. I am not hear to lay blame on individuals—far from it—but as I said earlier, he was a Minister of Works and Transport and a Member of the Government, and he must have understood the system that he worked in when he was a Minister.

In the four years or less that that administration was in office, and prior to that they had a run of 30 consecutive years, precious little was done in terms of public sector reform. I do not blame public servants, you know, because we have some of the most capable, professional, intelligent, experienced, highly qualified public servants in this country. Quite a few of them work very hard, but in every situation and organization there are people who are laggards, and there may be some laggards. There are many of them who do good work, but it is the system in which they operate; the milieu in which they operate. I can give you some very concrete and personal examples of the kind of problems I have experienced as a Minister during the last four years as a consequence of the system: not the people, but the system.

I took to Cabinet a complete restructuring of the Ministry of Trade and Industry. I took to Cabinet a complete restructuring of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs. I took to Cabinet a complete restructuring of the Ministry of Tourism while I was there for 18 months or so.

5.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, do you know it was like pulling teeth without anesthetic to get that restructuring process operational, to get the staff, to get the recruitment going,

whether it was by contract or under permanent establishment? He knows the system! Notwithstanding your best efforts, every week that I would ask my officials: where is this at? How is it going? How are we progressing? How can we get this done? You have to wait and wait and wait. Sometimes it is utterly frustrating.

So when we come at the end of the year and the Public Sector Investment Programme—although we have done exceedingly well, the former Minister of Planning always tells us that we have had a 68 per cent, 72 per cent or whatever it is, average, much better than the 43 and 45 per cent that the last administration had.

When we come here in terms of the recurrent expenditure, because of the system again, the system of tendering—and I am not knocking the Central Tenders Board—the point is, to get things done through the Central Tenders Board takes a lot of time. There is a lot of bureaucracy, red tape and waiting, as a consequence of which, many things you see here today have nothing to do with bungling and monumental failure—these are some of the words—they have nothing to do with that. If this Government had the system that you handed down to us as a proper legacy of public service reform, we would have gotten all these things done within the period and the costs for which we had budgeted. But it is the system! We are wrestling with the system.

Mr. Speaker, I am telling you that after four years, and it would be five years at the end of this year, we would still not have had the kind of reform that we would like. It is a long haul, a long road to go before we get the type of public service reform that we want; where we can managerialize the public service as we want to. The point is, we are constrained by the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, you know the Westminster system that we inherited from Great Britain—Britain is said to have an unwritten Constitution except for the statute law that they put on the books from time to time. New Zealand is in a similar fortunate position, it does not have a written Constitution except for the statute law that it puts on the books from time to time. As a consequence of which law, Margaret Thatcher was able to introduce radical and fundamental public service reform during her tenure as Prime Minister.

Similarly, in the New Zealand model, they were able to do the same thing and they have been able to privatize and managerialize many of the ministries into what they call state corporations. So that the person who is involved in a state corporation is no longer a permanent secretary, that person is now a chief

executive officer with a budget, goals, benchmarks for performance and incentivization for achieving your objectives on an annual basis. So there is a whole team behind that chief executive officer who he can hire, fire, promote, discipline and achieve the objectives of the budget which the Prime Minister introduces into the Parliament on an annual basis. That is the kind of thing that we should be working towards.

But whenever we come to the Parliament for the simplest bill to be passed into law, far less, Mr. Speaker, a bill that seeks to amend the Constitution, which may require more than a simple majority, we run into a brick wall with Members opposite. Therefore, it is impossible to get things done. I remember when we brought a Constitution (Amdt.) Bill to deal with committees to be established to scrutinize the service commissions, we ran into a whole storm of protests. Many people said that the Executive wanted to interfere with service commissions, that it wanted to abolish and influence the commissions and all kinds of things, when we were simply trying to innovate and to make the public service commissions much more responsive to the needs of a modern society moving into the 21st Century and the new millennium. That is what we were trying to do!

We were not trying to interfere. We were trying to assist you, the Opposition; to do exactly what you said this afternoon, to deliver goods and services of the highest possible quality to improve the quality of life of all the citizenry in this country, through the fundamental and radical reform of the public service. But, of course, whenever you do that there is always malice attached to your motives; always an interpretation that you do not trust this Government because this Government is this and that. You never see the nobility as expressed in the proposed clauses of the Bill. All you see is red diabolism on the part of this Government! That is why my distinguished friend from Tobago East has had the occasion to call certain people opposite Mephistopheles. That is all you see, devilish activity!

We are trying on this side to reform, innovate, and improve and to modernize a public service to respond to the needs of a society in transition and to make it a modern society. That is why Singapore today has been on the highest, No. 1 on the competitive index in the world for three consecutive years; that little island. Because they have been able to do exactly what we have been struggling to do for years, to reform the public service and, by extension, to reform society and to make it better. Unless we do that we could never be competitive. We would remain forever a hewer of wood and a drawer of water in the guise of having a

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high per capita income and a high gross domestic product. That is what will happen!

You would have side by side, two economies warring in the bosom of one nation; an economy where people are enjoying high lifestyles and where people are living below the poverty line, as demonstrated in the Human Development Report where it is clearly articulated that about 30 per cent of the people in this country are living below the poverty line, although it went on to say that Trinidad and Tobago was number one in the entire developing world to have put in place measures for poverty eradication and poverty alleviation. We are number one! This Government is on the road because it is putting measures in place for poverty eradication and poverty alleviation.

So when the Member for Diego Martin East comes today and talk about all this poverty taking place, standards of living have risen in the last four years. The quality of life has been improved in the last four years. In fact, somebody was asking me recently, why is it that the Southwest Regional Health Authority does not advertise their achievement? I was visiting the Port of Spain General Hospital and the various clinics in this particular regional area and in the last four years, although I am the first one to admit that when the former Member for Arouca South, Minister Eckstein, was there, he did a good job. I would be the first to admit that because it is unfair to just stand and criticize and not give somebody his or her due.

He started the process, but in the last four years, that process has been carried through to greater heights and greater achievement. The quality of health care that is being accessed now, and not only the quality but the diversity of healthcare that is being accessed now in the Port of Spain General Hospital and in all the various health centres—because the Woodbrook Health Centre has just been refurbished—is undoubtedly, of a higher quality than you had four or five years ago. It is a fact. The statistics are there and people are telling you that.

More people are accessing water today. I have people who work in my Ministry and they tell me, “I never had water in Harpe Place,” and this place or that, or whatever it is called, and they are getting water today. They did not have water for years, but they are getting water today. Never in the history of this country!

Mr. Speaker, I spent a very quiet Christmas and New Years; I went nowhere. All the invitations I got, I asked my secretary to return them with thanks. I went nowhere at all. Immediately after Christmas I decided to take a drive into the

country to commune with God and nature. I decided to drive from Port of Spain along the Eastern Main Road into Sangre Grande, to Manzanilla, to Mayaro, go through all the other places which my two friends represent, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro and the Member for Nariva and I was astounded. I was amazed that there were six brand new concrete—not temporary—steel and concrete bridges that have replaced those rickety, unreliable, fearsome little wooden structures that they had for 40 years in this country under the People's National Movement.

I went through Valencia which the Member for Toco/Manzanilla represents. Since I was a boy, I remember—my mother was from Toco, I have often said—I used to go to Toco for my August holidays, and I used to go through the base, through this one-lane silver bridge. So that bridge was there for maybe a century. *[Laughter]* I said before I was born, but that bridge must have been there for a century. Today, there is a double bridge and you are passing swish, swish on either side; no traffic congestion, beautiful bridge.

I used to go on the Southern Main Road long before we had the Churchill Roosevelt, the Uriah Butler and the Solomon Hochoy Highways. I used to go down on that Southern Main Road and, again, there was that little silver bridge. Today, we have a double bridge; swish, swish, swish, again. *[Laughter]*

I used to go to Tunapuna, Mr. Speaker, and you know Tunapuna very well. You had to go through that narrow dirt road behind the petrol station to get from the Eastern Main Road across the Priority Bus Route into the Churchill Roosevelt Highway. Today, there is a fantastic link road in Tunapuna, where Hilo sits at the corner, which takes you beautifully unto the Priority Bus Route, into Macoya Road and the Churchill Roosevelt Highway.

In St. Ann's where they said that it was technically and engineeringly impossible—if there is such a word—to do a design at the St. Ann's roundabout to filter traffic from the Lady Young Road into St. Ann's Road, because hitherto drivers had to come out of the Lady Young Road and go right around the perimeter of the Savannah to get back to St. Ann's. For the last couple years, traffic is filtering beautifully on all sides. There is no danger; there is absolutely no hazards; swish, swish, swish.

Mr. Speaker, if you go to San Fernando. The Member spoke about the problem with the Solomon Hochoy Highway. Let us assume what the Member for Diego Martin West said—although it was highly exaggerated—that there was some measure of inconvenience for about 18 months or so. Let us assume that

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even at this point in time the work is incomplete, but it has been improved. If you go down to Cross Crossing you would see one of the most marvelous pieces of engineering that you could ever see in a Third World country; if we are a Third World country.

Mr. Speaker, you should go down there, double lane again, another bridge. There was one bridge in Cross Crossing, another silver bridge where you had to stop. There are two bridges now, Member for San Fernando West. Where is the Member for San Fernando East? Swish, swish, and swish again! Look what is happening on the La Romain Road. Again, the widening of the La Romain Road for people to go into La Brea, Siparia and wherever you want to go into the deep south. Again, it is this Government.

Mr. Speaker, somebody told me some time ago that maybe Piarco Airport is on a cemetery and there is a jinx, because nobody could build a new airport, including my friend from Diego Martin East. When he was Minister of Works and Transport the Pride project turned into shame. [*Laughter*] There were all kinds of inquiries; the Ombudsman had to come in, all kinds of unfortunate this and that and the other.

That airport project, as you know, Mr. Speaker—because you were a Minister of Works and you were one of the first ministers to improve the airport by putting in a nice baggage room and so forth—that was the beginning of improvement at Piarco Airport when you were the Minister there. I remember that very well.

Today, after 30 years of trials, tribulations and failures by all the previous PNM administrations, this administration will deliver a modern, 14-finger, state-of-the-art airport sometime this year and I hope by Independence. [*Desk thumping*]

I saw in the constituency of St. Joseph, with great delight but with great humility also, because I had been waiting for some time, piles are being driven on the southwestern side of that intersection, which heralds the start of another fantastic engineering project, that is, the flyover by the Grand Bazaar, which will have both east/west, north/south wings to take people swish, swish, swish, again, hopefully, by the end of this year or before. And they sit there and say that the quality of life has not been improved!

That administration decided to close down the Woodbrook Health Centre. It has been restored and renewed. That administration had decided to close down the Aranguez clinic. It has started to be restored and by the end of April the people of Aranguez, my constituents, would have a brand new health facility. [*Desk*

thumping] I am looking forward to the polyclinic in St. Joseph before long. I am also looking forward to my friend, the Minister of Social and Community Development, Member for Chaguanas, and myself turning the sod very shortly for the community centre in Aranguez.

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I have had three brand new schools in the constituency of St. Joseph: the Bamboo Government No. 2 School, which is a state-of-the-art school. I have had the Hindu Government School and it is now going to be co-ed, it used to be separate before. San Juan Girls' RC and San Juan Boys' RC, one with 350 and the other with 450 students. They are now getting a 900 pupil school combined in co-ed, a brand new San Juan Boys' and Girls' RC School.

The former Minister of Education had built schools not only in St Joseph, but in Beetham and every part of this country. He built primary schools in Arima and everywhere, now they are building 20 secondary schools and the Member is saying the quality of life has not been improved. Have a conscience! "Conscience makes cowards of us all," says Shakespeare, and he also said "O judgment thou has fled to brutish beast and men have lost their reason." Just like the Member for Diego Martin East and the Member for Diego Martin West. *[Laughter]*

How could the Member say this Government has not performed. He could criticize this Government, maybe, by saying that he does not like the Minister of Trade, or he does not like the Minister of Public Utilities. He could do all that, but to say that this Government has not performed reminds me of when I saw "The King and I" with Yul Brynner when they were accusing him of doing all kinds of things with the state of Siam, he said that was a false lie. That is a false lie to say this Government has not performed. I am sure that within the next six months the water supply in this country will improve immeasurably, a quantum leap in the entire country.

We recently opened the Arima Hospital too. They were tinkering with it all the time. Who opened the Arima Hospital? It is this Minister of Health who opened it, and we are renovating San Fernando and we are renovating and upgrading Sangre Grande Hospitals. You wanted to close down Point Fortin Hospital and that is going to be a beautiful hospital also before long, and I hope Scarborough Hospital will be a reality even before the end of the year 2000, or at least construction would have started and advanced before the end of 2000.

Mr. Speaker, they sit there and deny truth and fact. I cannot understand how anybody could deny truth and fact. Look how many community centres would be

built and have started to be repaired. We are going to be building four football stadia. This prophet of doom and gloom from Diego Martin East says it will never happen. We will see. I want him to eat some crow when it happens, but he would not do it, he is so proud that he would not say *mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa* for having misled the Parliament. He would not say it, you know, but it will happen. Have no fear. I know he does not want these things to happen because he does not like the people of Trinidad and Tobago. He does not want to see the improvement in the quality of life. He does not want to see sports for young persons, he does not want to develop the physical, moral, intellectual and spiritual talents of the young people. I know he does not want it, but it will happen.

Member for Tobago West, it will happen because you were one of the initiators of that project. You brought the note to Cabinet for the Government to host the 2001 Under-19 and for this we are grateful to you, Member for Tobago West. Now the Member for Diego Martin East wants to scuttle the project that was initiated by the Member for Tobago West. I think she should deal with him when she makes her contribution.

Mr. Speaker, look at the skills development that has been taking place. One of the most important assets of any country is the quality of the skills of its human resource. That is the key to modernization, the key to sustainable development, the key to competitiveness, the key to a quality nation—the quality of your human resource—and you cannot deny that this Government has been spending money very wisely. We have pooled together all the loose ends. Hitherto, you had lots of institutions both in the public and private sectors and the quasi-public sector involved in training. We have pooled everything together so that we get optimum and maximum benefit from the resources we deploy. We now have the maximum National Training Agency, we have quality training and Skills Development Centres all over the country including Tobago.

Miss Nicholson: Where?

Hon. M. Assam: It will start very shortly. *[Laughter]* A Skills Development Centre has been earmarked for Tobago and it will start very shortly. That is a fact. This is not something that I am misleading the Parliament with. We have had people graduating from this Skills Development Centre in some of the most important areas of technical and high-tech training and skills development. I went to one last year at the Trinidad Hilton and I was so pleased to see young men and women in some of the most advanced technical skills and the Member says this Government is not doing, or has not done anything. I can stay for 10 hours tonight

you know, but I do not have 10 hours. I can give a record of what has been achieved.

Mr. Speaker, I have often said that trade is the lifeblood of a nation and we have been advancing the frontiers of trade through market access in collaboration with TIDCO and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the missions abroad. I will give a little snippet, and I know the Member for Diego Martin East is going to say that the figures are not true. “Whe” you get those figures from? I know he will dispute them, but nevertheless, I will give them to you.

In 1994—and I am talking about non-oil exports—it was \$2.5 billion; 1995, \$3.5 billion; 1996, \$3.7 billion; 1997, \$4.04 billion; 1998, \$4.321 billion and we have figures up to September because we do not have the rest of the year and it is over \$3 billion up to the third quarter. That is a creditable achievement for this country and because I am the Minister of Trade I am happy for the country because trade is the lifeblood. What does trade do? It creates a society in which you have more people employed in high-paying permanent jobs. You are providing foreign exchange by exporting and do you know what that does? When people see you are doing that, investments are invited into this country.

I am going to be laying in Parliament before long—and I hope when I lay the figures for the pageant, the Member for Diego Martin East does not say that the Auditors, who are reputable auditors, cooked up the books because I know that is the first thing he would say. They are talking about \$80 million; \$100 million; \$120 million; \$140 million and \$150 million. Even the Member for San Fernando East who is supposed to be a responsible man, because he is looking to lead this country, makes all kinds of wild statements all over the country. He said it was \$140 million some time ago. Could you imagine this? When I lay it, you would see.

We have been attracting investments in the non-oil sector and when I lay it—I am not going to read it now but—it will show the beneficial results of our efforts, not only from the investment in the pageant of May 1999, but all the other things which the Ministry of Trade and Industry, TIDCO and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been doing in order to bring investors into this country.

We are about to launch, or to turn the sod, or to break ground for a science technology and innovative park. [*Desk thumping*] The Member says this Government is doing nothing. We are going to have investors coming here involved in software development and all kinds of high-tech activities that would create the kind of jobs that are highly paid, but also we will have to get the

university to do all the kinds of training necessary to provide the cadre of people to sustain that kind of operation.

Mr. Speaker, when that aluminium smelter plant comes on stream, when that new steel plant comes on stream and if trains 2 and 3 come on stream and there is an ethylene plant with all its downstream plastic industry this Government would have created virtually an industrial revolution in five years. The Member says this Government has pauperized people, and has not done this and that? Have a heart, Member for Diego Martin East. I am sorry the Member for Diego Martin West—he took prime time so he could be paraded tonight on television.

Hon. Member: You ‘vex’ for that?

Hon. M. Assam: I am not ‘vex’ at all. Me? If people want to engage in misuse of the information system and the people who operate it encourage them in this misuse, so be it. If that is the kind of society they want, so be it. But I will stand up and try to elevate the society to the best of my ability until my last voice cracks and the last drop of saliva ceases to lubricate this tongue of mine. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago, under this Government, has been one of the most important players in the Caricom scene. We have been driving the process to the extent that there is a certain element of jealousy and sometimes we have to slow down our speed in order to accommodate those who cannot move at the speed. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the last four years has been able to attract more diplomatic missions than you would have been able to attract in the last 15 years.

Hon. Member: He is a good Minister.

Hon. M. Assam: We are all good Ministers. Do you know of any who is not good? All of us are good Ministers that is why the Government is moving. That is why investors are coming, that is why the standard of living is increasing; that is why trade is moving; that is why we have more infrastructure and a better quality of life. Not one Minister could do it, it is a collectivity my friend, and that is what you were not able to achieve.

When the Member says that he agrees with Mr. Lloyd Best, I have no quarrel with Mr. Best, he has a fine brain, but he also said that when you get on stage you have to stop rehearsing, that is what you all did for three years and 11 months. You all had three years and 11 months of rehearsal time and what did you do in your three years and 11 months? You collapsed. Why did you collapse? Because

you went into government without a proper plan of operation and without that kind of cohesion and cohesiveness in your ranks. Of course, you had a leader who probably felt that he was maximum. Almost like the Pope, *pontifex maximus*, pontificating all over the place: "I am the father of the nation." Could you imagine this? He is the father of the nation. Could you imagine this thing?

Mr. Speaker, I thought that I would enter into this debate simply to put the record straight, simply to educate Members opposite and tell the national community that everything they heard from the speakers on that side this afternoon is misleading and inaccurate. We have a whole litany of achievements about which this Government can boast.

It is true that we have had some unfortunate floodings. Do you think we will deny that? We cannot deny it. I feel very grieved when rain starts to fall, you would not know how fearful I become because parts of my constituency are low-lying and in this country the rain falls in a manner that creates such torrents of floods.

So we are mindful of that, but it does not mean that we have not been doing anything. We have been working at it. In fact, much work has been done at the Caparo River. Am I not right? Much work has been done in other areas too. The San Juan River has been dredged, the Mt. Lambert River has been dredged, the weir in the Johnny King Road which borders both the San Juan River and the Mt. Lambert River has been concreted and a weir put in. We have put in sluice gates in Bamboo Nos. 1, 2 and 3, pumps have been put in and the Member says we have been doing nothing.

We have concreted the whole of Boundary Road and are about to do the drain so that the confluence of water would be taken straight into the Caroni River without any damage or hurt to the people who suffered this damage hitherto. This is happening everywhere and the Member says nothing is happening. He talks about a big hole in Morne Coco Road or Saddle Road, but when he was Minister of Works and Transport, he built a road at the cost of several million dollars of taxpayers' money and up to now it is not open.

Millions of dollars spent to build a road in the Member's constituency and up to now there is no vehicular traffic to utilize millions of dollars of taxpayers' funds.

5.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Member has the temerity to come here this afternoon and knock this Government. *[Interruption]* Today, the road does not have a name. It

has this thing over it that is used to block a road—this arm that is put over to block a road—I forget the name of it. I pass there many times and see the road unopened.

Mr. Speaker, what they have got to realize is that development is not something overnight. You see, the People's National Movement had a mentality—I would not say philosophy—it is really a mentality that their time-frame, time horizon was five years, so they wanted to pack everything in five years to come and fool people and, of course, did nothing, or what they did was done badly. As the Member said, the roads the Member constructed—if the Member did any—collapsed! That is why today they are in a state of disrepair, all the infrastructure—because they did it so badly.

In fact, you know, I will tell you something. I used to see, when the Member was Minister of Works and Transport, they were paving roads and patching potholes and after two weeks or three weeks, the potholes opened up again. The road collapsed again and bridges have collapsed. Do you know how many bridges collapsed when the Member was Minister of Works and Transport? Even in the Member's private capacity, the Member cannot build a wall. [*Desk thumping*] Do you know that? But the Member is an engineer, so the Member claims.

Mr. Speaker, this administration is different. Of course, we want to bring relief, improvement, development, and improve the quality of life as rapidly as possible to as many people as possible. We want to do that, but we cannot do everything in five years. It would be folly to try to do everything in five years. What you have to do is identify those areas and those projects that you feel will bring maximum benefit to the population. You see, like water for all, maximum benefit; your hospital programme, maximum benefit; your primary and secondary schools programme, maximum benefit and your airport and seaport. We are dredging the seaport now and do you know why? Because the draft is not sufficient to accommodate all these big vessels that are coming in. Have you been seeing—I congratulate the Minister of Tourism, I do not want to take the praise for it—but every week now, three and four cruise liners are at the Port of Spain Harbour.

Mr. Imbert: That is hurricane.

Hon. M. Assam: It is hurricane. I know that this country is worth nothing for the Member, I know that. I do not know how the Member could want to be a Minister. This country is worth nothing for the Member. The only reason why the tourists are coming here is not because of the facilities, the amenities and the

tourist attraction it is because it is hurricane. I know that. I know of course, that is the reason. The Member did not think that I went to two Caribbean Cruise Conferences and I persuaded them, both in Ocho Rios and in Puerto Rico to come down here and I showed them the benefits of coming here. The Member did not think so. The Member thinks it is hurricane. *[Interruption]* Yes, that is true, I did a hurricane on them when I went to both conferences. *[Desk thumping]* That is what I did on them, a hurricane, so that they could come here. So do not tell me anything about hurricane.

Mr. Speaker, we have identified the very broad areas of development that would have the maximum impact, in terms of development and improvement in the quality and sustainability of life for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Education, health, sport, community development, drainage, roads, water, skills development, job creation, trade enhancement and market access. What more do they want? That is what the Government did—And therefore if we went to the polls now, I am sure—*[Interruption]* No, you said this afternoon that we cannot go to the polls because we have done nothing. I am saying that if we went to the polls now, all that I have said this afternoon in this distinguished Parliament, people will appreciate it. Do you know why? Because they are facts not fiction!

The Opposition was in power for 34 years as a party and they have left all their constituencies that they represented in poverty, penury dilapidated, depressed, deprived and dependent. That is what the Opposition did. *[Desk thumping]* So that when these gentlemen come here to repeat a set of cliches as they did last year, this year in 2000, I am imploring and exhorting all of them to come with their facts and figures and stop disguising behind innuendoes, threats and all kinds of other uninformed suggestions and assertions. Let them come with their facts and figures and tell us which figures they are going to accept. The Government will meet them on their turf. What figures do they want? The Central Statistical Office figures? Do they want TIDCO's figures? Do they want Customs and Excise Figures? Do they want Central Bank figures? Which figures do they want? They should tell us what they want and the Government will bring them and we will bat and bowl with each other on the same wicket and the Government will score all the runs, boundary after boundary against their foolishness and non-sensicalities

Miss Nicholson: Make sure and score them.

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

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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: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much and Members for extending my time. What is the reason why we had to bring this Variation of Appropriation Bill that was approved in Finance Committee and that we are debating today, both as a Motion and finally the Finance Bill, why? It was an inheritance, a very unfortunate inheritance that this Government got. They do not seem to understand that. It is an inheritance.

Mr. Speaker, when we were on the platform during the election campaign of 1995, between September, October, November or whenever it was, we said a debt must be paid and we honoured it and it will be paid in cash. When we entered into office and started to offer cash to public servants—and I think the first tranche was \$95 million, if my memory serves me correct—do you know what we were told by the bargaining bodies of public servants? We just realized—and I am not knocking anybody; I am trying to recall the truth and the fact—that if you paid us in cash, we would have to pay tax and, therefore, what you have given us, which is arrears of salary that you owed us for years, we will have to pay tax on it now. We would be losing out twice because we will have to pay 28 per cent, 35 per cent or whatever bracket we fell in. Therefore, they are the ones who opted for bonds. So we did, in fact, honour the debt and, secondly, we honoured the commitment to pay in cash, but we were told that they did not want cash because if they were paid in cash, they would have to pay income tax and that is how the bonds came about.

Mr. Speaker, we issued the bonds and from time to time, the bonds become encashable. The Ministry of Finance either made an error, did not budget properly or, perhaps, the way the bonds were encashed was in a different time sequence than the Ministry of Finance had on their books. I do not know exactly and I am not here to make a defence, but it is possible for a combination of all these things to have happened. So there was an overrun in the fiscal year 1998—1999 of \$204 million dollars. Now are you against this Government honouring the debt of public servants? Are you against that? Particularly arrears of salary which, was taken away from them? Some mechanism had to be devised to pay the debt.

5.55 p.m.

This was the mechanism that this Government devised and, having devised the mechanism, some error was made in the budgeting. As I said, I am not too

sure why it happened or how it happened, but you have to close the books. It is a fact. Every company, every organization, every institution, including Government, must close its books on an annual basis because you are mandated by law to do so. The Audit and Exchequer Ordinance says, you must close the books after a certain period of time after the financial year has elapsed. That is what we are trying to do in accordance with law. This Government is following the law. Are you against that too?

All right, having realized that \$204 million has been overpaid in terms of bonds that have been released and encashed, you have to find the money from somewhere. So this Government has not come to the Parliament and said, "We are increasing the parliamentary appropriation by \$204 million". We are not doing that. We are not putting an extra burden on the Treasury or the taxpayers. What we are saying is, "We are going to live within the means of the budget that was presented by the Minister of Finance in 1998/1999", as a consequence of which we had to find, you call it savings, you could call it what you want, you could call it surpluses, I would say perhaps the more correct word would be unspent balances. I would say perhaps that is the more appropriate terminology because perhaps savings could be misleading, that you have really, in fact, exercised restraint and all kinds of other financial devices in order to have a saving.

I would say, Mr. Speaker, that whether you want to call it surpluses or savings or unspent balances, it is the same thing. Therefore, the Ministry of Finance went around the various ministries and identified where there were unspent balances and they aggregated these unspent balances to transfer to the Ministry of Finance, Head 18 or whatever it is, in order to meet a liability that had already been committed, which is \$204 million in bonds that were issued. What is wrong with that? We did not say this Parliament must increase.

All we are saying is, we want a variation. We are viring from Education, from Tourism, from National Security, from the Judiciary, from Prime Minister and so forth, and we are viring these amounts that we have identified as unspent balances that were appropriated to Head 18, Ministry of Finance, in order to meet a legitimate liability which was \$204 million that was disbursed in bonds to public servants to pay the arrears of salaries. What is wrong with that? Where is the monumental failure? Where is the incompetence? Where is the mismanagement? I just do not understand it.

Of course, these unspent balances, as I said in the preface, Mr. Speaker, came about as a result of the system to a large extent and perhaps, maybe—sometimes,

you know, they say every fault could become a style. I hear ladies saying that, "Every fault becomes a style". Maybe the system helped us in that if the system were working perfectly there may not have been any unspent balances and we may very well have had to come to the Parliament to increase rather than vary the appropriation. So, in this case, the system in a sort of a way, worked for us, but not that I am in any way advocating that the system should work for us in this way. It just happened that it did on this occasion. I would prefer the system to work properly and that all the money appropriated by Parliament for the purposes for which they were appropriated should be spent in order to improve whatever activities a department or Ministry has pursued. In this case, this was how it worked out.

What is wrong with the Minister of Finance coming to the Parliament and saying, "We have identified these savings; we have identified these unspent balances and when you aggregate them they are sufficient to meet the requirement of this particular liability which we inherited, which you did not pay"? You were there for almost four years, and I am not knocking the NAR. When the NAR got into government they inherited a bankrupt Treasury from your previous administration, the PNM. What did you expect the NAR to do?

The NAR had to undertake an economic stringency programme in order to survive and even then they could not survive. They had to go to the IMF for a compensatory facility programme. This was because you had wiped out the Treasury and you had wiped out the foreign exchange reserves of the country by your recklessness in the 1986 election because you felt that you had to do everything in your power to get back into office so, therefore, you raided the Treasury, you raped and bankrupt the Treasury in the 1986 election and you were still beaten.

When the NAR came in they had to introduce economic measures to stabilize the haemorrhage that was taking place both in the local and external balances of the economy. They had to take away COLA and they had to cut salaries by 10 per cent and so forth. I suffered it too. I was an ambassador in London at the time and I got a letter stating, "Your salary is cut by 10 per cent". Nobody asked me anything. I got it too. Ministers got it too, "wap".

Miss Nicholson: I lost 15.

Hon. M. Assam: Well, 15; I lost 10. Nobody told me anything. I had no bargaining or collective union for me. They just wrote me and said, "Your salary is cut by 10 per cent, Ambassador", and that was it. So everybody had to get the

chop because the imperatives of the economic situation demanded it because of what the PNM did between 1956 and 1986, notwithstanding the fact that there was a windfall between 1972 and 1981. Billions of dollars went through the system and, as the late Michael Manley, Prime Minister of Jamaica, said—although you lent him US \$250 million, he threw it back in your face—“The money of the PNM went through the system like a dose of salts”. He added insult to injury. You lent him \$250 million and he still told you that the money went through the system like a dose of salts.

So that, I am not blaming the NAR but you did nothing about it because from 1986 to 1991 the NAR was in some of the most difficult economic circumstances in the country; very, very difficult, tight economic circumstances. However, you boast. You see, the irony of it, Mr. Speaker, is that they boast every time they come to this Parliament, not wanting to recognize the achievements, the innovativeness, how we have managed in the last four years. They always say they left us a brimming Treasury, they left us with all the projects, they did this, they did that, the economy was on high road, we were driving in a Rolls Royce—this Government—when we came into office because they left us a Rolls Royce. If you left us a Rolls Royce and we were on a highway when we entered into this Government, why did you not meet all of these commitments that you inherited from the previous administration? We could not afford it. Why did you not do it?

Why did you not put all the infrastructural projects in place? Why did you wait for the UNC to come and do it or implement it? Why did you leave government prematurely? You were elected for five years when you went to the polls. Why did you leave after 3 years and 11 months? Did you have something to hide? Were you afraid of something? Were you running away? Why did you leave? Then you talk about collapse. You collapsed totally, completely, irrevocably, irretrievably, like the wall. Like Humpty Dumpty who fell from the wall, no soldiers could put Humpty Dumpty together again, “nah, nah, nah, nah, all you cannot get together again at all”, not at all. Why did you run away after three years in the government? You were doing such a great job.

You know, I cannot understand it. It is like somebody who is a great boxer or a great athlete or a great actor or a great whatever it is and, in the prime of your acting or athletic prowess you give it up and say, “Boy, I gone”. Does that make sense, Mr. Speaker? I am not trying to involve you. It is merely a rhetorical question. Does that make sense? You are in the height of your economic prowess, your developmental thrust, you are designing all kinds of fantastic plants and infrastructure and this and that, you said that you had all these things put together;

social programmes, this legislation and after 3 years and 11 months, when you are now on the home stretch to win the President's Cup, you abandon the race. What kind of people are they?

Now, you want Trinidadians to respect you and even trust you? You abandoned them. It is like you forgot the Bible, boy! You must read the Bible. You must run the race to the finish, boy! You must read the Bible. You must run the race to the finish as a government. If somebody on your side wants to resign, let that person resign, but run the race to the finish as a government. That is the time you were elected for, five years; not after 3 years and 11 months you abandon people, you throw people, as they say, in the bamboo, people with high expectations. They figure you are doing so well they say, "Boy, it is this plant and that plant and this hotel and this highway and this project", and you just throw them in the bamboo. What kind of people are you? You are not good governors and then you want to talk about good governance! That is malfeasance, not good governance at all.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want the Members opposite, when they come here on a Friday or whenever we sit in this House, to address the issues very, very seriously. Let us pitch the debate at a high level. Let us introduce proper analyses, proper statistics, facts, figures, concepts and philosophical constructs if you want, if you are capable of that, programmes and policies to take this country forward into this year 2000 and beyond. Let us pledge to do that and cut out all the foolishness about who killed who and who murdered who and political assassination for which the Speaker had to pull up the Member for Diego Martin East and ask, "How did that come into this debate?" It is not important.
[*Interruption*]

He said it, the Member for Diego Martin East. The Speaker had to pull him up. He asked, "What does that have to do with this debate?" Let us cut out the foolishness, all the histrionics, all the acting, all the circus and vaudeville that the Member for Diego Martin East engaged in this afternoon. He spoke for 65 minutes and said absolutely nothing. That is a great feat, you know, to spend 65 minutes on your legs and say absolutely nothing; a lot of froth like the top of "mauby". You know, when you throw "mauby" in and you get to the top, it is only froth. That is what it is.

Let us cut it out. As I said, Mr. Speaker, tell us which statistics you are going to accept because I do not want to come here and tell you these are TIDCO statistics, these are Central Statistical Office statistics, these are Customs and Exercise statistics, and you are telling me you do not accept any of these statistics.

Which one do you accept? It is as if he becomes infected with some kind of a virus that must have gone to his brain and one day I might have to recommend a lobotomy for the Member for Diego Martin East. It must have gone to his brain to say that food prices have gone up 200 to 300 per cent in this country when the retail index does not suggest that whatsoever.

I do not know why he must try to mislead the Parliament. Is he trying to incite a certain kind of disaffection in the society against this Government or, particularly, against the Minister of Consumer Affairs? What is he trying to do?

Mr. Bereaux: Would the Minister give way for a question, please? I thank the hon. Minister for giving way. Mr. Speaker, since he is the Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs, would he be able to tell us by what percentage he thinks food prices increased between 1995 and 1999? We would like to get his—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. M. Assam: Yes, 8 per cent. I can tell you off the bat. It is 8 per cent in the last four years.

Mr. Bereaux: I am not arguing with you.

Hon. M. Assam: I can tell you why it is 8 per cent if you want a longer explanation, but it is 8 per cent overall. The man says 200 to 300 per cent. Listen, if food prices—Mr. Speaker, you see, he is an engineer and he only knows about rocks and concrete and steel but if he had a smattering of understanding of economics or statistics, he would realize that if food prices had gone up by 200 to 300 per cent, do you know what the rate of inflation would have been? I mean, it is a logical thing. The rate of inflation would have been in double digits, skyrocketing like in Brazil and in Guatemala and those places. You would have had a rate of inflation of 30, 40 or 50 per cent like in Jamaica. Our rate of inflation is under 3 per cent and he is saying that food prices have gone up by 200 to 300 per cent. It is either madness, wickedness or a sheer abundance of ignorance.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make one last point before I take my seat, because you have been generous with your time. This Government has been accused of all kinds of things about bringing in this legislation and that legislation. I would like to know, how do you reform and modernize a society if you do not do it through laws, either new laws or upgrading and updating and modernizing existing laws? They always accuse us of bringing this Bill and that Bill, describing the process as a waste of time. This is what the Member for Diego Martin East said this afternoon, you know, “a waste of time”, this and that, “ba, ba, ba”, you know. How do you modernize society? How do you become competitive?

6.10 p.m.

I remember when the Member for Siparia was the Minister of Legal Affairs, she introduced eight or nine Bills on intellectual property. They may seem esoteric or a waste of time, but had she not done that, we would not have been in sync with the World Intellectual Property Organization, and we would not have satisfied our membership in the World Trade Organization to be able to trade as partners in that world organization. We could not do it and we could not satisfy our treaty obligations with the United States, Canada and other countries with which we signed agreements.

How could we not do it? It may sound esoteric to the Member for Diego Martin East who only has a brain for concrete, perhaps. These things are important. In introducing Bills here, they may not seem relevant to him, or even to some members of the public, but they are extremely important in putting Trinidad and Tobago on a proper footing in terms of its international obligation as being a member of a world nation state system; as being part of all of these international organizations and also, to modernize, reform and take our society to the greatest heights to produce the quality society and improve the quality of life of all our citizens.

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

Miss Pamela Nicholson (Tobago West): Mr. Speaker, I hope that my contribution here this evening on this Motion, “Be it resolved that this House adopt the Second Report of the 1999/2000 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the expenditure from the Public Revenue which were not included in the Annual “Estimates 1998/1999” will be credible and would not lack credibility. I also hope I will not be wild, as the last speaker tends to say about everybody.

Mr. Speaker, as I said at another place, if we are going to close the books, one cannot just be looking at the figures for Trinidad. That is my major contention here this evening. I want them to justify to me how solid and correct these figures are. The country is Trinidad and Tobago, yet nowhere can we see anything dealing with the accounts of Tobago. Nowhere can they show me where they have vired (a) to (b) and what they did. I questioned it. I have provoked them into thinking about it and so forth, and no corrective actions have been taken. As a matter of fact, they are throwing their hands up in the air and saying that they cannot address Tobago and the Tobago House of Assembly. This is what they are doing.

This is not the wild arguments that he was making a while ago that we are here about. We are here about the figures with respect to the variation. They are telling us how much they saved here and how because of their savings, they were able to get the \$204 million to pay the public servants. I am not against that, but I want to also see Tobago people's business. That is what I want to see, because when the document was brought on the Finance Committee, I raised certain questions affecting Tobago.

I do not know, because Tobago said they are not getting their money. So, they cannot tell me it is for Tobago too, because they say they are not getting their money. I raised certain questions when the Finance Committee Report came some time in September and I asked, "Is Tobago a part of the country called Trinidad and Tobago"? I said that if Tobago is a part of the country called Trinidad and Tobago, at least I must know what is happening, as the representative of the people of Tobago. We should know what is happening with the accounts of the people of Tobago, particularly when the people of Tobago are questioning the accountability and transparency of the Tobago House of Assembly. We must know.

Questions about certain issues have been asked in the Tobago House of Assembly. I raised a particular matter, and I am raising it again publicly. Questions were asked in the Tobago House of Assembly to the Secretary for Finance, Planning, Public Administration, Works and Transport and infrastructure. This is a document from the Tobago House of Assembly. It is a response to a number of questions asked in the Assembly. It is a public document, and even a public document—the Minister of Finance said he cannot get it, and the Minister of Tobago Affairs said that he does not know anything about it and he cannot get it. It is there for any member of the public. Go to the Tobago House of Assembly and get it.

The questions were asked with respect to the funding for scholarships in Tobago. We are very pleased about the scholarships given in Tobago. If they could give all our students in Tobago scholarships to go to universities and to go to all the technical institutions in the world, we will be very pleased, but when we see a certain amount of funding being spent in a particular way and the people are not allowed to make use of it in the way it ought to be made, we must question it.

If they are giving scholarships, they must advertise the scholarships, all the students must be able to apply and then face their interviews and get those scholarships. There should not be a situation where one man is giving 101 scholarships out to the tune of \$17 million, and when we look at the budgetary

figures, the estimates, nowhere under the Tobago House of Assembly Act do we see scholarship fund: \$17 million or \$20 million or \$10 million, and that they have to look for another \$5 million or \$7 million. We have not seen that.

Every time we raise questions affecting our business, we are being told that they cannot do anything about that; that they got the money *en bloc* so they could do anything. When they give the funding from Parliament, give it under headings, and that is why we must question. The answer was given in the Tobago House of Assembly where 101 scholarships were given to the tune of \$17 million, and I am going to leave this document here with the Minister of Tobago Affairs.

There is a summary here with respect to the scholarships:

SUBJECT	NO. OF PERSONS	TOTAL COST
Social Sciences	35	\$2,673,453.40
Health	46	\$12,941,776
Engineering	11	\$1,200,000

It goes right through earth sciences, agriculture, human ecology, information technology, art, tourism and sports. The total figure is \$17,911,690.

We know that when one gives scholarships, they are supposed to be allotted to the brightest people in the community; people who merit the scholarships. That is how we feel. If one is going to give the scholarships, one must advertise so that all the people—if it is to be a doctor, engineer, or whatever—who are interested and have the capacity would apply and face the interviews. They do not have that system. Somebody is just giving people, so if they apply, they give it in their name. So they are using politicization in this whole scenario to keep themselves alive, using public money in that way, and we have been questioning, where did they get all that money? Because when we look at the figures of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, they gave, in that period, \$3.5 million for scholarships to students in Trinidad and Tobago.

We are happy for the scholarships. We are not against getting them, but we expect them to be given in a certain way. One does not give scholarships for people to do pre-med. When we look at the medical part, there are about 10 of them who have gone to do pre-med first before going into the medical school somewhere in Grenada.

I am going to leave this document. I am very happy about it, because when they come back I do not know if the jobs will be there. It is Tobago people's

money! After we spend this money, we hope that the students will come back and serve Tobago. We would not want all this money to be spent on the students and when they are trained, they remain where they are and do not return, and a system was there.

We believe that one should find out the needs of one's community; what the needs are over a certain period, and then, if one wants to give scholarships, one would then advertise to suit that situation. Also, one should try to have at least somebody who appears to be independent, and then all the people with the qualifications must have an opportunity to make use of that. So, when they see that is happening and the question was raised, the answers were given: 101 scholarships, over \$17 million, and one is wondering if Tobago will benefit from that. As a matter of fact, if Trinidad and Tobago will benefit from it.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER in the Chair]

What I am concerned about, why I raised my question, is that I expected that when the Minister brought his documents to the House, I would have seen certain things that were varied by the Tobago House of Assembly; their figures. I should see their business in this document too, and I am saying that this is incorrect. Their books cannot close unless they come with Tobago's own too and we deal with it in this House! That is my view! [*Desk thumping*]

If the country is the unitary state of Trinidad and Tobago, the system must be one that Tobago's business must come here and be a part of this. So, if they vary, just as how the Government varies, we must see what they have done. That is our business here. That is what I am talking about here this evening. I have not seen that. We asked questions and what we were told by the Minister of Finance was that he communicated with the Chief Secretary but he did not get an answer. He did it also through the Minister of Tobago Affairs, who is also the junior minister in the Ministry of Finance, and the junior minister said he did not get any answer too. He communiquéd.

When the Member for St. Joseph was just talking, he spoke about adhering; one must close the books by a certain time in order to adhere to the Exchequer and Audit Act and the regulations that go with it. What governs the Tobago House of Assembly? I would like them to tell me, because the Tobago House of Assembly does not have its own financial regulations. When the Tobago House of Assembly got the new Act, the document says that in two months after the coming into being of the Tobago House of Assembly, there should be financial regulations to guide the Tobago House of Assembly.

Section 52 says:

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

6.25 p.m.

That is one of the main reasons why I am sitting on this side: for questioning and questioning and questioning, without any action. Up to today, the rules are not here.

However, there is another section in the Act, section 78, which states:

“The Tobago House of Assembly Act...”

Well it is repealed. Section 78(2) states:

“Notwithstanding subsection (1), the Tobago House of Assembly Financial Rules, 1990 shall, until such time as Financial Rules made under section 52 come into force, remain in force and apply to the Assembly with such modifications as are necessary for conformity with this Act.”

Before this Act came into being, the Tobago House of Assembly was guided by the Exchequer and Audit Act. There must be rules. Are the rules saying that the Minister of Finance cannot tell the Tobago House of Assembly anything? The Minister of Finance is the custodian of the finances of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is the Minister of Finance who releases the funds to the people. There must be regulations. The Tobago House of Assembly must account to the Minister just as all the other ministries account. The Minister must. That is the purpose of the financial regulations.

I cannot subscribe to the view postulated by this Government—and they are responsible for some of the behavioural patterns that Tobago is now confronted with by the Chief Secretary; by not carrying out their instructions, by not taking action which [*Interruption*—you would not be going outside of the Tobago House Assembly Act, you are the Central Government of Trinidad and Tobago! We have not seceded as yet. We are not independent. [*Interruption*] Well, as yet. Because one is getting the impression that that is what the Government is forcing upon Tobago and certain people are taking a particular line. I am not a supporter of that. The People’s Empowerment Party (PEP) is not supporting that. PEP is fire, we will be coming.

The point that I am making—and let us be very serious—I cannot see how we could have a Central Government, a Minister of Finance in charge of the moneys of the country. The Ministry of Finance gives us money and we can spend it how we want, take \$12.5 million and invest it with some people called D’Arcy and—what is the name of the other one?—Armstrong, set up a company called “ADDA”, take Tobago people money, give D’Arcy 49 per cent and we keep 51 per cent. Our own money. You are setting up a company called “ADDA” but D’Arcy did not spend a cent and he got 49 per cent, right? We have a situation of crisis! Because of the outcry, the Government investigated and so forth. The Government came up, through the Auditor General—the Auditor General was called upon to act and act promptly, yes, and she acted and came up with certain recommendations.

As a matter of fact, this is what the Minister said when he came to this House. Section 28 of the report states:

“At September 30,1999, most of the bank accounts of the THA, including the THA Fund Account, reflected overdrawn balances totalling in excess of \$35 million. This unauthorised...”

This is the Minister speaking.

“This unauthorised action of the THA resulted in teachers not being paid in September and public servants not being paid their increments.”

The same increments we are talking about here this evening.

“The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago appropriated money for this purpose. The THA, contrary to Parliament, misappropriated these funds without authority.”

Up to now, not a soul ain’t lock up yet! This is the Minister of Finance talking:

“The THA, contrary to Parliament, misappropriated these funds without authority.”

He then went on to show where the authority comes from. He quoted section 51 of the Tobago House of Assembly Act which says:

“The Secretary may—

- (a) with the approval of the Assembly, borrow by way of overdraft, such sums as the Assembly considers fit for the discharge of its functions;”

or,

- “(b) with the approval of the Minister,...”

That Minister is the Minister of Finance.

“...borrow sums by way of term loans for the purposes of capital investment.”

The Government invested US \$2 million which I think was broken down to TT \$12.5 million. They invested and they got no approval from the Tobago House of Assembly. No plenary session of the Tobago House of Assembly was held to discuss it and get approval. That did not happen.

Secondly, approval should come from the Minister of Finance. They did not get that and they invested \$2 million of Tobago people’s money. Public money; throw it away! Then, the Auditor General made a number of recommendations. Up to now, this Government has not done anything about it. Up to now. This is the Auditor General:

“In light of the foregoing, the Auditor General has recommended:—

- that the transfer of US \$2 million of the THA Fund, which is now a Court matter, be referred with immediate effect, to the Attorney General for legal guidance and support;”

All now the Attorney General is sleeping. It is over two months they received this recommendation and up to now the Attorney General cannot act. It is over two months and he cannot act. The Attorney General cannot take action. He is sleeping.

The Attorney General also made it known that the Government, in itself, would have had legal advisors to seek the interest of the public of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to know from the Attorney General whether that was done. One is getting the impression that they did not even try to seek the interest of the Tobago people’s money. Even though they were appealed to, to do so. The Government does not care about anybody.

Then the Member for St. Joseph jumps up here this evening. I am sure the people of Trinidad are looking. They made recommendations—

“In light of the foregoing...”

I read one of the recommendations.

Secondly, the Auditor General says:

- “. the legal, financial and administrative structure at the THA be strengthened or adjusted to prevent the further transfer of public funds by the THA in circumstances that do not promote transparency and

accountability and consistency with the Financial Regulations and Laws of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.”

Coming on the heels of this, \$40.9 million—Eddy Grant said it is a mere pittance—have been given to Eddy Grant and company to run a concert, may be, for one hour. The Member for Tobago East said it is good to hold concerts like these and so forth. We know that music is good. We know our culture is good. We know that we should market it and so forth, but I am sure the Member for Tobago East would not have spent \$40.9 million plus—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Job: I do not think that the Member for Tobago West is quoting me correctly. I did not make that statement. I intended—when I made that statement—to make it clear that the Government was not opposed to the Tobago House of Assembly sponsoring concerts or using other means to promote Tobago’s culture. Maybe my language would have been a little difficult to interpret, but I did not mean what you are saying that I mean.

6.35 p.m.

Miss P. Nicholson: Sorry if I misconstrued you, Member for Tobago East, but you went all over the place, you went all over the world. You go over to Tobago and you come back, you talk about amendments and so on. I did not raise anything about amendments of the Tobago House of Assembly and there was an impression that that was the line I was pushing. I was not pushing that line. I am saying, \$40.9 million of taxpayers’ money was taken and spent in a squandermania fashion by the Chief Secretary, who is also the Finance Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly.

When you look at the Parliamentary appropriation, again, you do not see any money set aside for a special concert called the Ringbang Millennium Concert and say, well \$40 million is provided for that or \$30 million. You do not see that anywhere. So one must ask the question: Where have they sourced that kind of funding?

These are the questions the Tobagonian would like to have answered. Because we are hearing that they are mortgaging Tobago to pay up for these kinds of things. The Auditor General actually said that they were mortgaging our financial fund; she said that. You are hearing all over the place, they mortgaged this estate and that estate. We must not be hearing, we must get the facts. I am saying, if we are closing books and dealing with accounts, the business of the Tobago House of Assembly, especially under those circumstances, must be seen in this document if this document is to be proper and correct. You cannot close unless you deal with that.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

I was not finished with that, let me go over this again, it is very, very important. Sometimes I want to know if the Members of Government really sit and listen to what is being said here and why no action is being taken. The Auditor General said that the legal, financial and administrative structure of the Tobago House of Assembly should be strengthened or adjusted to prevent the further transfer of public funds by the Tobago House of Assembly in circumstances that do not promote transparency and accountability and consistency with the Financial Regulations and laws of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. She is talking about the Exchequer and Audit Act there. Namely, the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Exchequer and Audit Act and the Financial Regulations and Instructions.

So we do not know anything about our US \$2 million, which is TT \$12.5 million. We do not know anything about the \$40.9 million. We do not know how they got \$17 million to give the scholarships. I want to stress, I am not saying giving scholarships is not a good thing, but we are questioning the way in which it was done. I am questioning that. You have to have had variation of funds from various areas. That is why, when the Tobago House of Assembly was to pay the public servants their increments it could not, because the funds were being interfered with. What is given in Parliament is not used against that background and this Government is condoning that. I have heard it several times in this House, in Finance Committee meetings and elsewhere, that when they get the money *en bloc* they can do anything, yet they are functioning within the confines of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Exchequer and Audit Act, and the Financial Regulations and Instructions. Over two months, the Attorney General is still sleeping. No action!

She says again, that arrangements be made within the framework of the Tobago House of Assembly Act No. 40 of 1996 and Financial Regulations in force, to reserve funds necessary for the payment of salaries and public officers. She went into other areas also, but I think I have made the point what we would like to see.

I am saying, if we are dealing with the closing of our books, if we are dealing with variation of funds, we must see the variation of funds from the Tobago House of Assembly because that deals with the Tobago aspect of the finances of Trinidad and Tobago. The country is Trinidad and Tobago. You cannot deal with the closing of the books with respect to Trinidad alone, the country is Trinidad

and Tobago. I would be very happy if this aspect of the question can be answered here this evening. That is really why I am on my feet.

Mr. Speaker, you see what we have in Tobago is a crisis situation, in that public funds are being used to politicize Tobago and Tobago's business. The public service is supposed to have an appearance of independence. Public funds are being used to set up a parallel public service. Politicians are setting salaries when there are regulations stating that even though you employ people on a contractual basis, your information must then be sent to the Cabinet of the country, given the approval, and the CPO deals with the salaries. So you have all kinds of wild figures. You have public servants who should be employed by the public service commission. Whether or not they are sluggish and slow, this is our policy, this is our system. We are to make them more efficient, that is, the Public Service Commission and all the commissions. You have a situation where politicians are employing people and putting them into positions that are under the purview of the Public Service Commission.

So you have a politician dictating and saying, I want eight administrators and he employs them and they send them to the positions and so forth. I have raised this question in the House about the administration officers. I raised it in this House months ago. I was told that the matter was before the Member for Tobago East, the Minister of Tobago Affairs, it was being investigated and I will be given my answer soon. I am still waiting, months after, no action at all. These are the things we are very concerned about. We would like to know how our funds are varied when they are varied. It should be shown in any documents coming before the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I raised another question at the committee stage and that question was within the confines of education when I saw how much money education had to give away and hold and save and so forth. I raised the question of the technical/vocational wing of the Signal Hill Senior Comprehensive School. I was pleased to hear the Member for St. Joseph talking about the importance of training in skills and the need for that kind of development in the country. I was wondering if Tobago, again, was a part of the country called Trinidad and Tobago. Because for over five years, the technical/vocational wing of Signal Hill is complete and year after year the question is being raised about the funding to furnish that wing in the school and to employ the teachers. Communication was made to the Minister of Education. I did that more than once. If the Tobago House of Assembly does not act, what is the Ministry of Education doing? Because the Tobago House of Assembly is saying nobody is giving them funds. I questioned

and I questioned, I am now told that they got \$1.1 million last year, but that wing is still empty.

We have a library in Tobago, an earthquake “mash” it up. The Prime Minister said he would have given money to fix it. They gave money last year. I know about that. I think they gave about \$1.5 million this year. Nothing was done to the library. The librarians said they are not working in that, they are now thinking about carrying the library up to Signal Hill. So we have no library in Tobago. Then the technical/vocational wing that should have been functional over a period of time is not functional.

It is a question of training; it is a question of skills—and we know it is important. For example, you have the Hilton people who are now there constructing, that is a different type of thing too, but it also deals with training in certain skills. Tobagonians are not there working. Most of the people, 85 per cent of the people who are there working are from Trinidad. So people who should have the skills are unemployed because they do not have any skills and any training. Therefore, the technical/vocational wing of Signal Hill is very critical. If we are concerned about our development, as the Minister for Trade & Industry just articulated, we should know that Tobago must be addressed in a serious fashion. The whole idea was there already.

Mr. Speaker, the third area that I raised, I am going to comment on it. When I saw the amount of savings also under works and I listened to the information re URP, you have to ask questions. When the Tobago House of Assembly communicates with the Ministry of Finance do they listen to them? Because over the last four years no maintenance work has been done in Tobago on any of the streets in the villages, in the housing development areas; all are dilapidated throughout the east and west of Tobago. Throughout, no maintenance work. You will visit them a million times and they cannot act, because there is no funding. The Minister is coming to tell me that they should get \$5 million re gas taxation money or something like that to repair those roads, when you want probably \$100,000 million to repair those roads. Roads that were well kept before are totally dilapidated throughout Tobago east, Tobago west. All! Well, the recent thing with the slides—I know that the Member for Tobago East knows about that because he came to Tobago and he would have seen, particularly on the Windward Road, the urgency of moneys to do certain works there to keep that important area going. *[Inaudible]* I am not getting into that.

Mr. Speaker, I just thought I should make a brief intervention to highlight my concerns about the accounts and to find out, one: are the accounts those of

Trinidad and Tobago or Trinidad? If they are, where we have variation with respect to the Tobago House of Assembly, should we not be seeing that kind of information here? Can we just accept that we cannot do anything about it? There are laws, they are functioning under regulations, even though the Tobago House of Assembly's financial rules are not ready, they are functioning under the Exchequer and Audit Act and you also have regulations. I am appealing to the Ministry of Finance. I am appealing to the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development. I am appealing to the Attorney General. I am appealing to the Government to take urgent action as far as Tobago is concerned, to carry out the recommendations, implement the recommendations that the Auditor General made with respect to the \$12.5 million.

We do not want a situation when you tell the Auditor General—I have to raise this point, because the last time, when the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development made a statement here, he assured us that he communicated with the Auditor General and that she would do some urgent investigations in Tobago and also that they must audit all sections of the Tobago House of Assembly. To date one is seeing no action. You are getting, again, information—four, five letters are sent by the Auditor General and nobody replies. But, we just have to throw up our hands. The Auditor General will throw up hands, Government throws up hands, and no action! You are here to govern the people of Trinidad and Tobago and we want action.

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

6.50 p.m.

Mr. Martin Joseph (*St. Ann's East*): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate firstly on the Motion:

Be It Resolved that this House adopt the Second Report of the 1999/2000 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the expenditure from the Public Revenue which were not included in the Annual Estimates 1998/1999, and subsequently on the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (1998/1999) Bill, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, I join this debate to correct some mis-statements made by the Member for Oropouche and also the Member for St. Joseph. The Member for Oropouche, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources responded to some concerns raised by my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin West, concerning the question of the so called savings in particular areas. I am going to

focus on just two areas of savings identified. Vacant post salaries and COLAs and the decreases taking place in those areas and the payments of increments.

The Member for Oropouche, in defending the savings that were taking place there, said that this was as a result of the fact that the ministries, in order to pay increments, saw it necessary that there were certain things to be put in place, because increments were as a result of some kind of merit increase. I made a note when he was making that comment and I asked: What has happened to the Public Sector Reform Programme, that this Government knocked so much when it came into office. I remember my colleague from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West was ridiculed. Sen. Wade Mark came in here and talked about the public service reform as a waste of time and waste of government moneys. Then the Member for St. Joseph, in his contribution, contradicted the Member for Oropouche because he said that notwithstanding all that this Government had done in terms of public sector reform it was unable to accomplish it. He put that within the context of constitutional reform, as if to say they could not make progress in the public sector reform because they could not get legislation passed with respect to the Constitution. I could not understand the relationship between the two.

You see, Mr. Speaker, in an attempt to give the impression that we have frustrated the Government during its four-year watch, that could not be further from the truth. I know that they are on the public campaign. The Member for Oropouche has already indicated that the campaign has started and we know the direction in which the campaign is taking. They are going to go out there and talk about their supposed performance over the last four years, and as my colleague from Diego Martin East indicated, Trinidadians and Tobagonians are not stupid at all. They have watched this Government over this four and a half years and they are going to make a decision on this Government whenever the time comes. We are sure about that. So that I am asking the question—the hon. Member is trying to say that because we could not make constitutional amendments they could not make any progress with respect to Public Sector Reform Programme.

Let us go back to the fact that the Member for Oropouche said that they could not pay increments because they did not have mechanisms in place. What are the basic mechanisms necessary if they were serious about paying increments? It is a question about a performance management and appraisal system that the PNM administration had already put mechanisms in place just before it demitted office, in order to make sure that some programme was in place in order for them to pay increments, a performance appraisal and management system. I want to find out from this Government what they have done over the last four and half years to put

that programme in place so that increments could be paid. It does not have anything to do with amendments to the Constitution. So that when the Member for Diego Martin West says that this is an indication of the lack of performance of this Government, he is absolutely correct. So that they are talking about savings realized in this particular area, and I agree—when the Member for St. Joseph knocked my colleague from Diego Martin East—when he said that this is incompetence.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the payment of increments and salaries, again, we are talking about having to get \$204 million to pay the public servants, and I am wondering whether or not it was really the intention of this Government to pay these increments in the first place. Whether it was to pay the increments for which he said there were savings. Mr. Speaker, let me give you some examples because I think this is important. I am going to call the areas that have been identified for which savings were made. In terms of the Elections and Boundaries Commission there were savings of \$625,130,000. This is because they did not pay increments and salaries. In terms of the Office of the Prime Minister, there were savings of \$1.2 million according to them. In terms of the personnel department \$155,000; in terms of the Ministry of Finance \$908,408; the Ministry of National Security—and the Member for Diego Martin West raised that; \$18.672 million is said to have been saved here.

I remember that there was a time last year when the army was complaining about the fact that there were no increments; no increases in salaries; there were threats for them to march and so forth. Again, here we are seeing a savings of \$18,672,000. With respect to the Ministry of Attorney General \$500,000; Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources \$2,960,000; Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources—the second figure is wages, the first was salaries—\$1,540,000; Ministry of Local Government, \$2,858,000; Ministry of Works and Transport, a savings of \$6,786,000; this is in salaries. In terms of the Ministry of Works and Transport wages; \$14,530,184; Ministry of Public Utilities—\$4,357,000; Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs—\$702,332; Ministry of Information, Communication, Training and Distance Learning—\$1,726,000 which gives a grand total—under this heading of payment of increments and salaries—of \$57,520,063. Was it the intention in the first instance.

When the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, my colleague from Oroupouche, said that he was unable to pay these increments and salaries because he did not have a system in place to pay the increments which required, as I said, a performance management system, what was the intention of this Government?

7.00 p.m.

When you come to the other category of vacant posts, salaries and COLA, what did he say? He said that the procedures for recruitment and hiring personnel were too cumbersome, or something like that. Yet, at the same time, I recall in my contribution to the budget debate we saw a movement where there was an increase in the amount of moneys allocated to ministries for consultancies. I said there that clearly the intention then was to give Government the leeway to bring in their own people—contracts. Here we have vacant posts, so it might be too difficult to go the route of hiring through the system, where the most suitable person would be hired *etcetera*, so there is a larger amount of money placed to consultancies.

Mr. Speaker, look at the areas where, again, savings were supposed to have been realized in vacant posts, salaries and COLA: Service Commissions, savings—that is the decreases, \$310,000; Election and Boundaries Commission—my colleague from Diego Martin West raised that also—\$250,000; Personnel Department, \$750,000, Ministry of Planning and Development, \$785,000, Ministry of National Security, \$5,442,373. So when you add this \$5 million with the other \$18 million on the other side, you see how much moneys have been denied the Ministry of National Security during the period that we are talking about. [*Interruption*] Exactly, no wonder crime is on the increase; no wonder you talk about these personnel not having their salaries and so forth being paid the incentives.

The Ministry of the Attorney General, \$500,000; the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, \$2,375,000; Ministry of Housing and Settlements, \$603,500; Ministry of Local Government, \$3,437,700; Ministry of Public Utilities, \$308,000; Ministry of Tobago Affairs, \$286,000; a total savings, again, of \$15,047,969. When you add those two categories together that turns out to be \$72,568,032, which is almost 35 per cent of \$204,889,158 that was supposed to have been savings. I do not care what my friend from St. Joseph talks about; I am focussing now in terms of this administration and this watch.

My question is, very basically: was it Government's intention, in the first instance, to pay these moneys for which they had allocated? Were they serious about the vacant posts and salaries that they had allocated these moneys for in the first instance, a total of \$15 million, for which they varied? Were they serious in terms of the payment of increments in these particular areas for which they have withdrawn some \$57 million? That is my basic concern, Mr. Speaker.

As I raised in the finance committee—and I want to echo the sentiments raised by my colleagues from Diego Martin East and Diego Martin West—what we should be doing here is discussing variation from one head within a ministry to another. So for example—I raised this when I saw a \$39 million savings in the Ministry of Works and Transport—I drive through my constituency and I go up the Maracas Royal Road, the thing is a shame. It is a shame! And I have said over and over that the question about this Government's allocation of resources is the worst in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

As I said, I would like the junior Minister of Finance, the Member for Tobago East, in his winding up to respond to some of these concerns I have raised.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Health (Dr. The Hon. Hamza Rafeeq): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a brief contribution to this debate in support of the Motion presented by the Minister of Finance.

As far as the Ministry of Health is concerned, with regard to the variation of \$17.8 million in respect of increments that were not paid, the explanation as given in the document here which is, in fact, correct, is that the provision for the payment of the increments was more than sufficient to meet the amounts due to eligible employees. I also want to respond to a couple statements made during the course of the debate, particularly by the Member for Diego Martin West in his contribution.

He raised the issue of Mount Hope, the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. Mr. Speaker, we have been in office for a little over four years and I do not know if the Members on both sides of this House and, indeed, the national community, remember the state of affairs in the health sector four years ago, with particular reference to Mount Hope.

When we took office in November 1955, out of a total bed complement in Mount Hope of 580 beds, there were about 60 beds in the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex in use. Shortly after that, we put our programme and plan in place to utilize as many of those beds as possible, bearing in mind that it was a very costly exercise to do so. About two years ago we opened in Mount Hope, the Wendy Fitzwilliams Paediatric Hospital with 100 beds, and we are due to open another 48 beds in the coming months.

When I visited the Mount Hope Hospital at that time and I saw the state of the equipment and furniture there, which were purchased to equip these particular

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wards, Mr. Speaker, if you had seen them it would have brought tears to your eyes, because there was one inch or more of dust on all those pieces of furniture and equipment. It cost us close to \$1 million to refurbish that equipment and put them into use.

Hon. Member: Shame!

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: As I said, we opened the 100 bed Wendy Fitzwilliam Paediatric Hospital in Mount Hope. In addition—and this was part of the National Health Services Plan which was agreed to by the previous government—we have now moved most of the services from the Caura Chest Hospital to Mount Hope. We have opened another 50 beds in Mount Hope to house most of the patients that were previously located in Caura. There is still one medical ward in Caura and that deals with the Tuberculosis patients, and plans are already in place, at some point in the future, to move that ward as well.

Over the last few years, we have been performing cardiac surgery at Mount Hope. We are now performing angiograms and angioplasty in Mount Hope, hip replacement surgery, dialysis treatment, renal transplants and so forth. One of our major achievements is that we have, over the last year or so, performed over 30 surgical operations for children in regard to heart disease. These were children who would either have died if they did not get those operations or they would have had to go abroad. All those operations were performed free of charge to the patients, 30 of them. [*Desk thumping*] May I just mention, Mr. Speaker, that during the course of this year we will be performing 50 more such operations, just clearing most of the backlog of patients who need those types of operations. In addition to that, we now have state-of-the-art CAT scan machines and quite a few pieces of equipment, again, in Mount Hope.

In addition to Mount Hope, I still would like to mention, very briefly, a few of the other things we have done within the last few months, particularly. As I mentioned some time prior to this debate, when we came into office one of the greatest areas of irritation to the population was that of the ambulance service. We have introduced within the health sector, at this point in time, over 20 new ambulances throughout the country. In addition to that we have in the southwest region a pilot project where we are now responding to house calls and emergency calls on the street, as far as accidents and so forth are concerned.

I just want to relate, very briefly, three of the calls that these ambulances have responded to so far. Just a few days ago, a gentleman called in from Point Fortin and said that his wife had an operation at the San Fernando General Hospital, she

was discharged and at home bleeding and he needed an ambulance to take the patient to the hospital. While that gentleman was on the telephone talking to the command centre in San Fernando, the ambulance was at his door. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, a few days ago it was reported in the newspapers as well that a well-known sports person went into the St. Margaret's Police Station because she suffered a chest pain and may have had a heart attack as well. I inquired into that incident. The lady went into the St. Margaret's Police Station complaining of chest pain and they instituted some emergency therapy because she collapsed while there. They called the ambulance and the call went to the command centre in San Fernando at 10.18 a.m. The ambulance was dispatched from San Fernando 10.20 a.m. and got to St. Margaret's Police Station at 10.38 a.m. After instituting emergency therapy, the lady was in the San Fernando Hospital at 11.05 a.m. and her life was saved. [*Desk thumping*]

The final incident which I would like to refer was reported in the *Newsday* of today, where it says, "Emergency Health Service delivers first baby." I would like to read this very short article:

"Anne Marie Wyatt would have named her baby Gordon after the man who delivered him, but she already had a son by that name. Instead, she named her baby Gideon Richard Wyatt.

The gesture was Wyatt's way of saying thanks to Gordon Richardson, one of a Canadian team of trainers from the Emergency Health Services of Nova Scotia, Canada in Trinidad to train locals in a pilot project at the South West Regional Health Authority for the National Emergency Ambulance Service."

Mr. Speaker, these are three incidents that I just wanted to put on the record. This pilot project is on stream at this point in time and it is not only in the southwest region, but also in Tobago. The ambulance service is also operating as a pilot project in Tobago as well. That pilot project is intended to last for a period of one year after which an assessment would be made and it will be introduced nationally. It is not only vehicles but also trained emergency medical technicians in a course that has been approved and accredited by the National Training Agency of Trinidad and Tobago. It will eventually develop into a 911 system.

There are many things that I can talk about, but I would just like to mention one other thing in this contribution and then I will take my seat. As far as training is concerned we have in Trinidad and Tobago as one of the major problems facing the health sector at this point in time, the shortage of nurses. When we came into

office a little over four years ago, the health sector was training 100 nurses per year. Some years before that the government had discontinued nursing training and that is one of the reasons why we have such a shortage today, but they restarted it.

When we came into office we continued that training of 100 nurses per year, but from last year we have doubled the training from 100 nurses a year to 200 nurses a year. This year we are training 400 nurses instead of 200; from 1995 to now we have quadrupled the amount of nurses being trained from 100 to 400. In addition to that, we have also re-instituted the training of nursing assistants and we are training two batches of 100 per year. We are also about to start a training programme for single trained midwives and scrub technicians to work in the theatres.

Mr. Speaker, Members would have read in the newspapers that the Government is now looking at the remuneration package for nurses with the hope of giving them some additional incentives for those who are inclined to go abroad, for them to stay in Trinidad and Tobago to provide the service we need. In addition to that, those who have been trained in these programmes are now being bonded for a period of three years so that they must give three years service to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago before proceeding elsewhere. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to make this brief contribution to say—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Bereaux: Mr. Speaker, Minister could you please state whether or not the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has indicated to the United Kingdom Government or to any other government that they should not hire nurses from this country?

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: I thank the hon. Member for that question, because I did mention before that at the end of the previous year when I attended the Commonwealth Health Ministers Conference, as a Caricom group we did raise the issue with the Minister of Health from the United Kingdom asking him to ask his government to desist from employing nurses from Trinidad and Tobago. He did give us some kind of commitment and just recently a few weeks ago we received a letter from the Prime Minister of England, Mr. Tony Blair, saying that they were only recruiting nurses for very special purposes and they had instructed their agency not to recruit on a blanket basis. So we did approach them and we are still following up on that initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to make this brief contribution.

7.15 p.m.

Mr. Hedwige Bereaux (*La Brea*): Mr. Speaker, I wish to join the debate on a Motion: “Be it resolved that this House adopt the Second Report of the 1999/2000 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the expenditure from the public revenue which were not included in the Annual Estimates 1998/1999.”

Mr. Speaker, you are in charge of the management of this House and I have great confidence in your ability, but we are all human and sometimes there are lapses or things we do not know. When the hon. Member for Oropouche was speaking, he referred to the hon. Member for Diego Martin West and spoke about barking and snarling. I was a bit taken aback by those comments and I thought I would look at the examples of “unparliamentary language” and I made it my business to check those documents which were displayed when the House indicated the kind of work it does and I saw the words “Member is barking, Member is howling” as “unparliamentary language”. I am just mentioning it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The Member knows that it is not proper for a Member to challenge anything that I have done by way of the office of the Speaker except on a substantive motion. If what you are trying to do is show that I was wrong, no you cannot do that. If what you are trying to do is to show that I erred, or that I was wrong, you are not permitted by the Standing Orders to do it like that.

In addition to which I may say that, what you are referring to as “unparliamentary language”, may well be parliamentary. One Speaker may do certain things, another Speaker may do something else, the President of the Senate may do something which may not be done here in this House by the Speaker. I am not answerable for the ruling of someone else. So I am quite happy to discuss this issue with the hon. Member in the Chambers. But for you to try to put on the record that I was wrong, and that I erred, I am afraid I cannot permit that.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Mr. Speaker, I never intended to put on the record that you were wrong. I was trying to get a basis for chiding the Member for Oropouche.

Mr. Speaker: I understand what you are saying, but just for the avoidance of doubt and for Members of both sides, I do think that every single Member of this House has a responsibility indeed an obligation, whenever he or she feels a Member is doing something that contravenes the Standing Orders, to rise on a point of order. So if, indeed, one felt that the word “bark” or “snarled” in the circumstances was not right, it was the correct thing to get up on a point of order

and ask me for a ruling on it. Do you understand? I wish we would proceed like that. It would give all Members an opportunity to test a matter and I would be forced to rule. I do wish that both the Government side and the Opposition side would act accordingly.

Mr. H. Bereaux: I thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take what you are saying and I would be guided accordingly.

We are here today dealing with this variation of the 1998/1999 Bill, but before I get to the meat of my contribution, the hon. Member for St. Joseph in his usual very confident style indicated to me when I asked him, that the inflation rate, or the rise in food prices was 8 per cent. I heard the hon. Member for Tobago East on the radio today being quoted as saying that most teachers in this country do not understand mathematics and I am not going to make it as a general statement of fact; he knows. He may believe that, but I do not believe that the hon. Member for St. Joseph knows how to work out his percentages and I will deal with some food prices to show the deficiency.

Arawak processed chicken in 1995 was \$4.99 per lb., in 1999, it was \$7.01. I did not work out the arithmetic, but that is about 40 per cent.

Live chicken in 1995, \$2.25 per lb.; 1999, \$3.00, and it is even higher now because I had to pay more for it over the Christmas period, 33 1/3 per cent.

Eve Corned Beef, 12 ozs. was \$4.99 in 1995, in 1999, \$5.99, 20 per cent. I am using round figures, hon. Member for Tobago East, so please do not attack me on my mathematics, although I do not profess to be a professor of it.

Green Butterfly Milk, ¼ litre, was \$1.99 in 1995; in 1999, \$2.99, a 50 per cent increase. Nestlé Condensed Milk in 1995 \$4.39; in 1999, \$5.09, approximately 18 per cent.

Macaroni 400 gms. in 1995 was \$1.89; in 1999, \$2.25, 20 per cent. Oxtail in 1995 was \$4.99 per lb.; in 1999, \$10.30, approximately 100 per cent.

Mighty Foam was \$7.99 in 1995; in 1999, \$10.89, approximately 50 per cent. Palmolive soap, 140 grammes, \$5.99 in 1995; in 1999, it was \$7.99.

Imported goat in 1995 was \$5.89 per lb.; in 1999, \$10.63. Vienna sausages, \$1.99 in 1995; in 1999, \$2.90, a 50 per cent increase. Incidentally, imported goat was 100 per cent increase.

Choice flour 2 kilograms was \$4.99 in 1995; in 1999, \$6.80, 40 per cent. Pigtail was \$5.99 in 1995; in 1999, \$6.80, about 18 per cent. Orchard orange juice, \$4.99 in 1995; in 1999, \$10.05, 100 per cent increase.

Mr. Speaker, that was for food. Since we are dealing with cost of living and the cost of items, even for antibiotics and over-the-counter drugs there were increases varying from 19—75 per cent between the period 1995—1999, and I am not saying this is a comprehensive indication of all the prices in the country, but I am saying, having regard to that type of increase, it seems that the Minister's 8 per cent seems extremely bad mathematics and it stretches the imagination to see, even if there were no increases in some of the items, how this 8 per cent figure could be correct.

Mr. Assam: Mr. Speaker, I cannot vouch for the statistics in terms of prices enumerated by the Member for La Brea because the Ministry of Consumer Affairs does surveys and it has a whole battery of statisticians, plus we rely on the Central Statistical Office for the retail index. But to illustrate how that cannot be correct, the Government removed VAT on basic food items, the Government sought suspension of the CET every year which means that the 20 per cent CET was removed and thirdly, in terms of prescription drugs, the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Ministry of Consumer Affairs organized a programme where basic drugs have been reduced dramatically. So to come today and talk about foam and soap, I do not know if the people eat foam and soap, but in terms of drugs and basic food, the prices have been VAT removed, CET suspension removed, and drugs have been reduced through a programme worked out between the Ministry of Consumer Affairs and the Ministry of Health, so that information is not only misleading, it is dangerous.

Mr. H. Breaux: Mr. Speaker, now that the Member for St. Joseph has had his rebuttal, let me tell him that I am just reading some of the facts which I collected at the time of the annual budget speech and he spoke after me and did not controvert them, now he is trying to excuse them.

I pointed out at that time that although they had removed the VAT on these items, despite the removal of VAT on drugs they were still going up and he did not speak correctly, he did not say his figure of 8 per cent was backed up by all the surveys and whatnot, but it is incorrect. He is not the only person doing it, but you see, when you speak loudly, I believe that means it is sensible. It is quite clear that his mathematics is bad and even trying to cover it up now shows that he is totally incorrect and it is the kind of trickery, and I am ashamed of the way he behaves. I should not say trickery, it is the kind of subterfuge that I see all the time.

This is a Government that said no new taxes, no new licence increases, but they came here and tried to increase licences. They increased licences on clubs afterwards in a surreptitious manner, and at the same time during the speech of

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the hon. Member for Tobago West it was mentioned that the Technical/Vocational wing in Signal Hill Comprehensive School, Tobago, for a while now, although it was completed, has not have any equipment.

I ask, who is the Minister of Tobago Affairs? He is very educationally-oriented, well educated, well spoken, well read, well suited to be a Member of this Parliament and knows what is correct, particularly in education and how much training one must have, but when it comes to doing just what he should do and get the poor black people in Tobago—as he likes to say, not for Tobago but for Laventille—he does not get the technical/vocational wing going and those persons who are trained in Trinidad, notwithstanding how bad the education system was or was supposed to be according to him, have to go to Tobago and do the job that he will not assist in allowing his own constituents to do. A friend of mine said those who can do, and those who cannot, talk about it. I leave that for him.

7.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I looked at the removal of money from the Ministry of National Security and I see here, even in the transfer from sub-heads, they transferred \$1.7 million. All the sub-heads involved replacement of vehicles, coast guard, replacement of vehicles, police, and replacement of vehicles, fire services and that brings me to a headline in today's newspaper: "Bandits force Republic to close La Brea branch." We are talking about security. We are talking about national security.

"REPUBLIC Bank announced yesterday it was closing its branch"

It is today's edition of the *Guardian* newspaper dated Friday January 21, 2000:

"REPUBLIC bank announced yesterday it was closing its branch in La Brea, effective January 31, because of the 'continuing security risks' to operations there.

The bank said the closure of the La Brea branch was the first warranted by a series of robberies and attempted hold-ups."

Mr. Speaker, if this is not an indictment on the security in the Ministry of National Security and on this Government, then what can it be? The La Brea branch of the Republic bank is situated about 200 yards from a police station. As I was telling people today, that even in my state of non-physical fitness, I could run from the La Brea branch of the Republic Bank to the police station and I would not even work up a sweat. *[Interruption]* Please, please, I would ask the Member for Nariva—you have made enough trouble for this Government already, do not

come across here and make it. You have caused serious problems, be quiet. *[Interruption]*. Yes, you did. You made mischief.

Mr. Speaker: I suggest that the hon. Member speak to me.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Yes, I will speak to you, but I must remind the Member that he is a mischief-maker.

Mr. Speaker: You could do it through me.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Yes, you see, the Member is a mischief-maker. The Member is mischievous. He has caused serious problems for a man called “a nice guy” by the Members of the Unemployment Relief Programme, so I believe them. He is a nice man but the Member is a mischief-maker.

Mr. Speaker: Order please. Order please.

Mr. H. Bereaux: I was saying, that the La Brea branch of the Republic Bank is about 200 yards away and we have reached a stage in this country—for a while I thought that we were talking about Medellin, Colombia—where bandit gangs could close down a bank. Look at what we are doing. We have reached the stage in this country where banditry could close a bank down. It is on the internet. The Government come here and Members boast and talk about how much investment they will bring, but that is on the internet already.

Mr. Speaker, we had an unfortunate incident in Tobago, where no bank was closed down, no hotel was closed down but yet, the British Government issued a warning to their citizens about coming to Tobago. All that happened, unfortunate as it might have been, was a couple was “planassed” in the face of a Member of the other House and they were robbed. That is unfortunate; it is wrong and I do not support it. I think something has to be done.

[Mr. Adesh Nanan on his feet]

Please, no, sit down. I am sorry to have to deal with it that way, but I am in full flight and I want to deal with it. Something has to be done about that. *[Interruption]* But if that alone can evoke such a reaction from the British Government and the tourists, just imagine, the effect of this statement about a Republic Bank, the largest bank in this country, which was formerly Barclays Bank and Barclays Colonial Bank, with roots in the same country that we are talking about or can you, imagine what will happen and what does that telegraph for this country? It telegraphs that we are in a sad state and this Government which claimed when they came into power they were going to see about crime—

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admittedly, crime like the poor, we will always have with us—but the level of criminal activity and the level of murders in this country has risen to a crescendo, if I may use a mixed metaphor for it.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is not paying any attention to what is going on. They are here and they have to be moved. If there are bandits operating in a place and the police have vehicles, well then things would go well and the police could chase down the bandits. The Government made a big brouhaha of getting E 999 vehicles—well it turned out that E 999 police, with no psychological assistance are now killing people. I am not blaming that on the Government *per se*, but I am saying, here we have the Government transferring money from the Ministry of National Security and banks are now closing.

The Government talked about getting out of the third world but we are worse than any banana republic, because it is the first time in any Caribbean country, we have heard that a branch of a bank has to be closed—this is not a banana republic—because of bandits. Does this remind you of the Wild West? The last time I have seen or heard anything like this has to be in a western picture. If you have cable, it is Channel 58. You could plug on Channel 58 and you will hear about that, not in Trinidad and Tobago, today. All of that lawlessness is squarely at the feet of this Government and its Members. I do not want to say, “What monkey see, monkey do.” One asks oneself, if it is not because of certain examples being set by exemplars, that things are happening. I will move on from that.

Mr. Speaker, I am having a meeting with the Managing Director of Republic Bank and I expect that we might be able to encourage him to stay, but at the same time, I am calling on this Government to provide security for the bank. *[Interruption]* It would appear that the Member for Chaguanas wants to know the connection between this and the Appropriation Bill. I will draw the connection for him.

Mr. Speaker, what you have here is this. We are talking about money and we are talking about variations, removing money from one sub-head to put it in another. The sub-head under the Ministry of National Security was removed from one sub-head, where it could have been used to purchase vehicles for the police and other areas of national security and put elsewhere. So you do not have the vehicles and the police in La Brea who would have been able, by having vehicles, to provide the necessary security, were not able to do so.

7.40 p.m.

A bank is money and if they are making jokes, let me tell them that this has done untold harm to this country. I am upset about it, not because they are not speaking the truth but because we have reached a stage in this country where this kind of thing has to happen and I have to read this, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member, instead of annoying me, should be weeping or thinking about how he could correct a situation such as this. However, just as when people were speaking about corruption, instead of trying to correct it and do something about it you made mischief and have caused untold problems in this country. The Member should be saying instead, *mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*, because he should be doing it. [*Interruption*]

We know that, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Arima, notwithstanding his Ph.D., is really not trained in the classics and I apologize to him. I mean to say, “Through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault”. That is what I know. [*Interruption*] Well, I just wanted to teach him. It is my business. I taught for several years and I will always do it when the Member, in ignorance, requests that I explain. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, I am laughing but I am crying on the inside for Trinidad and Tobago.

We now go to the Ministry of Housing and Settlements. I see that, in fact— [*Interruption*] I am dealing with important matters and I am being annoyed. On the strengthening of land administration, land tenure, I see there was \$2.3 million allocated to deal with that and it has not been done. As we talk about land tenure, Mr. Speaker, we came to this Parliament and in one of the, I believe, better and more rewarding sessions in this Parliament—although we spent about 11 hours doing it—we passed the State Land (Regularisation of Tenure) Act in 1998, assented to on October 28. You see, we are talking about land tenure.

That Act provides for a Land Settlement Agency and arranges for persons squatting on state lands to obtain a certificate of comfort, then a statutory lease and then a lease for 199 years. There is a period of time to apply for that and that initial period was one year from October 1998, ending of October 1999. We saw no advertisements in the newspaper inviting persons to apply but I understand that persons got.

Then, quite recently, there was an advertisement in the newspaper inviting persons squatting on state lands, without authorization, to apply for certificates of comfort. However, Mr. Speaker, this Act provides regularization for not only persons squatting on state lands but also persons squatting without proper

authorization on state agency lands. A number of areas were put in this Act and also in the Schedule named “designated areas”. Some of those designated areas were on state agency land, state agency meaning a company owned by the state, all the shares of which are owned by the state. When the Land Settlement Agency put out the advertisement, they put state lands alone and I know why they did that because, really, they are only permitted to give certificates of comfort to squatters on state land. State agency land will become state land when it is transferred to the state.

Mr. Speaker, I am a lawyer with many years’ experience in dealing with land being transferred to the state. The final date in the Act for applying is two years after the coming into being of that Act and that date is October 27, 2000. It means that if you do not apply for a certificate of comfort by that date—I am not saying if you are not given because that is not what it says—October 27, 2000, to use a colloquialism, “crapaud smoke yuh pipe” and you could be removed. Section 28 says:

“A person who occupies land—

- (a) within a Designated Area after the appointed day; or
- (b) within a Land Settlement Area without permission, is liable to ejection according to law without any compensation or other pecuniary benefit.”

Right now the appointed day is January 1, 1998. Fine. Now, you can apply but if you are on state agency land and you do not apply and, at some subsequent date—whenever that may be—the state agency transfers that land to the state, once it is past the actual date 2000 you cannot apply again. You are there improperly and subject to whatever sanctions are stated in the Act.

It also says—and they are telling me this—the law provides that you can only give a certificate of comfort to somebody on state land. However, somebody to whom this land—look at the sanction this Act applies in section 3(c):

“a squatter or tenant in respect of his actual occupation or tenancy of lands owned by a...” *Interruption*]

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I am indebted to the hon. Member for giving way. I rise really to introduce a procedural motion to the effect that, notwithstanding the hour, this House do continue with this debate until its completion and embark upon the debate in respect of the next Bill, the

Environmental Management Bill, and also that we complete the Finance Bill itself, because we are doing the motion. So it is this motion, together with completion of the Finance Appropriation Bill and embarking upon the debate on the Environmental Management Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

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Mr. H. Breaux: Yes, Mr. Speaker, section 3(c) says:

“This Act applies to—

- (c) a squatter or tenant in respect of his actual occupation or tenancy of lands owned by a State Agency listed in the schedule, and on which there is a dwelling house before the appointed day...”

Then it goes on to say:

“...so however that no occupant therein may obtain a Statutory Lease or a Deed of Lease until such time as the land is designated and legally transferred to the state.”

I understand that and I am not saying that the state or the Land Settlement Agency can give a lease, a statutory lease or even maybe a Certificate of Comfort to those persons.

What is happening, Mr. Speaker, is that when these people go—I must say what I did because I am not coming here to make jokes or to mislead anyone. When I saw the *lacuna* in this law and I saw what the problem would be for persons who are squatting on state agency land, I called the Land Settlement Agency to speak to the chairman of that agency. I called him three days before the 10th, the Friday. I could not get him. I got the general manager, a lady, and she just parroted to me what was on the advertisement. I recognized that she did not understand. Then she told me she would get somebody from the legal department to call me. No one called me.

I eventually spoke to the legal department. The lady there told me—a young lawyer—I could understand, I have a bad reputation. As they say, I am a parliamentarian so they do not want to tell me anything wrong. She said the head of the legal department would be coming out to work on the 17th. I called back, nobody answered. I have called Dr. Allen Sammy on more than one occasion. He is either in a meeting or out somewhere. I eventually called and was able to speak to Prof. Cartey. He asked me if I was a lawyer or a politician; I told him both.
[*Interruption*]

I am not upset. I do not get upset about things like that. I told him both and then he said that he would get back to me. He has not gotten back to me. I have spoken to the hon. Minister on more than one occasion and I must say he has told me, "They all should apply". He has pointed out to me that you cannot give them the Certificate of Comfort but he said they should apply, in order for them to retain their rights. However, you see, there is a lady named Chandler in Point Fortin who is arrogant and very insulting to the squatters who go there and I will say what I did.

When I realized I could not get in touch with anybody, I issued my own notice and said, "State land, including land owned by Petrotrin, Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited and Trintopec, if you are squatting there without authorization from whatever date, go down and pay your \$20 and get your form". This is because I know that if that land is not transferred before October 27, Mr. Speaker, those people are going to be left out in the cold. Therefore, I wanted, as a representative, and as a person who understood the difficulty, to advise them properly.

Miss Nicholson: So, it cannot be another date?

Mr. H. Bereaux: I do not know. When we get into Government we will amend it, of course, but I do not know. *[Interruption]* You all know that you are going to be returned, so be it. I do not have a problem. *[Interruption]* If you know that, rest assured and be comfortable about it.

7.55 p.m.

I am dealing with a matter as it is today, and I am pointing out, Mr. Speaker, to the national community that there is nothing in this Act which says that a person who is in a designated area cannot apply. There is something which says that the Land Settlement Agency cannot give them a certificate of comfort until the land is transferred. That is understandable, but you see, there is another element. I happen to know those lands, and I know them in terms of the difficulty to transfer and deal with them.

Most people do not know in those areas what is state and what is state enterprise, because all the lands are under oil-mining lease and the oil companies use them as their own, but it does not mean that all the land they use as their own belongs to them. Take for instance Beach Camp where I live, that is state land.

Hon. J. Humphrey: Are you squatting, Sir?

Mr. Bereaux: No. If I thought that, I would have applied for a certificate of comfort. *[Laughter]* The land on which I lived, the company had a house there

for me and they had the right to build those houses under the oil-mining lease, but they built it on state land! The squatter really cannot tell whether it is state land or not. So, for somebody—some Clerk in the Land Settlement Agency, Tricia Chandler, I think is her name—to take it upon herself because she sees my signature and a PNM sign on it—because I took responsibility for it. I did not try to hide behind anybody and say “Go anyhow”. I wrote what I thought was in the best interest of my constituents and I sent it.

First, if there were people with any kind of courtesy working in the Land Settlement Agency at a high level, I would not have been speaking about this today, because I would have sat down and explained it to them, but they would not talk to me. They are too arrogant! But you see, Mr. Speaker, it leads me to believe—I am really going to exclude the Minister from this—that the Government has another agenda for this land settlement thing. I do not know. Why are they seeking? It cannot be because Caroni is under the same problem too. I cannot understand them. It is just stupid they are stupid! Or they do not understand the nuances of the legal situation.

I am showing them. I believe that it is a simple thing. Anybody who has any understanding of the law and reads it will understand where the problem lies. First, it is difficult to differentiate between state and non-state, and secondly, when one tries to transfer those lands to the state, what one is going to have to do first is a geological assessment of them. Then, they are going to transfer parcel by parcel, and some of them have oil wells close to them, so it is going to take a survey and a number of things, and those lands will not, with the best of intentions, be all transferred under five years.

By that time, my people, after October 28, 2000 will be in problems and they will be in problems just because some petty bureaucrat—*[Interruption]* No. The closeness to my name has no reference to that. If it was a “Bereauxcrat” they would have enough sense to know. It is a bureaucrat. *[Laughter]* Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, I am asking the Minister for once to speak to the Chairman, Dr. Alan Sammy. None of my children could ever get a Ph.D. after the Member for Arima, and Dr. Sammy is following in the footsteps of what I speak about. I would advise all my children!

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Bereaux: Mr. Speaker, I promise that I will not use all of my time, but if I am further disturbed or provoked by any Member on the other side, I will then proceed to use all of my time. *[Interruption]* You could call me anyhow, because any derogatory remark that the Member for Princes Town makes on me coming from his lips would be deemed a tribute. Go ahead!

As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, I would like the Minister or the Government to inform the Land Settlement Agency that something could be done.

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, can I share with the hon. Member a notice that has been sent out to all managers. It is in response to the initiative that he took, and it says as follows.

“Persons who are living before January 01st 1998 without proper authorization upon those Caroni and Petrotrin (PSAEL) lands which are listed in the Schedule to Act 25 of 1998, should also apply. A copy of the list will be on display at all the L.S.A offices referred to in 3(ii) above. However successful applicants will not receive their Certificates of Comfort until these Caroni and Petrotrin (PSAEL) lands have been transferred to the State.”

So the Member has accomplished the objective and I want to congratulate him.

Mr. H. Bereaux: I thank the hon. Minister. With that, Mr. Speaker, I will end my contribution. *[Laughter]* *[Desk thumping]*

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance and The Minister for Tobago Affairs (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the hon. Member for Tobago West that I do share all of her concerns; indeed, the Government does. The matters concerning ADDA, Ringbang, viring moneys allocated to Tobago, the matter of scholarships, all of these matters are matters of public interest, and by “public”, I mean Trinidad and Tobago.

I do not know that these matters are merely for the Minister of Finance, and I do not think they are merely matters that can be dealt with as matters of law. I want to restate for the benefit of the public and for the record that my own judgment is that much of the problem between Trinidad, as an administration, and Tobago, as manifested by the THA—as they call themselves the government of Tobago—has to do with politics, with expectations and with antecedent circumstances. Therefore, I cannot but reiterate what I said in this honourable House last Wednesday that there ought to be no necessity to use legal remedies for problems that are in the main, political problems.

The problem of Mr. Hochoy Charles and his actions as the Chief Secretary and Secretary of Finance are not merely problems of law. They are political problems. I have to live in the real world. What I will do is repeat what I said when I was on my feet the last time, that the Auditor General's Report, the implementations that were promised, would indeed take place, and that the accounting or whatever investigations we need to do to account for moneys that would have been spent on Ringbang—the concerted efforts of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Finance will be used to make sure that according to law, the public interest is secured in those matters. I cannot, at this point, promise more than that, because that would be merely simplistic politicking.

I just want to make a few comments in terms of summary because it is getting late. The Member for St. Ann's East did say that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are not stupid with reference to the statements made from the members on this side. I do agree with him. They are not stupid enough to believe the propaganda of the Member for Diego Martin East. Indeed, the public is wise in that regard. The Member for Diego Martin East reminds me, Mr. Speaker, of a certain individual who must go down in the annals of infamy under the name of Joseph Goebbels, who was the minister of propaganda for Hitler.

They spent a lot of time between them doing the identical thing that I am reminded of every time I hear the Member for Diego Martin East when he is on his feet; which is to say, to deliberately make statements that are totally without merit, without meaning, irrelevant to the particular case, purely on the assumption and the belief that the more often one makes these kinds of statements, the more they get credibility. I discern that kind of mischievous purpose in much of what was said by the Member for Diego Martin East and, indeed, by many of the Members from the other side.

Imagine the Member for Diego Martin East saying that it is because the UNC Government is in power that a policeman would have shot a woman and her brother and then killed himself, and that he is going to propose a hypothesis that when a government, as the UNC Government, has put a country under stress, crime must increase. What kind of proposition is that? One does not have to be a logician to get into affirming the antecedent or denying the consequence into these kinds of complicated arguments, *modus ponens*, and things like that, to understand that these things are not part of the course. They are not relevant. They are fallacious.

When one comes into this House and makes out as though the problem of bonds, compensating public servants was a problem created by the NAR

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government or the UNC government, it is awfully bad without educating or edifying the public concerning the antecedent circumstances again. Why did they have to cut people's salaries by 10 per cent? They were just getting into a kind of Hitlerian, fascist, Nazi propaganda mode, because the public out there, hearing this kind of thing and giving credibility to these honourable gentlemen—because they are indeed honourable gentlemen—could create problems.

I do not know if this is the way the election campaign for 2000 is going to go. Maybe I would have a lot of fun. I remember when they closed down my programme, I promised to march up and down the country and say all the things that I wanted to say, and I did that. Maybe I might have to start going to Diego Martin East and explaining to the people why, and reading what Goebbels did and what Hitler said and saying, “Is this not the identical thing?” Are they not doing the same thing? I would probably have to do that.

8.10 p.m.

With respect to the question of training, that was raised by the Member for Tobago West and also by many of the Members on the other side—Mr. Speaker, I want to say is something that must be said in this House, and it will be repeated very often in time to come.

One of the reasons why the situation in the country is how it is with respect to unemployment—with respect to that undercast, I say, that is there creating distress for many people—has nothing to do with this UNC Government. I do not know a single bandit in this country that is 4 years old or 5 years old. I do not understand that this gentleman, who killed his girlfriend or lover or whatever, is 5 years old. The newspapers said he was about 26 years old. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it is quite evident that many of the people who are creating these demonic and mind-numbing crimes in the country are people who had been nurtured in another time by another regime. These are the facts of our lives: people learn from the circumstances around them.

I remember, Mr. Speaker, and sure you did hear, on sundry occasions, until last Wednesday—Wednesday, to me, reminded me of the day when Paul was walking on the road to Damascus in order to persecute those Jewish people who had converted to Christianity. Paul was there as an agent of the state persecuting his own people. So the story goes, I think it was in the Act of the Apostles, when he was on the way to persecute some more of these converted—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: Not Paul, Saul.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Yes, you are right, Saul. He was blinded by a shaft of light and heard this voice telling him: “Why Saul? Why persecuteth thou me?”

Apparently some blinding has taken place, because I heard, with my own ears something so amazing: these people are admitting that there are illiterate people in Trinidad. They are amazed that the education system is bad. I cannot believe it!

When the Members from San Fernando East, Diego Martin West and Laventille East/Morvant—everyone of them have spent the last 5, 10, 15 years telling people in this country: “We have the best education system in the world. We are 98 per cent literate, or 99 per cent,” I cannot remember which one. One per cent does not matter in that regard; it is all lies anyway. They went on and on telling these innocent people who have been brutalized and left trapped in a mire of stupidity, illiterate and ignorant—that those people over there told them—that they have the best education system in the world. But, we have to be grateful for the light that has struck them. I hope he did not strike them blind, but they were there admitting, all of them, that this Government is on the right track.

The Member for Diego Martin Central even went as far as to say that we need to have a bipartisan approach to education, we should not make it a political issue, we should all get together. I welcome that. I, for one, endorse that. I would be part of that programme.

It is late in the evening and we have to go. The Member for Laventille East/Morvant does not understand what he reads. He quoted statistics by Professor—what is his name, the thing that the Member quoted last Wednesday? Palmer. The Member does not understand what he read. He quoted Professor Palmer as saying that: “Trinidad and Tobago, in 1960 was better off than Singapore and Korea in education.” He read that in this Parliament: In 1960 Trinidad and Tobago was better off. In 1990 Singapore, Korea and Malaysia had gone past Trinidad by so many percentages. Where they have 29 or 30 per cent of their people in tertiary, we are still struggling to get 9 per cent. The Member read that right here, without understanding that the reason we are there is because of his government. [*Desk thumping*] Because of PNM. Because of intellectual backwardness and bankruptcy. The Member does not even understand what he is doing. He is condemning his own self—which is Palmer’s purpose without saying so. [*Laughter*] The Member came into this Parliament quoting, in glee and grinning and not understanding that he is condemning. The evidence is overwhelming, it is abundant, it is oppressive.

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What the PNM has done to this country, and to the people who have been its clients: the ones who they have trained like little monkeys to be shouting that they get free education. They are the ones who have suffered, not the middle-class, the Syrians nor the French Creoles; their children win scholarships. The evidence is there.

In 1992, a United Nations study was started under the NAR and was completed by Mr. Manning's Government—rather the Member for San Fernando East. They did something like 400 primary schools in Trinidad and all those in the Member's area, Laventille East/Morvant, were at the bottom of the list, the most illiterate children in Trinidad and Tobago. It is there. I have the document. I did not prepare it. The Member comes here grinning and talking about what Professor Palmer said.

Mr. Speaker, I will have more of this. We will have a lot of time on this in this Parliament. I commend the Member for Diego Martin Central and the Member for Diego Martin West who said that we should have a bipartisan approach to education. But we must remember the past, lest we repeat it.

Mr. Speaker, thanks for the opportunity and I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION 1998/1999) BILL

The Minister of Tobago Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job): I beg to move,

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

In the light of all that has gone on in Parliament, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

The Minister of Tobago Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 70(1), I beg to move that the Bill be now read the third time and passed.

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

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT BILL

Order for second reading read.

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): I beg to move,

That a Bill to repeal and re-enact the Environmental Management Act, 1995 and to validate all acts and things done thereunder, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, the contents of this Bill are well known. What occurred is that—based on a Bill which was brought to this House and went to the other place—it was recognized that the 1995 Act, which was passed by the last administration, was an Act which, if passed with a special majority, would be the most appropriate Act in order to implement the environmental laws of Trinidad and Tobago.

In the other place, the Act which was reintroduced was scrutinized by that place and we brought it into conformity with what was passed in 1995, subject to certain corrections in respect of the preamble and other matters. What we have before us is the 1995 Act with a special majority clause.

8.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition undertook in the other place to support the Bill in both Houses. In the other place, the Bill was supported by a unanimous vote. I have spoken to the Opposition Chief Whip and the Acting Opposition Chief Whip and the Opposition has also indicated its support.

In light of the fact that the contents of this Bill are well known, I beg to move, Mr. Speaker.

Question proposed.

Mr. Jarrette Narine (Arouca North): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on the Environmental Management Bill, 1999. As indicated by the Attorney General in the other place, the People's National Movement, after receiving amendments to the Environmental Management Act, 1995, there was much debate and it was decided that they would revert to Act No. 3 of 1995 which was assented to on March 7, 1995.

In supporting this Bill, it is important that we set the records right in that, in 1995 when we were in government and the present government was in opposition, the very problems that they had with the Bill at that time, is what they are now trying to solve with the amendments. There was a lengthy debate in the other

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place as far as certain aspects of what they were trying to do. At that time, the opposition indicated, in 1995, that it was not here to make the government look good. So they opposed the Bill, they ripped it to shreds and the present Attorney General, the Member for Couva South, at that time indicated that there was an opinion that we should have a two-thirds majority for that Bill in 1995. But the government too had the opportunity to have its legal luminaries look at it and advised us that there was only supposed to be a majority in Parliament to pass the Bill, with no need for a special two-thirds majority.

Mr. Maharaj: I do not want to embarrass the Member, but in the other place, I read a letter where the then Government had an opinion that it needed a two-thirds majority, and I have that document here.

Mr. J. Narine: Mr. Speaker, I have the *Hansard* in which the Attorney General, in the other place, indicated that Justice Guyapersad gave an opinion that it needed a special majority.

What I am saying, is that in 1995 when we were in government we too had an opinion from other sources, and this is why we came to Parliament for a simple majority and the Bill was passed and assented to on March 7, 1995. If you look at Act No. 3, 1995, you would see that it was assented to on March 7, 1995.

I went through the *Hansard* of the other place, Mr. Speaker, and it is important that we say this, because at that time the present Attorney General—probably he was right, probably not—indicated that this matter can be taken to court for judicial review and that he had intentions of doing so, but after four years nothing was done. Because of certain things that have happened during this four-year period, we are here now to correct a situation and we are supporting this.

When I received documentation last week for this matter that is before us, I was shocked when I received the amendments. When I came to Parliament on Tuesday I was told that we are going back to Act No. 3, 1995. We had a caucus and we had decided that if they were going to go back to Act No. 3, 1995, we would support the Bill in the other place, and when it came to the Lower House, we will also support the Bill here. In this document it was indicated in section 3 that the Minister was going to be the person to approve any appointments and there were arguments on clause 82(a) where they were trying to introduce lay assessors. All these things happened in the other place.

What I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is that in order to set the record straight we must indicate certain matters that took place then. We are in total agreement with

the amendments that came from the Upper House. For instance, the change of the financial year was an appropriate change.

There were also other areas where the Minister wanted to drop subclauses (1), (2) and (3) of clause 35, certificates for environmental clearance. One cannot help but think about what is taking place in Tobago today. They were saying that they were going to generate electricity, buy garbage from abroad, and the Minister came here and answered a question indicating to us that he tried on many occasions to get in contact with the Chief Secretary, they wrote him, he tried to get him on the telephone, and it was impossible. Which means that if, four years ago, the commission was put in place, this matter would not have to come to Parliament at this time, because the EMA now has the authority to go in and do something about it. We are only looking at that Tobago situation.

I am also concerned about a question which was asked here last week in Parliament. The *Newsday* carried it this week, Tuesday, January 18, 2000 and the headline read, "NP discovers cancer-causing agents in nine underground storage tanks". This raised many questions in my mind. Because if it is that we have probably a couple hundred gas stations all over the country, and these gas stations have been operational for a number of years, we know that from time to time, the underground tanks do have seepage into the ground.

As a matter of fact, at that gas station opposite the police station in Arouca, five tanks in that gas station leaked, probably, for two years before I made an appeal to National Petroleum to come and have them changed. The system that they worked out is that they give the owners a percentage of what leaks, so that when they fill the gas station up they get a percentage of gasoline that leaks. So after a number of years—as indicated by the Minister, and rightly so—there would have been contamination.

My question, and my concern, is that if there are cancerous agents in the ground of nine storage tanks up to now and we have not done the entire programme, then obviously, when the other gas stations are renovated you will find this same problem. My question is: Do we have right now in Trinidad a specialist agency for dealing with these contaminants like lead poisoning and all that? How was it removed? Did we have a specialist agency doing this removal? Or was it thrown somewhere like what happened in Demerara Road, where, the batteries which were going to be dumped elsewhere, the people begged for it to be put on the roadways, so that that they could drive their cars in, and eventually, this caused lead contamination in the area.

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At another point in time I raised a question here. There was a fire on O'Meara Road where a battery factory was burnt out. Because we did not have this legislation in place, they were able to get a private contractor with a backhoe and two trucks to clear the area at very cheap cost, where it would have cost that company millions of dollars to remove those lead contaminants away from the area, securing it properly. My information is that the fellow with the two trucks and the backhoe employed other vehicles, took up the lead and dropped it all over Wallerfield. This is a fact.

Dr. Griffith: That is not true.

Mr. J. Narine: This is true. I will tell you after Parliament the person who got the contract. He is known to both of us.

So, for God's sake tell me if we have an agency in Trinidad that can handle these types of problems adequately, so we will feel safe to know that the lead poisoning or the cancerous agents were taken out of the ground and those seven storage tanks were sealed properly and secured in a place, so that it would not come back to haunt us, just as how the Soodeen boy died in Wallerfield. This is my point.

Mr. Hinds: Good point.

Mr. J. Narine: We waited four years. The Government thought that the PNM is an obstructionist Opposition, but the PNM is an Opposition that cares about the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] When we found that you were bringing faulty amendments to the Upper House, we decided to take the best interest of the people, and the Attorney General alluded to the situation at that time and asked if he brought back Act No. 3, 1995, whether we will support it. The Leader of the Opposition in the other place said yes, but she still had to come back to discuss it with the parliamentary caucus of the party. We said it was in the best interest of Trinidad and Tobago to have this legislation passed and put teeth to the Environmental Management Agency, so that these things will not happen again. I need these questions to be answered.

There was another situation with the sewer pilot projects which the Minister of Public Utilities indicated, not in the last budget, but the budget before the last. There was supposed to be a pilot project on certain sewer systems in Trinidad. There are hundreds of sewer systems in Trinidad that seep into our waterways and so on. Our children bathe in those rivers and so forth. I am speaking about the Arouca River at La Florissant. It was on the PSIP that we do something about it

and they were supposed to be on this pilot project that would have rectified the sewer problems created by a private developer.

Mr. Singh: The sewer plans are on a pilot project for this year.

8.35 p.m.

I hope that La Florissante is not forgotten.

Mr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, we intend to deal with that.

Mr. J. Narine: Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is that the constituency of Arouca North—although I have written many letters and all these types of things—have gotten very little for the last four years. The people of La Florissante were looking forward to this project because they used their money to rectify that problem only on a part-time basis; whenever it acts up they have to pay WASA to come and clear the system and so forth. They have been trying over the years, but they have been able to live in that area because D’Abadie developers sold them these properties; they had mortgages and so forth so they cannot afford to maintain a sewer system. From time to time the developers were telling them that they washed their hands from that sewer problem and that they should put money and maintain that system. I am happy to hear that this will take place.

Apart from that, with respect to the 1982 constitution of the commission, we hope that it remains the same so that we would not have persons like lay assessors who would recommend to the commission, but will have no vote. This was being recommended, and we are happy that this remains the same. Basically, I have gone through this document here and I am very satisfied that it is almost the same. Only in one case here in clause 84(7) section 34 which was in Act No. 3 of 1995 was changed in this Bill of 1999 to read section 69. I am saying that that is correct, because section 69 is the one that really deals with the section that has alluded to clause 84(7). Whereas in this present Bill it says section 69 but in Act No. 3 of 1995, it was quoted as section 34. In the case of a direct private party action brought under section 69 in the Bill of Act No. 3 of 1995, it reads “section 34.”

So I am also in agreement with this.

We must be always vigilant and we always feel that the environment is very important for our well-being; our children’s well-being; our grandchildren and the future generations to come. I heard today that someone was speaking about the Forestry Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources which is very important to the environment, and I would agree that if the Forestry

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Division is transferred to the Ministry of the Environment, probably we may have better control on those areas which we are supposed to reserve for the future generations of Trinidad and Tobago.

I have been reading books on Africa and so forth, and they have also reserved certain sections in Africa for medicinal plants, and we have areas like that in Trinidad. I know at the Botanic Gardens there is a section that reads “place medicinal plants here just for viewing,” but in areas such as Valencia, Matelot and Grand Riviere, there are large estates where people cultivate medicinal plants and sell on the local market.

Mr. Speaker, in supporting this Bill, I hope that the problems that we have been having over the last four years would now come to an end.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I think I need to correct some inaccuracies that have been mentioned by the hon. Member for Arouca North. When this Bill was debated in this honourable House, the Opposition took the position that the Bill would not be effective unless it was passed by a two-third’s majority. The then government maintained that that was not correct, and that they had the opinion that it needed a simple majority. That has turned out to be untrue, because nowhere in the files you had any opinion that it needed a simple majority. What we found in the files is that the then government was advised that it needed a two-third’s majority, and there was an opinion dated February 08, 1995 by the Law Commission which I mentioned in this honourable House.

I read the whole thing in this honourable House. I have it here, which, in effect, stated that it needed a two-third’s majority. The reason for that was that this Bill was setting up an environmental commission which had coercive powers and that you could not have a commission with coercive powers which exercised similar jurisdiction of the Supreme Court without having a special majority because it was altering the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. It was not even inconsistent; it was altering and the Opposition was taking the position that it needed a two-third’s majority, but the Government was saying a simple majority.

After the Bill was passed, the Government went ahead. For many years from 1995, the environmental commission had to do a lot of work; they got all the rules and regulations and that took years, and it is still being compiled. When they attempted sometime ago, to try to implement the Act, it was decided that it could

not have been implemented. Because of the position the then government took at the time, obviously the Bill could not have been implemented. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Narine: Mr. Speaker, so then why have you brought these amendments on the very Act No. 3 of 1995?

We altered the commission so that the commission would not have had persons in a way who would perform the functions as a court. So we tried to alter it in order to bring it within a simple majority, in other words, the whole aspect. If you were putting persons who were doing judicial work, they had to be appointed by the Judicial and Legal Service Commission. There was a case of Hinds that was well explained in that debate that you had in the Senate. We tried to bring it within the simple majority. When it went to the other place and the Opposition raised the point, I produced this opinion and I said that if it is that the Opposition would support the Bill, I would withdraw that Bill and bring back the original Bill. The Opposition in the Senate, quite nobly, said that it would support the Bill.

So the impression being given that this Government is responsible for the delay, and so forth, in the implementation of the Bill, is not correct. As a matter of fact, if the then government had taken the advice and it was passed by a specified majority, we would have had a commission by now. So the fact of the matter is that I do not think this is a matter for us to say who was right and who was wrong. That was why I produced this Bill here because it is an important matter affecting the environment. Every day that the environment is damaged, it does not affect the PNM or the UNC alone, it affects the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, we should not decide to score points here; who was right and who was wrong.

That is why in the context of this Bill, I would like to congratulate the Opposition for taking the position in supporting this Bill so that we can have an environmental commission with teeth. Before I move, I do not want us to go to a vote and we do not have the required two-third's majority. Therefore, we will need at least 24 Members.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

8.45 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Clauses 1 to 87 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the proceedings of this committee will be suspended for a short while. I must go back to my chambers.

8.52 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

9.05 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Clauses 88 to 98 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Preamble ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be reported to the House.

House resumed.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the third time.

The House voted: Ayes 27

AYES

Maharaj, Hon. R. L.

Persad-Bissessar, Hon. K.

Lasse, Dr. The Hon. V.

Griffith, Dr. The Hon. R.

Humphrey, Hon. J.

Sudama, Hon. T.

Rafeeq, Dr. The Hon. H.

Assam, Hon. M.

Job, Dr. The Hon. M.

Khan, Dr. F.

Singh, Hon. G.

Nanan, Dr. The Hon. A.

Partap, Hon. H.

Mohammed, Dr. The Hon. R.

Singh, Hon. D.

Ramsaran, Hon. M.

Sharma, C.

Ali, R.

Imbert, C.

Narine, J.

Hart, E.

James, Mrs. E.

Bereaux, H.

Joseph, M.

Hinds, F.

Williams, E.

Nicholson, Miss P.

Question put and agreed to.

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

ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General and the Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House stands adjourned to Friday 28, January 2000, at 1.30 p.m. That Friday is Private Members' Day. I do not know if the Opposition would want to indicate which motion it proposes to debate. [*Interruption*] Later on in the week? Okay.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 9.11p.m.