

*Paper Laid**Friday, June 9, 2000***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, June 09, 2000*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

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

The Election and Boundaries Commission Order, 2000. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj)*]

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT****Presentation**

**The Minister of Tobago Affairs and Acting Minister of Finance, Planning and Development (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the Third Report (1999/2000 Session) of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the Supplementation and Variation of the 1999/2000 Appropriation.

*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.*

**PROCEDURAL MOTION**

**The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Security has to make a statement but, unfortunately, it is not ready. Could we defer it for later in the proceedings, please?

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, in the absence of any objection, this item would be deferred to a later stage in the proceedings.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION)****(1999/2000) BILL**

Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum of the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 1999/2000 [*The Minister of Tobago Affairs and Acting 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.*

#### CONSTITUTION (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

#### SERVICE COMMISSIONS (DISMISSAL OF OFFICERS) BILL

Bill to authorise service commissions to summarily dismiss or suspend officers who have been convicted of a criminal offence [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

#### JUSTICE PROTECTION BILL

Bill to provide for the establishment of a programme for the protection of certain witnesses and other persons; and to provide for matters incidental thereto. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

#### ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

**The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Speaker, may I advise this honourable House that the Government intends to proceed first with the report of the Finance Committee and the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (1999/2000) Bill; then the Senate Amendments to the Dangerous Dogs Bill and the Senate Amendments to the Sexual Offences (Amdt.) Bill and then a Bill to provide for an application to the High Court or the Supreme Court of Judicature for relief by way of judicial review and related matters.

*Agreed to.*

#### FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

##### Adoption

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

*Be it resolved* that this House adopt the Third Report (1999/2000 Session) of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the supplementation and variation of the 1999/2000 Appropriation.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance Committee met at the House of Representatives yesterday, Thursday, June 8, 2000, and agreed to a number of proposals. These proposals include the variation of the 1999/2000 appropriation as follows:

- (1) Recurrent Estimates—\$547,390,310; and
- (2) Public Sector Investment programme—\$285,968,000.

The second item was the increase in the 1999/2000 appropriation by the provision of supplementary funds of \$927,651,519. Mr. Speaker, given the increase of \$927,651,519, the 1999/2000 appropriation will now be \$14,973,703,216. The increase is in respect of one Head of Expenditure, Head 19: Charges on Account of the Public Debt, \$927,651,519, the provision of supplementary funds of \$927,651,519. The supplementary funds in the sum of \$927,651,519 are required under Head 19: Charges on Account of the Public Debt to facilitate the early redemption of Government's high cost bonds which attracted an interest rate of between one per cent and one and three-quarter per cent below prime. No budgetary provision had been made under the amount allocated for domestic principal repayment for early redemption of the bonds. Accordingly, it is proposed that the subject Head of Expenditure be provided with the supplementary funding of \$927,651,519.

Mr. Speaker, variation of the appropriation or I should say, Variation of 1999/2000 Appropriation: Recurrent Estimates—\$547,390,310. The variations in the recurrent expenditure reflect the amended schedule of responsibilities of Ministers as assigned by His Excellency the President, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister.

The summary of the Heads of Expenditure affected by the proposed variation in the 1999/2000 appropriation, which are to be increased, is as follows:

Head 13—Office of the Prime Minister	\$25,048,200
Head 18—Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development	\$438,909,020
Head 23—Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs	\$24,409,390
Head 26—Ministry of Education	\$28,836,000
Head 38—Environmental Commission	\$28,602,700
Head 39—Ministry of the Environment	\$1,585,000

**1.40 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, there was a slight typographical error and I will now correct myself. Head 38, the Environmental Commission is to be increased by \$1.585 million and Head 39, the Ministry of the Environment is to be increased by \$28.6027 million for a total increase of \$547.390310 million.

The heads which are to be decreased are as follows:

Head 21—Ministry of Planning and Development' \$457.945720 million

Head 24—Ministry of Legal Affairs \$24.409390 million

Head 42—Ministry of Local Government \$3 million

Head 53—Ministry of Training and Distance Learning \$53.7342 million

That is a total decrease of \$547.390310 million.

With respect to the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), Mr. Speaker, the reallocation of funds under the 1999/2000 Public Sector Investment Programme is due to a revision of the PSIP and reassignment of responsibilities of ministers.

A review of the performance of the 1999/2000 PSIP was undertaken in April, 2000, and it was found that some of the projects had performed as well as forecasted, while others had experienced low levels of expenditure and slower than anticipated project outturns. Following the exercise, it was recommended that a reallocation of funds among programmes and projects should be undertaken. This would allow those which performed well and were in need of additional resources to proceed by transferring funds from those which were not likely to meet the targets in 1999/2000.

Mr. Speaker, as a consequence of the reassignment of the ministerial portfolios, parliamentary approval is required for the transfer of funds from one ministry to another. The overall effect of these changes on the various Heads of Expenditure is as follows:

Head 6—Service Commissions	An increase of \$200,000.
Head 13—Office of the Prime Minister	An increase of \$17.7 million.
Head 15—Tobago House of Assembly	A decrease of \$23 million.
Head 18—Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development	An increase of \$84.107 million
Head 21—Ministry of Planning and Development	A decrease of \$ 22.560 million.
Head 22—Ministry of National Security	An increase of \$11.432 million.
Head 23—Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs	An increase of \$38.924 million.
Head 24—Ministry of Legal Affairs	A decrease of \$24.375 million.
Head 25—Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources	An increase of \$11.605 million.
Head 26—Ministry of Education	An increase of \$24.712 million.
Head 36—Ministry of Housing and Settlements	A decrease of \$5.667 million.
Head 38—Environmental Commission	An increase of \$2.150 million.
Head 39—Ministry of the Environment	An increase of \$26.981 million.

Head 41—Ministry of Culture and Gender Affairs	A decrease of \$1.047 million.
Head 42—Ministry of Local Government	An increase of \$7 million
Head 43—Ministry of Works and Transport	An increase of \$16.493 million.
Head 44—Ministry of Public Utilities	An increase of \$26.936 million.
Head 45—Ministry of Social and Community Development	An increase of \$6.8 million.
Head 46—Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs	A decrease of \$61.819 million.
Head 48—Ministry of Trade, Industry and Consumer Affairs	A decrease of \$14.15 million.
Head 50—Ministry of Tourism	An increase of \$3.544 million.
Head 51—Ministry of Tobago Affairs	An increase of \$2.384 million.
Head 53—Ministry of Training and Distance Learning	A decrease of \$33.350 million.

For an overall balance, increase and decrease, of \$285.968 million.

Explanations for the variations in allocation for both the recurrent expenditure and the PSIP have been circulated to Members.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I wish to remind hon. Members that this Bill will increase the 1999/2000 appropriation by \$927.651519 million, and the total amount to be appropriated for 1999/2000 would, therefore, be \$14.973703216 billion.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question proposed.*

**Hon. R. L. Maharaj:** Mr. Speaker, I wonder if it might be a convenient time for me to interpose the statement of the Minister before the debate starts, if that is okay with you.

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes.

**UTILIZATION OF PROPERTY  
(NO. 14 ELLERSLIE PARK, MARAVAL)**

**The Minister of National Security (Sen. Brig. The Hon. Joseph Theodore):** Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to place the facts related to the presence of members of the defence force at the property at No. 14, Ellerslie Park, Maraval accurately on record.

Statements criticizing the defence force as an institution, members of the defence force, agencies of the Government or the Executive Arm of the state, the current utilization of the property at No. 14, Ellerslie Park, are either misinformed or deliberately oblivious to the facts surrounding this matter and the factual background.

Three essential concerns have been placed in issue:

1. Did the Ministry of Public Administration violate any principle, break any law, offend any protocol in assigning possession of and responsibility for the property at No. 14, Ellerslie Park to the defence force?
2. On what basis did Justice Mendonca assume possession of the property and commission, out of his own pocket, work on the property which it is claimed was estimated at some \$200,000?
3. Did defence force personnel take any action in respect of the property at No. 14, Ellerslie Park that was contrary to their legitimate responsibility in this matter?

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[SEN. BRIG. THE HON. J. THEODORE]

Mr. Speaker, for the record, I present the facts item by item. By written communication of December 2, 1996, the Hon. Chief Justice called for a revision of the terms and conditions of judges. I quote the relevant section of the Chief Justice's letter recommending that Government put an end to the provision of houses for judges. I quote:

“To:                   The Attorney General  
 From:                The Chief Justice  
 Dated:               2<sup>nd</sup> December, 1996  
 Subject:             Revision of Terms and Conditions of Judges

The fact is that the provision of housing by Government is really an outdated prerequisite more appropriate to a colonial era.

In the private sector, many of the larger institutions which used to provide their senior staff with housing have ceased to do so or have limited that prerequisite to one or two of their top management.

Government is even less well equipped to maintain residential properties and the result, inevitably, is that buildings deteriorate and properties depreciate in value.

Many of the sites, however, like that on which the Chief Justice's residence is located, hold their value and good commercial sense would dictate that Government sell many of these properties, starting with the Chief Justice's residence.

If one quantifies the interest that would be earned on the capital sums produced by such sales, and adds to it the savings made by not spending money unproductively on repairs and maintenance, one would, I am sure, find that Government could afford to pay a proper housing allowance to those now entitled to housing and still show a profit.

The fact of the matter, in any event, is that at present Government is not, and has not for some time been, discharging its obligations to provide housing for the Judges, and in those circumstances it is only fair that the housing allowance which is now at a nominal level of \$1000.00 per month should be increased to a figure which bears some relation to the rental value of the accommodation to which Judges are, by law, entitled.”

Those were the recommendations of the Hon. Chief Justice.



Mr. Speaker, in any event, following the representations of the Chief Justice, the Cabinet agreed that the Chief Justice's recommendations be reviewed by the Salaries Review Commission. Consequent upon this, the Chief Justice's recommendations were given legal effect. The law governing the entitlement of all judges to housing is defined in the Judges' Conditions of Service and Allowances Regulations No. 2 as amended by the Judges' Conditions of Service and Allowances Amendment Regulations 1997LN 190 of 1997.

The relevant section of these conditions states in summary:

“With effect from the 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1997, where a Judge is not provided with a residence or where the Judge chooses not to occupy a residence provided by the State he or she shall be paid a monthly housing allowance of Seven Thousand Five Hundred Dollars, in the case of the Chief Justice, and in the case of a Judge other than the Chief Justice, Five Thousand Dollars.”

The legal position, Mr. Speaker, is either housing or a housing allowance for judges. The Hon. Chief Justice's stated preferred position, as confirmed in his letter of December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1996 to the Hon. Attorney General, was to sell the houses and increase the housing allowance to judges. The result was a 400 per cent increase to \$5,000 per month in the housing allowance paid to judges, and a monthly housing allowance of \$7,500 in the case of the Chief Justice.

Mr. Speaker, it is most regrettable that in the face of the decision to which the Hon. Chief Justice was the instigator, the court administration has taken an action that has resulted in uncalled-for developments that do no credit to any individual or agency involved. The position is that the Government has offered all residential properties which were occupied by public officials for sale to those officials who are in legal occupation of those properties. This is, of course, with the exception of the President's House and the Prime Minister's residence, the official residence of the Chief of Defence Staff and other official residences.

Following the decision to offer Government residential property to legitimate occupants, seven judges have made down payments on the purchase of state-owned properties they occupy. Mr. Speaker, at all times throughout the years, the Judiciary has recognized the Property Division of the Government as the landlord in the allocation of houses to judges. Correspondence from the Judiciary established this beyond doubt.

*Utilization of Property*  
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Mr. Speaker, on November 27, 1997, the Registrar of the Supreme Court wrote to the Property Management Unit which was then in the Office of the Prime Minister as follows:

“Re: Properties no longer required by the Judiciary

I am directed by the Honourable Chief Justice to inform you that the following quarters are no longer required for use by the Judiciary:

4. St. Lucia Street, Federation Park;
5. 2 Tobago Avenue, Federation Park;
6. 1 La Fantasie Gardens, St. Anns;
7. 164 Morne Coco Road, Diego Martin;
8. 11—13 Barbados Road, Federation Park.

Numbers 1-4 are vacant and No. 5 is at present occupied by the retired Justice Mr. Clebert Brooks who has given the assurance that he will vacate same within the next ten days.”

The keys to the mentioned properties were returned with that letter, Mr. Speaker.

**1.55 p.m.**

In further confirmation of the fact that there was no misunderstanding that properties occupied by judges remained under the control of the Executive arm of Government, the Supreme Court Registrar wrote to the Properties Management Unit on December 12, 1997, as follows:

"Further to my letter to you dated 27th November, 1997, I am returning the keys for the following properties:

- 2 Tobago Avenue, Federation Park;  
164 Morne Coco Road, Diego Martin."

The letter continues, Mr. Speaker:

"The keys for 4 St. Lucia St., Federation Park were taken by the Ministry of Works some time ago to effect works and those keys have not been returned to me.

Recent enquiries by me have revealed that Justice Koylass handed over the keys for 1 La Fantasie Gardens, St. Ann's to one Mr. Knutt at the Ministry of Works.

Justice Brooks is still in occupation of 11-13 Barbados Road, Federation Park and is in the process of vacating same, and he assured me over the telephone a short while ago that he will complete his moving by 19th December, 1997."

The letter concludes:

"As soon as I am in receipt of those keys, I will be able to pass those over to you."

The letter clearly confirmed the position regarding state-owned property occupied by judges. The properties were allocated by the competent Ministry, not by the Court. There existed no basis for the court administration to assign the property at 14, Ellerslie Park to Justice Mendonca.

Justice Mendonca, who was appointed to the Bench last year, long after the decision prompted by the Chief Justice's representation that judges be paid an increased housing allowance, long after the Chief Justice agreed to the judges' conditions of service regarding housing.

The Hon. Chief Justice is, therefore, patently in error, in suggesting that the designation of the state-owned property at 14 Ellerslie Park, as the official residence of the Chief of Defence Staff represents an interference with the entitlement of judges.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the recent events involving the defence force.

By written communication of February 21, 2000, the Ministry of National Security was advised by the Ministry of Public Administration that the house at 14 Ellerslie Park was allocated for use of the holder of office of Chief of Defence Staff. The house at 14 Ellerslie Park was effectively placed in the possession of the Defence Force on that date.

By letter, NS: 44/7/4 Sub. 1 Vol. 6 dated February 29, 2000, the Chief of Defence Staff was informed that the Minister of Public Administration had granted approval for the residence at 14 Ellerslie Park to be allocated to the Defence Force and to be designated the official residence of the Chief of Defence Staff.

Thereupon, the Chief of Defence Staff, with admirable efficiency and with the degree of responsibility expected of his office, took charge of the property at Ellerslie Park and took the actions that were indicated and appropriate. The defence force took possession of the property and carried out a survey to ascertain

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what was required to be done in order to bring the house up to the required standard. After consultation with the civilian architect and the Clerk of Works from the Engineering Battalion, a decision was arrived at as to the extent and quality of work to be carried out.

In early May, work commenced by the removal of cupboards that were termite ridden; the removal of structures that were not required and the removal of some woodwork at windows, for example, the framework for the mosquito proofing. Meanwhile, the grounds were being kept in good order.

Because of the imminent return of a senior defence force officer from Washington, a decision was taken to give priority to the work that was required on a property at 3, Nevis Avenue where he was to take up residence. Consequently, the Chief of Defence Staff instructed that work should cease at 14 Ellerslie Park and the human and material resources concentrate at Nevis Avenue, after which work would resume on the Chief of Defence Staff's new quarters.

On the morning of Thursday, June 1, 2000, it was brought to the attention of the Chief of Defence Staff that construction works were being carried out at Ellerslie Park by persons who had not been authorized by the defence force.

After investigation, it was learnt that a construction firm was carrying out work on behalf of a judge. The matter was immediately reported to the Property Management Unit and to the Minister of Public Administration. That evening, the Chief of Defence Staff instructed that guards be placed on the premises and that no workers were to be allowed to enter the following morning.

The Chief Justice contacted the Chief of Defence Staff on the night of June 1, 2000 and claimed that the house was under the control of the Judiciary. The Chief of Defence Staff advised the Chief Justice that the house had been allocated to the defence force since February and, therefore, responsibility for the property fell to the defence force.

Since the Chief of Defence Staff gave no authority to anyone to carry out works on the building, as I said before, a guard was placed to prevent any further unauthorized work. The Chief of Defence Staff advised the Chief Justice that he should discuss the matter with the Minister of Public Administration.

The matter was brought to the attention of the Minister of National Security the next morning. On the morning of June 2, 2000, the Chief of Defence Staff went to the site to ensure that no untoward situation developed. He spoke with the contractor who indicated that work had commenced just under three weeks prior to that date. The contractor admitted that it was obvious that attention was being paid to the premises by the way the grass was cut and that dismantling was taking place.

The workers were instructed to remove their personal belongings and tools. An inventory of material and equipment left on the site was undertaken and signed by the contractor and a representative of the defence force.

The Chief of Defence Staff advised the Minister of Public Administration, the Minister of National Security and the Property Management Unit of his actions.

The facts are, contrary to what might have been alleged, defence force personnel did not evict a judge from the property at 14 Ellerslie Park, which had been properly allocated to the defence force.

There is no evidence to even suggest that Justice Mendonca was in occupation of the premises at the time, prior to or during the events which I am now clarifying. Defence force personnel simply stopped workmen from carrying out unauthorized work on the property for which the defence force had responsibility.

The property at 14 Ellerslie Park will henceforth be the official residence of the holder of the office of Chief of Defence Staff.

I have presented the facts on this matter to this honourable House. I hope, Sir, that commentators will be guided by the facts. The defence force has done nothing in this matter that would warrant blame and I trust that all future references to this matter will be fair, factual and responsible. The Chief of Defence Staff and the men and woman under his command deserve no less.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for permitting the facts surrounding the developments at 14 Ellerslie Park, to be ventilated in this honourable House.

#### FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

**Mr. Speaker:** We will resume the debate. The Member for Diego Martin West.

**Dr. Keith Rowley** (*Diego Martin West*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for your recognition.

I rise to join the debate with respect to the presentation of the Acting Minister of Finance, Planning and Development on the proceedings of the Finance Committee Minutes and the matter of the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (1999/2000) Bill.

When we start the year or when we start a parliamentary term, all that we can hope is for the best and no one can be unreasonable with respect to expectations for the best, but there comes a time when one is in a position to assess how well we have done and to ask the relevant questions: Why, what and in some instances, whom?

I go directly to Head 15, under "Decreases in Allocation". Mr. Speaker, when we saw this, we saw a decrease in allocation of \$23 million which was initially allocated to the Tobago House of Assembly for development works in Tobago and it said it had something to do with construction of the stadium at Bacolet.

The question arises: Under what circumstances is \$23 million which was allocated to Tobago now being removed from the allocation for Tobago? What we are told by the Government is that money is no longer needed because it was initially earmarked towards the construction of the Tobago component of the stadia population. Mr. Speaker, you know we are building four new stadia. The one in Tobago, like the others, were to have been financed by direct government allocation. Somewhere along the line the Government has changed that approach, therefore, the \$23 million allocated for this development project is no longer required.

It looks clear; it sounds logical, but it brings us to the point, if in fact, \$23 million allocated to Tobago for development works was not required on this particular project, another question arises: Could it have been utilized for some other development project in Tobago? In fact, the question arises: Are there other development projects in Tobago which are starved for funds?

My mind would run to three of those projects. One is the Richmond Water Project in Tobago for which, in the last three years at least, allocations have been made in the national budget to provide Tobago with a second and improved water supply system and, to the best of my knowledge, up to this day, under this Government, not a shovel of dirt has been disturbed at Richmond with a view to providing an improved water supply for Tobago from that source.

We do know that the Hilton Hotel is due to come into operation very soon and when that hotel comes into operation, along with other development projects, there is likely to be a severe water problem in Tobago. In the interim, the Government—as a result of the hideous performance of this Government and its colleagues in the Tobago House of Assembly—has done no work with respect to the Richmond Water Project.

### **2.10 p.m.**

We talk about the Tobago Hospital, again, a number of allocations in the last four years. That project was approved when I was a member of the last Cabinet in 1995. From 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, every year money was allocated in the budget for the new Tobago Hospital at Signal Hill. If you go there today, Mr. Speaker, not a bush cut, not a shovel of dirt was disturbed, and Tobago's health service is the worst it has ever been in the history of Tobago, going back to colonial times. That is what it is.

I can go to one other project; the Mason Hall Secondary School, construction of which was earmarked to begin in 1996. It was one of four schools approved under the last administration; one in Diego Martin, one in Sangre Grande, one in Cunupia and one in Mason Hall, Tobago. As of today, this Government has only seen it fit to take action on the school in Cunupia, and pretty soon that school is due for opening, and I am happy for that. I am afraid I cannot say the same thing—if one goes to Sangre Grande one will see no school; if one goes to Diego Martin, one would see no school. One would hear from the Government that, after five years, we have only now agreed on a site. So, it took this Government almost five years to determine the location of a school in Diego Martin.

If one goes to Mason Hall in Tobago, between the Government and the Tobago House of Assembly—wrangling between the Government agencies; the Minister for Tobago Affairs, the Minister of the Cabinet and the Chief Secretary in Tobago—between all of them playing their own games, there is no school in Mason Hall, and the people's children will not be able to enter a new secondary school as the Parliament said they should.

**Miss Nicholson:** They are in charge of the country.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** I give you those three examples, Mr. Speaker. Here are three examples, and one thing is clear; when one looks at this removal of \$23 million from the Tobago Development Programme, one thing that cannot be said is that money was the problem. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, money cannot be the problem.

If one looks at the back of the document, one would see approval is being requested from this House, for \$927 million of additional expenditure, over and above what was approved in the last budget, almost \$1 billion. That request is as a result of the Government being in funds. The Government has money, so what the Government has chosen to do is to pay down some of the debts early. It is paying down seven bodies of loans—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Someone seems to have a seizure. The sitting would be suspended for a while. Members in the public gallery just remain where you are please. The sitting is suspended for a few minutes. Please do not crowd. I just asked people not to crowd. It is being attended to.

**2.16 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**2.27 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, thank you ever so much. You will be pleased to know that the official from the Ministry of Education who was ill is, in fact, getting attention and is on her way to get further attention.

Out of an abundance of caution, I wish to indicate to the media that there is to be no footage of that unfortunate incident with the official who actually collapsed. I thank the doctors who were here to give assistance. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, before the interruption, I was making the point that what Head 15 is saying to us, in summary, is that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and in its wider sense I am hearing, including the Tobago House of Assembly, having resources available to proceed with major projects for the benefit of the people of Tobago, have seen it fit to fight among themselves, to have disputes at the level of governance, the end result of which is that neither the Richmond Water Project, the Tobago Hospital nor the Mason Hall Secondary School, none of those projects has seen the light of day; in a situation where it cannot be said that funds are a problem, because here you have \$23 million for another project not being required, but being removed from the allocation for the service of Tobago.

I was making the further point that the Government could have raised \$1 billion in recent times to pay off expensive debts by borrowing cheaper moneys. It is there for debt service, on the last page of the document, so funding is available to the Government. The indictment against this administration and the Executive of the Tobago House of Assembly is here for all to see; that is the performance record of those who are in charge of Trinidad and Tobago today. [*Desk thumping*]

I am putting you on notice that if you think the health system in Trinidad is bad it is probably worse in Tobago and can only get worse, and there is no sign of the Tobago hospital.

Mr. Speaker, the next question I raised was: Why did the Government change horses in midstream with respect to the funding of the stadia? I would explain to you, because the record is here. The Government agreed to build four stadia and to fund them from government revenues. This Parliament was approached and agreed to provide moneys for that. This \$23 million from Tobago was part of those moneys. What we did not know and what we have seen so far is that the cost of that project has risen from \$169 million to \$445 million.

The Cabinet Note was read here in this House at an earlier time, when Cabinet took a decision to allow FIFA to manage those moneys, because they wanted to put a particular individual in charge of public moneys. When the Solicitor General wrote to the Attorney General pointing out that the Cabinet was acting illegally, rather than comply with the instructions of all those who know what should happen and put the contracts out for tender, the Government chose not to do that. If they had put it out for tender, under the Central Tenders Board Ordinance, they could not guarantee that it would go to their favourite friends.



Mr. Speaker, do you know what they did? They scrapped that approach in midstream and said, “No, no, the Government is no longer going to fund it.” If the Government was going to fund it directly it would have had to be done according to the tendering laws and regulations. What they have done is say, “We would go by the BOLT approach: Build/Own/Lease/Transfer, which means that, yes, they would be built, but the moneys would come from other sources. Their favourite friends would be in control of the contracts and they can give the contract to whom they want to give it, and only on completion of the stadia will the Government finance the projects and pay the interest. That is the ruse that the Cabinet used to get around putting the thing out for open tender and that is why this \$23 million is now being withdrawn from Tobago, because it is no longer required.

The stadia are being built by private sector money for which the Government would pay after completion, because the objective is to be able to put a particular person in charge of this \$440 million, even if it means changing what the Parliament approved; withdrawing moneys available and come to tell the Parliament now, Head 15, decrease of so many millions for the stadium. I said before and I am saying it again, Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago is facilitating the pathways and the side roads to get around the regulations that are there for the protection of the public purse; and that is what this means.

Let us go to page 39, Head 44 under “Increases”. I just spoke a moment ago about decreases, now I am going to speak about increases. We see under Head 44 an increase of \$26.9 million. For argument sake, let us say \$27 million. The budget of the Ministry of Public Utilities increased by \$29 million. I want to ask you, Mr. Speaker: what is the portfolio of the Minister of Public Utilities? It is the Water and Sewerage Authority, T&TEC and TTPost; so we see an increase of \$29 million. When I asked yesterday, “What is this for?” I was told—and it is written here—provision for emergency infrastructural work for flood relief.

This Government is not only undermining institutions outside the Cabinet, the undermining is now taking place inside the Cabinet. How else could you explain that? You have a Ministry of Works and Transport and under the Cabinet system of this country, as of now, the Ministry of Works and Transport is responsible for drainage. A large part of the Ministry of Works and Transport is the Drainage Division. In that division you have engineers, clerk of the works; a variety of public servants in positions paid for by the state to carry out works relevant to drainage, but this Government, hell-bent on undermining everything we have come to know in this country, with respect to the management of the country’s affairs, decides to put \$29 million under the control of the Ministry of Public Utilities to treat with emergency flood relief!

I ask myself: When the Ministry of Public Utilities is managing \$29 million for flood relief, what is happening in the Ministry of Works and Transport and what process would the Ministry of Public Utilities use to ensure that this money is spent in an effective way? What staff do they have in that ministry to manage that money? What staff is available to the Member for Caroni East that is not available to the Ministry of Works and Transport?

The Ministry of Works and Transport has hundreds of millions of dollars in equipment which is relevant to drainage and material which they could use; personnel, paid millions of dollars per month, but they are not involved. The Prime Minister and his partner in the Ministry of Public Utilities managing \$29 million for flood relief. I can say, Mr. Speaker, without fear of contradiction, that on close examination you will find that a substantial part of this money was spent without proper regulations being followed and an absence of transparency. [*Desk thumping*] Yesterday, some one of them muttered that it is because the Minister of Public Utilities is efficient and it happened in his constituency. What poppy cock!

If ever there was any indictment against the current Minister of Works and Transport, this is it; because any Minister worth his salt would never sit in a Cabinet and have his Prime Minister allocate his portfolio to the Member for Caroni East. [*Laughter*] But the whole Ministry of Works and Transport has been at laughter from the beginning. What we are seeing here is a culmination of the catastrophe that is called the Ministry of Works and Transport; a culmination of that. One could probably find justification for a Minister of Works with this kind of record being removed from his portfolio.

My argument is that if something had to be done, it ought not to be done by providing the funds to the Ministry of Public Utilities. But I can and will show you, Mr. Speaker, how the Ministry of Works and Transport ought not to have anybody's confidence, because the performance of that ministry is dismal. It may be the reason the Prime Minister has seen it fit, in the presence of the Minister of Works and Transport, to allocate emergency flood relief money to the Minister of Public Utilities.

Mr. Speaker, let me give you an idea as to how the Ministry of Works and Transport performs. The Ministry of Works and Transport was responsible for a major project: the renovation works on the Solomon Hochoy Highway. For the repairs to that highway, the government of Trinidad and Tobago—not this Government, a prior government—initiated the works for repair of that road. By the time this Government came into office, the process had reached the point where public tendering was done to choose a contractor, and because the bulk of the funds was going to be a grant from the European Economic Commission (EEC), the EEC required that you make it open to European contractors, and that was done.

The lowest tenderer was a company called Cubiertas from Spain; a company that had a US \$5 billion turnover in its portfolio. This large contracting firm was the lowest bidder, and it bid TT \$121 million for the project.

**2.40 p.m.**

This Government is not concerned about performing for the people's benefit, it is concerned about opportunity and performing for its own benefit. So what does the Minister of Works and Transport do? One of his first actions as the Minister of Works and Transport was to set the stage to create opportunities for his friends. So even though Cubiertas had bid \$120 million for the entire project, the Minister of Works and Transport and his agents went to Cubiertas and told them the Government could not afford to provide counterpart funding for a project of \$120 million and it wanted them to reduce the scope of the work by 7 kilometres and Cubiertas, the lowest bidder, said it could not do it. The price that was offered was based on the length of the road and if it is reduced by 7 kilometres, the amount of \$120 million would be down to \$109 million and because of its overheads, it did not make it worthwhile.

The Minister of Works and Transport told them if they did not reduce it they would not be considered, and Cubiertas said it could not reduce it and the Minister smiled because the next bidder in line was a contractor called Comylsa-Lain operating out of the office of the contractor on Wrightson Road who is now doing the airport. So immediately Comylsa-Lain became the next contractor in line, and the Minister awarded the contract for \$127 million, 7 kilometres less.

The Government could not find \$120 million for the entire road, but it found \$127 million for 7 kilometres less of road. I defy anyone on the other side to contradict those figures, because they all sit there in silence, willingly supporting what I am saying because this is what has been happening. It was only when Justice Deyalsingh's report came in pointing out that that particular company was in collusion at the airport that Comylsa-Lain came out of the office on Wrightson Road.

The next thing that happened was that the contractor was not performing properly. He used substandard material on the project, used red sand to do the work and the EEC said no, no we are not going to provide you with any money for that, and that sand had to be dug up and the project restarted. In the meantime the people from San Fernando who use the highway were suffering for months and months. *[Desk thumping]* Then the contractors stopped working and the whole country was asking why the Government was not taking action against this contractor. What they did not know was that the contractor was the preferred contractor of the Minister who pushed out Cubiertas to be able to give them the contract and was hesitant to fire them.

Public pressure eventually forced the Minister to act. Comylsa-Lain was fired and then moneys had to be returned to the Government because the contract was frustrated and this Government made a big hue and cry that it had received \$34 million and asking for credit and praise for having not performed on the contract, not getting the work done, and for undermining the Cubiertas bid. They are asking us to praise them because they received \$34 million of moneys that should have gone to the Comylsa-Lain project.

Then an announcement was made that the work would now be done by the Ministry of Works and Transport. Well, now we are in trouble because the Ministry of Works and Transport ensures that nothing has been done and today the highlight of this Government's performance in road construction is that disaster at the Solomon Hochoy Highway. [*Desk thumping*] So you understand why the Prime Minister will not want to give any flood relief money to a Minister with that kind of record. So what does he do? He puts the money into the Ministry of Public Utilities and tells us the reason the money is there is because that Minister was chairing a committee for flood relief. What nonsense! How does the chairing of a committee by the Minister of Public Utilities result in funds being put in his ministry as a portfolio responsibility? It is here, Head 44: Ministry of Public Utilities.

What happens after that? The Prime Minister announces—with five months to go in the life of this Government, elected to stay in office for no more than 60 months—a new Minister of Works and Transport. He had to, because with a Minister of Works and Transport with that kind of performance, he had to hire a new Minister, who with five months at most available to him, is given responsibility for the highway project. The same highway that the current Minister of Works and Transport could not deal with for four and a half years, so the magic man will now handle it in five months.

Mr. Speaker, that would have been an aberration if it was the only infraction of the Minister of Works and Transport. What about the airport? It was the same Minister of Works and Transport with that kind of record and behaviour on the Solomon Hochoy Highway who was the architect driving the airport project, who committed \$100 million of public moneys to a contractor who was already overpaid to expedite the project to have it done by a particular day. Now we are hearing it is not going to happen by that day.

If you pass there now, as I have done in recent days, what you will see will make you shudder. You will see a steel shed, a galvanize roof like a glorified barn which you see all over the United States of America on the farms; you will also see a contractor compacting fill in the rain. Any contractor will tell you that you

cannot compact fill in rain because then you cannot control the water content of the compaction. If you compact it with water in it that you cannot control, when the water eventually dries out, what is the nature of the foundation of your compaction? But at the airport, there is this magical deadline to meet; \$100 million incentive for a particular deadline and they are compacting the fill in rain; and now that has been passed over to the new Minister of Works and Transport.

The highway is passed to the Minister of Works and Transport, the airport is passed to the Minister of Works and Transport, but the Minister himself has left head office here and has gone to San Fernando. I presume to prop up a wall on the bypass because the ministry is building a wall down there costing millions of dollars that is threatening people's lives. That is not what he has gone there for, he has gone down there to use public moneys in a Government office to campaign for the San Fernando West seat, at Government expense. Having been a dismal failure as the Minister of Works and Transport, he now has the effrontery to move the Government office to San Fernando to campaign for a constituency office. That is what this Government is about, and would like us to know him as the "Minister of Bridges".

What self-respecting Minister will allow himself to face this situation? We talk about Westminster system and that our system is patterned after the British. This could never happen in a British Cabinet. No Minister of Works and Transport would have allowed a Prime Minister to hand his portfolio to a colleague with no expertise, no staff, nothing, and then call himself hero. What hero? He wants to be known as the "Minister of Bridges". What bridges?

Mr. Speaker, the bridge-building programme for which this Government is claiming credit is a programme that crosses three administrations. The Rural Roads and Bridges Programme was initiated by the NAR under Selby Wilson and Robinson. It was a \$240 million programme, the first phase of which commenced before the PNM came into office. I was the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and my colleague the Minister of Works and Transport handled the second phase; this Government is handling the final phase, but somehow, the Government and its supporters' eyes were closed when the NAR was doing it, they were closed when the PNM was doing it. Suddenly, this Government is *pièce de résistance* in building bridges. It has nothing to do with the UNC Government except that it has left well alone, that is the only thing it has done on that project, but it is where they had to intervene to initiate something to get the Solomon Hochoy Highway prepared, they put out the lowest bidder by putting in some friends, and frustrating the country's programme. Give friends the airport without

tender, increase the expenses by a \$100 million incentive. Nurses are marching up and down the streets and the Government is doing absolutely nothing to bring the matter to a head. People are suffering and dying and we are hearing from the Prime Minister: "Who wants to go could go and they must go now", and who dies, dies. That is what they are telling us because they are not concerned about solving the problem.

This Government is not about accountability, not about ensuring that moneys are well spent to the benefit of the public of Trinidad and Tobago. This Government is about humiliating and demoralizing. What are the public servants in the Ministry of Works and Transport to think when they see the Minister of Public Utilities in charge of an emergency drainage programme? What is the Government saying to them in the Ministry of Works and Transport in the Drainage Division? We have an emergency and the Government sees it fit to put the Minister of Public Utilities in charge of it and the funds under his portfolio. This is a Government that has undermined Cabinet responsibility. The whole concept is undermined. When I asked yesterday what it was for, I see the answer here that the \$29 million is payment for the Honda River diversion which was undertaken last year.

I am glad that the Member for St. Augustine is here, because he was the one who was on television holding the portfolio of Minister of Housing and Settlements, playing hydraulic engineer, giving instructions as to how the Honda River will be diverted to flood Chaguanas. *[Laughter]* Not the Ministry of Works and Transport's staff, but the Minister of Housing and Settlements with absolutely no qualification in anything was instructing this Government on how to divert the Honda River as a result of which, anytime it rains, the people in Chaguanas who were high and dry before, have to put on tall boots and bring out their boats.

When the PNM was in office, it was that Minister who said that flooding is not an act of God but an act of man. Well, he was right, flooding is an act of man. That man. *[Laughter]* So they had to divert the Honda River on the advice of the hydraulic engineer from Newbury Hill, holding the portfolio of Minister of Works and Transport. If that is how the Cabinet functions, when you have money for a flood relief, it is put into the Ministry of Public Utilities, then it should not bother us. We should not be surprised when the hydraulic engineer's advice comes from the Minister of Housing and Settlements. And when you want to build an overpass at the junction of the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway and the Solomon Hochoy Highway, you get the designs from the Minister of Housing and Settlements. We are told that a contract has been awarded for some arch; and who awarded the contract?

**Hon. Member:** The Minister of Housing and Settlements.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** It has to be.

Mr. Speaker, this is a pattern of behaviour which demonstrates “all fall down” in the administration of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] If you drive past the stadium you will see work going on there. There are people who are protesting that work and the Government is telling them, literally, where to jump. When one asks what the Minister of Works and Transport has to say about this—to date nothing, because he has no responsibility for the port and those are port lands. Dredging is taking place, reclamation is taking place on lands belonging to the port. The Minister of Works and Transport is silent, the port is silent, the Minister of the Environment is silent, and the Minister of Housing and Settlements is reclaiming the land.

So one can understand why you can get up one morning and some fellow off the road is the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Portfolios and responsibility do not matter, all that matters is that they retain their salaries and get whatever they want to get elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, the only reason the current Minister of Works and Transport is in San Fernando and still carrying the portfolio of Minister of Works and Transport is to maintain his salary. The Prime Minister has told us in this document, words to the effect that he has no confidence that the Minister of Works and Transport can get the work done otherwise he would not put flood relief money under the control of the Member for Caroni East.

**2.55 p.m.**

I would not allow the Minister of Housing and Settlements to be telling the *Guardian* newspaper that he is designing an overpass; I would not allow the Minister of Housing and Settlements to be dredging and reclaiming lands which fall under the portfolio of the Minister of Works and Transport, in effect, the entire Cabinet has acquiesced to a vote of no confidence in the Minister of Works and Transport. [*Desk thumping*] Of course, they expect that they would be saved by some American “Carvellite” who will tell them: “Tell the public what wonderful performers you are; leak the document about Carville and show the country what an expensive tool Carville is, and he will then frighten the country into submission.”

The people of this country understand what a Government is elected for. Unfortunately, this Government does not understand what it has been elected to do. Because all I am pointing out here is total chaos in the governance of Trinidad and Tobago; from Scarborough to Port of Spain to San Fernando, from the Central Government to the Tobago House of Assembly. That is what is happening here. So you understand why there is a feeling of uneasiness in this country. For the first time there are people in this country who are worried about our direction. Where is this country going?

You see, Mr. Speaker, there was a time when we had boundless faith in our destiny, and we marched forward bravely and our forefathers wrote in the Constitution protection of our rights and freedoms and protection for our public servants. They knew that over time, some day, some despot would arrive in office and decide to abuse the people of this country, and that is why they put in the Constitution protection for some of our officers.

I was shocked—this Government, which is bent on undermining Cabinet responsibility; undermining Cabinet form and substance; undermining the country's institutions—when I saw a picture in the newspapers with the Prime Minister holding up a chart. In the picture is the Commissioner of Police, a senior officer and a chart showing, “PNM murders and UNC murders.” It is all well and good for the Government to express murders in the context of political parties, because that kind of “dotishness” would get them nowhere, because the Government murders nobody. They were the ones who said that because there is a certain government in office, murders would go on, and when the government comes out of office murders would stop. That has not happened. There is now a chart showing, “PNM murders, UNC murders,” and behind the chart is the office and the \$1,000 cap of the Commissioner of Police. Mr. Speaker, that, along with this kind of development in this matter, symbolizes the general undermining of our institutions.

Public servants ought to be told—Mr. Speaker, I want to tell public servants in this country that whatever office he or she holds, high or low, you have a responsibility and a duty to say, “No” to the Government. If this Government asked you to do something that is wrong you say, “No.” Because this Government is like a child with a toy or a dangerous tool and can inflict damage on itself, as it has done, and can inflict damage on others. No person must feel that this Government is all powerful, and when you look at the Government's behaviour, and its lack of respect for tradition; its lack of respect for order; it is more important now than ever that people who are protected by the Constitution do not allow this Government to put them in political positions where they find themselves compromised, or the public gets the view that our systems are open to compromise.



I do not know what else to say about this Government. I would not say anymore to them but I will speak about them, because what this Government shows in the management of our moneys, is that it does not care. Do you think any one of them over there is worried about the fact that the people of Tobago have not had any of those projects?

**Miss Nicholson:** Not at all.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Not one of them! Do you think any one of them is concerned that we are going to overpay for an airport? Do you think any one of them is concerned about the fact that flooding is now being handled by a man who has demonstrated no competence in his chosen field? Mr. Speaker, this does not stand on its own; it is a continuation of a Government's lack of caring for public moneys. A while ago when the Government had taken a decision to allow a private sector company to build a power station in this country, we were told that the project would cost US \$80 million. Before the next news item came out we were told that it was US \$100 million.

It turned out that the people who were given that project, under dubious circumstances; even after T&TEC's own report had shown that they appeared to be questionable in their resource base, this Government pursued bending the rules, in the same way they bend the rules here, to allow the Tobago stadium to be built under the control of FIFA. They bent the rules by not going to tender for the InnCogen Plant, and the Government, for a US \$100 million project, put up a guarantee for a US \$150 million. We ask in this honourable House: Why is the Government of Trinidad and Tobago putting up a guarantee of US \$150 million to an American company called Yorke to build a US \$100 million power station? We got all kinds of chit-chat from the Government but in the prospectus of Yorke, we saw why. Yorke used US \$30 million to service a debt on its Big Sur project in New York. Guarantee provided by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago raised the money and the money was used to treat with a debt problem that Yorke had in New York.

One year later—I just came from London and I can tell you—I am sure you know, Mr. Speaker, because you know everything that goes on in this country—Yorke is about to go bankrupt and the InnCogen Plant is for sale. *[Interruption]* You can buy it if you wish. The InnCogen Plant is now being flogged because those who came here and were beneficiaries of the Government's good nature and generosity, and the Government's guarantee of raising money are now in a position to liquidate the asset to a new owner. Right now, there are companies

doing due diligence on the one-year old InnCogen Plant. We warned the Government; we told them what they were doing, and they told us that what we were saying was not right. But we knew all along that it had nothing to do with the people of Trinidad and Tobago, it had to do with the Prime Minister, Paladeno and the Member for Caroni East. [*Desk thumping*]

So we are not surprised at all now that they had already gone to market. My colleague from Diego Martin Central read the T&TEC report in this Parliament, which did the assessment of the people in New York and pointed out that InnerCob is only a facilitator and the others are basically carpet baggers. That is how this Government has run this country for four and one half years and they have the unmitigated gall to be annoying people by way of toxins of all kind, talking about performance, but we are standing by waiting to debate performance in the streets all over Trinidad and Tobago and this performance—as recorded here—is a performance. [*Desk thumping*]

**3.05 p.m.**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I wish to advise that, allowing for injury time, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin West has expired.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Dr. K. Rowley:** [*Desk thumping*] I thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those of us who have documents before us and who have followed the developments that led to these documents and the figures being presented in this way, at the end of the day we are in a position to say, "I told you so". It raises the whole question of trustworthiness. We have no basis on which to trust the Minister of Public Utilities, MP for Caroni East, in managing any flood emergency money. We have no basis on which to trust this Government with Tobago's affairs on this matter. That is why, when the Prime Minister talked about, "We are expecting some company called REEMA to come here to do a gas to liquids project", the whole question of trust rose up again because we do not like to come at the end and say, "I told you so." We like to come up front and tell the Government, "Come up front and tell us what is happening with our administration and our moneys." Even that announcement, Mr. Speaker, is likely to join the litany of woes that I have pointed out here this afternoon.

I want somebody on the other side to tell me, sometime, how come in September and October of last year and January, March, April and May of this year, Methanex and Syntroleum Corporation were issuing releases all over the world saying they are in final negotiations with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for constructing a gas to liquids plant? Then the Prime Minister made an announcement that some company called REEMA is to get 150 acres of Caroni (1975) Limited land to put up this gas to liquids plant, yet REEMA cannot be found anywhere where businesses live.

We do not know who REEMA is. Nobody could find REEMA but the world has been told about initiatives dating back to last September. Of course we have to ask the question, does REEMA have anything to do with Methanex/Syntroleum as published in the international community? If not, what has happened? Where did Methanex/Syntroleum fall off the table? Where did REEMA come from? Who is REEMA? The big question being asked now in international circles is, who is REEMA? This is because the patent for the gas to liquids conversion technology is held by Syntroleum licensed to ARCO, licensed to Texaco and licensed to Enron. If they were talking to the Government and they are not, in fact, the people getting the project, is REEMA? The pattern continues.

As I raise the question this afternoon, the Government must answer because the people of this country want to know what is happening to their affairs. We do not want another InnerCob/InnCogen situation. That, however, is all the Government has been offering us, administration by subterfuge, leaping in the dark, and only the Government insiders know what is going on. At the end of the day the people of Trinidad and Tobago receive a report like this which says, "We are reducing a project by \$23 million. We are giving some neophyte an extra \$29 million. The staff to do the work are going to be sidelined and contracts are being awarded."

Only on Friday I received a letter written by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Local Government advising some lady in Laventille that the Ministry had awarded her a URP contract for \$82,000. So the nonsense is not only at the level of a billion dollars at the airport, it is now right down to the very rootlets of the country. URP is supposed to be the Unemployment Relief Programme but they have appointed their favourite party hacks as contractors now and the Permanent Secretary is drinking the cup of bile on the Minister's instructions, writing to a person saying, "You have been awarded a contract for \$82,000". The question is, is that contract price inclusive of materials, or is it only for labour? Has this Government told the country that we have embarked on a system now where the

Ministry of Local Government is giving petty contracts to individuals in communities? If so, how were these people selected? Is that available only to that person in Laventille? Is that available in Tobago, Point Fortin, Chaguanas or Diego Martin?

What this is, Mr. Speaker, is an open opportunity for favouritism and mass corruption. [*Desk thumping*] That is what the Ministry of Local Government has been doing all along. As I have pointed out in this House, on the Minister's intervention in my constituency they started a two and a quarter million dollar project on which they have been paying people who pretend to be UNC supporters. Since last July not a soul has turned up for work. The Minister knows that because he came here last week when I asked him under "Questions to Ministers" to tell me the expenditure for each month from July to now. He refused to answer because he knows if he says, "August, September, November and December, so and so was spent", the people of Carenage will know that money was stolen by ghost gangs, because they know that no person worked on that road for that six-month period.

That is how this Government is managing our money. Yet it matters not to them because in this mayhem and discord, in this total breakdown of administration, there are beneficiaries who are holding their pockets to the well. That is what this Government is about, opportunity. They see opportunity for themselves in public administration. The airport symbolizes it. Comylsa-Lain and its disaster on the highway symbolizes it. The construction in San Fernando symbolizes it. The FIFA award symbolizes it and Cabinet is the chief culprit because none of this could happen without the acquiescence of the entire Cabinet.

When I sit, Mr. Speaker, they must get up and tell me that any of the things I have said, the names, places and figures I called, the actions I referred to, are wrong; that those companies are wrong. Their rhetoric is not going to excuse them. They have to account. The name of the game in this country today is accountability and this Government is found wanting. [*Desk thumping*] So as the Government responsible for this expenditure of these funds, they must get up and refute what I have said and they must account for their stewardship because this country is on a very slippery slope. The Government does not care who it humiliates or intimidates.

I have no reason to doubt that the Permanent Secretary who is being asked to sign that document to hand over 80-odd thousand dollars to an individual in Laventille would ask the question, "Can this money be properly accounted for?" The letter did not even say what it was for, you know. While that person will receive that cheque, I understand from other sources that the Minister's intention

is to supply materials from elsewhere. So the project could end up costing half a million dollars because material will come from elsewhere and this person will receive the cheque.

**Mr. D. Singh:** You have wrong information, you know.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Well, if I have wrong information, when I sit I hope you will enter the debate and say that the Permanent Secretary has not written to a Ms. Pope, I think it is, awarding her an \$82,000 contract to do work under URP in Laventille. I am sorry, I did not expect the Minister to be so brazen otherwise I would have walked with a copy of the letter. You know, however, Mr. Speaker, they do not speak the truth. The Minister has no problem interjecting there and saying it is not true.

**Mr. Valley:** He did not say it is not true, he said the amount—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Whatever it is, I saw the letter for \$82,000. You see, when I asked him about the repairing of the Abbe Poujade Road, he told this Parliament that the Self-Help Commission is going to repair the road. Mr. Speaker, when I asked him further to tell me the document by which the commission agreed to do that, he refused to answer, the reason for that is, the Self-Help Commission has taken no such decision because the Self-Help Commission does not repave local government roads. They do not speak the truth. We have come to the point in this country where, when a Minister says something, it has to be treated as something to be examined. It cannot be taken at face value.

The Minister—[*Interruption*—I am not talking to him, I am talking to you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Local Government is only one of the—how do you call them—“humiliées” or “humiliatees”? This is because the Prime Minister allocates the portfolios. First, we had the Minister of Works and Transport responsible for URP, then we had the Minister of Local Government responsible for local government roads, now we have Minister John responsible for all roads in the country. So there are two Ministers of Works, in a Government that has more Ministers than they have MPs, responsible for roads and then a third is hired in a five-month term and put in charge of repairs of all roads in the country.

If they had any self-respect and any shame, that would have been a source of concern to them. My only concern with that is that it is public moneys being used to fund this spider’s web because these people do not care how they spend the money, as long as it suits their myopic arrangements. So, to sit across there now and tell me that what I am saying is not true, the Minister should get up in the debate and say it is not true. When I return with the document at a later time the Member will sit there quietly and, as my friend from Princes Town will know, they are allowed to get up and speak untruths and not lose office. That Government has protected that.

The said Minister of Works and Transport was the one who came into this House and told us, concerning the airport project, that Ernst & Young approved, Ernst & Young evaluated the tenders and awarded to whoever got it. Ernst & Young eventually told us, “We did no such thing.” The Minister of Works and Transport remained there and today we are faced with this embarrassment of a Cabinet in which we are not sure who is what or is doing what. What we do know is that public moneys are being spent in a way where there is no transparency and there is maximum opportunity for corruption and wrongdoing. [*Desk thumping*]

Thirdly, the moneys earmarked for the service of the country for certain projects, be it water in Tobago, the Tobago hospital, the airport or the highway, those projects have not been delivered or have been delivered in a manner that has not been cost effective. Those are the facts. I am not making up stories, Mr. Speaker. So today I view this document as living proof of a situation that has disintegrated to a point of embarrassment. This country is in chaos, this Government is in chaos, and the only hope that we have is that a general election is around the corner when the people of this country will intervene to save the country. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Trade & Industry and Minister of Consumer Affairs (Hon. Mervyn Assam):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to join in this debate on the outcome of the third meeting of the Finance Committee of the 1999/2000 Session of this House as a consequence of the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (1999/2000) Bill.

Mr. Speaker, you would have observed I sat in deep silence listening to the Member for Diego Martin West because I did not wish to disturb him as he fed this House and, by extension, the national community with much vaudeville and comic relief; a role to which he is not suited at all because I do not believe he has any theatrical or dramatic experience. The Member seems to be gaining some of it over the last several months in this House; from one who has been regarded as fairly intelligent at the beginning, but who is rapidly losing such a stripe, as we move towards the general election of 2000 and he is trying to expose himself to the gallery.

### **3.20 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, do you know what the Member reminded me of also? Many years ago when I was a student, I read a book by Adolf Hitler called *Mein Kampf*, which is the German for “my struggle”. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler developed the theory of the big lie. He says in that book if you repeat it often enough and if

you lie big enough people will begin to believe you. Consequently, the Member's whole contribution this afternoon—if one were to get the *Hansard*—repeated the same points at least half a dozen times each—[*Desk thumping*]*—hammering home the same six points, at least, half a dozen times about corruption, mismanagement, chaos, bedlam and all the words intending to incite this country; intending to destabilize this country; intending to put fear and discomfort in the minds of this country as we move to the critical point of a general election in the year 2000. That is the strategy and, therefore, Hitler was right in *Mein Kampf*—the bigger the lie and the more you repeat the big lie it is more likely that people will begin to believe you.*

Mr. Speaker, it is my view that we have a great intelligence in this country. If you also read a book called the *The Children of Sisyphus* written by Orlando Patterson that great Jamaican sociologist, in that book a lot of politicians believe that they can fool the children of Sisyphus—because we know the story of Sisyphus who was rolling the stone up the mountain side and every time he rolled it up it came back down and he rolled it up again. A man of great patience and perseverance. It is the children of Sisyphus who are going to determine the results and the outcome of the next general election, not the Member for Diego Martin West practising what Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf* and trying to incite people into discomfort and to all kinds of disregard for law and order. The Member says that this Government—

**Dr. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 35(1), I rise on a point of order.

**Mr. Speaker:** The point of order is? Which section?

**Dr. Rowley:** Standing Order 35(1).

**Mr. Speaker:** Standing Order 35 does not have a “(1)”.

**Hon. Member:** Standing Order 36(1).

**Mr. Speaker:** No that deals with definite matter of urgent public importance. [*Laughter*] Please continue.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Mr. Speaker, I was correct in my description of the Member for Diego Martin West, where at the beginning of this term of office, the Member seemed to be an intelligent person but he is losing his marbles and becoming a comic relief disseminator. The Member was the one—I wrote it down—who said this Government has no respect for tradition and no respect for order and is creating chaos and mayhem in the society. Is it not an incitement that the Member is trying to create disorder in the society by these words? I wrote it down.

Mr. Speaker, it is that government that created disorder when it was in office; it is that government that did not respect tradition; it is that government that violated the Constitution; it is that government that disrespected the Office of Speaker and they continue to do it in this administration. [*Desk thumping*] They continue to disrespect the Office of Speaker in this administration. Several Members on that side have challenged the Speaker in the most disrespectful way, notwithstanding the fact that everybody knows that the decision of the referee, the umpire, the judge, once the appeals have been undertaken and the Speaker are final. But on that side they do not want to believe that the Speaker's ruling is final. They challenge the Speaker in the most disrespectful way all the time and they are talking about no respect for tradition! Mr. Speaker, what greater tradition, as you have mentioned in these hallowed halls than respect for the Chair; what greater tradition which they have abrogated and violated in nearly every session of this Parliament and they want to talk about this Government?

Mr. Speaker, this Government never suspended the Constitution in four and one-half years. Did we ever suspend the Constitution? Did we arrest a Speaker during this period of time?

**Hon. Member:** You undermined the Chief Justice?

**Hon. M. Assam:** Did we put this country in a state of disorder and chaos by suspending the Constitution and civil liberties as a consequence? And they talk about this Government not respecting tradition and they did it. I am amazed that the Member could stand here today and make these statements. We never did any of those things. We ever tried to fire the Commissioner of Police?

**Mr. D. Singh:** No.

**Hon. M. Assam:** We ever did that? We ever tried to disband the service commissions? We came to the Parliament with a Bill so that everybody could discuss certain amendments which will now put service commissions under the purview of parliamentary committees. We did it in a legal way and they wanted to do it in an illegal way and they want to talk about destroying tradition. In the days of Moses you would have turned into a pillar of salt because the Member says we lie on this side and he cannot trust this side. Well, I cannot trust the Member either because the Member has told us today a multitude of falsehoods, with such great mendacity that I cannot believe someone who is supposedly intelligent could come and try to mislead this honourable House and by extension the national community—but I am not going to carry on.



Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate to you and this honourable House that the purpose of this exercise is very simple. It was done every year by every government that has been in this Parliament even before Independence. From 1956—and I can go beyond 1956—every year, religiously, governments come through their Ministers of Finance and they either after the budget do a Variation of Appropriation, or they do a Supplementation of Variation of Appropriation. Every year it happens but, of course, the Opposition takes the opportunity to widen the debate into a full-fledged budget debate and to use the opportunity to excoriate this Government in a manner to give the public the impression that this Government has done absolutely nothing for the people of this country in four and one-half years.

Mr. Speaker, even in private organizations—because I spent most of my working life in the private sector—you are forced from time to time to review your budgets depending on changing circumstances. We live in a dynamic, interrelated, globalized world and, therefore, what you do today may be irrelevant and redundant tomorrow or next week and, therefore, you are constantly forced to change the parameters, the perspective, the priorities and so forth. That is what budgeting is all about and, therefore, when you plan you must put into your plan contingencies for changing these plans—and a budget is no different because a budget is a one-year plan, although it is about a lot of numbers, there are other things associated with the numbers that you want to achieve. So when we come today with a variation on the first hand, and a supplementation on the second hand, it is merely to come to terms with the realities of the situation.

The Member for Diego Martin West gave us a tirade about schools, misleading the House and the public as a consequence. I am going to answer the Member because he says he wants somebody on this side to get up, we will answer you!

Mr. Speaker, this was said before, so I am not giving the Member any new information but, perhaps, the Member was not there or he did not understand or he forgot. I am prepared to give the Member the benefit of the doubt, not like the Member believing everybody on this side is untrustworthy. I still believe that I can believe if the Member has forgotten what we have told him.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Mason Hall Government Secondary School it was said before that the memorandum of understanding was not signed. There was a delay in signing the memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Education representing the central government and the Tobago House of Assembly—

**Dr. Rowley:** That is what I said.

**3.30 p.m.**

**Hon. M Assam:** The reasons for that are very simple, because we did not wish to impose the will of the central government on the THA unduly, to give the impression that we were using the heavy hand of the state—a criticism and a complaint that we have heard from time to time, emanating either from the THA and sometimes from the Member for Tobago West; although she speaks sometimes with a forked tongue. Sometimes I do not know what is her position; whether we should—as they say in Jamaica—put THA under heavy manners or, on the other hand, let THA have free rein.

She says that we are not giving them money on the one hand, but she says on the other hand that they are engaging in sqandermania. She says on the one hand that we are not giving them enough room to manoeuvre, and on the other hand she is saying “You are the Executive. You are the Cabinet, and you must control Tobago! Because Tobago is a runaway horse!”

**Miss Nicholson:** My forked tongue is for putting you there.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Member for Tobago West is really behaving badly. You cannot do that.

**Miss Nicholson:** I apologize, Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** You know that.

**Miss Nicholson:** He does too!

**Mr. Speaker:** The Member knows that and she is continuing it even while I am speaking to her.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Mr. Speaker, although confirmation of availability of funds was provided to the THA by the Ministry of Finance on March 28, 2000, some further delay has ensued as a result of the fact that the project is including the package for international competitive bidding under the World Bank project, the expenditure level for national competitive bidding having been exhausted.

This, therefore, has required a process of prequalification of contractors to be followed by invitation to tender. This dimension of the matter had not emerged clearly, including the continuing bank involvement at the time when the Minister responded to a parliamentary question on the matter. At that time, the matter appeared to turn simply into funds availability confirmation and the capacity of the THA to follow through in the implementation activity.

The Ministry of Education, through the EPCU, is assisting by use of its construction management consultants and the expediting of requests to the World Bank. The international competitive bidding process is somewhat longer than the national competitive bidding process, but is a requirement of the loan agreement with the bank. I am told, Mr. Speaker, that the project is scheduled to commence in August, 2000. I hope I have put that to rest; the Mason Hall Government Secondary School in Tobago.

Then the Member for Diego Martin West tries to mislead the House and talks about Waterloo being part of the package of Government secondary schools. Totally erroneous and totally misleading. I would say, perhaps, mischievous because it was Cunupia and not Waterloo that is involved in that package. I do not know how Waterloo got into it. He is going to meet his Waterloo like Napoleon did for misleading this House and not performing as a proper Opposition Member, although he never performed as the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources! He is bound to meet his Waterloo. It is on his mind! That is why he said it!

He is talking about the Diego Martin Government Secondary School and he knows the entire circumstances. He has had private discussions with the hon. Minister of Education and he raises the matter *ad nauseam* because of the site problem. [Interruption]

**Mr. Speaker:** Again, may I say to the Member for Diego Martin West who spoke and had an extension, you know you cannot carry on like that.

**Dr. Rowley:** I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes, but I indicated on the last occasion that we were not going to have that type of thing. Not only would I identify the people, but I will use the measures set out for the Speaker in the Standing Orders. I ask you, please, not to force me to do that.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Mr. Speaker, I hope I have put that to rest because the Member for Diego Martin West knows the problems associated with the site for the Diego Martin Government Secondary School. He has been given the assurance. He does not trust anybody, but I hope he trusts the Minister of Education who has been delivering, since she assumed the portfolio of the Minister of Education, to the benefit and to the satisfaction of the national community in Trinidad and in Tobago. I hope he has received her assurance on this matter. I lay that to rest also.

**Mr. Bereaux:** The last one was not doing that.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Comparisons for me are quite odious. You know that. Now we go to the health system in Tobago and he speaks about the lack of delivery of the Tobago hospital. Mr. Speaker, all of us in this country, whether Government or Opposition, whether a member of the public or the national community, must be concerned about health: health facilities and the delivery of health care. Again, the problem with the health system and the Tobago hospital is very similar to that of the school in Tobago. We had to go through the entire process again, because this is an IDB requirement of competitive bidding. We had to do a feasibility study.

In the first instance, the MOU was not accepted by the THA and they argued and argued interminably about the terms and conditions and the powers that must inhere in the Tobago House of Assembly when the hospital is constructed. There was a lot of giving and taking and “toing” and “froing” between the Ministry of Education, the bank officials and the THA. It was not this central government or the Ministry of Education that was responsible. It was a kind of power game, a power play that was taking place.

Again, we did not want to use the heavy hand of the central government to enforce the will and, therefore, we let it play out. Unfortunately, the delay has been inordinate and the people of Tobago have suffered as a consequence. It is not the fault of this Government. I am happy to say that the Minister of Health has advised me that everything is on stream with respect to the designs and that hospital will become a reality with the commencement of construction towards the end of this year.

We come now to water supplies in Tobago. I would have excused, perhaps, any other Member opposite who spoke about water in the way in which the Member did. But an individual in the person of the Member for Diego Martin West who was a commissioner of WASA for several years ought to know the problems of WASA and ought to know what was being put in place to improve the delivery of water in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, this was a release that WASA issued on June 8, 2000:

“Contractors acting on behalf of the Water and Sewerage Authority in collaboration with the Tobago House of Assembly have discovered abundant fresh water from ground water sources in the Southwest of the island.

Two (2) test wells were drilled at Carnbee and at Government Farm after extensive and intensive exploration work using satellite technology.”  
[*Interruption*]

I know you are in a sense of anticipation. I know, as we say in the local vernacular, you are “gigiree” and you cannot wait. Be patient to the last. I continue:

“The expected combined production of these two (2) wells is in the region of over one million (1,000,000) gallons per day”.

**Dr. Rowley:** That is not water!

**Hon. M. Assam:** I continue: *[Interruption]*

“This new water is excellent news for the Tobago water supply.”

One million gallons additional water per day is no water, but you did nothing in office. Can you imagine that, Mr. Speaker? When the Member was the Prime Minister of this country, the whole country was in a state of unhygienic proportions, because only about 20 per cent of the people in this country had any kind of water supply and he is sitting there, the effrontery—to use the fine word of the Member for Diego Martin West—saying that a million gallons of additional water per day for Tobago is no water at all. You should choke on your words!

**Dr. Rowley:** I thank the Member very sincerely for giving way. On this point of clarification, is the Member in any position—I know he might not have the information, but just in case he does—to tell us what was supposed to have been the production of the Richmond Water Project? How many gallons were expected from the Richmond project, if that project was pursued?

**Hon. M. Assam:** I do not have those exact figures for you, but certainly, I know that the Richmond project is going to be on stream producing increased supplies of water before long.

**Mr. Breaux:** One gallon more.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Yes, one gallon. I expect you to say that because of all the pitch in your head. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Speaker, the four critical components of the Tobago water project are:

1. The Tobago Ground Water Exploration Project which has already commenced and is being executed by Lennox ETI on a success basis.

All this corruption he is talking about, it is on a success basis! This is innovation in awarding contracts. Almost like what the investment bankers do, as the Member for Diego Martin Central is fully aware from his experience in the

Ministry of Finance. On a success basis, this contractor is working at a cost of approximately TT \$60 million.

2. The refurbishment of the Courland Water Treatment Plant which was awarded on December 16, 1999 to TOSL for a contract price of approximately \$8.5 million, funding for which is being provided under the North Water Project.
3. The refurbishment of the Richmond Water Treatment Plant which has recently been recommended for an award to GEM/EUEM Incorporated for a bid price of TT \$7.8 million.
4. The refurbishment of the Hillsborough Water Treatment Plant which has also recently been recommended for an award to NH International Caribbean Limited—your partner from Diego Martin East—for a bid price of TT \$10.3 million.

You see, we do not discriminate, notwithstanding party affiliation when the Member for Diego Martin West was talking about an \$82,000 contract to some poor person in Laventille. He is condemning someone for awarding a contract to somebody in Laventille, but we have awarded a TT \$10.3 million contract to one of their party affiliates and partners. Why did he not say that was corruption? Go and talk about corruption now!

The Water and Sewerage Authority, in consultation with the Tobago House of Assembly—I hope the Member for Tobago West is listening—has already launched a twofold initiative to remedy the situation in Tobago, and this twofold situation, I have described earlier, Mr. Speaker. So, I hope I put to bed again all the scares and all the fears, and that farrago of misleading information that the Member for Diego Martin West has given this House and the national community, and by extension, the press, this afternoon. A farrago of misleading information! That is what he gave. He has disappointed me because I have always told him in private that I think he is a bright guy, but he must behave and perform in accordance with his academic qualifications!

The Member says that Government has changed horses in midstream in the method of funding for the building of the stadia. I do not want to get into any long debate on the question of the stadia but, Mr. Speaker, it is very simple. At the beginning of the year, the Government had allocated some millions of dollars for the construction of stadia. When we began to review the PSIP—because we do reviews every quarter—we realized that we could free up these funds that were originally allocated to the building of stadia for other developmental works and, therefore, a Build/Own/Lease/Transfer (BOLT) arrangement became available and the Government opted to choose a BOLT arrangement and free up these funds that were already in the PSIP for other developmental purposes.

**3.45 p.m.**

What is wrong with that? Is that corruption? Is that mismanagement? Is that rocket science, that the Members opposite cannot understand, that you change a method of financing from the Public Sector Investment Programme to a Build/Own/Lease/Transfer (BOLT) arrangement? What is wrong with that, particularly if the BOLT arrangement has a kind of mechanism that allows the Government to amortize such an expenditure over a sufficiently long period of time that the burden on the Exchequer would be less every year? What is wrong with that? To me, that is good financial and prudent management. What is wrong with that?

So, I also hope that I have put to bed the disquiet of the Member for Diego Martin West when he said that we had changed horses in midstream. I was going to talk about something else, but I will leave it, because I was going to talk about Humpty-Dumpty and his horses cannot put the Member for San Fernando East together again. But I will leave that for another time.

The Member spoke about the catastrophe in the Ministry of Works and Transport. I am not here to defend any minister or any ministry; I am here to deal with government policy through my role in the Cabinet, having collective responsibility for that policy or set of policies. So, I am not going to dwell on any minister's performance, as you are wont to do. I am not going to do that. If you want to take a minister to task, that is your business, but I am going to defend Government's policy because I am a part of the policy formulation process and whether you like it or not, I will defend it.

**Mr. Bereaux:** Miss Universe.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Miss Universe is about pretty people. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, I said Miss Universe is about good looking people.

**Mr. Bereaux:** So am I. You do not know that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder.

**Hon. M. Assam:** That is why \$81 million—it is \$71 million. Do not augment it by ten. Why do you not like to speak the truth? The financial statements were laid in the House and they were done by a reputable auditing firm. So, do not mislead. It is \$71 million, but we are getting a lot for the \$71 million. The returns are enormous.

**Mr. Bereaux:** That is a big lie.

**Hon. M. Assam:** The Member talked about the Minister of Works and Transport and the Ministry of Works and Transport being a catastrophe. Well, I believe that is the greatest inheritance we have had from the former Minister of Works and Transport. He left it as a catastrophe, therefore, the new Minister of Works and Transport has been grappling with this catastrophe for four and a half years. That is what has been happening. He has been grappling with the catastrophe that is his legacy for four and a half years, therefore, do not talk about catastrophe, when the former Minister of Works and Transport was himself a catastrophe.

They talk about projects being executed by the Minister or Ministry of Works and Transport. They seem to have very short memories, but it is a good thing that I always try to keep my memory well-oiled, so I can deal with Members opposite. I take the necessary vitamins so that my memory cells will not die as they opposite have died and atrophied over the last four and a half years.

I wonder if they ever heard of that project called Project Pride. Has anybody ever heard of that project? The Member talks about the airport. An airport which he says is a cow shed, or whatever it is. That is his prerogative, to be able to describe it how he wants. But I will tell him something, cow shed or no cow shed, like it or do not like it, the reality is that Trinidad will get a brand new airport sometime later this year and whether you think it costs too much, or whether there were cost overruns or not, we will get a brand new airport towards the end of the year.

**Mr. Bereaux:** And what is Ish getting?

**Hon. M. Assam:** But what did we get with Project Pride, Mr. Speaker? The expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money that was sunk in the ground and for which the Ombudsman made one of the most scathing reports and criticisms—

**Mr. Imbert:** What hundreds of millions of dollars?

**Hon. M. Assam:**—of the personal intervention in the tendering process of the then Minister of Works and Transport, the now Member for Diego Martin East. The most scathing condemnation he ever got for interfering in the process.

**Dr. Rowley:** What is he talking about?

**Hon. M. Assam:** As he did when he took the hand of an Acting Transport Commissioner, went and dismissed the incumbent Transport Commissioner and tried to install a Transport Commissioner on Wrightson Road, totally contrary to



Civil Service Regulations and trying to usurp the powers of the Public Service Commission. He did that. They are talking about chaos, catastrophe and tradition, not to speak about his throwing the press out of his office. A beautiful girl working with the *Express*, he just summarily threw her, bodily and physically, out of his office when he was working at Salvatori building. They are talking about tradition, respect for the press and all that. They have no shame really; they are shameless.

They talk about construction. They spent \$120 million on a race course that never materialized—\$120 million sunk in Caroni in a race course that never materialized and they want to talk about cost overruns, construction, incompetence and cost-effectiveness. Those people should have a nerve. They are totally shameless, in truth, to come to the House to talk about cost overruns, inefficiency and so forth. Apparently, they do not know the legacy they left. Look at the legacy of the maximum security prison about which today, the Member and a certain of his former Cabinet colleagues, do not talk. They are not on speaking terms.

**Mr. Imbert:** That is Ferguson.

**Hon. M. Assam:** A Cabinet colleague, not Ferguson, whom he does not speak to and who does not speak to him because he had a complete hostile relationship with his Cabinet colleague, because of the serious cost overruns that he thought were being incurred at the maximum security prison. Millions of dollars in cost overruns at the maximum security prison and they want to talk about cost overruns.

If they look at that book, *Accounting For The Tax Dollar*, they would go through project by project—and I see David Abdullah defending them. I am sorry that David Abdullah wrote an article talking about the projects that the PNM did. Yes, they did projects. They were swimming in oil during that period. But, what did we get? Millions and millions of dollars in cost overruns for every one. On every one of the projects about which David Abdullah wrote in his article, there were cost overruns. So, do not come today to talk about cost overruns.

Now, do not get me wrong, Mr. Speaker. I do not want anybody in this House or in the national community to believe that I am condoning cost overruns, or I am condoning inefficiency, or I am not trying to promote cost-effectiveness. I am a stickler for all these things, but they have no moral authority to come here to chastise us. None whatsoever!

They want to hoist themselves on their high moral petards to give the impression that they are so moral; they are so lacking in corruption; they were so effective; they were so competent when they were in office. National quarries, national fisheries; there is a whole litany of sadness associated with the PNM administration over many years, including the last one headed by the Member for San Fernando East. So, do not come and make these statements. On the contrary, as we used to say, "You should put your tail between your legs". That is what you should be doing.

Mr. Speaker, he makes a big song and dance that the Minister of Public Utilities was given a sum of money to engage in flood relief and he tends to give the impression that this is an abrogation of Cabinet, Government and the Parliament's Westminster style. I want to know whether a Prime Minister and his Cabinet cannot make a decision to involve a particular Minister or Ministry with a group of other Ministers in special projects. I want to know whether they want to deny a Prime Minister and a Cabinet, of that authority and that prerogative.

Mr. Speaker, they do not understand what the bottom line is—results. Do not look at who is doing it; look at what is being achieved. That is the important thing and if we are achieving the desired results and the desired outcome, what is wrong with the Minister or the Ministry of Public Utilities undertaking this particular special project? What is wrong with it?

**Dr. Rowley:** The rains are on the way, you know.

**Hon. M. Assam:** They will see the benefits. They will have the opportunity to come back to this House or, even more importantly, to go onto the hustings, because they anticipate elections are round the corner. I heard the Member for San Fernando East saying last week, when we were attempting to discuss the Representation of the People (Amdt.) Bill that elections may be weeks from today. They believe it will be weeks. They will have an opportunity to go on the hustings and talk about the Ministry of Public Utilities trying to alleviate flooding in the country and it will be successfully undertaken and executed, I assure you. Already, we are seeing fantastic results, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Member:** In Rancho Quemado.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please.

**Dr. Rowley:** Yes. Chaguanas waiting for you.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Then he goes on to misquote and misinterpret the Prime Minister as they always do—the very thing they accused us of, of running a country undemocratically. The Prime Minister speaking on different occasions, trying to indicate that people are free in this country. It is a democratic society. You can withhold your labour or you can sell your labour. You can work in Trinidad or if you want to go abroad, you can go abroad and work. That is all he was saying, but they interpret it as a slap in the face to the nursing community, not realizing that their first boss whose ashes are now rumbling and tumbling in the Gulf of Paria, perhaps with great sadness, said on more than one occasion, "Those who do not like it, get to hell out of here", and "I am the centurion. When I say come, you cometh and when I say go, you goeth and if I put a crapaud and put a balisier tie around the neck of that crapaud, you must vote for the crapaud." And you want to accuse this side. Oh my goodness!

Why do you not study your heritage? You know it is important to study your heritage. You must study where you came from, to know where you are now and where you are going. Study your antecedent, the person you call your great leader and the Father of the Nation and what he told you, your parents and your ancestors.

Now, he makes a statement, Mr. Speaker, and we are talking about in a real sense, the budget, because it is merely a variation and a supplementation of both the recurrent expenditure and the Public Sector Investment Programme, moving from certain heads to other heads in order to facilitate certain developmental works and to give priority to others.

People are worried where this country is going—that is a quote from the Member for Diego Martin West. Well, if they are worried, maybe they are worried because this country is exhibiting some of the greatest signs of prosperity. Maybe that is why they are worried. [*Desk thumping*] They do not know where we are going because this Government and this country are moving at such cosmic speed that many people cannot catch up and keep up with what is taking place, the rapid changes in everything, whether it is education, technology, investment and so forth.

Let us look at the gross domestic product, Mr. Speaker. My colleague is so kind, he is showing me the hard numbers but, really, it is not necessary to read the hard numbers. Everybody knows. This is one story to which there is no secret. It is an open story, what is taking place and what has been talking place in this country.

The gross domestic product—we have had under this administration, four years of successive growth. [*Desk thumping*] He is worried. Do you know why he is worried? Because he may not be re-elected. [*Laughter*] On this kind of performance, how would any of them not be worried? They must be worried. Four years of successive growth of the gross domestic product! That is performance! They need to be worried. If I were him, I would be shivering in my boots. He must be worried.

When they left office, unemployment was 19 per cent. Unemployment is about 12 per cent. Would you not be worried if you were in the Opposition? A Government that has reduced unemployment by 7 per cent, and you would not be worried? Man, you should be more than worried. If I were you, Member for San Fernando East, I would pack up my guns and hang up my boots.

**4.00 p.m.**

**Mr. Manning:** I thank the hon. Minister for giving way, and merely to correct the record that when we came into office in 1991 in that quarter, employment was 20.3 per cent. When we left 3 years and 10 months later, it was 16.4 per cent. It fell four percentage points in four years.

**Dr. Rowley:** Put it right in the record.

**Hon. M. Assam:** I will not quibble numbers with the Member for San Fernando East, because you know, Mr. Speaker, whenever we come here and begin to quote statistics, they want to question the statistics; is that Central Statistical Office's statistics? Is that Central Bank's statistics? Is that World Bank's statistics? Are those statistics from the Ministry of Finance? So, whether it was 16, 17, 18 or 19, I am merely telling you that we reduced it by 6—7 percentage points in four years.

**Hon. Members:** That is not true!

**Hon M. Assam:** Mr. Speaker, what about foreign reserves? Bulging. When we came the foreign reserves were in the worst possible state, at very exiguous levels. Today they are bulging.

Mr. Speaker, inflation; the lowest in the history of this country, 3.4 per cent, the lowest in the history of this country. [*Desk thumping*] Would you not be worried if you were a Member of the Opposition? You could imagine if I were a Member of the Opposition I would be so scared I would not know what to do.

**Hon. Member:** Stay home.

**Hon. M. Assam:** I just would not know what to do. I will stop coming to Parliament. I will stay home!—*[Interruption]* Oh yes, a lot of them are staying home. If they are not staying abroad, they are staying at home, some of them. Some of them are staying abroad and some of them are staying home, but I would be worried. You are right! Perhaps that is the only true statement the Member for Diego Martin West made this afternoon: that people are worried: people of the People's National Movement Opposition Benches are indeed worried about this kind of performance. You are right! I have to give it to him this time, he is right. He is quite right.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to investment, people are worried about what is happening in this country, when there are billions of dollars of inflows of investment in both the oil and non-oil sector? And he says that people are worried. Maybe they are worried that we are making too much money, they would not know what to do with the money. Already we are seeing that the balance sheets of every company that produces a balance sheet, every year in this country—the profits are swelling. *[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, I am really grateful to the hon. Minister for once again giving way. The document I have here is the *Economic Bulletin, Central Bank, November 1999*. It shows the net foreign exchange position in 1994 at US \$514.5 million; 1995, US \$460.2 million, coming after a float of the currency in 1993, and moving from a negative net foreign exchange position in that year.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Mr. Speaker, that is the problem of the Member for San Fernando East; he lives in the past. Not only does he live in the past, he is unable to interpret the past properly, that is one of his problems.

Mr. Speaker, the size of investment in this country—investment inflows, both in the oil and non-oil sector—is phenomenal. But he wants to pooh-pooh REEMA, \$300 million in the gas to liquid project that was unveiled a few days ago, he wants to pooh-pooh that—*[Interruption]* Of course, if I were you, I would do the same thing, because I am worried. If I were him, I am worried, I would do that. He must do that because he is worried. Of course, it is a non-existent company, it is not an investment, it is a fake—yes, of course, if I were you I would say these things because I am worried.

What did I say about Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*? The big lie! The bigger the lie, the more believable it becomes, because he feels that if he says untruths—they speak falsehood—he would believe it eventually and he thinks people would

also believe. But the children of Sisyphus are too intelligent, Members for San Fernando East and Diego Martin West. The children of Sisyphus have an intelligence far superior to all of you on those benches opposite. I am telling you. I have seen it over the last several years, and you caught them in a trap for years. The trap has been taken away now, I am telling you.

**Mr. Manning:** I want to hear you after this election, you know.

**Mr. Breaux:** He would not be back after the next election.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Education and training—*[Interruption]* It does not matter whether I go back or not. Do you think I want to be a professional politician like you? I am not a “scrunter” like you, you know. You had to go and beg your leader to put you up. I am not a “scrunter” like you, scraping, begging and crawling to him to put you up, but you will see. He has the sword of Damocles on all of you, and you will see, in the final analysis, who will be his candidates. You will see, but we will go now—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Breaux:** Me “scrunting”?

**Hon. M. Assam:** When I say “scrunting”, I mean politically “scrunting”. I know that you do have a little money. I know you have a few cents. I do not mean you do not have a few cents, I mean you are a political “scrunter”, that is what I mean. We are talking politics here.

Education and training, Mr. Speaker, would you not be worried with the revolution in education and training that this Government has unleashed? Would you not be worried? *[Desk thumping]*

Computerization, computer literacy, computer in all schools, distance learning—*[Interruption]* telecommunications revolution, the kind of backbone and the kind of band width that we have produced in this country to provide e-government, e-commerce and e-business, Mr. Speaker. *[Desk thumping]* Would you not be worried? I would be worried if I were on the Opposition Benches. I would be very worried if I were on those benches. You must be worried.

Building how many schools, in order to abolish the Common Entrance Examination? No more trauma for these 11-pluses and their parents—all that trauma they go through, no more common entrance in 2001. I would not be worried? When you destroyed so many children over the last 20 years, after they reached 11-plus, and 10,000 could not get school places, they deemed themselves to be failures. Do you know how many failures you have thrown on to the society? *[Desk thumping]* Thousands and thousands of people, you deemed to be

failures. You threw them on the dung heap of society and you are not worried because we abolished the Common Entrance Examination and are building 20 new secondary schools to accommodate them? We are deshifting so that there would not be the problem of civil disorder, with children having no supervision when they leave the first shift or they have to go on the second shift. Would you not be worried? If I were you, I would be very worried man, extremely worried.

With the development of community colleges, with the tying together of all the new training under the National Training Association (NTA) and all the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT) and all these things coming on stream, would you not be worried? I would be desperately worried.

**Mr. Manning:** Let me see what you will be talking about next few months.

**Hon. M. Assam:** I would be worried. What about drug rehabilitation, what did they do about drug rehabilitation in this country? What did they do? The proliferation of drug abuse in this country was under the PNM. This Government is the first government that has developed programmes and policies and physical accommodation, with capable people having expertise, to deal with drug rehabilitation.

I understand the Attorney General of the United States would be here shortly, and she is going to be visiting one of those centres, Mr. Speaker. Trinidad and Tobago has developed an international reputation for dealing with the drug trade. *[Desk thumping]* Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, France and our Caricom partners—international reputation for dealing with the drug trade, and he is talking that he would not be worried. I would be worried. I would be extremely worried with this kind of performance, with this record. I would be worried.

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Manning:** Give him 30 minutes to talk foolishness.

**4.10 p.m.**

**Hon. M. Assam:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I was about to thank, particularly, not only the House, but also the Member for San Fernando East for moving the motion for extension of my time. I was going to say how gracious he was, but he is really not gracious because he said, "Give him 30 minutes to talk foolishness."

Of course, I understand that; everything is foolishness for that side. They cannot understand good language, or good speech, good elocution, ideas, philosophical positions, facts, figures or logical argumentation; all these things escape them. They do not appreciate all these things, so I understand that they are all labelled as foolishness. No problem!

People do not believe him, I am telling you; although my friend from Diego Martin Central says that I am a joker. When I go to the schools of this country they all like to tell me how they wish to emulate me—[*Desk thumping*]*—*all the children, primary and secondary, they wish to emulate me and they are so saddened by what they hear on that side. They tell me that all the time. [*Crosstalk*]

“Yuh jealous; I eh selling it to nobody; yuh hear that. Ah not selling it to anybody.” [*Desk thumping*] Just in case, I am not selling it to anybody; just in case. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, I was giving you examples of why the Members opposite should be worried. I was trying to indicate to you on the basis of our performance, which includes this year’s budget and Public Sector Investment Programme, recurrent and PSIP, how this Government has been carrying this country forward in all the important areas of development. I was mentioning education and training in drug rehabilitation, social and community development. Never before in this country have so many community centres been built. [*Desk thumping*] Never before in this country have so many sporting complexes been built.

We have to give credit to the Member for Tobago West when she was in this Government. She did her part and we will never forget that; she was responsible for the programme being kicked off. She initiated it and needs to be congratulated. [*Desk thumping*] Never before!

Mr. Speaker, we had so much interest in the development of sports in this country and, today, our Trinidad and Tobago football side is riding high; high morale. There seems to be a rebuilding of the West Indian team in cricket; notwithstanding a few set backs, the morale seems to be high.

**Mr. Bereaux:** All of that is your responsibility?

**Hon. M. Assam:** Social and community development is one of the areas that this Government has placed high on the agenda and we are making a tremendous success of it.



What about tourism development? Tourism development is taking off in this country as it has never taken off before. Tourism was placed—I would not even say on the back burner of this country by the People's National Movement.

**Mr. Manning:** How could he say these things? What is wrong with you man?

**Hon. M. Assam:** Perhaps the Member for San Fernando East does not realize that I was the Minister of Tourism for 18 months and I was in possession of all the figures and facts for the last several years.

**Mr. Manning:** That is why they changed you.

**Hon. M. Assam:** It is okay; I have no difficulty that they have changed me. Do you think that I am the owner of a ministry? I do not own any portfolio. You feel you own the Prime Ministership. I do not own any portfolio. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Bereaux:** He will get it back shortly.

**Hon. M. Assam:** But in every area of tourism—and that is why we came to the Parliament yesterday and amended the Miscellaneous Taxes Act in order to facilitate more inflows of tourists in this country, who sometimes come either for one or two days. Soon, when it is passed in the other place and assented to, we will be waiving the departure tax for them, and this certainly is a measure to encourage more tourism.

Look at the cruise ship business; it has just burgeoned over the last nine months or so, or more. Every week in this country there is one, maybe two or three cruise ships—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Members:** Thousands and thousands!

**Hon. M. Assam:** There are thousands of people on the cruise ships. When you look at the Ocean Princess there are 2,500 people on that boat, and they will soon be producing, towards the end of this year, what they call “mega cruise ships”, 4,000 to 5,000 plus. So Trinidad and Tobago will be a beneficiary and a recipient of this kind of revenue. That is why we are dredging the port.

The Member spoke in the most disparaging terms about the dredging of the port. Whether it is the Minister of Housing and Settlements, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs or whichever minister, the important thing, which escapes them all the time, is the benefit and results to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the improvement in the quality of life. [*Desk thumping*] That is what is important, not who does it. They do not understand that. He believes in process, he does not believe in results, and that is why he was a failure as a Prime Minister. I wonder if he could think of anything he did as a minister? Always in process; legalistic; the Cabinet system, Westminster system.

**Mr. Hinds:** Central Tenders Board!

**Hon. M. Assam:** It is results that we are interested in, so if the process is being driven by the Minister of Housing and Settlements and we are getting the results to have boats of deeper drafts, in order to have the port of Port of Spain as one of the most economic and viable ports in the world, where we can bring any ships in, that is what we want. [*Desk thumping*]

If the Member for San Fernando East has the competence to come on board, we would use him too.

**Mr. Manning:** Watch me: you have no chance! “Doh try dat.”

**Hon. M. Assam:** In every department of tourism we are advancing in terms of plans. If you go to Tobago today you would see the kind of investment in tourism that has not and did not occur during the People's National Movement administration. That is confidence! If you were worried about where this country is going, would you seek millions of dollars in hotels, guesthouses, beautiful four and five star properties? Would you do that? It is you who are worried, not the people in Tobago who are putting all their investment; not all the energy sector people; not all the non-oil sector people; they are not worried. You are worried, because you know what the consequences are. The consequences are that you will continue to occupy those benches for a long time; that is why you are worried. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Breaux:** Fool yourself with “ole” talk.

**Hon. M. Assam:** There is such general prosperity in the country. Everywhere you go there is prosperity in the country; from the smallest to the largest. He is talking about foreign exchange. You know, Mr. Speaker, one of the things about the foreign exchange situation—and do not get me wrong, I would like to see anyone going to the bank and buying their foreign exchange without any difficulty—it is because we are so prosperous in this country that everybody wants to buy a brand new car; you know that. Everybody wants to buy a brand new car.

What do you think you buy a car with? What kind of exchange do you buy a car with? Foreign exchange. Everybody wants to build swimming pools in their homes. Everybody wants to renovate, wherever you go; whether it is Beetham, Laventille, Bamboo, Naparima, Rio Claro, Nariva or Princes Town, wherever you go, mansions are just mushrooming all over the country. There is no such thing as

a modest dwelling house anymore. Even people who are living in NHA properties and so forth, are expanding them. I am amazed at the kind of general prosperity that has descended upon this land. God has been so good to us and every day I see reflected in this country the majesty of God—[*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]  
—guiding the hand and the wisdom of the members of this UNC/NAR administration. [*Desk thumping*]

That is what you are worried about! You are worried that God is too good to us, that God is blessing us. Is that what you are worried about? I know you are worried.

**Mr. Bereaux:** We are very worried.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Mr. Speaker, I do not want to go into another erroneous, misleading statement about us guaranteeing \$150 million for InnerCob, InnCogen and so forth. The guarantee was on the purchase of the electricity that is generated; that is the guarantee. There is no other guarantee. It is only on the electricity.

It was the same thing that they did with PowerGen, when they sold T&TEC to PowerGen. It is the same thing that you did! So I would not go into any long argument, because I know that the Member for Diego Martin West was not serious in many of the things he said. He obviously had an opportunity to use prime television time this afternoon, and he did it most effectively, in the sense that he created a lot of jest in this House. Did the Member not observe that none of us answered him? We were just sitting and listening to the kind of vaudeville that you have become accustomed to displaying in this House. [*Interruption*] Vaudeville.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at some of the areas where we are making changes, you would see that, in the main, these areas are for developmental purposes. For example, a wholesale market in Aranguez is an absolute necessity. They may ask why was it not included in the original estimates, and the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources said that we were having difficulty in identifying a site. No sense putting money in an estimate and you are not going to spend, because you do not have a site and preparation. So when we found the site we were then able to insert it and take it from another source. [*Desk thumping*] A wholesale market is absolutely necessary.

Of course, the hon. Member does not go to those places, he is too highfalutin. If he were to go to the Central Market on a Wednesday, Thursday or Friday night he would see the utter confusion—to use his words—chaos, bedlam and mayhem.

He was the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and he never addressed the plight of farmers who had to go to the Central Market on a Wednesday, Thursday or Friday coming from all parts of Trinidad. These people who get up two o'clock and three o'clock in the morning to plant, then they have to harvest, against praedial larceny and the inclemency of the weather and all the other difficult conditions of flooding and lack of irrigation, which the PNM did not put in place for 34 years, neither did the Member put in place for the four years that he was Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources.

These people are now being given an opportunity to sell their goods in comfort, without being harassed; without having to pay the exorbitant fees that the city council is charging them; without having to contend with robberies or someone snatching the women's purses and hard-earned cash, and facing the elements because there is not sufficient cover for all of them. We are doing that—development. [*Desk thumping*]

We are doing that because we are a people-centred Government and are interested in the development of agriculture.

**Hon. Member:** What about the Debe market?

**Hon. M. Assam:** It is very operational and functional. It is functional and operational. [*Interruption*] No, it cannot solve all the problems. One market cannot solve all the agricultural marketing problems of Trinidad.

Then we have increases at the Ministry of Tourism, which are very important for the development of the tourism product; for promoting and marketing of the product. [*Interruption*] No, \$3.5 million; you did not read your document.

Of course, the increase of \$84 million in the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development, is a question of debt servicing. There was an under budgeting of the figure, the calculations at the beginning of the year were incorrect, so we have to remedy that to the tune of \$84 million. Because Trinidad and Tobago has had such a good name in terms of repayment of its debt we do not want to tarnish its name, so we have to make this particular provision.

The Ministry of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Legal Affairs—\$38.9 million, that is to do with some very important technological work that is taking place there. Moving of the registry, siting it at the Ministry of Legal Affairs, the George F. Huggins building, building of the vault and doing all that is necessary in terms of the computerization, the land registry, the births and deaths and so forth, plus the unique identifier. The development of the unique identifier.

**Mr. Manning:** What is that about?

**Hon. M. Assam:** You do not know. You would not know about these things. Already it is in Jamaica; you do not know that. Already Jamaica has that system in place and you do not know it? Sometimes I wonder what kind of Prime Minister this country was saddled with between 1991 and 1995. The guy does not know about hits. When we said there are 47,000 hits on the Tourism Industrial Development Corporation web site every week, he said, “What hits!” He did not know. He believes it is hitting a man and cuffing him down. *[Laughter]* He does not know about hits.

Something is wrong with this former Prime Minister. I tell you; you have to take over that party if you have to survive—*[Laughter]*—but you must demonstrate it to the Parliament.

**Dr. Rowley:** Sprangalang has a show this weekend, are you on it?

**Hon. M. Assam:** Regarding the Ministry of the Environment, it is the first time in the history of this country that a government has taken the environment seriously. *[Desk thumping]* It was always in a little department, in a little room with one or two persons; a secretary, a clerk and, maybe, a technical officer and, perhaps, a minister in another ministry responsible for it. It is the first time that we are taking the environment seriously.

#### 4.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that if we do not protect the environment for future generations, we will be giving them a legacy for which we will suffer, but right now we have to do environmental remediation and environmental education. We have to establish an environmental court which you all never did. *[Desk thumping]* So the \$26 million is for increasing the budget of the Ministry of the Environment for those purposes.

The Ministry of Social and Community Development, \$6.8 million. I just spoke of the exceptional work that is being done by the ministry and we want to continue that work because we have to understand the importance of health, education, training, community development and culture in a society if we are to remain a civilized society, if we are to become a quality nation, and if we are to improve the standard of living in this country. All these areas are critical, but hitherto, there was a Minister of Social and Community Development and all he was interested in was Better Village. Do not get me wrong, Better Village has a place, but it needed to be changed, a new paradigm shift was needed in Better Village to introduce more elements and dimension into the Better Village which we have done.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources—\$11.6 million is critical in terms of the development of more access roads in the country. The Praedial Larceny Bill was just passed. We are dredging the St. Joseph River, the Caparo River, the San Juan River and Caroni River in order to ensure that flooding is abated. I never said that it would be completely eliminated, because we know that no matter what one does, if there is unusual rainfall we could run into problems. People are careless and throw all kinds of stuff into rivers and watercourses. We could run that risk, but we are doing everything in our power to abate flooding in the country. That is one of the matters for which we are using this \$26 million.

We are using \$11.6 million of it to build more agricultural access roads to give farmers greater opportunity to take in and bring out their supplies and bring out their agricultural produce to market—an area which has been sadly neglected for many years in this country. In fact, when I was speaking on the Praedial Larceny Bill, I said that persons involved in agriculture have not been treated properly *vis a vis* other economic sectors in the society.

Mr. Speaker, you would see that most of the virements one to the other are important areas for the development of this society and I cannot understand how a supposedly intelligent man who is vying for the leadership of his party, a man who fought tooth and nail to become the leader of his party, could stand in this honourable, august Chamber this afternoon and say that people are worried about where this country is going. All the indicators, all the indices, all the signs point in one direction, that of the highway of prosperity. A prosperity that would encompass every class, race and creed in Trinidad and Tobago, a prosperity that would ensure that the PNM stays where it is and this Government continues to govern this country in the interest of all and for all. [*Desk thumping*]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**5.00 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Mr. Colm Imbert** (*Diego Martin East*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. After listening to one of the more pathetic contributions of the Member for St. Joseph, it is a testimony to the intellectual bankruptcy of the Members on the other side that they would listen to the tissue of untruths and flights of fantasy of the Member for St. Joseph, and somehow believe that this was enhancing their position. It struck me, in his bombastic arrogance, is when he spoke about mansions springing up in Laventille and various places.

It struck me that a member of the public—and there are many—in a depressed situation: unemployed, single mother, four or five children, struggling to make ends meet is very aware of the reality of the situation because one has to deal with it every day: a daily struggle to survive in Trinidad and Tobago. Listening to the Member for St. Joseph, with his nonsensical diatribe about mansions flourishing in Laventille; about prosperity; and milk and honey flowing throughout the country—what pleases me about this is that every time there is that sort of absurd contribution all it does is annoy more and more people and brings more votes to the PNM. It is absurdity at its highest. *[Words expunged]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Until such time as you establish that, I will not allow you to say that any Members brought forged documents into this House, please. You could bring a substantive motion to establish that but we cannot have that, and you know that. That will be struck off, please.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Mr. Speaker, the point that struck me is that when I was in Government I would listen to contributions from Members of the UNC and they were so far from the truth. I used to wonder what manner of men would come into this Parliament and utter total untruths without any remorse whatsoever. You know, I was totally disappointed in the Member for St. Joseph, in his attempt to lift the spirits of his comrades, after the devastating contribution of the Member for Diego Martin West, in his bombastic attempt, the uttering of such falsehoods and untruths. He has really descended and I just took down three of them: He uttered at least 33 direct falsehoods in his contribution.

Let me give you one example: In an effort to deflect the truthful criticism of the Member for Diego Martin West that the Government is squandering hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money in that glorified cowshed at Piarco, he indicated that, under the PNM, there was a project called Project Pride, in which hundreds of millions of dollars were sunk into this project. That is an absolute lie! Not a dollar was spent! No contract was ever awarded and then he goes on to say that the Ombudsman made scathing—the Ombudsman never commented on that project. It amazes me that he will come into this Parliament and speak. *[Interruption]* No, I am not giving way, you spoke untruths. Absolute untruths! You knew that there was no contract ever awarded for Project Pride but yet you came in here today and said that the PNM spent hundreds of millions of dollars on that project. Not one cent was spent! No contract was ever awarded. To justify, by comparison, the scandalous racketeering that is taking place in this country, he comes in here with utter falsehoods.

He speaks about the prison but he knows that it is one of the finances of the UNC. *[Interruption]* Mr. Ferguson is the man behind that prison. He knows that the project started at \$200 million and was put on the books in this Parliament a couple months ago at \$300 million. He knows that under the UNC that prison has been inoperable, dysfunctional and defective. It cannot be opened and it cannot be

used. Five years under the UNC, there is maximum security prison and they cannot finish it; they cannot operate it; they cannot open it; they cannot use it; and the cost is increased by \$100 million under the UNC; but he will come into this Parliament and speak all these untruths.

It disappoints me that a Member like the Member for St. Joseph, who knows better, would come in here and talk such arrant nonsense. When I say, he knows better, I am talking about his own Cabinet, because I have in my possession, certain documents which are a glaring testimony to the incompetence, inefficiency and possible fraud that takes place on a daily basis in this country under the UNC administration. I am talking about the schools that he spoke about but he would not tell you the truth. [*Desk thumping*]

We have here a Cabinet Minute No. 1192 of May 13, 1999.

“Construction and Equipping of the first ten (10) Secondary Schools under the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP)...

“in order to meet the target date of September 2001 for the placement of students at secondary schools...a first set of ten (10) schools to be constructed and equipped under the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP)... would be undertaken by a Construction Management Agency (CMA) to be selected by Government.”

**5.10 p.m.**

It indicates that Cabinet has agreed to the funding of the construction of schools at a cost of \$138 million. That was in May 1999. What happens? November 1999—Do you see how quiet they have gotten? Now it is the truth that is coming out, not lies as was spoken on the other side.

Now, Mr. Speaker, November 17, 1999 Cabinet Minute No. 2513:

“Cabinet:

(a) agreed:

(i) to rescind its decision recorded in...Minute No. 1192 of May 13, 1999 relating to the award of a contract...”

Then Cabinet agreed that the total cost will now be \$183 million. So that Cabinet Minute No. 1192 agreed to a cost of \$138 million in May of 1999 and just six months after that in November 1999 the cost escalated to \$183 million, Mr. Speaker. That is not the end, you know; and the reasons are puerile. They did not understand; they did not check the site properly; they did not know how big the school would be; they made mistakes. So they go from \$138 to \$183, a \$45 million increase, in six months. Now we come to May 2000.



## “NOTE FOR CABINET

The matter for consideration of the Cabinet is an increase in costs in the amount of \$54.3M (from \$183.7M to \$238.0M), for the construction...of the—ten 10...schools listed at para. 2 below.”

So it goes from \$138 million in May 1999 to \$183 million in November 1999 to \$238 million in May 2000. In one year, Mr. Speaker, the cost of the schools increased by almost 100 per cent, from \$138 million to \$238 million. That is management UNC style. The same schools with which the Member for St. Joseph was regaling us about the efficiency and performance of the UNC and so forth. That is performance!

I know the Prime Minister is concerned and very angry regarding this matter. The Prime Minister is very, very concerned about the level of mismanagement and possible corruption that has taken place. How can 10 schools go from \$138 million to \$238 million in one year? They have not even begun to build the schools yet. They are now breaking ground but the cost has gone from \$138 million to \$238 million. God alone knows, Mr. Speaker, what the schools will cost when they are finished because that is the style of this Government and that is the point that the Member for Diego Martin West was making.

There is an airport project costed out at \$400 million in 1995. It goes to \$600 million in 1996, \$800 million in 1999 and now it is \$1 billion and included in there is a \$100 million slush fund for accelerating the works to finish on Independence Day. So they announce at the beginning of 2000, in January or February, that they will open this thing, come hell or high water, on August 31 and they are paying the contractor accelerated costs and incentives, an additional \$100 million, yet just three months after that announcement they come and say they cannot do it. “The rain falling. The contractors falling all over themselves.” That is management UNC style.

A Minister tells us the reason they cannot finish is, there are too many contractors and subcontractors and it is hard to manage them, and that they are all tied up and tangling up with each other as rain is falling; as if rain has never fallen in Trinidad and Tobago before. The contractor, however, is still getting the \$100 million, though, for deceleration not for acceleration. He is getting the \$100 million to slow down and it just gives you an idea of what they are doing with the country’s money.

I heard the Minister carrying on about performance relating to the fact about the money that is being spent in the Ministry of Legal Affairs to refurbish the Huggins building. That is a crime against humanity. Some smart boys bought a building for \$5 million, sold it to the Government three months later for \$10 million and all of a sudden it is discovered that it is full of asbestos. All the Government experts did not know that before, you know, when they agreed to give a 100 per cent return to some very clever capitalists who bought it for \$5 million and sold it for \$10 million. They did not know it was riddled with asbestos. Now, we see here under Head 23, Ministry of the Attorney General, refurbishment of the Huggins building, \$4.5 million. The Government buys a building for \$10 million and is planning to spend \$5 million refurbishing it and this is not the end, you know, this is only the beginning, Mr. Speaker. One really has to wonder what is going on, because it bothers me that a Government could be so callous.

The point my colleague made about this gas to liquids project is that nobody knows who these people are. They cannot be found. REEMA does not exist in the public domain. The people in the petroleum sector have never heard of them. The Government is giving 150 acres of land to a non-existent company that has no profile. It has no presence in the industry. Nobody knows who the company is. You see, it is InnCogen all over again. My colleague pointed out that Yorke is going bankrupt. Yorke was already bankrupt when the guarantee was given. This is all a mechanism, Mr. Speaker.

**Miss Nicholson:** You are not talking about the Trinidad Yorke?

**Mr. C. Imbert:** No, no, it is the Yorke involved in the InnCogen scandal.

**Miss Nicholson:** So it is a different Yorke?

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Yes. It is the InnCogen Yorke, the bankrupt company given a 30-year golden guarantee by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago enabling some fella to come and make millions of dollars in taxpayers' money, selling us electricity we do not need, do not require and will never require. That is the style of this administration. If the Member for St. Joseph believes that he could just come here and say whatever he wants and everyone in Trinidad and Tobago is "dotish", illiterate, and stupid, let him think again. So, as I said, the "fella" living in his little house in a depressed area, and "ketchin' his tail", Mr. Speaker, pardon the language, the Member for St. Joseph would tell him, "Doh worry, man. Milk and honey flowing, man; prosperity, man. Go to sleep tonight and when you wake up tomorrow morning your house will be a mansion. Miraculously it will become a mansion." All that does is annoy people.

When we talk about this wholesale market in Aranguez, it took five years to do it, and it is one of their constituencies. The Member for St. Joseph represents that area. The Member could not get a market going in five years yet he wants to go back and represent St. Joseph. It is no wonder that he is going out, no wonder that he cannot get a nomination, Mr. Speaker. The whole point is, in order to justify his foolishness he said that people will be so happy they will no longer be involved in the marketing of produce in Port of Spain, where there is so much crime, and they will go to Aranguez where there is no crime. Bandits, robbers and thieves do not exist in Aranguez, which is just a couple miles up the road from Port of Spain, you know, Mr. Speaker. You see, he thinks that the people of this country are all fools, that they would just swallow this nonsense. It bothers me. Let them tell all the unemployed people that the unemployment rate is 10 or 11 per cent and see what they will do to them on election day, Mr. Speaker.

I look at the contempt with which this Government treats this Parliament and the people in this country. Yesterday we held a Finance Committee meeting. We asked certain questions and undertakings were given. As a result of the contemptuous approach of the Government, we have had no response. We asked the Minister of Public Utilities to tell us about these emergency works that will be undertaken for flood relief. He tells us in the Minutes that a list and details will be provided. I have searched throughout this document. There is nothing here, Mr. Speaker. It is typical contempt. We asked so many questions yesterday. The acting Minister of Finance agreed—I could go through them one by one—that information will be given during the debate at the next sitting and so forth. Nothing, absolutely nothing, has been forthcoming. I mean, some of the answers are so absurd it is ridiculous.

I made the point that under the PNM a considerable amount of renovation work was done on the Mille Fleurs building. We renovated the entire building, changed the electrical and plumbing fixtures. This is not what we asked for. We asked for details of the infrastructural works and the Minister of Public Utilities agreed to make available a list of the said infrastructural works. Where is it? They do not want to give us. They are afraid.

I made the point that the PNM administration renovated that Mille Fleurs building, got it working, got all the electrical and mechanical systems functional, renovated the annexe, paved the yard, did substantial reconstruction work on that building and put a fully-functional government department there. I passed by the other day, looked at that building and saw weeds growing, I saw bats flying about, I saw the roof falling off, I saw decay and thought to myself, how could these people be so callous and incompetent as to take a fine, historical building like that and just destroy it?

Yesterday we asked about what had been done, and the answer is absurd, Mr. Speaker. They tell me in the answer that no substantial work was ever done to the building in the last 20 years. It is just lies, Mr. Speaker, absolute lies. A fully functioning, refurbished building has been left to rot by this administration. We ask, why, and how come after two or three years of allowing the building to rot the Government now decides to do something? There has been no answer at all. So that we, the guardians of public funds, are denied the information. We just want to know what happened. Is it that the Ministry of Public Administration does not know what it is doing and it just could not be bothered?

That is all we wish to know because we notice on the one hand that, while they allow these historical buildings, like Mille Fleurs, to deteriorate and rot, on the other hand they are buying buildings like they are going out of style. They just bought another building for the Ministry of Finance, the Guardian Life building, I believe, and we have to ask, what is going on? What informs the policy of this Government? On what basis would they buy a 40-year-old building on Independence Square, to spend another \$20 million refurbishing it like the Huggins building? Is the policy that informs this Government such that they enjoy buying old, dilapidated buildings at inflated prices only to then give some favourite son, a contractor, a job to spend \$20 million refurbishing it?

It is like those old buses. They bought a set of foreign-used buses, all of them are falling down and smoking all over the road. I mean, that is their policy—buy junk and spend good money, throwing good money after bad. That is the policy of this Government. When we ask the questions, we get no answers. No organization could operate in a chaotic manner. There have to be rules, systems and procedures. No government, in particular, can operate in an *ad hoc* manner and no one knows that more than the Member for St. Joseph.

If we have a bank—I will use the example of a bank because perhaps he will understand that—and there are tellers, cashiers, security guards, managers, secretaries and so forth, one does not find the security guard behind the cashier's cage taking money. One does not find the manager behind the typewriter typing. That is not how it is done. In the same way, if there is a Cabinet system with allocation of portfolios and responsibilities to various ministries, agencies and ministers, it is a recipe for chaos when responsibilities are assigned to individuals in a Cabinet yet there is this free-for-all. This is the point the Member for Diego Martin West was making.

In this country there is a ministry with responsibility for drainage. I made the point yet again it has not been dealt with by the Attorney General. He promised to deal with it. He has not dealt with it. I made the point that in 1987, because of the misbehaviour of the Member for St. Augustine where he awarded contracts to dredge the Diego Martin River and others without tenders, as a consequence of which he was going to be dealt with, a change in legislation was made to allow the Minister with responsibility for drainage, in anticipation of a flood, to take emergency measures, including awarding of contracts and so forth without tenders.

**5.25 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, that was retroactive legislation done to protect the indiscretions of the Minister of Works. All Ministers of Works have had that flexibility since then. If there is a flooding problem in Trinidad and Tobago; if you anticipate that there is going to be unusually heavy rainfall, as Minister with responsibility for drainage, you can undertake emergency works. But all of a sudden, there is a Minister responsible for drainage but the Minister responsible for pipelines and post offices and—

**Dr. Rowley:** InnCogen.

**Mr. C. Imbert:**—InnGogen and desalination and so forth, all of a sudden that Minister is getting involved in emergency work and it makes me wonder, to whom do the agencies report? There is the Drainage Division, the Highways Division and the Local Government agencies and they are all involved in flood relief. Are they going to report to the Minister of Public Utilities now in the event of a flood? It does not make any sense.

Mr. Speaker, so there is the Permanent Secretary in one ministry today, he gets an instruction from the Minister of Works and Transport, but five minutes later he gets another instruction from the Minister of Public Utilities all about the same matter and the two instructions could be totally conflicting. That is how they are running a Government? It is like the paving of the savannah. The Environmental Management Agency says it is an illegal act; the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources says we gave no permission for this to take place, but some person decides that he is going to do it, okay? That is “adhococracy” at its worst. That is how this Government operates.

Mr. Speaker, it is like the dredging of the harbour. What on earth is the Minister of Housing and Settlements getting involved in dredging a marine operation and reclamation, which is something that impinges on the Ministry of Planning and Development? The Ministry of Planning and Development is the agency with responsibility for reclamation and the Government knows that. The

Minister with responsibility for physical planning issues reclamation licences. The Government knows that! The Harbour Master governs dredging by the Maritime Services Division, which falls under the ambit of the Ministry of Works and Transport. So, the two agencies with responsibility for dredging and reclamation are not involved in any way. The Ministry of Housing and Settlements? The third agency, the Environmental Management Agency that has a responsibility is also not involved.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what the net result of all of this would be?

**Dr. Rowley:** Chaos.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Absolute chaos, because the technocrats with the knowledge and the ability are not involved. So the dredging is going to be a fiasco; the reclamation is going to be a fiasco; and they are going to kill all the mangrove in the swamp and that will be an environmental fiasco as well. Everybody will be like the three monkeys: “ah hear nothing, ah see nothing and ah say nothing.” That is what this Government is all about. Whenever something happens—see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil, that is them. There is the Member for St. Joseph supporting that level of indiscipline, inefficiency, mismanagement and incompetence. It is like a banana republic. That is what is taking place in Trinidad and Tobago today. The government is running this place like a banana republic.

**Mr. Sudama:** What is a banana republic?

**Mr. C. Imbert:** I am amazed that the Minister of Education in particular would allow this nonsense to take place under her watch. One hundred million dollars increase for schools and the schools are not even built yet.

**Dr. Rowley:** She has no say in the matter.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Mr. Speaker, I guess so. I guess the Minister is just a puppet. She just does the dictates of others. What bothers me is, all of this is going on in an election year. It is the contempt with which they hold the population; it is like this clause 7 in this Equal Opportunity Bill.

I went back and read my circular from the St. Mary’s Old Boys Association and I read it again yesterday. It talks about the new concordat and the retention of the 20 per cent quota to principals in denominational schools, and yet this same Government with the same Minister of Education in it will come to this Parliament and pound the table when the Member for Couva North brings this infamous Equal Opportunity legislation, which is abolishing the 20 per cent quota for principals of denominational schools and the Government is playing like they do not know—see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil, three monkeys. That is

what happens. It is a one-man show. That is what Trinidad and Tobago is now. Just one person is running this country and that is the Member for Couva North. That is why all this nonsense is taking place; that is why there is all this foolishness that we saw in the Finance Committee Minutes yesterday. That is the nonsense that we see; testimony to incompetence.

Mr. Speaker, when one goes through the documentation the reason there are funds available to them is because they have failed to perform. That is why funds have been freed up. The Government is almost at the end of the fiscal year. It is two or three months to go before the end of the fiscal year, but the Government is viring funds in a billion dollars to do what? To fool people! Half of these projects will not be implemented. It is a joke! The Government cannot spend \$200 million in the first nine months of the year and it is going to spend \$1 billion in the last three months in the rainy season! Who is the Government trying to fool?

Mr. Speaker, it makes me wonder what is going on. There must be somebody over there with a modicum of intelligence, or are they all puppets and the puppet master is just pulling the strings, do this, do that—puppet masters. That is what it is. It is nonsense! The Minister for the Environment cannot build an outhouse in Penal in all the time he has been there, but the Minister will come and spend \$20 million in the last three months of 2000. I mean, what is the point of viring funds to the Ministry of the Environment. What is the point? It is a dysfunctional and non-functional ministry. What is the point of viring funds to the Ministry of Tourism and Consumer Affairs? What is the point when the Minister cannot even understand that it is because of climactic changes and because of changes in the hurricane patterns in the Caribbean. There are all these disastrous hurricanes hitting the northern Caribbean forcing the cruise ships southward. They do not want to come here. The Minister does not even understand the economics of cruise shipping.

Mr. Speaker, when there is a cruise passenger coming out of the United States of America getting on a plane and flying to the Bahamas—that is a half hour or 45 minutes flight—jumps on a cruise ship and sails for five or six days and comes back and then jumps on a plane and goes home, no problem. The Government is going to tell that same person now to jump on a plane and fly to Trinidad, travel six hours, get on a boat and go where? The Minister does not even understand the dynamics of the tourist industry; the Minister does not understand that maybe there are one or two extra cruise ships in the harbour. It has nothing to do with the Government, it is weather patterns. All the harbours in the northern Caribbean are being destroyed by hurricanes over the last three to four years. The ships cannot berth in those islands anymore and that is why they are coming here. As soon as the weather pattern changes again—

**Dr. Rowley:** And the harbours are repaired.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** —and the harbours are repaired all the cruise ships will be going back up north. It is pure economics. That is what it is. It is a business; it is economics.

Mr. Speaker, do you know why tourism is so difficult in Trinidad and Tobago? It is because of our location and the fact that tourists come from Continental Europe and North America, Trinidad is just a little too far. When these tourists are looking at the package price of a holiday it is a fact that if they go to Barbados it is going to cost them £200 to get there.

**Dr. Job:** What about Tobago?

**Mr. C. Imbert:** No. No. I am not saying Tobago. I am talking about Trinidad. One of the reasons Trinidad has so much difficulty is that it is just a little too far. To go that extra distance may cost another £100 or £50 and the tourists make the decision they are not going. That is what this Government has to deal with and not this foolishness about departure tax. This nonsense about waiving departure tax for 48 hours. Which tourist is coming to Trinidad and Tobago for 48 hours? Is that the kind of tourist the Government wants to encourage here? That tourist will come on a Monday and leave on a Tuesday. Is that what the Government wants? It is the intellectual bankruptcy. I mean, the kind of tourism one wants to generate in one's country is a visitor that will come for, at least, two weeks. Waiving the departure tax for 48 hours to the person who wants to come here for two weeks is an absurdity.

Mr. Speaker, I could not have put it better than my colleague from San Fernando West put it yesterday, that the person who is coming here for two days is a business visitor and departure tax is irrelevant to that person. That person is coming to do investments maybe in a methanol plant; maybe in this fictional gas to liquids plant, or maybe even for Miss Universe. Okay? That is what that person is coming here for. They are dealing in millions of dollars. Do you think US \$12 makes any difference to them?

**5.35 p.m.**

Which tourist is coming here for 48 hours? Do they want to encourage people to stay here for only 48 hours? Is it, in fact, an incentive for them to leave the country earlier than they should? That is what they are doing. It is the level of intellectual bankruptcy. They do not have a clue! It sounds good. Someone told them they should do this and they would get more tourists in the country, and they said, "Yes, that sounds nice" and they just do it. No analysis whatsoever! That is how it is with everything they do.



We heard my colleague speak about the Solomon Hochoy Highway. That is such a catastrophe, it is not funny! I have to reinforce what he said. Manipulation of tenders! That is the hallmark of this Government. There was a situation where the lowest tenderer was not one of their favoured contractors. He was not one of the boys, so they interfered with that contractor, frustrated him and got him to withdraw. That is UNC style. Then they go and award the contract to the next highest bidder to give him more money for less work. They then watched him do nothing for two years. This was the most interesting part. What bothers me is that all of them have to pass through this area with the exception of the Member for St. Joseph and the Member for Barataria/San Juan. All of them have to pass through this "jooking" board every day.

**Dr. Rowley:** Cellulite!

**Mr. C. Imbert:** When they go to their Cabinet meeting, they have to drive on this disgrace for a road. Every day they go to Cabinet meeting, they are shaking because they have to drive on the highway. For two to three years they allowed that fiasco to continue until public disquiet reached to the point of a crescendo. They had to fire the contractor.

**Dr. Rowley:** Reluctantly.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** We could see how reluctant they were. They fired the contractor about a year ago and they have done nothing. It is little wonder that a new Minister has to come into the Ministry of Works and Transport to deal with roads. Look at their record. Five years fooling around on the Solomon Hochoy Highway, frustrating the entire nation. They built a Berlin Wall in San Fernando at Cross Crossing; potholes everywhere in this country.

There is a Road Improvement Fund. It is a legal requirement that reports of that fund be laid in this Parliament every six months. They have reported once in four and a half years. They are supposed to have nine reports on the record of this Parliament. They have one. That was laid about two or three years ago.

The reason they will not lay these documents, Mr. Speaker, is because they do not want the country to know what they are doing. They do not want the country to know that they have \$50 million coming into that fund every year. They take \$25 million of it and spend it in Oropouche, they take another \$5 million and spend it in Penal, in some lonely road in some canefield. They take another \$5 million and spend it in a backyard somewhere and end up spending \$45 million in a little underpopulated area, and then the other \$5 million is scattered like crumbs around Trinidad and Tobago.

There is a situation where from Chaguaramas to Maraval there is a resident population in excess of 100,000—10 per cent of the population resides between Chaguaramas and Maraval—but they spend \$200,000 out of \$50 million, where, if we do it on a direct proportionate basis, it should have been at least about \$5 million. They spent \$200,000 and the Member for St. Joseph speaks about milk and honey flowing and there is so much prosperity and so many mansions.

I come back to the stadia as well. It is a pattern of this Government. The stadia started at \$90 million; six months later it was \$180 million; six months after that it is \$360 million; and now it is \$440 million, and they are not built yet. When they are finished it will be \$880 million. It is like the Miss Universe fiasco in that the Member for St. Joseph can so glibly come into this Parliament and boast about expenditure of \$71 million. Nurses are marching up and down this country for the last three months, hospitals are in chaos, no medicine, patients not being attended to, but they could boast about spending \$71 million on the Miss Universe show. It was for pretty people and he was involved in it.

The only thing I am happy about is that election is coming soon. That is the only thing. It would not be long. That is the only thing I am happy about. Mr. Speaker, I go back to the Minutes of the Finance Committee. It states that:

“The Member for Diego Martin East inquired as to the nature of the refurbishment work to be done on the Cascadura and was this work anticipated.”

Listen to the answer:

“Funds are for the continuation of refurbishment work.”

That is the answer. We asked them what is going on. Is it that they are building a new ship? Is it that there are cost overruns? Are they putting in a new engine? They tell us that funds are for the continuation of refurbishment work. This is the kind of answer we are getting right through.

Mr. Speaker, what is bothering me is the manner in which they operate. Everything is a big joke for them. They tell the Minister of Education about cost overruns in a programme of 100 and they laugh, "cyah cyah". They talk to the Minister of the Environment about his inability to spend money and do anything. Joke! We see the Member for Barataria/San Juan laughing at the Member for St. Joseph when he talks about no crime in Aranguez. Everything on that side is a big joke.

**Dr. Khan:** I am not laughing at him. I am laughing at you!

**Mr. C. Imbert:** We have the Member for Tobago East refusing to answer any question asked by the Member for Tobago West. The Member for Tobago West, since she found herself and found herself on this side, has been asking pertinent and cogent questions about irregularities taking place in Tobago, the non-disbursement of funds, the inactivity of the Government, the refusal of the Government to do anything about matters in Tobago, and everything is a big joke. Instead of dealing with it, instead of dealing with the issues, week after week, we have to hear some kind of dodge or that the school will start just now. They cannot sign the MOU.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for Diego Martin East has expired.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. C. Imbert:** One of the particular things that bothered me about the Member for St. Joseph, as I said, is a continuation of the practice of putting falsehoods on the records. He has perfected, since he has come into this Parliament, the practice of putting falsehood on the record.

**Mr. Assam:** I have perfected it and you have patented it.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** He spoke about *Mein Kampf* and the big lie, and all we got from him was a series of big untruths. He started off his contribution giving us the policy of the administration of the UNC—the big lie—and then he went straight into a number of big lies.

That is exactly what went on today. What bothered them, as I said, was the contribution of the Member for Diego Martin West. When one answers that one cannot build a school at Mason Hall in Tobago because the THA would not sign an MOU, so from 1996—2000 they would not sign it, and that is why they cannot build a school in Mason Hall; and in Diego Martin—they cannot find a site from 1996 to 2000—five years and they cannot find a site for a secondary school in Diego Martin! Diego Martin is such a huge place, Mr. Speaker? Is this the United States? There is a little area, a couple square miles; they cannot find a site for a school there, but they could find sites for 10 secondary schools in the most remote parts of the country. They are building schools in the middle of the jungle, in the forests, for “douen” and “lappé” to occupy. That is management UNC style. There is nobody living there.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Go and tell them that! You are calling them that!

**Mr. C. Imbert:** One has to drive five miles to find a house. The reason they are building these schools in the most remote areas where nobody lives for miles around is to remove them from scrutiny. When one goes into the middle of a virgin forest where the first house is five miles so and the next one is five miles so, it is the easiest thing to do.

**5.50 p.m.**

You could build any kind of school you want; there is no scrutiny. You could half-build the school. You could leave the school unfinished; there is nobody there. You could increase the size. You could knock it down and build it back up because there is no scrutiny of this construction work. That is what they are doing.

It has nothing to do with any policy of the Ministry of Education. None whatsoever. It is—anyhow, do not let me use unparliamentary language here today, but in every action of this administration, as they wind down to their exit from public life, there is something that smells rotten.

The point my colleague from Diego Martin West made about the airport is valid. Do they want to tell me we could not spend \$1 million or \$2 million to hire a competent architect to give us something of beauty, something that is attractive, instead of something that is alien to Trinidad and Tobago? As I said, it is a glorified cowshed. When I look at all the other airports in the world—John F. Kennedy Airport, Singapore Airport, all the modern airports—how beautiful they are, they give you an impression of the country when you are coming in on a plane, you see these magnificent structures, but in Trinidad and Tobago, one billion dollars on a cowshed with a galvanize roof. I mean, remove the scales from your eyes. The next time you go on one of your flights of fancy out of the country, take a look at the cowshed. Look at it properly and see it for what it is.

**Mr. Assam:** That is your racial slur, cowshed.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** See if you could see a billion dollars up there.

What also bothers me, Mr. Speaker, is that they are so caught up in the promotion of irregularities that they do not care what they do; they just do not care. It brings me back to this InnCogen thing. We do not need the electricity but they went and spent \$700 million building a plant. Your friends need the money so that is why you did it—no glass plant; no ethanol plant; no bagasse plant; no ply wood plant; no paper plant. All that is happening, you have a white elephant sitting there on prime lands in Caroni, generating electricity that nobody needs, that nobody wants and a man in a short pants making plenty money in the United States.

That is the style of this Government. It creates an opportunity for others to make money. I have said this before, little fellows sit in a room in the back and they say, "All right. What will we do this month in order to make some money? Let us come up with something." Then, they go through an entire project to justify it, rush it through, create a diversion and then get it done—typical.

Every time some skulduggery is due to take place in this country, they create a diversion. I am wondering now—with the Equal Opportunity legislation, the clause 7 and the public furore it has created—what is the “skull” that is taking place? Because I remember with that desalination plant, in the middle of the public bacchanal, they went and paved the Savannah, so that while everybody was worrying about why Carlos John did that; who told him to do that; Prof. Kenny and Prof. Spence in the Senate getting on filing motions; Eden Shand gone there, getting buried by gravel; Citizens For Conservation marching and editorials, newspaper headlines, television. Desalination contract sign.

I remember the same thing occurred with the InnCogen matter. That is when the Prime Minister decided he would take on the media, so while he was fighting with the media, attacking reporters and that was making all the news, Paladeno gone to the bank with Yorke and making all the money. That was InnCogen.

When they had the LNG contract, there was all the controversy about the LNG contract. There were chairmen of state enterprises making noise, getting up and criticizing their line Minister publicly. Favourite daughters of the UNC criticizing the line Minister. One set of confusion in the newspapers. The chairman of the National Gas Company refusing to sign the contract, all kinds of things. All of that was going on. Do you know what they used to deal with that? They made Gillette Prime Minister.

**Mr. Hinds:** Oh!

**Mr. C. Imbert:** At the same time. It is a pattern of behaviour. They put Gillette as Prime Minister. The next day: Who is Gillette? How did he come there? Is he a member of the UNC? Where did he come from? Kuei Tung vex; he gone to China. All kinds of confusion. Humphrey not attending Cabinet meetings; Humphrey demoted; Sudama vex; all kinds of things in the newspaper. They signed the LNG contract.

I wonder if it is the cellular licence. Could it be that? Is that what is going on? All this clause 7 and Equal Opportunity legislation and this attack on the churches in this country. Is it the cellular licence? Is that what they are up to, Mr. Speaker? Mark my words, they are up to something. Some skulduggery is going to take place, or has taken place. It probably took place yesterday, in the Cabinet meeting. Some skulduggery took place.

**Dr. Griffith:** Wednesdays. Wednesday is Cabinet.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Well, day before yesterday. It does not matter, Mr. Speaker.

I am just warning the citizens of this country to be on their guard against the people over there, because when they had the confusion with the Chairman of the Tobago House of Assembly, there was more “skull” taking place then, too. When there was this big quarrelling and attack on Mr. Hochoy Charles and fighting the Government, some skulduggery was taking place around that time.

**Miss Nicholson:** That is why they cannot handle him.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Things quieten down now, so that “skull” done.

I entered this debate to deal with the issue of untruths, the web of deceit, the misinformation, the absolute dishonesty and falsehoods that have been put on the record in this Parliament and I am warning the country, something is going on, some skulduggery is due to take place in this country. Some racket is brewing or about to break.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Miss Pamela Nicholson (Tobago West):** Mr. Speaker, I thought that I must rise to make a brief contribution on the Motion:

*Be it resolved* that this House adopt the Third Report (1999/2000 Session) of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the Supplementation and Variation of the 1999/2000 Appropriation.

Mr. Speaker, I thought I had to get up here this afternoon because of the total contempt with which the Member for Tobago East, who is the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, has treated this House this afternoon.

Just yesterday, I remember a number of questions were raised in the minuted meeting and the Minister who was the Chairman at that time, promised us that he would have answered a number of questions today. One thought when he got up here this afternoon, that would have been the first thing he would have done.

For example, I was questioning the scholarship funding, how moneys were spent on scholarships in Tobago and I questioned how \$17 million were spent on scholarships and it was not appropriated for. The Minister of Finance, Planning and Development at that time, who was not the Member for Tobago East, told us he would have answered the question when he was dealing with the budget. He did not say a word. I raised those questions here yesterday to find out what was the position and the Member for Tobago East said he would have replied today and I have not heard a word from him.

I also raised another question with regard to the Ministry of Education and the Mason Hall school where I saw that \$5 million were being spent on the building of another school in Trinidad—I think it is the Cunupia secondary school. The question that I raised with the Minister at that particular point in time was about the new technical/vocational wing at the Signal Hill Senior Comprehensive School. I raised that question which I have been raising year after year, month after month. Why is the technical/vocational wing not being furnished? Why are teachers not put there so that the Tobagonian will be able to go to that school and get their skills?

The Minister promised, again, that he would have answered that question and he has not said a word on that. No answers. We are just asking question after question. I ask questions here week after week on health, on education, on everything, on housing. What is happening with Signal Hill? When are you going to intervene on Pigeon Point? When are you going to come to give us our road legally? The road is there. We have been using it. The state maintains it and we get some very rude, contemptuous answers from them and when we recognize that Tobago is responsible for them being seated there, it gets us angry. They are totally unconcerned about resolving the problems in Tobago on behalf of the people.

Then, we listen to the Member for St. Joseph talking about power struggle between the Chief Secretary in Tobago and the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and so forth, as being responsible for no hospital. Again, it is very devious to listen to them because the Attorney General, who is the Member for Couva South, told us in this House that the Cabinet of this country has the ultimate responsibility for running this country, so, if the Chief Secretary gives problems in one year, are they going to allow the Chief Secretary to continue for another year and another year and another year? So that we would not get our hospital?

The Attorney General told us, when we were debating the Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill, that the Tobago House of Assembly does not have autonomy; the Tobago House of Assembly does not have internal self-government.

**6.05 p.m.**

What the Tobago House of Assembly had, was upgraded administration. It is based on the interpretation of the Tobago House of Assembly Act, that I am raising my questions these days in the House, and I am asking: why is the Attorney General not responding? Why is the Attorney General not taking action? This is what the Attorney General said: “What Tobago has is upgraded

administration. Tobago does not have autonomy, Tobago does not have internal self-government.” Well, if Tobago does not have autonomy, it does not have internal self-government, and it is a part of Trinidad and Tobago, why is the Central Government of Trinidad and Tobago not responding to the Tobago question? [*Desk thumping*] Why?

With respect to the Signal Hill Land Development Programme, the people of Tobago have spent their money, five dollars per square foot. We have the Chief Secretary coming with another problem, he said you have to pay two dollars more per square foot. The question is raised, month after month in this House, why are you not intervening? Why are you not taking action, Mr. Minister of Housing and Settlements? To date, nothing has happened.

The question of ADDA was raised. The Minister of Finance, Planning and Development said: “I will send the Auditor General to look into this matter.” The Auditor General comes back in two or three weeks’ time, she said: “The Attorney General must get into this matter immediately.” The Attorney General jumps in and we have not heard a word. I have asked questions in this House. Mr. Attorney General why are you not answering us? Why are you not bringing the report and laying it on the table? No answer. This is what we are confronted with in Tobago. I am very, very concerned here this evening with the Acting Minister of Finance, Planning and Development who happens to be the Tobago representative for Tobago East. I am very, very concerned about him not answering questions that are asked. I thought he would have led off his debate here this evening with answering the questions that were asked, because I am very, very concerned about accountability. I am very concerned about transparency.

When the Member for St. Joseph says I speak with a forked tongue, that is not forked tongue, for me wanting the Government to address accountability and transparency in Tobago, to have the Auditor General step in and deal with that matter, that is not forked tongue. I want positive action. I want the people’s moneys to be protected. That is what I want. [*Desk thumping*]

I am very concerned about these areas; the \$17 million scholarship. I would like the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development to answer that question this evening, because he promised to do it this evening.

Mr. Speaker, we have some very, very important questions here to be answered: the question of the Mason Hall Government Secondary School. It is almost five years. That is a school that should have been constructed even before that. The first year when we came into government, when I was a part of that government, Mason Hall Government Secondary School was supposed to be constructed. Scarborough Hospital was supposed to be built. The decisions were



taken. And people are coming here this evening to say it is because of the Chief Secretary and his power struggle. When the Attorney General tells us: we are the Cabinet, we are the Central Government, we are in charge of Trinidad and Tobago. The first year the man give trouble or the second year, after that, the Cabinet of the country should take action and give the people of Tobago justice. I am sure that this year would be ended and Mason Hall Government Secondary School would not be started. I am sure about that. I am sure the hospital would not begin. I am sure the Richmond Water Plant would not be constructed, and we want action. *[Interruption]* All right, we are not going to get into that at this time, do not disturb me right now. I am sure, you are doing work on Courland—

**Mr. G. Singh:** And Richmond.

**Miss P. Nicholson:** —and I am going to accept that, but the Richmond Water Plant has not started. We have a number of problems here, Mr. Speaker, that we want to see the Government address, such as the failure of the Government to remove acting administrators who have been employed politically in Tobago. Right now we have a very big problem in Tobago in the department of health. The worst thing that one could find in, perhaps, the whole of the Caribbean, is the health department in Tobago. In Scarborough Hospital we do not have an operating theatre. When I said, some weeks ago, that the Scarborough Hospital was in Trinidad, I am sure they did not understand me. What I am saying is that because we do not have an operating theatre in Tobago, all the people who have to do anything with surgery must come to Trinidad. So, the hospital is in Trinidad, and we are here taking away \$23 million from the Development Fund of Tobago, and the Cabinet does not know that it should put a certain per cent on the Scarborough Hospital; clean up the hospital immediately. If \$5 million are needed, put \$5 million of the \$23 million to address the hospital question. That is what we are saying! It is just about \$60 million that was given to Tobago for development, a very small fund. The sum of \$23 million was supposed to build the stadium. You are saying that you took that away. But there are other urgent areas that should be addressed in Tobago, and the \$23 million should be used in Tobago, to address those problems. That is what I am talking about. The hospital is an emergency.

I was not here last week to hear the nonsense that was said here by the Member for Tobago East, when he said it is a good thing to have people on stretchers going on planes. It is a sad, disgraceful thing to see people in pajamas and all, going on planes. When I read the document, it was something like that he was saying. I said what should happen is that you should have a helicopter and

you carry the people re: ambulance, helicopter to Trinidad, because our hospital is in Trinidad. *[Interruption]* What Air Ambulance? Use that system so, at least some of the funding from the \$23 million should have been used. If you are worried that Charles would not spend the money correctly, give him the money, but oversee, monitor to see that it is spent on the Scarborough Hospital, that is what should happen *[Desk thumping]* Monitor! It cannot be the powers that the people have struggled for—what the people struggled for was the Tobago House of Assembly. You must not take away the powers of the Assembly. That is what you have done when you take two—you are giving the Minister for Tobago Affairs something like \$2.5 million—it is over \$2 million to build—let me look for it, Mr. Speaker, I want to say the correct thing. Where is it? What page is it on? Yes, it is \$2,384,000 to put down a skills development centre in Tobago.

### **6.15 p.m.**

Education is under the Tobago House of Assembly. The Tobago House of Assembly is now constructing a technical/vocational wing on the Roxborough Secondary School, so what you have is a contradiction. The Member for Tobago East is doing the same thing that the Tobago House of Assembly is doing in Roxborough; contradiction. You are giving the Ministry for Tobago Affairs \$11 million to build a skills development centre; it is basically the same thing. You should have discussion between the Government and the Tobago House of Assembly. If you feel that they would not spend the money correctly, you monitor it. You cannot have the two things happening.

I always talk about the technical/vocational wing at Signal Hill that was constructed so long ago. I have asked several questions on it. What should have happened is that these funds should have been used to furnish the technical/vocational wing at Signal Hill and to put the teachers there. I asked questions already; when the Member for Tabaquite was the Minister of Education I was told in this House that the moneys were sent to NIPDEC to furnish it. Well, I asked the question to the Minister and that was what he said, that the money was sent to NIPDEC to furnish the school. I asked questions over and over and nobody is addressing it. Yet the Minister is saying that Tobago is a part of Trinidad and that the Government is concerned.

Also, the Attorney General interpreted that the Central Government has the ultimate responsibility. What does that mean? It means that if the Tobago House of Assembly is not functioning in keeping with the policies of the Government that the Government will take action. Why are you not taking action? You are taking five years to take action? If after one or two years the Tobago House of Assembly has not responded correctly you take action, because you are in charge; that is what the Attorney General has said.

Coming back to the health situation, Mr. Speaker, we have a situation where a contractual worker is employed as an administrator and she was made the head of health in Tobago, at the secondary level. There is a big conflict between that individual and the Public Health Inspector IV and that division. Coming out of that situation, you have endless problems rippling through that department. People are not getting their salaries; all the public health centres are run down. You have a new situation where they are now telling the caretakers that they have to carry their keys to police stations, when there was a decision taken by the Public Services Association and the Government that allowed the caretakers to keep keys for the health centres. So for over 20 years or more than that, caretakers in Tobago have been keeping the keys for the health centres.

There is a new situation now where they have demanded all the keys from these people and when they returned them they said, "You have to carry them to a police or fire station." So you have some people spending \$60, \$100, or \$150 to take keys to the fire station or the police station, and that is out of their salaries; it is not an allowance.

There is another problem: some people have protested, so they found somebody in the area to whom they have to go for the keys. So when people go and that person who has the keys is not there, sometimes the doctor and the nurse would wait for an hour, if they do not see the centres opening up, they return home; so the people are not taken care of. These are issues that the Minister of Health must know about, because he has ultimate responsibility as far as health is concerned in Tobago. When you have your money that is how you must spend it; seek the interest of the people. I thought that I had to raise that question here today.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to read something from the budget speech that was made by the Minister of Finance, and that is on page 30.

**Mr. Hart:** Where is he now?

**Miss P. Nicholson:** On page 30, the first paragraph it states:

"In terms of physical infrastructure development, the Government will allocate funds for the construction of roads in Tobago. The construction of 13 kilometres of road between L'Anse Fourmi and Charlotteville is due to begin in the new financial year. This is to be funded jointly by a grant from the European Union, and Government. Another important roadway under construction is the Belmont Road, which provides a link between the Northside and Windward roads. These two projects are expected to cost \$23 million."

So the \$23 million should have remained in Tobago. Up to now the L'Anse Fourmi/Charlotteville Road has not begun. Also, the Tobago House of Assembly is saying that they have not received any funds for that Belmont Road which is the link between the Northside and the Windward roads. Why did you take away the \$23 million from Tobago? Tobago is in need of the funding. The L'Anse Fourmi/Charlotteville Road should have been on its way and also funding should be given to the THA to take care of the Northside/Windward Road.

We have another problem, Mr. Speaker, and I want to read again:

“Over the past few months, commuting between Trinidad and Tobago has been challenging for the citizens of both Trinidad and Tobago. Government intends to rectify this with the restoration of an efficient inter-island ferry service.”

There is a situation that when we go to the supermarkets today, sometimes we cannot get rice, flour or milk. When you question the owners of the supermarket there is a problem with the inter-island ferry service. In this House we questioned already, we asked that a boat should be leased to complement the work that the inter-island ferry is doing, and nothing has happened so far. By the end of this month, that same inter-island ferry, the Panorama, should be going on dry dock.

So we already have a situation where the supermarkets and the hardware stores are under pressure, because the inter-island ferry, which is the Panorama, cannot cope with all the problems in Tobago. We should have had a boat already complementing the Panorama. When it goes on dry dock, I would like to know, what will be happening in Tobago? I would like the Member for Tobago East, who is a Tobagonian, to answer that question, because you have \$23 million. I do not know if \$23 million could have leased one for a few months but, at least, it could have addressed one for, at least, two to three months. The money should have remained in Tobago to address the Tobago question.

Mr. Speaker, we have another situation. When you look under “Education” you notice something like \$12 million is being spent on libraries. In 1997 there was an earthquake in Tobago and the library in Scarborough was almost destroyed. The Prime Minister of this country said that they would have given funding to Tobago to deal with that. Now you have \$23 million, this should have been used to address the Scarborough library. There was structural damage to the Scarborough library and nothing has happened, until the librarians had to protest using it and they have been removed to another site. I think it is the same technical/vocational wing at Signal Hill. So we do not have a library. Our library in Scarborough that we should have, we do not have that, but \$23 million has been taken away from the Tobago House of Assembly.

Even though the \$23 million was supposed to be the money to deal with the stadia, there are other important areas to address with funding in Tobago. There is the library, a proper, efficient ferry service in Tobago. There is a hospital without an operating theatre; so Tobago does not have a hospital, you could say. You could even use the money to send specialists up to Tobago because that is another problem that we have; we do not have specialists at the hospital to deal with certain areas. Use the funding to do that. Look at the Tobago problems and communicate. If you do not communicate with the Tobago House of Assembly, you have the representative for Tobago West. Communicate with the representative for Tobago West and use the money in that area.

Mr. Speaker, I read recently where a substance abuse rehabilitation institution is being constructed in Trinidad. I see \$12 million set aside here. We have a water highway; drugs and so forth overrun Tobago: the high schools everything. You need an institution like this in Tobago. You have \$23 million, look at that situation.

We need an AIDS centre in Tobago. I was very happy today to be listening to a programme on 104 FM and they were dealing with AIDS. When they questioned one of the doctors, one of the first things that he said was that there was not the political will to address the problem. I am calling upon you to find the political will to address that question—[*Desk thumping*]*—*the AIDS centre that Tobago needs. When you have to take \$23 million from Tobago use it for something like that, the substance abuse rehabilitation centre. You are building one in Piparo for \$12 million; one should be built in Tobago whether it is for \$3 million or \$4 million. You have money, use it there so that we can take care of our people who have that sort of problem in Tobago. Why the \$23 million must be removed to go and do A, B, C, and D in Trinidad, when Tobago did not get enough funding from the beginning? Why should you do that?

For development you only gave Tobago about \$60 million. You are using a different system to deal with the stadia. I do not understand the Build/Own/Lease/Transfer system as yet; I would like the Minister to tell us about that here this evening. I understood the Fincor system, but I do not know about the BOLT system. We would be very happy, Mr. Minister, if you could tell us about that.

The point I am making is that even though you are using a different system, the \$23 million that was under the THA could have been used on different programmes that are of urgent need to the people of Tobago. That is why I thought that I should get up here this evening and say a few things on this Finance Bill of 1999/2000.

I am of the opinion that the \$23 million should have remained in Tobago, and if you are having a problem with management of the funds, the Government has to be blamed also, because it knows that it was supposed to bring financial regulations to the House. You have not done it over almost a five-year period. The financial regulations to guide the Tobago House of Assembly should have come here anything like in two months after the inauguration of the THA. You have been in operation for nearly five years and have not brought the finance regulations here. Outside of that you have the system that the THA was guided to use until you were ready with that, you should use that to manage.

What we have most times when we question anything on it, the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development throws up his hands, he “cyar” do anything about it. You must be able to do something about it, because you have the ultimate responsibility; that is what the Attorney General, the Minister of Legal Affairs, told this House.

Mr. Speaker, I am very, very concerned about those areas. I feel that we have many problems in Tobago. I feel that the \$23 million should have been spent in Tobago because of the numerous problems that exist there.

We have no operating theatre; the L'Anse Fourmi/Charlotteville Road; the Belmont Road which is a link road, and the Mason Hall secondary school.

**6.30 p.m**

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Education, if Tobago will be a part of her programme and when September comes all the children will be going into secondary schools, could she tell me where she will be putting these children? I want her to answer that question because the secondary school at Mason Hall has not been built. If we are a part of Trinidad and Tobago and a part of that programme, could she tell us how she is going to address that question?

These are the areas I would like to draw to the attention of the House and I feel that the Government should be rethinking its position of the \$23 million, and to say that should be spent on Tobago.

Thank you.

*[Dr. The Hon Morgan Job gets up to reply]*

**Mr. Speaker:** It appears that there is someone on the Opposition side who wanted to speak. I looked on this side and I saw no indication of anybody saying anything. I think we went through the motion of a person just standing, which is the correct thing, but if the Member for Diego Martin Central wishes to speak I withdraw that and he could speak. No problem.

**Mr. Kenneth Valley** (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Speaker, I join this debate at this time simply to deal with one particular matter, the Supplementary Appropriation under Head 19 where the charges on account of the public debt is being increased by \$927.6 million.

Mr. Speaker, there were some issues with respect to this and I thought that I would have been given some information by this time, because when we look at the information provided coming from the finance committee, it simply says that Cabinet has agreed to the issue of this amount, and the purpose of it is to retire high-costing debt.

One would have thought that the argument of the Member for Tobago West is valid and one would have thought that the Minister would have demonstrated that we are in fact, effecting a savings on the retiring of these debts. That is the first thing. On the face of it, one has to ask, even if we are talking about almost \$1 billion, these debts have been outstanding for some time. We know as a fact that if you were doing the type of financing, in addition to the finance cost, there is the management fees and other expenses. Quite simply, management fees on \$1 billion at 2 per cent works out to \$20 million. If there is no information coming, and knowing who the substantive holder of the post of the Minister of Finance is, without that information it is easy for one to conclude that something is happening once more. That is the first point I am going to make.

I have looked at some of the local debts. We do not know what is the new rate the Government is supposed to be getting. There is no information given to us with respect to the interest rate that was being charged on the existing debt; all we are told is that the Government is effecting savings. That is not sufficient. We would really need to have the information with respect to the terms and conditions of the existing indebtedness, the terms under which the new loans were raised, but more importantly, I understand that these new loans are not raised as yet. So I do not know how you are going to be effecting cost savings especially in an environment of high interest rates; you have not raised the new debt as yet, and telling me that you are effecting savings.

If one is doing this type of transaction, one would raise the new indebtedness at the same time the old indebtedness is paid off. That, surprisingly, does not seem to be the case. I really want to have more explanation on this, otherwise you will have to forgive me for believing that perhaps somebody is making something. More importantly, going on from that, a Government has to be extremely careful about what it does. Understand what has happened here.

Sometime ago, the Government would have gone out to the public and investors and say it wants to raise funds, and persons with funds would buy bonds maturing at some period at some priced interest rate. Now, what we have been told is that the Government has seen an opportunity to effect savings and, therefore, it is retiring those and borrowing at a lower interest rate.

Mr. Speaker, we are talking about a government and let me give an example. If this were a company doing this type of transaction, normally the company would have had to pay a premium for being able to repay its debts earlier than planned because the assumption is that the investors getting into the transaction are expecting a certain return and are now being denied it because the Government is paying them back, giving them the funds and they therefore now have to reinvest those funds and there is the concept of reinvestment risk. That is if it is a company, bear in mind that in any society the government is the best borrower, so if the Government could get a lower interest rate, it means that the whole structure of interest rate in the society is going lower. Therefore, the investor is faced with a loss, he now has to reinvest those funds at a lower interest.

One would ask whether in Trinidad and Tobago at this time one sees that as being true, whether we see interest rates falling bringing into question further, whether the whole purpose of this refinancing has been to get lower rates. Understand the point I am making. I am saying that in the normal scheme of things if this is happening, if the Government is doing this, it means that interest rates are falling across the board. If interest rates are falling, and a government does this, it means it is penalizing investors who will then be wary later on. I am saying however, when we observe the society, we do not see any fall in interest rates, therefore, I am further suggesting that this transaction will not result in lower cost to the Government, and if it will not, one has to ask why is it being done now. A management fee will obviously be paid. To whom?

Mr. Speaker, if one is doing this type of transaction as a Government, one would have expected to see some kind of tendering procedure out there. I have not seen anything and I would think that I follow the financial news in Trinidad and Tobago very closely. So I ask, what is happening?

My colleague, the Member for Diego Martin East made the point that given all that is happening in the society, something seems to be cooking. He thought it was the telecommunications deal, I do not know what it is, I do not know whether it is this, but I am saying that we need further information on this matter. One, to prove in fact that the Government is effecting a savings via this transaction. I am



going further by saying that even if in a situation where Government can effect savings on transactions like this, a government has to be careful of the message it sends to the investing public. Because if this is so, then it means that the investing public will be very wary of getting involved with the Government on a long-term bond, because even if a long-term bond is not a long-term bond, even with the Government they will say if you want to call this bond early, a penalty or a premium above par would have to be paid.

There is a third issue, Mr. Speaker, if in fact, these debts were repaid without a consequential refinancing at the same time, then it means that the Government has been monetizing the economy. Remember that Government has an account at the Central Bank and if it is now retiring a set of bonds, it is putting money into the system. When a Government does that, then the adjustments would be inflation and inflation imports. I am making the point that while on the face of it, a transaction may look good, the Government has to analyze it extremely carefully to determine whether, given all the variables, it is the thing to do at this point in time.

I heard the Member for St. Joseph making the point that they have been having growth and so forth. That is fine but first of all, I think it is well known that they had nothing to do with the growth or any of the positives in the economy. What has happened is that the last government left fundamentals in place in this economy and we have seen very poor management over the last four years, such that even though there has been an increase in the foreign reserves, and even though we have been earning more foreign exchange, it is not available in the market, there are still lines. I made the point sometime before that the businessman still has to wait at least six months to get his VAT refund.

**Mr. Assam:** Everybody is up to date now. It is a fact, call Inland Revenue.

**Mr. K. Valley:** I will check it because it is not so in my case. Are you telling me also that there is still not a queue for foreign exchange? How can this be if there is proper management of the economy, if we have increasing earnings of foreign exchange? What is happening? I do not know what is happening, Mr. Speaker. If you talk to key persons in the economy [*Interruption*] Well, there are normal indicators. One looks at car sales, housing statistics and all that, but if you talk to these people, they tell you all the indicators are pointing south. Look at the stock market, in the midst of plenty there is none. I can tell you. When you talk to business people, the accounts receivable is climbing. That is what is happening over the last four or five months. Just suddenly it has started so we really have to

consider carefully what we are doing and I ask the Minister in the Ministry of Finance who has some training in economics, unlike his Minister, to consider carefully what is being done here with respect to the repayment and determine whether, in fact, it makes economic sense.

Thank you.

**6.45 p.m.**

**Mr. Hedwige Breaux** (*La Brea*): Mr. Speaker, I see the hon. Member for St. Joseph is not here but I got up just to make one very simple but important point. The hon. Member for St. Joseph, in his contribution, indicated that the Members of the Opposition did not respect the Speaker of this honourable House. Normally and traditionally, no one likes to get the Speaker involved in the debate, but since I have been one of those persons whom you have had the occasion to discipline, I respect what you did, but I am saying that having regard to the fact that the hon. Member for St. Joseph dares to come in this honourable House and say that we do not respect the Speaker, I believe such a statement requires an answer for several reasons:

One, the Members of the Opposition are on record in this Parliament and I am also on record in this Parliament as saying, notwithstanding the fact that when you were elected Speaker we took objection because of a principle, we indicated on the first occasion that we had an opportunity to speak and we respect it. And like lawyers, Members of Parliament, even moreso, are under an obligation to represent their constituencies vociferously, and when I get up in this Parliament and speak about my constituency—because I happen to have lived in that constituency for a long time. I am close to my constituents, and I make comments based on what I believe to be the truth, and wherever I believe—and it will continue—that my constituents are mistreated—be it by Government, generally, one Minister or anybody—I think I have a right to represent here vociferously and particularly—*[Interruption]*

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

**Mr. H. Breaux:** Every time I get up here to speak, particularly, the Member for St. Joseph chooses—especially when I am making a point about my constituency—to obstruct me and then speak about behaviour. I want to make it quite clear that I respect you and I am hoping that all the Members on this side respect you, but no respect or anything can mean failure to do your job properly, or if you take objection to something, to say it. I did not promise anybody to come here in this honourable House to be a “yes” man, and I do not think you, Sir,

require that I have; you have your job to do and I have mine. I respect you for doing yours, and if something happens and it turns out that you have to act in a certain way, well, then, you act in that way, and if I have to act in a certain way, then I would act in that way. And I resent, seriously, any implication that my acting as forcefully as I feel I need to act, on behalf of my constituents, could be construed as any disrespect to anybody.

Thank you.

**Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds** (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish to make a relatively brief intervention in this debate. I listened to the contributions of all the Members who spoke, of course, in this honourable House and, in particular the Member for St. Joseph. Recognizing the permanency of the record that is *Hansard*, and the inaccuracies that the Member sought to place upon that, it is incumbent upon me to correct some of those inaccuracies, to ensure that the young people of this country, 100 years hence, would be able to elicit from that record an accurate reflection of the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

I noted with great interest that a lot of the debate on these matters had to do with the business of the nation's education; housing was featured; health was featured but, by all means, education seemed to have grabbed the attention of some of the speakers more than any other aspect of governmental affairs. I listened to the explanations given in respect of the four schools: one at Diego Martin; one at Guaico; Mason Hall in Tobago and the only one that the Government managed to advance in the four and a half years, the one in Cunupia.

Yesterday, in the Committee Stage, I raised with the Minister of Education the question of that very school, the Cunupia Government Secondary. Because I noted in the Schedule that the provision in the estimates was \$9 million and the revised provision went to \$14 million. An increase of \$5 million. I asked the Member to indicate what was the justification. What was the reason for this substantial increase of more than 50 per cent? The Member indicated—and I am not an accountant, I am not specialized in that—that had to do with bringing forward some figure from next year into this year and what have you, and I found the explanation unsatisfactory. It was at a late stage in the proceedings. And I would like the Member for Tobago East, the Minister of Finance, as it were, to really explain for the benefit of this Member and other Members, what gave rise to that increase in the sum of \$5 million. A sum that was transferred from Head 36, the Ministry of Housing and Settlements.

I heard the Member for St. Joseph say that it simply does not make sense to allocate moneys for a particular project or function, and you are not going to use it. It does not make sense. Yet, moneys were allocated under the Ministry of Housing and Settlements, Public Sector Investment Programme, and now we see it moving from there to the construction of the Cunupia Government Secondary School.

**6.55 p.m.**

In respect of housing, Mr. Speaker, this Government misses no opportunity in telling us that for the 30 or 35 years the People's National Movement was in office they built houses and—well, no, they never said we built houses, they say the PNM has done nothing for this country. In my constituency there are hundreds of government-built NHA units, apartments and flats, all occupied by many of my constituents. If the PNM did nothing, I would like to know, who put them there? Today, however, they are in a sad state in many cases and they are in dire need of repairs, maintenance and upkeep, just like the highway of which we heard earlier today, which the Minister of Works No. 1, not No. 2, undertook to repair and now those who use the roads, that road in particular, are calling it a “jookin’ board”.

Those houses, Mr. Speaker, are in need of painting, new windows, sometimes repaired doors and floor boards. There is one apartment I know of where the floor boards are almost completely gone. The constituent complains often, and I write to the Ministry of Housing and Settlements and the National Housing Authority. They take note of the difficulty, but, for the four and a half years I have been writing and talking about that, nothing has been done in respect of that apartment and, indeed, many others. Yet we see a movement of \$5 million from that very ministry into the construction of a school in Cunupia.

Mr. Speaker, I have noted all together there is a \$53 million increase in the allocation under Head 26, the Ministry of Education. Probably that was the reason so much debate centred round the education function. I noticed as well that at least \$45 million of that \$53 million, the larger chunk of it, came from the Ministry of Information, Communication, Training and Distance Learning headed, of course, by the Member for Arima. I always imagine that, if some head of state is coming to visit us and he is made to meet all the Ministers at the airport, as is sometimes done, he might be astounded to learn that we have someone who is a Minister for Distance Learning. The fact that \$45 million could be moved from that ministry to Education is probably a good thing but it has much to say about the ministry from which it came. It is quite clear to us that nothing much is happening in that ministry. It is a charade. It is all a design to keep their friends, to keep the Government in place and to keep the people of Arima subverted, as they have been.

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal as well with a subject that was raised; this is the construction, under the Secondary Education Modernization Programme, of 10 secondary schools. We heard about some of it today and the Member for Diego Martin East was able to demonstrate on a factual basis, without it being controverted from the other side, that the budget moved from \$138 million to \$283 million in less than one year and the explanation given by the Prime Minister, we are told, is that the architects increased the size of the schools.

Now, if 10 schools are supposed to be built at a cost of \$138 million, even if it is then decided to build 20 schools—and incidentally, Mr. Speaker, the task force that recommended action to take care of the 10,000 or 12,000 children who, each year after Common Entrance, could not find a place, recommended the need for 21 secondary schools. The Government undertook to construct 10 schools in this year, a project that is unlikely to get off the ground, a project that is unlikely to meet the target for September in any event but, worse than that, the budget jumped from \$138 to \$283 million.

**Mr. Assam:** \$283 million?

**Mr. F. Hinds:** Yes, in a Cabinet Note, right here, approved by the Cabinet. So, Mr. Speaker, even if they had decided to build the 20 schools—\$238 million, I am sorry, not \$283—even if they had decided to build 10 schools more—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Assam:** Are you dyslexic?

**Mr. F. Hinds:** Yes, stay there—the budget is of course significantly overrun. The Member for St. Joseph spent much time talking about cost overruns while the People's National Movement was in office. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the Member for St. Joseph this, and he must not forget, it was he who raised the question of the oil revenues that were supposedly squandered by a PNM government and I have indicated that I have risen, among other things, to correct the record. He said that the PNM squandered \$60 billion of oil revenues over the period that it flowed through this country.

**Mr. Assam:** Who said so?

**Mr. F. Hinds:** He, the Member for St. Joseph. It has also often been said by the Member for Oropouche, and a few blind others.

**Mr. Assam:** Did I say that today?

**Mr. F. Hinds:** The Member says it all the time. I will address the Speaker. I have placed it on record before and it behooves me to do it again. For the last five years they have been there, this Government has spent, actual expenditure from the figures, \$59 billion. There is only one more to make \$60 billion. The question remains, what do we have to show for it? I want to remind the Member for St. Joseph that when the PNM in 1956 won the majority of seats at the then Legislative Council, between 1956 and 1962, Mr. Speaker, while that was the case, we were still a colony of Britain so that we had no control over our affairs.

Between 1962 and 1970 we continued in that state without having control of what was then called the commanding heights of the economy. In fact, in 1970, students in the university, young men, rose up claiming that in banking, in insurance, in oil and in sugar, we had no control over our resources and as we debate this legislation today we are talking about the country's resources. We are talking about how we spend the nation's money. Other governments, the PNM government past, was accused of selling the nation's patrimony, but this Government is merely frittering it away. At least when one sells the patrimony one gets some cash for it, bad as that might be if true, but they seem to be frittering the thing away.

So that by 1970 in this country there was uprising. We still had no control. It was not until the mid-1970s that the government benefited from increased oil revenues, Mr. Speaker, and it was the use of those revenues that saw an explosion in activity in this country. So that between 1956 and 1975, while we were government with statehood, a flag and an anthem, we had no money, really. It was still about Tate & Lyle in sugar, or Shell and BP in oil and much has happened since then. At that time foreigners owned the banks. So as we talk about revenue we need to get that history straight because when the government in the 1970s got the benefit of those oil revenues, it began to purchase the majority shareholdings in these major income earners in the economy.

So that the government of the day, the PNM government, just for the Member for St. Joseph, cannot be judged in terms of management of the economy, really, as an effective government with money before 1975. So if one has to look at the way the \$60 billion he talks about was managed, one has to properly look at no period other than between 1975 and 1986 because between 1981 and 1986 oil went to \$9 per barrel in this country. I will tell you something, Mr. Speaker. Between 1975 and 1986 we saw massive construction and development in this country.

I think the Priority Bus Route came on in the early 1980s and the introduction of the maxi-taxi, a revolution in road transport in this country, if ever there was one, came on in the early 1980s and I need not mention the Twin Towers in Port of Spain, the Hall of Justice, highways and byways up and down this country, the Mount Hope Medical Complex, the Jean Pierre Complex and the national stadium, a school next to every child, where he or she lives and the School Feeding Programme. So today with the revenues in the Ministry of Education, if breakfast is added to the lunch that we established in the School Feeding Programme, they are only putting a bit of icing on the cake. They are not doing anything new.

They, however, turn the sod for everything. They repaired a bridge somewhere in this country and turned the sod. I saw a Minister of Government come to my constituency and hand over keys for two vehicles that this Government never bought and that is the sort of thing, Mr. Speaker. So I hope the Member for St. Joseph would appreciate that. I want him to remember one other fact, that between 1986 and the year 2000, almost 14 years, the PNM was in government for no more than 3 years and 10 months of that period. Understand that. The PNM is blamed for everything and yet we cannot get an explanation today for the expenditure of \$5 million on the Cunupia Government School.

So, Mr. Speaker, we on this side, as has been expressed by various Members before feel, and we maintain, that much of the money that this country has been earning and much of the expenditure that the Government has been conducting is not justified.

**Mr. Assam:** You do not conduct expenditure. Do you think it is an orchestra?

**Mr. F. Hinds:** I know.

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

**Mr. F. Hinds:** The Member wants to take me to task for a word but he wants to slip around \$81 million. He tells us it is not \$81 million, it is \$71 million that he frittered away in Chaguaramas. But, Mr. Speaker, he did not tell us that the Chaguaramas Convention Centre was mortgaged, I think, for about \$13 million. He tries to detach that from the expenditure for the Miss Universe Pageant. He tells us that \$13 million expenditure under the CDA had nothing to do with the pageant.

**7.10 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, so, I have risen merely to indicate to the Member for St. Joseph in particular that it is unkind, untrue and incorrect to attempt to have the PNM judged on a record from 1956 to the present day. The Minister really has to look at the months between 1975 and 1976. Mr. Speaker, having corrected that record, I wish to thank you. *[Desk thumping]*

**The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Ganga Singh):** Mr. Speaker, I rise for a brief intervention in this matter. *[Laughter][Interruption]*

**Hon. Member:** Go ahead. *[Desk thumping]*

**Hon. G. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, I think it is prudent having regard to the conduct of this House, I would take my seat. *[Desk thumping][Laughter][Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** I am trying to record times. I had you starting at 7.10 and ending at 7.10.

**The Minister of Tobago Affairs and Acting Minister of Finance, Planning and Development (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job):** Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that I caused a little stir in the House and I should say thank you for facilitating me. I think, before I make my contribution, I should thank the hon. Members on the opposite side for their spirited contributions, some of them very poignant, I think, forcing the mind on to what really are the fundamental issues. I will try to deal with them especially the Members for Diego Martin Central, Diego Martin West, and Tobago East.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to Tobago, much has been said which would lead the innocent observer to form the opinion that this Government has abandoned Tobago. Nothing could be further from the truth. I remember when I was campaigning to become the Member for Tobago East, I reminded my audience all over Tobago East and, indeed, in parts of Tobago West where I kept meetings that the situation in Tobago was akin or it reminded me of a scenario that you would see, I think, it is in the second book of *Kings*, where when King David was dying he had planned to anoint or cause Solomon to be anointed. As is the nature of politics and human nature there were factions formed and one of his sons by another wife—which was not Solomon's mother—named Jeroboam made an alliance with some priests and they formed a faction and decided that Jeroboam must be king, and as a consequence of that, a civil war ensued in Judah where a lot of people were killed. I said to the people, I was not yet MP and Tobago was like that. What is there is a competition for what is perceived to be a vacuum of power.



Mr. Speaker, it reminds me that some of the contenders for power in Tobago might very well come from Tobago West. *[Laughter]* You know, they call some rollers of different types. There is a very voluble and well speaking lawyer. They are all contending for power, this vacuum that apparently exists in Tobago. I have said on my own behalf, when I was talking to the people that the fate of Tobago rests in their hands. Who they want to take over from the eminent former Member of Tobago East they will do so. So it is not the business of anybody to deny the facts, and the consequences of that domestic imbroglio that is in Tobago and blaming this Government for every single thing that happens in Tobago. A lot of the things that are going on there have nothing to do with Morgan Job, Member for Tobago East and Minister in the Ministry of Finance and Minister of Tobago Affairs or indeed, the Government.

We have to live in the real world. So all this brouhaha about the Senators and the Government being overthrown and Senators do not want to go and some want to stay and the President and Prime Minister intervening, all that has to do with competition for power in Tobago. The political consequence is in terms of the way the politics of Trinidad and Tobago is organized and the two seats.

Mr. Speaker, I have often heard, very often in this very House here, that it is because of Tobago that this Government is in power, and because of that, I do not know, some of the consequences might be that every demand must be met. I am not dealing with those political consequences or whatever bargaining or demands that people can make, but I am dealing with what is the reality. So, it is not true from my knowledge that the Government is neglecting Tobago. I will go into some of the things to demonstrate that this is not true.

With respect to the Hilton project and all these claims that are made that there is going to be a dirth of water—drought; people are going to be dying from thirst; tourists cannot bathe; and all these kinds of things. There is a lot of work in process now to deal with that. I have written countless memoranda, handwritten notes and raised the issues in Cabinet. I would say that at this point in time I am satisfied that all those efforts and instigation—including those from the Member for Tobago West—are bearing fruit. Acton is being taken concerning the water. I will not be surprised if within the next three or four months the people in Tobago do not have more water than they need. *[Laughter]* *[Interruption]* I would be surprised.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to touch on some of the things that they are talking about. The question of the stadium, the stadia rather and the \$23 million that was apparently withdrawn. Everyone in this Chamber has some experience in government and most of them or I say all of them have more experience than myself. I have said it before that Opposition politics is irresponsible politics and this is not something peculiar to this Parliament. When you are in Opposition you do not have to run anything; you are not responsible for anything; except if it is to make the Government look bad. That is what the world is like.

**Mr. Manning:** That is your concept.

**Dr. The Hon. M. Job:** So when you are in Opposition you can say anything, you are not responsible. So, therefore, you are not responsible for managing the money of this country; you are not responsible for the consequences of any decisions with respect to reallocation of funds. If you are the person responsible and you put \$23 million to build a stadium in Tobago and your priorities have been reorganized you are supposed to leave it there and build a hospital or school in Tobago. This is not to say that we are neglecting Tobago. All these things are being done. I think that the statement concerning the removal of \$23 million as though it is some kind of punishment or some pernicious action dedicated to some callous disregard of Tobago's needs that is nothing but untruth.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the library, indeed the Government is aware that the library needs to be fixed and Tobagonians need a library. I have discussed the matter with the Budget Director; I have discussed the matter with the Ministry of Finance; and the Government has every intention to allocate the required \$10 million in next year's budget to fix that place. It is the case where the engineers and the architects are saying you cannot do the work piecemeal. I think \$1.27 million was allocated in the last budget but the way the thing comes out, you cannot spend \$1.27 million, you might even get the work done worst. It might or should I say injure the integrity of the structure if the Government tries to do it in a piecemeal manner. So you either have to do it or not and that is the situation with that. Again, I do think it is unfair, without knowledge of the facts, to state that the Government is careless of Tobago's interest.

Mr. Speaker, when I came into the Ministry I knew that the Permanent Secretary had inert discussions with the Tobago House of Assembly and it had the matter of the ferry as one of the items on the agenda and caused to be put on the estimates of the Tobago House of Assembly \$150 million for a new ferry. The Government is at a point where two weeks ago, I think it was or last week—

**Mr. G. Singh:** Two weeks.

**Dr. The Hon. M. Job:** Two weeks ago advertisements were placed in the newspapers and that is because of the consequence of a process that is in place to ensure that when the Panorama goes to dry dock there will be a ferry on the ramp and that, indeed, the arrangements that the Government has in place are such that it might use the initial lease rental fee as a down payment on eventual purchase of the ferry. So there is no question that that matter is being taken care of.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to education, we are hearing that the Mason Hall school has not been built and this is because of a deliberate abdication of responsibility on the part of the Central Government concerning education in Tobago. Nothing could be further from the truth. As I stand here speaking to you, I signed letters, just last week, to set up a Commission of Inquiry into the bad state of education in Tobago and I say that deliberately because it is a manifestation of the truth. There is education and what is going on in the secondary school has a firm basis on what goes on in the primary school.

**7.20 p.m.**

The Cabinet of this country, on my instigation, had decided—even if the problem might be pervasive throughout the country, the situation in Tobago, I thought, required immediate attention, so I brought a note to Cabinet concerning the issue where at Roxborough, for example, they sent up 78 children to do CXC last year. They spent five years in a high school and only one of them passed mathematics. They told me that the years before were not much better. Parents were talking to me. They are saying that the teachers do not come to school. The children are not getting good management. They tell me that in Scarborough Secondary School, it is better but not much better.

In Tobago, one cannot be focussing one's mind on all these other physical infrastructure which, indeed, the people need, and the most important architecture and infrastructure for development is being abandoned to waste and neglect. This is part of the reason there is no development in many countries. I have been listening in this place for three years and I cannot understand why many politicians and people in the media cannot get a hold of this important and fundamental fact, that the prosperity of a nation, the prosperity of a people and the prosperity of an individual has very little to do with physical infrastructure. It has to do with the architecture of the mind; their culture and their ideas, what they like to call these days “Truman capital”.

If they say this Government is abandoning Tobago and they have set up a commission of inquiry, not to inquire, but to tell the Government what must be done immediately to reverse, to remedy, to improve on that situation, does that, Mr. Speaker, suggest to your mind that this Government does not care about Tobago? Is that a reasonable and logical conclusion to come to, gentlemen? That is going on.

They, by their own admission—I heard the Member for Tobago West asking and arguing about why we should put \$2.5 million to start the process of building a skills training centre in Tobago. Mr. Speaker, there is a thing in this country called a Constitution. I have read it and I still read it and study it. I gain great insights into wisdom by doing that. In section 75(1) of the Constitution it says that there shall be a Government here responsible for running this country and accountable to Parliament. I did not write it.

The Cabinet of this country makes a decision to improve the educational infrastructure for people who are not in school and require skills. We know, as a matter of fact, that most of the technical and skills people in the projects in Tobago, like the Hilton project, are not Tobagonians. This is not a case to say that after we build all these mega projects we would not need skilled people. That is not the case. They would need repair people, maintenance people, and in the future there will be projects. We have to make provision for that. Tobago people cannot tolerate a situation where throughout the foreseeable future they would have to depend on their children either being untrained or sending them to Trinidad to be trained.

If a Government is allocating funds—and already we have designs, we have a process in place, hopefully that centre should go into construction within the next month or two—that does not say that the Government is abandoning Tobago. The question of the hospital. Few people understand that the reason the hospital has not yet been built has to do with those altercations, those difficulties we have of implementing the Tobago House of Assembly Act in terms of differences in interpretation with respect to the degree of sovereignty and autonomy; what devolution means in terms of Tobago.

It is not a question of the Government deliberately, out of some kind of mischief or malevolence, deciding that a hospital must not be built in Tobago. The architectural drawings are now being done, and that will be done. Almost all of the issues, I can say, Mr. Speaker, that just two weeks ago the Cabinet did agree on a process to ensure that the place called “Big Hole” will be fixed. I got word from my Permanent Secretary this afternoon, I have a note somewhere here, where I said that if I did not hear what is to be done about it by this evening, I would cause another Cabinet note to be done, so that the job would be given out to a contractor so it can be done; if it is that altercations between the THA and the Central Government are holding it up.

On all the matters there are substantial explanations that will deflect the judgment from the allegation that the Government has abandoned Tobago, does not care about Tobago, and has neglected Tobago. Mr. Speaker, the question raised concerning the retirement of debt is an issue I did say the Member for Diego Martin Central raised. Indeed, it is a sensible observation that requires attention.

Indeed, I did speak to the Budget Director, the technical people, about that, and they say they are not in possession of the facts with respect to the cost for negotiating these arrangements, but that the annual savings are in the order of nearly \$40 million. We would not have to pay anything for those things, so even if the initial savings this year will have a cost to them which might reduce what seems to be savings this year—we say, gross savings this year minus whatever we paid in terms of fees—that is okay, but we cannot say that we need to spend that kind of money next year. So, indeed, there will be savings to the people of Trinidad and Tobago as a result of retiring those debts.

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the Member is aware of the concept of present value. If he is, could he give us an indication concerning the savings in terms of present value?

**Dr. The Hon. M. Job:** Mr. Speaker, present value has to do with getting appropriate interest rates, a revenue stream, a cost stream and going into the future. I could lecture him on that, but I do not know if that is a serious question. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move. *[Desk thumping]*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Report adopted.*

**FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION)  
(1999/2000) BILL**

**The Minister of Tobago Affairs and Acting Minister of Finance, Planning and Development (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum of the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 1999/2000, be now read a second time.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

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

*Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.*

**DANGEROUS DOGS BILL, 2000  
(Senate Amendments)**

**The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion in my name:

*Be it resolved* that the Senate amendments to the Dangerous Dogs Bill, 2000 listed in Appendix I be now considered.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Senate amendments read as follows:*

- 3                    In the definition of “dangerous dogs” insert after the word “dog” the words “or a bitch”.
- 5A                   Delete subclause (2) and substitute the following:  
                          “(2) In order to ensure compliance with this Act the Ministry may require an authorized veterinary surgeon to certify promptly in writing the type of a dog”.
- 6                    In subclause (4)(c) insert between the words “is” and “neutered” the words “spayed or”.
- 13                   Insert after the word “premises” in subclause (1A) the words “whether indoors or outdoors”.
  - A. Substitute for renumbered subclause (6) the following:  
 “ (6) Except for the purpose of complying with section 5(1) and where a veterinary surgeon certifies in writing that the treatment cannot be administered in any place other than at the office of the veterinary surgeon where it becomes necessary for a dangerous dog to receive veterinary or other attention such attention shall be administered in the private premises of the owner of the dog unless a veterinary surgeon certifies in writing that the attention cannot be administered other than at the office of a veterinary surgeon.
  - B. Delete subclause 13A (1) and substitute the following:  
 “Transportation of    13A (1)An owner or keeper of a  
 dangerous dog           dangerous dog who:
    - (a) Is fulfilling the require-  
 ments of section 5(1) or

- (b) desires to change his place of residence and wishes to take his dog with him or
  - (c) transports the dog pursuant to section 13(6),
- shall ensure that the dog is –
- (d) securely fitted with a muzzle sufficient to prevent it from biting any person;
  - (e) securely held on a lead by a person who is not less than eighteen years old and who is capable of controlling the dog.

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

Mr. Speaker, very briefly, the amendment to clause 5A is an amendment which will give the Ministry the authority to ask a veterinary surgeon to certify in writing, from any place, the type of dog, and clause 6 is to include not only when a dog is being neutered, but to be on the safe side, when it is being spayed, because of the sex of the dog.

Clause 13 is to cover the situation where we wanted to ensure that in condominiums or places like that, one would not be able to have dangerous dogs. Also to cover cases in which the medical attention for the dog cannot be done at the residence of the owner and in those circumstances, with an appropriate certificate, it can be done at the vet's place. In the transportation of the dog, clause 13A will have to be complied with. As Members would notice, although there is a Schedule, there was an error, so that is not before this honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

**7.35 p.m.**

*Question proposed.*

**Mr. Imbert:** Not the schedule?

**Mr. Maharaj:** Not the schedule. Am I not correct, Sir? We made it quite clear that it is not the schedule. There was an error. I beg to move.

*Dangerous Dogs Bill, 2000*

*Friday, June 9, 2000*

*Question put.*

**Mr. Maharaj:** Mr. Speaker, in light of the fact that the Bill requires a specified majority, can I ask for a division on the amendments?

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes.

*The House voted: Ayes 31*

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.

Maraj, Hon. R.

Rafeeq, Dr. The Hon. H.

Assam, Hon. M.

Job, Dr. The Hon. M.

Khan, Dr. F.

Singh, Hon. G.

Nanan, Dr. The Hon. A.

Mohammed, Dr. The Hon. R.

Singh, Hon. D.

Ramsaran, Hon. M.

Sharma, C.

Ali, R.

Valley, K.

Manning, P.

Rowley, Dr. K.



*Dangerous Dogs Bill, 2000*

*Friday, June 9, 2000*

Imbert, C.

Narine, J.

Hart, E.

James, Mrs. E.

Bereaux, H.

Sinanan, B.

Boynes, R.

Hinds, F.

Williams, E.

Nicholson, Miss P.

*Question agreed to.*

**SEXUAL OFFENCES (AMDT.) BILL**  
**Senate Amendment**

**The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion in my name:

*Be it resolved* that the Senate amendment to the House of Representatives amendments to the Sexual Offences (Amdt.) Bill, 2000 listed in Appendix II be now considered.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 18.*

*Senate amendment read as follows:*

- 18 A. Delete the words “she”, “her” and “herself” wherever occurring and substitute therefor the words “he”, “him” and “himself” respectively.
- B. Insert after proposed section 31D the following new section:  
31E. The Court may allow a minor, who is appearing in a matter before it, to be barred from the view of the accused.

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

The amendment to 18, A: there was an error in that it mentioned “she”, “her” and “herself” and under the Interpretation Act, whenever “he”, “him” and “himself” are mentioned, it means “her”, so that amendment was to cover the situation to put the masculine to refer to the masculine and the feminine.

In respect of B, this is a new clause and it was suggested in the Senate that we should give the court the discretion that when a minor is giving evidence, the court would have the power to put a screen so that the accused would be able to see the minor, but the minor would not be able to see the accused. This is done in other countries. It was done recently in the United Kingdom and it was suggested in the Senate—both the Opposition and the Independent Senators wanted it—and the Government agreed to the suggestion. I beg to move.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj):** Mr. Speaker, the Government would not proceed with the other item it indicated it would have done today.

I beg to move, and I informed the Opposition Chief Whip that I will be moving the House to be adjourned to July 7, 2000 at 1.30 p.m. That day will be Private Members’ Day because the Private Members’ Day in the month of June would, obviously, by the adjournment, not be given, so on July 7, it would be Private Members’ Day. I indicated to the Opposition Chief Whip that we will also sit on July 10, 13 and 14 which is the Monday, Thursday and Friday of the next week, in order to do some of the matters.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, before we deal with the Motion for the Adjournment, I had given leave to the Member for Diego Martin East to raise a matter on the adverse effects on the country’s image as a result of the apparent irregularities in the process of evaluation by the Government of tenders for the supply of cellular telephone services. The Member for Diego Martin East.

**Mr. Colm Imbert** (*Diego Martin East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Ganga Singh):** Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the hon. Member would give way?

*Adjournment*

*Friday, June 9, 2000*

Mr. Speaker, you would recall that we were prepared to answer this Motion on the last occasion. I want to inform the honourable House that this matter is now *sub judice*. There is a High Court action in which an injunction has been granted a conservatory order—

**Mr. C. Imbert:** On what?

**Hon. G. Singh:**—and a judicial review with respect to the evaluation and the grant of these licences.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Do you have the order here?

**Mr. Maharaj:** Mr. Speaker, if there is any dispute, may I mention that there are, in effect, proceedings filed in this matter. I think I should mention it because there are proceedings in that there is a conservatory order and the matter is fixed to go on.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Mr. Speaker, it is all very well for the Government to say that, but what is the nature of the conservatory order? How can they tell me that it is the same matter which I intend to raise here?

**Mr. Maharaj:** Well, if you want, I will produce it.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** I think the Government has something to hide, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Okay. This is not the sort of issue that arises every day, but the position is that one ought never to indicate that a matter is *sub judice* unless a matter in court is likely to be prejudiced by things that may be said and the learning is, it is not merely because a matter is in court why a matter cannot proceed in the Parliament. Now, that is the learning.

Now, quite clearly, I do not have the facts before me on either matter, but if the Attorney General, who is the advisor to the Government, gives this House the assurance that matters are so poised that issues which may come out on this matter may have an adverse effect, as I say, I do not have to accept what he says but a Speaker in his right mind, I think, would be inclined to accept it.

On the face of it, notwithstanding the way the Member feels about the issue, because it is a matter that was filed and has been re-filed and filed again, I think that I would err on the side of caution. In the circumstances, I, personally, would prefer to defer this matter in the light of the issue that has been raised.

*Adjournment*  
[MR. SPEAKER]

*Friday, June 9, 2000*

I am quite prepared, if the Member comes to my Chambers and persuades me that there could not possibly be anything so innocent that it could not possibly affect things, to reconsider things, but I certainly think that faced with it today and it being said to be *sub judice* in the wisdom of the Attorney General to say that, I think I will, in the circumstances, suggest that this matter be deferred. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Maharaj:** What I will undertake to do is, I will send to the hon. Member, as a matter of courtesy, a copy of the proceedings and a copy of the order.

**Mr. C. Imbert:** Could I also ask the Attorney General to advise me when this matter will be heard? Because this is something the Parliament needs to debate.

**Mr. Maharaj:** I do not have the exact date, but I think it is next week.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 7.47 p.m.*