

*Leave of Absence*

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

*Friday, September 1, 2000*

The House met at 10.30 a.m.

**PRAYERS**

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I wish to advise that I have received communication from the hon. Attorney General who has asked to be excused from today's sitting. The leave of absence which he seeks has been granted.

**PATENTS (AMDT.) BILL**

Bill to amend the Patents Act, 1996, brought from the Senate, [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

**BAILIFFS BILL**

Bill to provide for licensing of bailiffs and for other related matters, brought from the Senate, [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

**APPROPRIATION BILL  
(BUDGET)**

[Second Day]

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question* [August 28, 2000]:

*That the Bill be now read a second time.*

*Question again proposed.*

**Mr. Patrick Manning** (*San Fernando East*): [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate the landmark of our 38th anniversary as a proud independent nation on the dawn of the new millennium, it is indeed a signal honour and privilege to be afforded the opportunity to stand here once again in defence of the people's interest. On Monday last we all assembled here to receive from the Minister of Finance what we hoped would have been a true and clear picture of the nation's finances, as well as accurate budgetary estimates for the fiscal year ahead. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, we were grossly disappointed on every count. Instead, we were treated to a third-rate, self-serving, political campaign speech in which the Minister of Finance confessed that, and I quote:

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. MANNING]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

“This budget is not a radical departure from my previous ones.”

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, he has learned nothing from the past. Indeed, this is the only statement in his entire presentation that can be safely considered not to be open to challenge.

On closer examination, however, rather than a proper budget statement we have been treated to insipid vapidness and irresponsible campaign rhetoric that has been characterized by the following features: total absence of any reference to policy on anything; crude bookkeeping and a total absence of accountability; numerous false claims; a profusion of conflicting data; deliberate distortions of established facts; hidden items; deliberate non-disclosure of important information; studious avoidance of any reference to last year’s measures and commitments; outright falsehoods and misleading statements and voluminous doses of self-praise, seeking to take credit for many achievements which have nothing to do with his performance or any initiative of his Government.

Instead of advising and enlightening the population on the real state of our affairs, so that there can be some confidence that we are properly identifying and effectively addressing the many pressing problems of our people, the Minister chose secrecy and sleight-of-hand over openness and truthfulness. In short, Mr. Speaker, he refused to come clean. But then, why should we be surprised? Since 1996, bitter experience has taught us that coming clean is not an attribute that one can ever associate with this Government. [*Desk thumping*] This Minister of Finance preferred to hide information from the public and hope that they never find out the real story. Why would he want to do that, Mr. Speaker? Because he hopes he can hoodwink the long-suffering citizens of this country with his foolish and hollow claim that we are far better off today than we were in 1995—foolish and hollow. Totally incorrect, Mr. Speaker.

I have absolutely no doubt that the Minister of Finance and a few selected friends and cronies of the Government are far better off today than they were five years ago, and we can see it. [*Desk thumping*] However, to attempt to wish away the plight and concerns of the vast majority of citizens, the raging national crises in many areas such as health and education, the frightening spectre of the crime wave, the total demoralization and imminent collapse of the public service, the teaching service, the rest of the wider middle class and the abandonment of Tobago is positively insulting, Mr. Speaker.

This Minister of Finance has now gained the dubious distinction of being the first Finance Minister in this country to have had unplanned budget deficits in

each of his five years in office. Notwithstanding this—for emphasis I had better repeat it, Mr. Speaker—unplanned budget deficits for each of his five years in office. That is going to be the legacy of my good friend, the hon. Minister of Finance; [*Desk thumping*] and all of that notwithstanding the solid foundation which he inherited. That foundation included economic growth since 1994, largely favourable oil prices for most of the period and a good stock of foreign investment which he met on the table. He has run the country on overdraft for every single year. [*Desk thumping*]

As it is with a dishonest accountant in a prosperous business, this country would do well to understand that it is dangerous to have a Minister of Finance whose creed is that numbers do not matter. Truth is an inconvenience and the public can be bought. Those are the mantras to which he sings, Mr. Speaker. This is a dangerous proposition that spells doom for the country. If we simply take comfort in what he says, we are likely to wake up one morning and find that the whole shaky edifice has come crashing down. Like a businessman with a dishonest accountant, we would then be left to ask, “What happened; when? We were doing so well! How did this happen? How could this have happened?” That is what we would be left with. Just like that businessman, we are left to ponder these erroneous claims and left to think of what might have been if things had gone the way that they were supposed to. In the end, the person responsible for such deceit is much better off and goes to a greener pasture while the businessman has to pick up a bankrupt system that he left behind.

After all the rhetoric and grandstanding of the Minister’s 50-page presentation, most casually, Mr. Speaker, we are informed that the reality of fiscal 2000 is a deficit of \$280 million. Substantially, this is different from the surplus of \$84 million that he anticipated when he delivered the budget for fiscal 2000. We must remember that the promise of an \$84 million surplus was projected on an oil price of \$16 per barrel. We were fortunate and we got almost \$30 per barrel; yet he reports a deficit of \$280 million. [*Desk thumping*] Clearly, Mr. Speaker, something has gone quite wrong. We were only saved from disaster by the fortuitous high oil price which, incidentally, is the only thing that the Minister and his gang have not taken credit for as yet and there is time yet for them to try that.

The stark reality is—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** I would prefer if the hon. Member does not refer to Members of the House as a gang; please.

**Mr. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, I was not referring to Members of the House.

**Mr. Speaker:** It is open to different interpretations. Please, let us not.

**Mr. P. Manning:** The stark reality, Mr. Speaker, is that while our economic fundamentals remain strong and the world economy and international oil prices have been quite favourable, the Government has been frittering away the opportunity to transform the society through the prudent use of the inheritance bequeathed to the nation by the PNM. The only groups which seem secure and confident under this regime are its friends and political investors who participate in a series of get-rich-quick schemes and sweetheart projects.

We need to take a closer look at this Minister's financial track record if we are to appreciate the gravity of what has happened to us, and how he has represented these facts. Fiscal 1996—a planned budget surplus of \$16.1 million evaporates into a deficit of \$208.6 million. Fiscal 1997—the Minister budgeted for a surplus of \$213.5 million which vanished into thin air. The result was a deficit of \$636.1 million. Incidentally, he denied this state of affairs for almost one year until the review documents were printed finally and it was there for all to see. Fiscal 1998—no change in the shortened fiscal year 1998. The trumpeted budgeted fiscal surplus of \$297.2 million that was trampled all over the country was surreptitiously converted by the Minister into a deficit of \$178 million. Fiscal 1998/1999—a surplus of \$373.9 million budgeted; actual out-turn, a deficit of \$106.8 million—every year for five years, Mr. Speaker.

Not surprisingly, we began to see the sour fruits of his poor fiscal management. The capital expenditure programme for 1998/1999 was slashed from \$781.7 million to \$479.7 million, making nonsense of the budgeting process. According to the Minister, the real jobs that should have been created by the implementation of the capital programme were not really lost, they were simply replaced by URP 10-day stints, leaving the Government free to make questionable claims about dramatic declines in unemployment. This is the only Government that has found the secret to cutting the capital programme by almost 50 per cent and creating increased employment opportunities while doing so. We can believe that foolishness, Mr. Speaker, to our peril.

In the face of a record like this, should we be surprised at the news that the planned surplus of \$84 million for fiscal 1999/2000 in reality turns out to be a deficit of \$280 million; especially when the Government found \$69 million to pay their friends for a portfolio of lapsed insurance policies and the cost of 10 small secondary schools being built increased from \$138 million to \$183 million to \$245 million to \$348 million, Mr. Speaker, all in the space of 15 months—from \$138 million to \$348 million?

**10.45 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, \$29.5 million has to be found to pay for an alleged inconvenience caused to a party financier as a result of the Government's Deyalsingh Commission investigation into corruption in the Piarco Airport contract. That the Attorney General ruled that the so-called contract was null and void and that Justice Deyalsingh recommended its termination, having found that there was collusion in the award, was of no consequence to this Minister and his government. His day job is to instruct them to pay.

Contracts for road works are handed out willy-nilly to friends and investors without proper tenders and at inflated prices. Listen to this comment from the World Bank:

“There is growing demand within the country for better governance through improvements in the judicial procurement and financial management processes...issues such as improving the transparency in public contracts and public accountability and improving procurement practices to international standards...are being addressed.”

Meaning, Mr. Speaker, “need to be addressed”. That is the World Bank’s statement. *[Laughter]* I repeat, what the World Bank was, in fact, saying is that there was growing demand for better governance. *[Desk thumping]* Quite frankly, we just cannot go on this way. *[Desk thumping]*

That our economy is sound basically is no wonder to us. We are now in the seventh year of steady economic growth, inflation is manageable and unemployment is on the wane. Much of this is due to the fact that the enabling environment was established by successive governments between 1983—1995, especially the government of 1991—1995. *[Desk thumping]*

For those who wish to scoff, it must be remembered that after 11 years of decline and hardship, economic growth returned to this country in late 1993. *[Desk thumping]* Ever since then, the foundation that was laid has enabled the continuation of such growth, so there are no surprises here for us.

The people of this country experienced and shared a lot of pain and sacrifice to achieve the goal of returning economic growth to our country. Those who had a vision for prosperity exhibited a lot of effort and commitment in the 1980s and early 1990s. This welcome phenomenon of economic growth has less to do with this Minister of Finance and his government than with all the others over the last 15 years, therefore, he should cool it, Mr. Speaker, with the self-praise and the false claims. *[Desk thumping]*

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. MANNING]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

The country is concerned about the wanton waste and gross mismanagement of our prosperity by this Government. The Government's record of poor financial management threatens to undermine all the sacrifices and good work that went before. After five years of this regime, we are in grave danger of losing the possibility of real achievable promise of the future that our overall economic potential suggests.

It would be a great shame and a devastating blow to the vast majority of our citizens who kept the faith and demonstrated their patience, and who are so close, only to see their prospect of a better life snatched away by the uncaring actions of a destructive government which believes it is accountable to no one.

Mr. Speaker, the economic fundamentals we established and the confidence we created in the economy are being undermined by the callous and capricious manner in which this Government is spending taxpayers' hard earned money. The sluggish behaviour exhibited by the stock market since the beginning of this year is a warning sign of the grim output for the economy in the eyes of our investors.

In the face of hard facts, the utterances of the Minister of Finance count for very little. Our businessmen listen to the fairy tales of the Minister, but they know that they cannot get foreign exchange at the banks. They have a true picture of how many job positions they have filled. They know the difference between the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) and real job creation. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, when the Minister boasts of doubling the foreign reserves, he also has a responsibility to explain why there are increasing delays in obtaining foreign currency. It does not square at all.

What you may not know, Mr. Speaker, is that while he comes to the Parliament with his half truths and innuendoes, he can do no such thing when he talks to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Listen to the Minister of Finance as he informs the IMF of the reason for the increase in the reserves that he holds up to us as a mark of his good stewardship. This quote is taken from a March 16, 2000 letter to the Managing Director of the IMF—the letter that we call the Article Four Consultation letter. This letter is signed by the Minister of Finance and the Governor of the Central Bank. I want members of the Cabinet to listen very carefully, because they may not be aware of some of these things. It reads as follows:

“The recent increase in oil prices and a US \$230 million September 1999 Euro-bond issue contributed importantly to an overall balance of payments surplus of about US \$160 million in 1999, raising gross official international reserves to about US \$945 million by year end.”

In other words, Mr. Speaker, the balance of payments would have been US \$70 million in deficit in 1999, had it not been for this borrowing. That is the stark reality of this thing. *[Desk thumping]* Borrow money, high oil price, tap on the shoulder.

Secondly and more importantly, the increase in the reserves has absolutely nothing to do with policy initiatives of this Government. It has everything to do with high oil prices and foreign borrowings, with which the next PNM government will be saddled. We faced that before. They are laying a bed of thorns for the next government, which they know will not be them. *[Desk thumping]* To state it another way, they borrowed money abroad, brought it home and christened it “savings”. *[Laughter]* That, in our eyes, is the essence of deception.

Apart from the Minister of Finance, I can guarantee you that there is nobody else in Trinidad and Tobago who goes to a bank, pays to borrow money, puts that money in another bank and calls it savings. Nobody else does that, but my good friend, the hon. Minister of Finance. It is this kind of financial oddity which causes him to have difficulty in reporting the true state of the public debt. Indeed, it is only this kind of distorted logic that can allow the Minister to boast about having reduced the public debt in the following language. Listen to the Minister of Finance talking:

“As for our country's debt, this is down significantly over the past five years.”

I want to repeat that statement, “As for our country's debt, this is down significantly over the past five years”. Mr. Speaker, what he needs to explain to this honourable House and to the national community is why the public debt now stands at \$30 billion, when in 1995 it was \$18.8 billion. *[Desk thumping]* Strangers to the truth, and for no reason on an issue that is easy to check. Why, Mr. Speaker, God alone knows—sorry, the Minister alone, because I do not even know if God knows.

Moreover, when the Minister boasts of saving a portion of the revenue earned by the state, he needs to explain to the man on the street why there is an \$11 billion increase in the public debt. Mr. Speaker, \$5 billion of that \$11 billion was incurred in the last 12 months alone! An election year! Imagine, \$5 billion in debt in one election year. That is the reality. The Minister talks about fiscal prudence and fiscal management. That is how it manifests itself; \$5 billion in borrowings in an election year.

In 1992, when the country was still experiencing negative economic growth, central government debt service was \$2.3 billion; \$2,300 million. This increased

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. MANNING]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

to \$2.75 billion by 1995 or by an average annual rate of 6.2 per cent. Mr. Speaker, would you believe that the debt service for 2000 is TT \$4,900 million? Moneys we could have taken to build roads, hospitals and schools. We now have to appropriate it to debt service because of the profligate spending of the Minister of Finance. This is an average annual increase of 12.4 per cent, much higher than the rate of inflation and during a period of strong economic growth. Twice as fast as it increased in our time. They want to compare? Let us compare. [*Desk thumping*]

As an aside, Mr. Speaker, when the Minister boasts of the investment rating that Trinidad and Tobago was awarded, he owes a duty to explain to the population why, given this rating, this bond issue was priced much higher than similar grade issues which were marketed around the same time as this bond issue. Do you hear the message, Mr. Speaker? An overpricing. In fact, we made a calculation as to how much money was involved. The question is this: Who benefited from the overpricing? Not the people of Trinidad and Tobago!

The 1999/2000 budget has resulted in a deficit of \$280 million. He borrowed \$5 billion during that time, yet he is reporting savings. Obviously the Minister lives in a world where up is down and down is up; where an increase is a decrease and increased borrowings are considered savings. That is the world in which the honourable Minister lives. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, while too late to turn back now, maybe the frenzied and gluttonous appeal of his friends and party financiers, the voices of the people in the streets, in their homes, in their offices, on the highways and byways are in unison in the cry, "We just cannot go on this way!" [*Desk thumping*]

When the Minister praises the continued growth in the economy, declining unemployment, the increasing reserves, the falling inflation rates and the foreign investment flows, it would be helpful if he could spell out the specific initiatives taken by his Government which accounts for these results. What did they do to lead to the results of which he boasts? It is my contention that the economy is on autopilot. The only thing we can thank that administration for is that they have left well alone, although they have been plundering the fruits of their predecessors' efforts. Thank God they did not interfere with those fundamentals, otherwise we would be in more trouble.

We cannot go on this way forever. Sooner, rather than later, the economy will run out of momentum and would plummet right back to where we were prior to the attainment of economic prosperity in the mid-1990s. Mr. Speaker, non-oil tax collections are falling, non-productive expenditure is increasing. What happens



when the oil price returns to normal levels, as it is bound to do? What happens then? How will we bridge the gap?

Mr. Speaker, what would have been the country's position if oil prices had not come in at the \$28 per barrel that we received? Suppose we had received only the \$16 which the Minister projected? He would have been reporting devastating news. Indeed, disaster was only averted by external factors and, therefore, he cannot come here and insult us with his deception when our business is in real danger of falling apart as a result of his financial recklessness.

**11.00 a.m.**

Other Ministers of Finance can point to specific policy initiatives and interventions along the way. They consist of:—

- the structural adjustment programme;
- the liberalization of the trade and foreign exchange regimes;
- the rationalization of the state enterprises sector;
- the correction of the imbalances in the fiscal and balance of payments account;
- the provision of the enabling environment for the in-flow of foreign investment;
- the reform of the tax system and tax structure;
- the reform of the customs;
- the provision of special incentives to boost construction and create jobs;
- the provision of fiscal incentives to fuel the growth of the hotel industry in Tobago; and
- the diversification of the economy.

All these measures preceded the advent of this tinkerer and his ill-starred administration. It happened long before they showed up on the scene.

By 1994, the economy was already responding well to these initiatives. This is how things looked.

In 1994, the economy recorded a fiscal surplus for the first time since 1981. There was also a surplus in 1995. Sustainability was on its way until this accidental coalition of the naive and profligate. The fiscal position has weakened since 1996. There have been deficits every year since. Both the current account and the overall balance of payments were in surplus. How things have changed.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. MANNING]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

In 1999, the current account is in deficit in spite of high oil prices. The overall balance of payments recorded a surplus because of the US \$230 million foreign borrowing, hurriedly made in the last month of the fiscal year. Quite clearly, Mr. Speaker, we just cannot go on this way. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, while the Minister seeks to impress the Parliament with his claims that foreign investment has doubled, he laments to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that foreign direct investment is "tailing off". I have to repeat it because I do not know if the Prime Minister heard that.

While the Minister seeks to impress the Parliament with his claims that foreign investment has doubled, he laments to the IMF—to whom he cannot lie because they know how to find him out—that foreign direct investment is "tailing off"—"tailing off" in quotation marks. Those are the actual words of the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development.

Why is foreign investment tailing off? Where are the initiatives undertaken by this administration, Mr. Speaker, to maintain the pipeline of foreign investments? Where are the initiatives to move our economy to the next level of growth?

Today, almost five years after taking office, this administration is now planning to test some form of national health insurance next year, when all the preliminary work for such a programme was completed by my administration way back in 1995. They want to test something next year. While the Minister continues to play trick or treat with old-age pensioners, he is here to deal with the whole issue of pension reform.

In last year's budget, the critical ingredient of pension portability formed a major pillar of his edifice of promises. We have seen no action and we have not had one word on the matter. It is as though things never existed and were never raised. Such is the style of this Minister—if you do not do it, forget about it. They would not notice and, if they happen to notice, just tell them anything that sounds good. That is the philosophy of the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development.

While \$100 extra at the end of the month is a welcome sight to any old-age pensioner, it pales into insignificance when one compares that to those lucky persons who are made liquid by receipt of \$29 million on a contract that is null and void.

The Government is finishing its term of office but has it implemented the promises it has made? Where is the comprehensive investment code which was supposed to set out clear guidelines to all investors, which we were promised in 1999? On the revenue side, a major initiative of last year's budget was something

called the National Enterprises Limited (NEL). A specific time frame was given for its implementation. We should be grateful he did not mention that one, but only to say, it was not done, therefore, the revenue side of the last budget suffered a \$700 million shortfall as a result. Just like that—\$700 million. No big thing. That is the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development.

Mr. Speaker, is this Government for real? Do these people understand governmental responsibility? Do they understand that their behaviour impacts on the very lives of children and parents, employed and unemployed, every day of the year? Again, where are the mutual fund legislation, the competition policy, the comprehensive drainage programme and the amendment to the venture capital incentive programme that was promised in 1997? They promised that in 1997. Three years later, nothing doing. "Nahi", Mr. Speaker, nothing.

**Mr. Valley:** "Coulda"; "woulda"; "shoulda".

**Mr. P. Manning:** Farmers are now being asked to make do with something called a Flood Relief Disaster Plan. The only problem is that to benefit from it, you must first have a disaster. Thus has the administration offered a new approach which passes for policy. We do not implement flood control; we just put aside money to pay for flood relief when the annual flood disasters strike. The amazing thing about this non-initiative is that there are victims who are prepared to hail this farce without asking the serious questions that need to be asked.

Six years ago, before these managers began to run our affairs, this country was engaged in finalizing a major national drainage programme loan of \$450 million with the World Bank. For reasons known only to this Government, this particular loan initiative has not been pursued and nothing significant has been substituted in its place after five years. All we have seen is that money was spent before the fund was established and far less money has been allocated for 2001 than for the previous years. This tells us that they do not know what they are doing. They have no plan. They are only "vupping", but one thing is consistent, once money is involved, the lack of transparency and accountability are lurking nearby, the trademark, the hallmark, the signature of the Government.

For those who find this level of ineffectiveness and outright incompetence hard to believe, I invite you to reflect for just one moment on the absolutely disgraceful way that the Government has treated with the \$130 million repairs to the Solomon Hochoy Highway. This aborted project is testimony of the incompetence of this Government. In this case, funding was available largely from the European Union grant. All the Government had to do was to follow

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. MANNING]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

established procedures and implement the project. Instead, what we have is the manipulation of the tender process; the use of sub-standard material; re-excavation to replace materials; inexplicable null inactivity; belated firing of the contractor; false promises by the Minister of Works and Transport and the eventual abandonment of the project.

After three years of frustration for north/south travellers—and I am one of them—the highway is now far worse than when the renovation works began and is now officially declared the most dangerous road/highway in this country. Inexplicably, the Minister of Works and Transport, who is responsible directly for this monumental blunder, believes that this waste of people's money is worthy of reward from the very people of San Fernando, whom he has forced to suffer unnecessarily in this way and is seeking their franchise. But, we will deal with that then.

I turn now to highlights of the Government's initiatives, 1996—2000. One thing that the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development cannot be accused of is a lack of understanding of the political value of praise and commendation. When, in response to the initiatives of the Panday Administration, they are not forthcoming from the population, he is not averse to leading the cheers himself, hoping to jump-start a chorus. Those of us who are charged with the responsibility of being watchdogs of the public interest, understand his dilemma. With a record like theirs, they are prepared to disown their initiatives and resort to the kind of word games and deception in which the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development chooses to engage, especially on this occasion.

Many of the disturbing financial budgetary details which have been glossed over or simply ignored in the presentation of the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development have their genesis in some well-known horrendous initiatives of this administration. Now that the chickens are coming home to roost in the form of astronomical unprecedented public debt burden and contingent government liability, it is incumbent upon me to remind the national population how we arrived at this sorry pass.

What were some of this Government's major initiatives that are somehow represented in the financial situation before us today?

First, construction of a new terminal building at Piarco. Prior to this Government coming into office in November, 1995, there was and continues to be widespread support for the idea of a modern terminal building at the Piarco Airport. In fact, they, in Opposition, were among the few voices which were

opposed to the idea of airport construction which, at that time, was scheduled to cost approximately \$400 million of private sector investment capital. Instead, we have been treated to a national grab fest when materials and labour have been deliberately contracted at scandalous rates and prices, resulting in a phenomenal construction cost of \$1,300 million and rising, Mr. Speaker—taxpayers' dollars—and what we have just found out is that it is significantly higher than that, to the extent that moneys from the Airports Authority's revenues have been applied to infrastructural costs in the airport. It is significantly higher than this, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

This is a national disgrace in the face of hardships and wants in many areas of the public administration—a disgrace, if ever there was one. The true nature of this beast, of which the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development was very silent, is to be found buried in the most recent expansion of government contingent liability and guaranteed debt, which rose from \$2.3 billion in 1996 to \$9.1 billion at the end of the third quarter of 2000.

Last week, at a press conference at the Ministry of Works and Transport, this Government sanctioned the deliberate feeding of misinformation to the media by the Chairman of the Airports Authority and other friends of the Government.

In order to make the \$1.3 billion price tag appear palatable, we were told then that when the new terminal comes into operation, it would earn \$200 million per year for the Airports Authority. This means that revenues would have to jump from the current level of \$73 million per year to \$200 million next year, an increase of over 170 per cent.

Notwithstanding how this miracle will be achieved, the question before us here today is this. If the projections are as they are made out to be by the Airports Authority, why then is the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development budgeting to increase the subvention to the authority by over 100 per cent, that is, from \$50 million this year to \$108 million in 2001? This says nothing of the fact that transfers and subsidies to the authority, which stood at \$28 million in 1998 jumped to \$79 million in 1999 and now are budgeted to skyrocket to \$179 million in the year 2001. Explain that.

It is to be noted that \$112 million of this is just to pay next year's interest on money which has been borrowed for the airport terminal construction—interest charges alone of \$112 million for one year. We were going to build that airport for \$400 million using private sector capital; no interest to us.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. MANNING]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

**11.15 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, are you aware that the Minister of Finance borrowed \$1.028 billion to fund the excesses at the Piarco Terminal Project? Now you understand why the Minister has to play comedian in his budget presentation, avoid relevant details, and be as vague as possible. Their initiatives cannot stand the bright light of transparency and accountability. Surely, I agree with the Minister of Finance when he says we have gone too far. However, we just cannot go on like this. *[Desk thumping]*

I now turn to the InnCogen deal, Mr. Speaker. Last year, against all our protestations and pleadings, the Government railroaded T&TEC into excluding PowerGen from the bidding process—again, PowerGen, in which T&TEC has a 51 per cent controlling interest. They selectively contracted with close friends and associates of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Utilities to buy power that we did not need and which could have been supplied by PowerGen. I notice the Minister did not disclaim. The predictable upshot of this is now visible for all to see. After only nine months of InnCogen operations, the carefully selected owners of InnCogen have declared profits of \$84 million for themselves. In the same period, T&TEC has moved from a profitable position to a \$23 million loss as a result of having to meet its contractual obligations to InnCogen—\$84 million profit in nine months for InnCogen, profitable T&TEC moving to \$23 million loss! This is because of their liabilities to InnCogen. This thing is not a joke! Mr. Speaker, this thing has really gone too far. *[Desk thumping]*

Incidentally, the T&TEC losses, which will continue to grow in this way, will not be found in this budget, yet, eventually, they will be paid by the customers of T&TEC: the people of Trinidad and Tobago, in the form of higher electricity rates and charges. It is we who are paying directly for the excesses of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago—corruption.

The only thing that is worse than this is that an identical situation is waiting in ambush for the customers of the Water and Sewerage Authority, as a direct result of the well-thought out actions of this Government—the same Minister involved. That brings us, of course, to the desalination plant. It is the same Minister involved.

Whilst we all agree that there is a need to improve the supply and delivery of an adequate and reliable flow of water to every citizen of this country only this Government, and the carefully selected beneficiaries of the desalination deal, can simultaneously explain the frequent flooding in Chaguanas and environs, and justify the wisdom of buying water from an expensive desalination plant at Point

Lisas next door. They alone could do that. Water for all! In Chaguanas it is water up to your waist, Mr. Speaker, but they go for a desalination plant: the most expensive form of surface water available.

What we do know is that ultimately WASA's contractual obligations to pay these unnecessary costs, coupled with the reduced earnings from its best market: the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, will be reflected as chronic losses at the authority. This situation, which will begin to mature soon after the desalination plant begins its supply, can only be addressed through the injection of more public funds, or increases in consumer water rates or a combination of both. We pay all the time! It is the people who are paying for the excesses of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, every time. *[Desk thumping]*

Miss Universe Beauty Pageant. These are the things that contributed to the financial position of the country being where it is. From a debt of \$18.8 billion in 1995, to a debt of \$30 billion in 2000. These are the things that contributed to the Miss Universe Beauty Pageant. Although we all agree that promoting our country to the world is a laudable objective—we all agree on that—only this bunch of incompetents could have found a way to do so at a cost of \$100 million and have precious little to show for it. Notwithstanding the affectations of the Minister responsible, it is only the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of TIDCO who has been man enough to own up to the fact that the major benefit of this venture is that we have all been branded. However, like the Minister of Finance, he was careful not to say what we were branded as. One or two high-flyers who even got their reputations highlighted in the pageant process are now qualified to assist the disgraced Minister of Works and Transport in his futile bid for a seat in this honourable House. *[Desk thumping]* So are the benefits of incompetence in Trinidad and Tobago today. Mr. Speaker, we must be a very special country indeed.

With respect to the National Flour Mills rice deal—*[Interruption]* Good candidate. As a result of a visit to India by the Prime Minister—they found a new source of importing rice—\$30 million worth of rice disappeared into thin air. We just “eh” see it. It “eh” reach! Do you understand, Mr. Speaker? Those are losses from the revenue side of this budget. Not a word from the Minister of Finance who, in his capacity as Corporation Sole, is directly responsible for this money and for mismanaging the efforts. Miraculously, no one has been held accountable for this scandal. They got off scot-free.

**Dr. Rowley:** So they think!

**Mr. P. Manning:** \$30 million gone.

**Hon. Persad-Bissessar:** But we fired the chairman.

**Mr. P. Manning:** Tell me now which chairman you fired over the Dhanpur Sugar Mill? Tell me who got fired for that?

Mr. Speaker, that same visit to India also resulted in the saga of the \$25 million defective Dhanpur Sugar Mill, which has been central to the dismal performance of Caroni (1975) Limited in the last three years. Again, miraculously, no one has been held accountable. Tell me who you fired for that one? It came out of a visit the Prime Minister made to India. Did you fire the Prime Minister? [*Desk thumping*] Through you, Mr. Speaker.

With respect to sugar, the overall objective of the country is to support a sugar industry which is viable, profitable and is not a drain on the Treasury in Trinidad and Tobago. To achieve this, the last PNM administration wrote off \$2.14 billion of accumulated debt at Caroni (1975) Limited. The subvention from the Treasury was reduced systematically from the annual highs of \$200 million per year to \$49 million in 1995. We were on track, we had a plan and we were getting there. Silently and systematically, this Government has abandoned these objectives and has completely reversed the situation.

In 1998 Caroni (1975) Limited consumed \$100 million up from \$49 million in 1995. In 1999/2000 the sum of \$301 million was consumed by Caroni (1975) Limited. Mysteriously, and without a word of explanation or clarification, the allocation for Caroni (1975) Limited in this budget for 2000/2001 has been reduced dramatically by \$211 million. This is simply a deception to give the Parliament the false impression that during the next 12 months the Government will not fund Caroni (1975) Limited on the same scale as it did during the last 12 months. Deception! Look out for the variation of appropriation. They may be gone from office long before we get to that. The variation of appropriation will do it: that is what they will do.

Very carefully, the Minister of Finance neglected to tell this to the national community; especially the constituents or his colleagues from Central and South Trinidad. He also forgot to tell us the plan he and his Government intend to hatch and implement at Caroni (1975) Limited in the coming months, which will result in \$200 million that will not be required if the company is to operate at the same level as it did during the last 12 months. Where is the plan? What do you intend to do, lay off people in Caroni (1975) Limited? Maybe he ran out of time.

He did find time to regale us with boring, questionable details about how many cars are clogging up the congested roads which the Panday Administration



did not build. In the same context, he also forgot to tell us what portion of the \$9 billion government guaranteed debt is related to the operations of Caroni (1975) Limited. He did not think it was worthwhile to mention that since the books have been cleaned up, Caroni (1975) Limited has chalked up accumulated losses of upwards of \$1 billion with no end in sight. We wrote off \$2.14 billion. We were reducing the subventions to Caroni (1975) Limited. They have reversed all of that and Caroni (1975) Limited liability to the state is now in excess and well in excess of \$1,000 million.

**11.25. a.m.**

Apparently, it was more important to fabricate and report on "Anansi" stories about the United States Drug Enforcement Agency and agricultural exports than to treat with the billion dollar crises ensconced in the budget document.

What has brought us to this sorry pass? I turn to the Tobago ferry service. For the last 50 years, going back to the Colonial days of the Belize and the Berama, the sea route between Trinidad and Tobago has been served by, at least, two vessels. After three years of operating one vessel and having on some days no services, this incompetent Government makes a big song and dance about a proposed new ferry for Tobago as if it is a present to the people rather than a long delayed item that is essential for the preservation of the heart and soul of the unitary state. Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, I would like the Minister to show me where in the budget he has made an allocation for the purchase of a new ferry. I could not find it. Knowing this Government, it may not even be there. If it is there tell us where it is; we cannot see it.

In their typical cloak and dagger secretive style they started off pretending to treat with this urgent issue. Inexplicably, the Government aborted arrangements it had entered into for a second ferry. This is reported to have resulted in penalty compensation payments of almost \$24 million for absolutely nothing, and that is equivalent to one half of a "Ringbang" and two "ADDAS". [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]. The Government has neither denied nor explained this wanton waste. The Minister of Finance, Planning and Development must show us where the funds came from to meet these unnecessary expenses and what has been sacrificed as a result.

Mr. Speaker, you would notice that other acts of infamy such as the \$200 million National Petroleum (NP) gas station upgrade fiasco and the \$15 million Cherokee jeep scam could not even make the short list this morning. The short list is a list of 10 items; that is the top 10 of corruption. The NP upgrade could not

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. MANNING]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

make that; the Cherokee jeeps scam could not make the top 10, nor the financial state of the National Gas Company which had an \$850 million before tax profit in 1995 and an \$11 million profit in 1999; from \$850 million in 1995 to \$11 million in 1999. Of course, the five stadia cannot make the top 10. That is the state of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*].

The wastage of millions at the National Library resulting from the stop and start of the project as well as the 700 per cent increase in the Whitehall renovation cost, from \$5 million to \$36 million, are now small potatoes in the context of the current scheme of things; \$5 million to \$36 million in Whitehall, that is joke. You have the National Gas Company; InnCogen, the pageant and so forth.

What beats me, Mr. Speaker, is how some ministers sit quietly on that side knowing all of this and do nothing about it. That is what I could never understand: they sit there, fight to get a seat, not concerned about the people's welfare; sitting there and allowing all this to happen, and participating in it—[*Desk thumping*—and then holding themselves up to the national community as paragons of virtue; that is what they do.

I could go on and on and give example after example of the downright squandermania which has been the dull badge of this regime, but time is limited today. Fear not, Mr. Speaker, there is an election due any time now and the people will be appropriately informed of all the evils that have been inflicted upon them. They are standing by to intervene decisively to protect the national interest from the absurdities which are too numerous to catalogue in one session of Parliament.

However, Mr. Speaker, in order to make sure that you have a clear and comprehensive picture of what is involved, it is imperative that I itemize and summarize this matter of profligate waste so that every citizen, young or old, wealthy or impoverished, Hindu or Christian, Muslim or Baptist, Tobagonian or Trinidadian, man, woman or child: everybody could have a full and unimpeded understanding of how this Government has been playing fast and loose with the country's money. [*Desk thumping*].

This is the top 10, Mr. Speaker, add it: Piarco Airport terminal \$1,003 million; InnCogen, \$945 million; the desalination plant, \$750 million. Number four on the hit parade is Caroni (1975) Limited, \$800 million; NP gas station upgrade, \$200 million; Miss Universe Beauty Pageant, \$100 million; Winsure settlement to Maritime Life, \$66 million; Whitehall renovation, \$36 million; National Flour Mills rice deal, \$30 million; and Tobago ferry penalty compensation, \$24 million.

Mr. Speaker, do you know how much money is involved in just the top 10? Four thousand two hundred and fifty one million Trinidad and Tobago dollars.

[*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, you must remember that this is only the top 10. You must also remember that all of this gluttony took place in less than five years. We just cannot go on this way. [*Desk thumping*] Nurses, doctors, teachers, public servants, grannies, orphans and the unemployed "cyar" see their way; they cannot see their way. We just cannot go on this way. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, permit me to comment on some of the measures mentioned in the budget statement. The Minister's tax proposals package is lacking in both equity and fairness which are the two fundamental requirements of taxation. While the amnesty offered to non-payers would be attractive to and popular with delinquent taxpayers, what happens to those taxpayers who have paid their taxes owing, but have interest and/or penalties outstanding. They paid their taxes, but have interest or penalties outstanding. What would happen to them? Silence. Moreover, what comparable benefit is being offered to law-abiding taxpayers? I paid my taxes, is somebody now to get a benefit over me for not paying his? That is the question we are asking.

While the Parliament has passed legislation only recently to confiscate one's property for certain infractions of the Income Tax Act, the Minister seems all too ready to provide a loophole. Mr. Speaker, we know them well. There are friends and associates involved in this thing who owe substantial taxes—[*Desk thumping*]—that is what it is. Mr. Speaker, are vested interests being protected here? With this Minister you never know, unless you turn over every rock and you interview every grain of sand, that is the only way to find out.

What of the green levy? Is it a tax or a business expense? How will it be managed? Madness prevails this Government at every turn. The Government and its agencies are far and away the major polluters and destroyers of the environment in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] They are arrogant in their refusal to listen to reason as they march onward to the spoiling of our country; yet he has the temerity to ask the rest of us to pay a tax to preserve the environment. The Minister of Finance, Planning and Development is doing that.

Two state companies: Petrotrin and Caroni (1975) Limited are among the main offenders of pollution. Those are the two, Petrotrin and Caroni (1975) Limited. It is the Government that imported millions of dollars worth of 12-year-old buses from England. The regulations in Trinidad and Tobago prevent the public from importing vehicles that are older than four years, but that does not prevent the Government from poisoning us with diesel fumes emitted from English trash. [*Desk thumping*] And they call it a rural bus service. [*Crosstalk*]

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. MANNING]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

The Minister wants struggling small business to pay to protect the environment while the Government is providing loan guarantees for projects which would destroy the environment. There is to be a \$60 million guarantee for the provocative Toco project that would put an end to a unique marine reef ecosystem. Talking one thing, doing something else; they specialize in that.

Non-governmental organizations are sleeping on the Audrey Jeffers Highway to protest the destruction of the mangrove by the "Madhatter". A Chairman of the National Carnival Commission (NCC)—let me take my time and read this one—was promoted to Cabinet rank for paving the savannah for an undisclosed sum of public money, without authority. [*Desk thumping*] He is now rewarded with ministerial appointment; my boy.

It is against this background that the Minister is seeking to introduce a new tax. Need I remind you that it was this Minister who dismantled the established system of deeds of covenant which supported non-governmental organizations, sport and culture? Will the new communities and non-governmental organizations have to be registered, as are those charitable organizations wishing to benefit through tax-favoured deductions? Does the Minister see a contradiction between the removal of the tax-favoured voluntary contributions to all but a few charitable organizations and the mandatory levy to a slush fund? How does the Minister reconcile the fact that he is sending contradictory signals to the business community by the simultaneous reduction of 0.05 per cent in the business levy and the imposition of the green fund levy of 0.1 per cent. How does he reconcile that? Does the Minister realize that now the government levy on the business community will be increased from 0.25 per cent to 0.3 per cent? That is the net effect of it.

While the exemption from filing income tax returns for salaried-only taxpayers would obviously gain popular support, the jury will be out for some time as to its efficacy and efficiency. Clearly, there is some merit in this proposal, but no effort should be spared in putting safeguards in place against those who see opportunity here, and would want to abuse this system.

I turn now, Mr. Speaker, to crime. In the face of his Government's failure to contain the escalating crime wave, the Minister has unashamedly admitted that they pledge to do everything possible to fight crime. Remember their campaign slogan in 1995, Mr. Speaker? I am sure you remember their slogan in 1995, Mr. Speaker. [*Laughter*] "If you do the crime, you do the time." That is what they were saying. If you do the crime, you do the time. Apparently, the criminals have gone deaf, because they have stepped up their assault on the people of this

country in a way that we have never seen before. The situation now is such that the female population, the most vulnerable amongst us, now walk the streets with fear and trembling, even in daylight hours.

After five years of excuses and broken promises including the much touted Operation LEAP and the empty rhetoric from the Government, Trinidad and Tobago is no better off in the fight against crime today than we were in 1995. In fact, only recently we have qualified to be blacklisted by one of our major European partners; in other words, we are worse off.

Friends of the Government have made money by throwing some vehicles at the problem, but the absence of a cohesive long-term plan has resulted in the current runaway crime wave that has remained unchallenged. How has the Government responded to this crime wave? The Prime Minister goes on public platforms and berates editors and journalists who simply report what has happened to our people, who unfortunately become frequent victims of horrible crimes. He prefers to pretend that crime has gone down because he says so. The media is spoiling his deceptive campaign simply by performing their duty, therefore, he takes issue with them.

Mr. Speaker, that Government never had any plan. They have no plan now and will have no plan in the future. [*Desk thumping*] All they had was an opportunity to form a coalition government to take control. They used that opportunity and have made no difference to the situation; if anything it has worsened under their watch. [*Desk thumping*] Imagine, if you may, after five years of this inept Government and all its empty talk about equipping Trinidad and Tobago for the computer age, our fingerprinting detection system is still largely operating manually, and our rates of detection and solving of crime remain unacceptably low.

Imagine, if you will, after five years of "ole" talk the Minister has the "brass-face" to come to this House in August of the year 2000 and glibly promise to computerize the police records. For yet another time he promised that. It should be noted that they first promised to complete this essential task in 1996. What on earth have they been doing with taxpayers' money in the last five years? The forensic centre is still short-staffed and some services cannot be delivered at times because of an absence of qualified staff. I wonder what their campaign slogan for 2000 would be? I suspect it would be "We failed with crime, please give us more time". [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

**11.40 a.m.**

Let us see how they have done with health. In his presentation the Minister said we are delivering health care services that are essential, accessible, affordable

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. MANNING]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

and equitable. He must have been talking to men from Mars, not to this House and people in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, in the face of the visible crisis in the health sector, the unavailability of basic drugs and medicine, the lack of basic medical equipment, the non-provision for funding and resource for the maintenance and upkeep of our hospitals and the health centres with the highly publicized battle between the present administration and health care providers that is now in its fifth month, only a callous Minister or a knave would say that our health care systems are functioning effectively and better than before.

On this matter, the Minister of Finance would have done his flagging credibility a world of good if he had just kept his mouth shut. The politicians know that silence is always an option. Exercise it! He would have been better off. It is quite possible that he could succeed in fooling a few persons about the public debt and foreign reserve situation, these are things they cannot see. However, when citizens see their nurses and other health care professionals on the streets for five months, they do not need anyone to tell them about the state of the health services, least of all, a Minister who speaks with a forked tongue. The Minister should have held his breath instead of parroting nonsense about providing choice of doctors and hospitals in Tobago. Tobago almost does not have a hospital and the doctors are few and far between.

They have failed to kick-off the new Tobago Hospital project which was approved since I was the Prime Minister of this country in 1995. Other things of higher priority obviously were occupying their minds. Apparently, their favoured political investor had bigger fish to fry, so the Tobago hospital was pushed to the back burner for five whole years. Over the last five years, and within the last six months in particular, there has been a virtual shut down of our health care system.  
*[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, the PNM commits itself to providing the necessary financial allocation to bring our institutions up to an acceptable standard in the shortest possible time. We will sit down immediately with the representatives of the health sector personnel and negotiate with them in good faith to arrive at a speedy settlement of their many justifiable grievances. At all times, we would treat our health workers and their representatives as mutual partners with a shared goal and mission and show them the respect and dignity they deserve.

Water. The Minister says water for all. Just for the record, I have some documents showing the exact availability of water in every district of Trinidad

and Tobago and one of my colleagues will deal comprehensively with the Minister who keeps telling this country: "Water for all."

Mr. Speaker, the Minister has boasted that his Government has increased the nation's water supply by 100 million litres a day, yet he failed to mention that before he came in, the national water supply put in place by the PNM was almost 800 million litres a day. This means that if we accept their figures, in five years, and over \$1 billion squandered on the water sector, they have increased our water supply by only a meagre 12 per cent.

It is a fact whatever they are doing they are bringing some improvement and relief to some areas of the country and we are supportive of that, that is a fact. However, it is also a fact that many areas of our country especially in North Trinidad which hitherto had a fairly reliable supply of water are now without even what they had become accustomed to. I refer here to places like Diego Martin, Carenage, Maraval, Santa Cruz, Paramin, Laventille, Belmont and San Fernando.

Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I now address the question of rebuilding the middle class and our working families. Consistent with our belt-tightening exercise and the fiscal responsibility of an earlier time, necessary foundation upon which the economy could take off to its current and higher level was laid. Teachers, nurses, civil servants, fire fighters, soldiers, prison officers and daily paid workers all made the necessary sacrifices for a better day. We had a clear vision of what was possible and we succeeded. We made the transition from decline to growth. Those who sacrificed must benefit now that the economy is sounder. Strengthening of working-class families and the consolidation of the middle classes, are the two fundamental pillars upon which any society is built. The PNM has always supported the maintenance of strong families, respect of traditional values, the promotion of family values; morality, hard work, honesty and respect for others, providing families with the material resources they need today and the confidence to sacrifice for tomorrow.

We in the PNM believe that in good times, the very first concern should be the strengthening of working families and rewarding them for their vast contributions to society. To all those who have worked hard, played by the rules and sacrificed for the future of the country and our nation, the PNM's vision will work to improve your lives and reward your efforts. Years ago, a working family could have bought a car or a house without much difficulty. In fact, the possession of a decent home and a secure means of transportation were sure signals that they had achieved a level of respectability and an acceptable social status within the society. This approach also contributes to lowering criminal activity.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. MANNING]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

Relative peace and stability, the respect for others and their property are the necessary consequences of a stable middle class and the noble aspirations of families who worked hard to secure a living. Indeed, there was a time when the quality and tone of the society were measured by how we treated our teachers, police officers, our nurses, civil servants, our children and our neighbours whoever they happen to be. The promise was, that if they worked hard, they could make it and lead a secure and satisfying life. This was the guiding principle of our nation. The current Government has failed to respond to the needs of this bulwark of our civilization and this can only lead to the deepening of the social and spiritual crisis in our nation. Once again, it falls to the PNM to step into the breach and provide that beacon of hope which our people so desperately need at this time. *[Desk thumping]*

We must begin to rebuild the human capital of our middle and working-class families. The budgeting process we are currently engaged in must provide them with the opportunity to earn a decent income, obtain better skills and gain access to training opportunities, better incentives to save, security of the person and property and lead to deeper participation and control of their affairs. By investing in our working families, we build the future of our nation.

Those few who have prospered under the current arrangements are pleading with you, Mr. Speaker, please do not turn back now, but you, more than anyone else would know, Mr. Speaker. But if we do not turn back now, the continuing decimation of our working families in the middle and lower income groupings is virtually assured. They are doomed to be battered in the stormy sea of want and despair, victims of managers who boast about world record economic growth without understanding that striving for economic growth has a purpose: it is to develop people and improve the quality of their lives. *[Desk thumping]* The next PNM Government will correct this anomaly as a matter of policy.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to comment on the obscene manner in which this Government has attempted to sneak salary increases into the Parliament.

**Hon. Member:** You joining in that too?

**Mr. P. Manning:** Yes. I am joining in it. While the national community would agree that politicians should be compensated fairly, few would appreciate the surreptitious and clandestine manner in which this Government has handled this issue. *[Desk thumping]* The Government, on receiving the report from the commission which is charged with the responsibility of exercising and making recommendations for the remuneration for this group of public officers had every



opportunity and duty to treat with it in a timely and open manner in this Parliament. *[Desk thumping]* Mr. Speaker, they chose not to do so, instead they have opted for the underhandedness, subterfuge and surreptitious dealings for which they have become well-known. That is what they opted for.

Witness the Maritime pay out, Mr. Speaker, witness the escalating stadia contracts. They just cannot be trusted with the public purse. Now that they are caught, they tell us they never intended to proceed. You catch them with their hands in the cookie jar and they say: “No, we really did not intend to proceed.” It is the Cabinet that has to approve the position, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what do you think the burglar who is caught in the act will tell the judge? You catch a burglar in the act, what do you think he will tell the judge? Let them tell their story to the judge and jury—the electorate of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Desk thumping]*

Further Mr. Speaker, we have identified certain anomalies in the report as it relates to politicians. Accordingly, our view is, that the recommendation of the commission as it relates to all public officers other than politicians should be implemented forthwith. *[Desk thumping]* The recommendations relating to those holding political appointments should be referred back to the commission for study. There are anomalies in it, Mr. Speaker. If I had the time, I would go into several of them. There are anomalies, so refer that back to the commission and pay everybody else their money, and do not try to penalize the public servants because they want to ride on the backs of public servants to get a salary increase. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, the PNM’s position is very clear on this issue. There can be no salary increases for those Ministers without a corresponding strengthening of integrity legislation. *[Desk thumping]* The population is very concerned about levels of integrity in the political life of the country. They have no right trying to take any salary increase without assuaging those public concerns in some way. We say integrity legislation. Proper sanctions must protect the public purse from wrong doers; offenders must face stiff penalties including loss of office and jail sentences. *[Desk thumping]* We must have morality in public affairs.

Moreover, it is a deceitful and cynical act to highlight with such enthusiastic pounding of their tables when the \$100 increase for the old-age pensioners was announced. Mr. Speaker, they pound the tables and the tables were almost mashed up the way those fellas were pounding them. Even as they were doing this, they were all aware that they had kept the whole hog under the table for themselves. *[Desk thumping]*

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. MANNING]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

Mr. Speaker, this then is the legacy of this administration. Five years of budget deficits: 1996, \$208 million; 1997, \$636.1 million; 1998, \$178 million; 1999, \$106.8 million; 2000, \$280 million all of that is deficit, wanton squandermania.

Mr. Speaker, over the five-year period this Government received \$52.9 billion in revenues, they also increased the public debt by \$11 billion. A total of \$63.9 billion was available to this Government over the five-year period, more than the oft repeated \$60 billion in total revenue received during the ten-year period of the oil boom.

**11.55 a.m.**

What, Mr. Speaker, do we have to show for it? Where is the equivalent of the Point Lisas Estate? We built that in the oil boom. What have you built? Where is the equivalent? Where is the equivalent of the Hall of Justice? Where is the equivalent of the Solomon Hochoy Highway? [*Desk thumping*] Where is the equivalent of the expansion of the University of the West Indies? [*Desk thumping*] They are talking about education. Where is the equivalent of the BWIA airplanes [*Desk thumping*] or the numerous other projects implemented during that period? “Show mih! Ah not seein’ it.” All of this qualifies us to ask one question really: “Where has the money gone?” [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, we just cannot go on this way. Thank God there is another way—the PNM way. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, through you I wish to inform the national community that when we are elected after the upcoming general elections, a PNM administration as a matter of urgency will implement the following 10-point plan: No. 1—tax relief. The PNM commits itself to a reduction in tax rates for individuals and corporations on a phased basis to a targeted level of 25 per cent—top marginal rate 25 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] In fiscal 2001, the rate will be reduced for individuals in the upper levels and for corporations from 35 per cent to 30 per cent, a 5 per cent— [*Interruption*] [*Inaudible*] [*Desk thumping*] For individuals in the 28 per cent bracket, the rate will be reduced to 23 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

Public servants’ salaries—point No. 2 on the plan. A PNM administration will provide an immediate increase in compensation packages of all public servants. [*Desk thumping*] The quantum of the increase will be negotiated with the representative unions and will take into account the fact that they have not had a proper increase since 1983. [*Desk thumping*]

Point No. 3, Mr. Speaker, encouraging savings. The Minister of Finance had nothing to say on these matters. A PNM administration sees owning one’s home and saving for one’s retirement as the chief means through which the ordinary

citizen builds assets. Therefore, a PNM Government will: (a) take immediate steps to effect full pension portability; (b) increase the maximum pension income qualifying for favourable tax treatment from two-thirds of the highest salary to 100 per cent of highest salary. As retirees are only too aware, inflation eats away at fixed incomes. [*Desk thumping*] We will increase the mortgage interest tax deduction to a maximum of the interest cost on a \$350,000 conventional mortgage. [*Desk thumping*] I do not know that the Minister of Finance even understands what that is all about.

Point No. 4 in the 10-point plan, Mr. Speaker, entrepreneurship. The PNM recognizes that in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century one of the critical realities of the global environment is that the traditional distinction between what is around the world and what is around the block has become blurred. The world has become what is called “a global village”. New applications of information technology have made it possible to access information from any part of the world almost instantly. E-commerce is now a fact of life. One can now provide and/or access goods and services worldwide from one’s home. To us in the PNM, it is clear that in the future a country’s competitiveness will be determined more by the development of its human capital rather than its investment in plant and machinery or in its reserves of natural resources.

The reduction in barriers to trade occasioned by the formation of the World Trade Organization and the concomitant development of information technology have opened up important possibilities for small countries such as Trinidad and Tobago. Globalization has provided the infrastructure for the birth of the wisdom age in that what one knows is a major asset. Accordingly, the PNM commits itself to provide the infrastructure and support systems that are necessary to develop entrepreneurship and to provide grant funding on a properly structured basis for the encouragement of innovators.

Point No. 5 in the 10-point plan, Mr. Speaker, health care. The PNM believes that every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago must be entitled to a high standard of health care. Specifically, a PNM administration will complete the restructuring of the Ministry of Health in order to establish a delivery arm—the Regional Health Authorities—a policy making arm—the head office of the Ministry—and a financial arm—a national health insurance system. [*Desk thumping*]

Point No. 6—education. Secondary education will continue to be a main focus of the PNM education development plan. We will achieve quality universal secondary education. The PNM maintains that, regardless of the goals we set, the programmes will be executed in accordance with proper forward planning. In a

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. MANNING]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

PNM administration there will be no “Chicken Licken” for us. [*Desk thumping*] Recognizing that children develop at different ages and possess different talents, the PNM will provide alternatives for the development of all our students. A PNM administration will provide funding to the University of the West Indies to facilitate a higher intake of qualified applicants in a parallel degree programme which can make use of the physical facilities outside of the traditional hours. A PNM Government commits itself to construct and staff two colleges of arts, science and technology to cater for the development of skills as dictated by the requirements of the global environment. Academy for the performing arts, academy for the non-performing arts—that is what it is in case the Member does not understand it.

Point No. 7, Mr. Speaker, Tobago. The PNM remains alarmed and very concerned about the drastic deterioration of public administration in Tobago during the last five years. Equally alarming to us is the virtual breakdown of the civil relationship between the Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly. Under these circumstances, it is the average citizen who suffers when the provision of services and salaries becomes a hit or miss affair. Citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who reside in Tobago are particularly hard hit when there is failure of vital support systems such as the inter-island ferry, the NIPDEC Cold Storage and the Tobago Hospital. Large sums of money are frittered away in Tobago’s name, both by the Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly. Let me repeat that one, Mr. Speaker. Large sums of money are frittered away in Tobago’s name, both by the Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly.

The ineffectiveness of the present arrangements is highlighted by the fact that not even the Parliament is able to determine the true state of affairs or the levels of culpability of public officials involved in these matters. The only thing that is consistent is the constant meaningless finger-pointing across the Bocas that is now commonplace. Mr. Speaker, may I suggest to you: we just cannot go on this way. [*Desk thumping*] Within 90 days of coming into office the PNM will initiate comprehensive consultations throughout Tobago and at selective venues in Trinidad on the whole question of proper legal arrangements for Tobago in the Unitary state. [*Desk thumping*] We anticipate that this process would be completed and negotiated satisfactorily by June 30, 2001 at the latest. They could call the election whenever they want.

The PNM commits itself to repealing the Tobago House of Assembly Act before December 2001. [*Desk thumping*] We will replace it with revised legislation

that takes into account the outcome of the consultations. This new law would provide the people of Tobago with constitutional guarantees for any change in status which they agreed upon about the future relationship between Trinidad and the Central Government. [*Desk thumping*] The law will provide security for public servants in Tobago. It will also provide for proper accountability through timely auditing and reporting.

Community participation and development—this administration has undermined the authority of the local representatives of the people by usurping their authority. One council was forced to seek judicial review. Accordingly, the PNM administration will put the management of communities back into the hands of the people in their various communities who will choose their representatives. In turn, these representatives would be accountable to their communities. The Central Government will divest itself of much of what now passes for community administration. Local authorities will assume an expanded role for provision of services.

Security, Mr. Speaker; the Security of the state is perhaps the most important function of the Government. Crime and criminal behaviour have increased over the last five years. A PNM administration will provide the necessary resources and managerial upgrades to ensure that the Defence Force and the protective services are adequately prepared to discharge their duties. The PNM will provide the necessary training, equipment and support services and provide an enhanced joint services staff college, use of modern technologies, and expose our personnel to the relevant training institutions at home and abroad.

Energy—the PNM is committed to maintaining an investment climate that will facilitate and encourage activity by local, joint venture and international interests in exploration and development of natural gas reserves especially in our offshore, medium and deep water terrains. The PNM is committed to ensuring that the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as owners, receive the maximum benefits from the exploitation of the natural gas endowment whilst we preserve a fair return, commensurate with international industry standards, for the equity partners who invest in the industry. The PNM proposes to structure gas pricing policy so as to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago remains competitive in the international hydrocarbon and derivatives market. In keeping with PNM policy of the state maintaining a role as facilitator and strategic investor, the Government will take up its allotment of equity in these projects, either directly or through its designated agencies. The role and future direction of the National Gas Company will be reviewed. The time has come to look at the National Gas Company again.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. MANNING]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

As we enter the 39<sup>th</sup> year as an independent nation and the turn of the century, Trinidad and Tobago can look back with justifiable pride in its achievements, compromised only by the callous and capricious behaviour of those in Government during the last five years. Today, we stand in defence of the people's interest; of those who have given themselves so unselfishly to the well-being of our people. Ours is the challenge to restore the grandeur of our people and liberate their energies to create a new order of responsibility. As we consider our rights and responsibilities, we rededicate ourselves to the service of our people. While those on the other side are consumed by the trappings of power, the advancement of self-interest and the pursuit of greed, we are resolute in our commitment to a government of transparency, the preservation of truth and the defence of our liberties. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, our task today is to enlighten our people about the real state of affairs and to offer a prescription for our renewed prosperity. They wish us to continue in the same old way, yet we believe that we just cannot go on this way. The present administration has asked us if we are better off today. We say that we feel more vulnerable as we find ourselves in the grip of deception and deceit. They say things are better. We say that our task is to combat the raging crisis in health, education and rampant criminal activities.

Today, we stand ready to take our people to a new vista and to create a developed nation by the year 2020. That is our vision. Our vision is to make of Trinidad and Tobago a developed nation by the year 2020. [*Desk thumping*] We have offered a vision for the future as we seek to position Trinidad and Tobago in the global economy. For 34 of the last 43 years, we have protected our country's inheritance. We have generated much of the progress this country enjoys today. In a few months, the society will vindicate the trust they have bestowed upon us in the past. Elections are coming. With the help of Almighty God, Mr. Speaker, and our belief in our people, we shall treat with our nation's future and continue the task of nation building.

**12.10 p.m.**

When in 1962 we assumed responsibility for shaping our destiny, we had a vision of what we as a people can become. We have achieved much, but there is much more to be accomplished. We are proud of our independence and our republican status. We acknowledge the task as the mobilization of all our people towards the building of a nation with equal opportunity for all. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, with the help of Almighty God and our people's confidence, a new dawn awaits us.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Consumer Affairs (Hon. Mervyn Assam):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to join this debate on a Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30, 2001.

As I listened very carefully to the presentation of the Member for San Fernando East in attempting to rebut the budget statement of the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development, I could not help but feel that the Member for San Fernando East did not believe in one thing that he said. Not only did he not believe it; some of his Members did not believe it also. It was very clear that the Member for Diego Martin East sat and did not, during the course of his presentation, knock his table once. In fact, he had a grin on his face which showed that he was merely attempting to enjoy some of the fatuous statements that were being put forward by the Member for San Fernando East.

Mr. Speaker, he was chanting a slogan throughout his presentation which read, "We just cannot go on this way". I will try to demonstrate to this honourable House and, by extension, the national community, why his statement is correct insofar as we cannot go on the way of the PNM. I will get back to the 10 points that he made to show that the PNM, through its leader, the Member for San Fernando East, is attempting to take people to the mountaintop, but they will never see the promised land. Those 10 points of promise will never be seen if God forbid, come the next general election, the people of this country dare to throw away and to lose what they have gained over the last five years. *[Desk thumping]*

It just shows, Mr. Speaker, when the Member for San Fernando East talks about vision and planning, he is merely hoodwinking not only himself, but the people of this country. He stated when he was in Opposition from 1986—1991 that he had a plan for this country in every aspect of our society's activities, and that when he came into office he would immediately implement his plan because it was so well honed with all his advisors and so forth.

Do you know what I have here? The first budget statement of that administration, as read by hon. Wendell A. Mottley, the then Minister of Finance. Budget Speech 1992 delivered in this honourable House on Friday January 17, 1992. He just said, and I know he was not speaking the truth, that when he assumed office in 1991, he immediately made the decision to construct the Tobago hospital.

How could he have made the decision to construct the Tobago hospital when they won the election on December 16, when they were trying to form a government, trying to put together a budget, and yet he makes the same error as

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. M. ASSAM]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

he always made, arrogating to himself, decisions and positions which he never took. He could not have made a decision on the Tobago hospital in 1991.

I will read to you what this Government said through their Minister of Finance. This is the party that wants the people of Trinidad and Tobago to vote for them in 2000, or when they win the election. Hear what they have to say after having planned for five years in Opposition:

“The decade of the 1980s has been characterised as the ‘lost decade’ for development.”

Who was in office in the 1980s, Mr. Speaker? Who was in office?

He says the 1980s is the lost decade for development. But even worse, in Trinidad and Tobago we experienced a decline in our real income in the 1980s of more than 30 per cent. Who was in charge of the government and the economy, that this country lost income to the tune of 30 per cent as a consequence of which they pauperized so many people and, up to today, this Government is attempting to struggle with poverty eradication and trying to do things that will increase the standard of living and welfare of the people of this country?

He goes on. Here is what he says:

“This, unfortunately, was accompanied by an increasing incidence of poverty.”

Who was in office in the 1980s? Not the PNM ? But hear this blow. This is a real blow to the people who elected them to office with hope and optimism in 1991. After having planned for five years in Opposition, here is what the Minister of Finance, the spokesperson for the Member for San Fernando East, who was then Prime Minister, said:

“So far, the 1990s do not offer much cause for optimism. There is recession abroad and political turmoil in sensitive areas of the world.”

That is the PNM in 1991 when they assumed office. That is the beginning of their term of office.

He speaks in his 10-point plan about reducing taxes and increasing salaries. The last budget of the hon. Minister of Finance, Wendell Mottley—for every year that that administration was in office, they increased taxes, but 1994 was the worst. I do not have the time to go through. There are about six pages of increasing of taxes under the administration of the PNM through their Minister of Finance.

Every measure that was brought in 1994 was increased and there were new taxes—what I call “nuisance taxes”—like transfer of ownership of used car/vehicle



tax; business levy; financial transaction tax; increase in lands and building tax; tobacco tax; motor vehicle tax; all kinds of tax, Mr. Speaker, and today, the Member for San Fernando East comes to hoodwink this population and says that he is going to reduce taxes when he assumes office, whenever the election is called.

I would like to deal with the 10 points because in the rest of his presentation he spoke about insipid vapidity. That is exactly what I can describe his presentation as: vacuous, vapid and fatuous. That is what it is all about. Therefore, I do not need to go into it because it was like an excursion.

I remember when I was a young boy, I got a book as a literary prize, *Around the World in 80 days*. He went around the world and all he could have spoken about was that repetition of corruption. He had to talk about Miss Universe. He said it was \$100 million, although I laid financial statements in this honourable House certified by qualified auditors and accountants that it was \$71 million. Again, the people across on that side are strangers to the truth, and he had to go through the whole litany of the so-called corruption of which they have been accusing this Government. That is all he can talk about, and they would not go to the police.

I will ignore all that has been said because that was not a budget presentation. It was the normal weekly harangue and hectoring of this side, as they have been accustomed to do every Friday and, in particular, in their Private Members' Motions every fourth Friday of the month.

Let me go quickly to the 10 points, Mr. Speaker, and see how I can show you that the promises the Member for San Fernando East is attempting to foist on the people will never materialize. The first thing he said was tax relief. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, that in 1986 when the NAR Government came into office, notwithstanding the tight fiscal situation in the country, they reduced taxes? Do you know what happened as soon as the PNM came into office in 1991? They increased taxes every year. They reversed the whole order.

The whole purpose of the new tax regime, the whole set of new tax principles that the NAR brought in, was to decrease direct taxation and substitute indirect taxation, such as the Value Added Tax; and the PNM completely reversed it and completely obfuscated the tax system because of their tampering of the principles which the NAR had instituted during their five years, 1986—1991.

To come and say today that as soon as he comes into office within 90 days, he is going to reduce taxes from 35 to 30 and from 28 to 23, reaching down to the 25 per cent threshold, must be a terrible falsehood that he is trying to perpetrate on

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. M. ASSAM]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

the people of this country. Do you know why it is a falsehood? Not only in the context of their past performance of taxes, more taxes and increasing taxes on the population. He says that we are borrowing money, we owe so much, and we have bankrupted the Treasury. Where is the PNM going to get the money, if what he is saying is correct and if we are using the principles of logic and the principles of good accounting? If he says all of these things about this administration, where is he going to get the money within 90 days of assuming office to do all of these things? [*Desk thumping*]

He says that public servants will get an immediate increase in their salaries. Of course, he does not say how much. He says since 1983—I often wonder whether Members opposite have a conscience, because they say things and they do not remember or they do not seem to understand or appreciate that people are listening. He said since 1983. Who was in office in 1983, Mr. Speaker? From 1983—1995 the PNM was in office.

There was an interregnum with the NAR between 1986 and 1991. The PNM took up the cudgel once more in 1991—1995 and they did nothing about increasing the salaries of public servants, far less to pay them the arrears to which they were entitled as a consequence of a certain kind of economic policy that was necessary during the NAR regime. They did nothing, either increasing or addressing the arrears, but he, within 90 days of assuming office, will increase public servants' salaries and he will make sure that everybody gets an immediate increase. Mr. Speaker, if that is not the height of irresponsibility, then it must be the height of mamaguy or stupidity.

**Mr. Sudama:** Or deception.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Or deception. It has to be. Then he talks about encouraging savings. Who is it that increased the amount of tax on interest on savings in this country? It was the PNM administration, through their Member—at the time he was St. Ann's East—the Minister of Finance. He was the one who did it. Not this Government.

In fact, this Government has progressively reduced that 15 per cent and it was down to 5 per cent. We got it at 15, and in less than five years, it went from 15 per cent to 5 per cent.

**12.25 p.m.**

He talks about the business levy. Who introduced the business levy, Mr. Speaker? That administration and since we have been in office, every year we have reduced it to the point where now it is almost insignificant. But they

introduced the levy. In fact, he said increased the business levy by introducing a green tax, a green tax that will preserve and conserve the environment that is so critical to sustainability and to the generation of income. They are quarrelling about it.

He talked about increasing the interest on mortgages up to \$350,000 to the cost of the interest. Do you know what happened when that administration came into office in 1991? The Minister of Finance not only reduced the amount of interest on mortgages to the most ridiculous level, he also eliminated a particular facility that all taxpayers had, a maintenance allowance. If you spent \$10,000 or \$15,000 on maintaining your house and you were able to provide the Board of Inland Revenue with proper bills and receipts, you were able to get that as a tax relief, as a tax credit. They eliminated it. So, what happened? The houses deteriorated, our housing stock dilapidated over time and he is talking about building houses and not going to increase it.

Entrepreneurship. What does the PNM know about entrepreneurship? The PNM knows absolutely nothing about business, far less entrepreneurship. In fact, I, in my capacity as Minister of Trade, have been in the forefront of encouraging entrepreneurship in this country. I have even written to the Minister of Education asking her to put into her curriculum, entrepreneurial studies at the primary school level and she has responded positively. But we have been working with the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation and we have been involved in all kinds of programmes in terms of competitiveness, in terms of entrepreneurship and so forth, with emphasis on the micro, small and medium enterprises sectors.

What did they do with it when they were there? They set up a Small Business Development Company that is now taking off. It has expanded now into a small business leasing company where the kinds of pressures of borrowing from banks at high interest rates for purchasing equipment will no longer apply. You will obviate that particular difficulty with small business people.

He spoke about information and support systems: everything that this Government has done over the last five years. What is he going to do? Reinvent the wheel when he gets in there with all the support systems and all the computerization in? Is that what he is going to do? All the outreach programmes; all the educational programmes; all the training and management programmes. What is he going to do with them? Throw them into the Gulf of Paria, or throw them on the train line in Embacadero? What is he going to do with it?

High standard of health care. I wonder, Mr. Speaker, if you remember the days when children used to be wrapped up in brown paper in this country; when

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. M. ASSAM]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

people used to be huddled in the corridors of hospitals lying on the floor, or sometimes three and four per bed?

I had a personal experience where my niece was knocked down in Tunapuna in a vehicular accident and we took her to the hospital. We had to take a mattress; we had to take bed sheets; we had to take food and when we saw garbage all spilled in the corridor, a friend who went with me, called the nurse and said, "But, what is this? This is a hospital." She said, "Talk to the head nurse"; we talked to the head nurse. She said, "Talk to the sister"; we talked. She said, "Talk to the hospital administrator"; we talked. Talk to the Permanent Secretary. That was the kind of thing to remove some garbage in the corridor. If you go to San Fernando and you go to Port of Spain today—I went recently—you would see the tremendous improvements that have taken place.

I congratulate the various Regional Health Authorities, in addition to the Minister of Health and the Ministry of Health for the enormous progress and strides made. I am not going to talk about it. He will talk about it. He will give you all the details but I just wanted to make mention of it because he talked about the standard of health care.

Education. Could you imagine the Member for San Fernando East having the temerity to talk about education? They under-educated and under-developed this country. That is what they did. Mash up QRC; mash up all the prestige schools, if you want to call them prestige schools and built many plants which they could not manage, with the result that there is a high degree of delinquency, a high degree of anti-social behaviour, a high degree of dropouts and a high degree of functional illiteracy in this society resulting in the increase in crime.

It is this Government that is reversing the situation and I am going to leave it to the Minister of Education but I just thought I would mention it. More funding to the University of the West Indies. Which government has given more funding to the University of the West Indies than this Government? College of Arts. We had started an institute of technology; we have started the College of Sciences, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT) community colleges; we have overhauled the training system. What is this person from San Fernando East talking about? Where is he living?

Local government. He wants to talk about local government. It was the NAR that reformed local government in this country. For over 30 years they were in office and did nothing about local government. They provided no training, no professionalism, no resources. Nothing. I was the Chairman of St. George East

County Council from 1983—1987 and I felt the brunt of the neglect of the PNM but, moreso, their policy of centralization.

There is a book called the "Assam Report" where I, together with my colleagues—and the Member for Arouca North knows it—brought in a report to decentralize and to give more power to de-concentrate, to decentralize and to devolve power on local government. They never did it. It was the NAR that did it and this Government continues to do it. So, do not talk about local government.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the sitting is suspended for lunch until 1.45 p.m.

**12.32 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**1.47 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker, when we took the break I was going through the wish-list of the Member for San Fernando East. He was insulting the intelligence of the people of Trinidad and Tobago; having failed to perform when he was in office; having pauperized and impoverished the nation, particularly, the lower end of the economic scale. He comes here today brandishing a set of promises that will never materialize. In fact, his contribution is characterized by criticisms without solutions. He was elected to run this country for five years and in less than that—in four years—he ran away. He did not have the capacity for leadership. He did not have the capacity for governance.

He talks about Tobago. He says that he will have the solution. He will have some kind of arrangement and he will repeal the THA Act and so forth. You remember in 1995 he did the same thing. He is now saying if he is re-elected he will do this and he will do that. In 1996 the Act was piloted in this House and he refused to support it. Mr. Speaker, when he was the Minister of Tobago Affairs the people ran him out of Tobago. You did not know that? He did not want to give the kind of power and respect and autonomy to the people of Tobago. He comes here now saying he will give this and he will give that. He comes today and talks about island ferry and all kinds of things like hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, we will build a hospital. The reason why we did not build a hospital is because there has been some degree of disagreement between the Tobago House of Assembly and the Central Government. This led to a certain amount of change in the design. Of course, when you are dealing with international institutions with these kinds of delays this is what occurs. But my Minister of Health will deal with that.

Then he has the temerity to talk about security. In a previous debate I offered statistics to this honourable House and to the national community where crime

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. M. ASSAM]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

increased exponentially during the period 1991—1995. Now in every department, it has been reduced between 1995—2000. Since this Government came into office. More than that, compare the kind of support it has given to the police service and to the Ministry of National Security, in terms of training, equipment, vehicles, forensic sciences—all the various areas—crime detection and so on.

When the PNM was in office, not only did they do nothing, not only could one not find a vehicle but the police vehicles were dilapidated. In my constituency the police were sleeping on the floor. The police were sleeping on the floor in the San Juan Police Station. If you go to San Juan now you will see a fantastic police station that we opened up about two weeks ago. We have the E-999 Rapid Response service with its own backbone in telecommunications and an electronic system that responds within seconds to a call of distress. They want to talk about security! He should be ashamed to the extent that for the first time in the history of this country when they were in office 200 policemen marched around the Red House protesting the behaviour of the Prime Minister and his government. He wanted to fire the Commissioner of Police, put in a police management board, and get rid of the Police Service Commission in a most surreptitious and shameful manner. He comes and talks about security today!

With respect to energy, the Ministry of Energy, under the Member for San Fernando East, did not know whether it was coming or going. The old Energy Minister was outside of the Cabinet. The guy who was the Minister of Energy did not know whether he was coming or going. He had absolutely no control over the Ministry of Energy, as did the Member for San Fernando East, when he was the Minister of Energy. The then Minister of State Enterprises had him spinning around his fingers. He forgot those days when the Minister of State Enterprises had him spinning on his fingers? Over the last five years, Mr. Speaker, the strides the energy sector has made in this country are phenomenal. This is what is going to fuel the expansion of the economic growth and development.

Although, as the budget has said, we have now been able to diversify the economy within the five years so that dependence on the energy sector is only 24 per cent and now the non-oil sector is 76 per cent. What a transformation in the economic structure of this country; as opposed to when that PNM was in office: the whole country went into a tailspin because of the almost total dependence on the energy sector. The NAR had to pick up the pieces and restructure the country and go into a state of structural adjustment for several years, resulting in no economic growth for almost a decade.

This Government has turned around the situation into a totally different scenario where today—even during his contribution it slipped out. Do you know what he said Mr. Speaker? I have it written here: “Now that the economy is even sounder than ever.” He said so! It slipped out! It slipped out of his tongue. The truth will set you free. It slipped out—“Now that the economy is sounder than ever.” He was trying to put licks on us and it slipped out.

**1.55 p.m.**

He, too, has to admit that the economy is sounder, but when they were in office even starting with the late George Chambers, they were the ones who pauperized and destroyed the economic base of the country, because it was TT \$2.40 to the US dollar. Mr. Chambers moved it from TT \$2.40 to \$3.65. The National Alliance for Reconstruction had no choice: they moved it from \$3.65 to \$4.60, and they in turn moved it too from \$4.60 to \$5.65 when they liberalized the whole foreign exchange system, and progressively the standard of living and the income of people eroded. They said it; it was Mr. Mottley who said it—by 30 per cent.

It was that same Member, the Chairman of the People's National Movement, who was the Minister of Social Development, who in her report said that 35 per cent of the people were living below the poverty line. She said it when she was Minister of Social Development. This Government has reversed that totally and completely, where today that figure is substantially less and the well-being of people in those categories—whether it was social welfare people, old-age pensioners, or people who have some kind of disability—we have increased their allowances by more than 100 per cent in less than five years. All the various facilities have been built, not only for them but for people who have all different types of addictions and physical challenges and so forth. They want to talk about improving the quality of life of the people! They impoverished the people in every form and fashion, including the education system.

Mr. Speaker, it is very easy for the People's National Movement to come here and heap opprobrium on this Government in the form of allegations. It is very, very easy, but they forgot their sordid past. I do not want anybody to misconstrue what I am saying. I hate corruption; I will not tolerate corruption, but these Members of the People's National Movement when they were in office engaged in the worst form of corruption and mismanagement and in the worst form of squandermania that this country has ever seen.

If you take all the projects that he spoke about this morning, the same projects that he said attributed to the development programme of the PNM, the Hall of

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. M. ASSAM]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

Justice, the Financial Complex and Mount Hope, hundreds of millions in cost overruns. Not to speak of those that they started like the Caroni Racing Complex that they sunk \$120 million on, and it is still there; the La Brea industrial park, \$135 million, and it is still there; and the King George V Park, or whatever it is called, \$27 million, and it is still there. And they have the temerity to come and talk about corruption and mismanagement and so forth, when they destroyed the base of this country. When we had galloping inflation at one time; high unemployment and the percentage of people living below the poverty line rose astronomically; and they want to say that they could manage the economy!

They cannot even manage a parlour or a snocone cart. [*Laughter*]

**Dr. Griffith:** They could sell doubles.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Then the Member asked how it is that the economy is booming and yet still import duties are down? I would have thought that the former Minister of Trade who sits next to him, Diego Martin Central, would have explained this to him. If you are in a serious state of trade liberalization and you are a member of the World Trade Organization, and you are committed to tariff reduction and the removal of tariff, what do you expect? Would your import duties and custom duties fall commensurately? That is what we have been doing; we have been reducing tariffs. Most of our tariffs have been reduced to 0 per cent, 5 per cent or 10 per cent, maximum 20 per cent, whereas there was the high of 45 or 50 per cent before; so you must have a reduction in your import duties. I would have thought that the Member for San Fernando East would have known that as a former Prime Minister, and sitting next to his colleague who is a former Minister of Trade.

You do not have to be a rocket scientist. Of course, if you are a geologist with rocks in your head that might be a different matter; but you do not have to be a rocket scientist to understand that. As you reduce your tariffs, you reduce all your duties, you are going to collect less import duties, but obviously as your trade expands it will rise again, because you are not dealing in margins now, but in volume. For the period while you are doing it quite rapidly—as we did it quite rapidly—you are going to have falling import duties: that is a fact. You would hope to collect it in other areas, in terms of corporation taxes, VAT and so forth, that is how when you lose on the one side you gain on the other; it is very simple.

Mr. Speaker, you now understand how they learned nothing in government. You now understand when he talks all these things about interest rates, bond issues and the cost of a bond, he knows nothing of what he is talking about. The



fact that this Government could go to the International Bond Market and raise US \$200 million, US \$150 million, or US \$300 million, is a testimony to the fact that our credit rating has risen in the eyes of the investing world. [*Desk thumping*]

We have had strong approbation from Standards & Poors, and Moody's, two investment companies that rate your credit. The fact that you can do it shows that we have high credit rating, which they could not have done. The first time we went to the market is when I was in charge at CLICO Investment Bank. I went for you all; I raised US \$200 million through Credit Suisse, First Boston, as the leader and CLICO Investment Bank as the co-leader, a young investment bank. We did it for you; US \$200 million. That was the first time you went to the international market in eight or nine years, so do not come today and talk a lot of foolishness about this Government. This Government knows what it is doing, and the very fact, Mr. Speaker, as I shall indicate almost immediately, the kinds of progress we have made on the economic front—[*Interruption*]

Every time you call figures they say that they do not want Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development figures, they do not want Central Statistical Office (CSO) or Central Bank figures. They never tell us which figures they want, but these are Central Bank figures, take it or leave it, that is your business, but I will read them nevertheless. The key economic indicators in terms of performance of this economy—and I am going right back to 1991—in terms of gross domestic product growth: 1991, 2.7; 1992, minus 1.6; 1993, minus 1.5. Who was in office then?

In 1994 we saw an improvement, 3.5; 1995, 3.8; 1996, 3.9; 1997, 3.5; 1998, 5.6; 1999, 7.0, and the jackpot is in 2000, 7.9 is the estimated growth in GDP. [*Desk thumping*] Under whose administration did this economy grow? It not only grew, but the GDP doubled under this administration versus the People's National Movement; and they want to talk about management of the economy; that is performance.

Unemployment in 1991 was 18.5 per cent. In 1992 when they got into office it went up to 19.5 per cent; 1993 they were in office it went up again, 19.8 per cent; that is your record of performance in terms of growth in jobs. In 1994 it went down slightly, 18.4 per cent; 1995, 17.2 per cent; 1996, 16.3 per cent. In 1996 the UNC was in office it went down to 16.3 per cent. When we took over from you it was 17.2 per cent. In 1997 it was 15.0 per cent; 1998, 14.2 per cent; 1999, 18.1 per cent, and the year 2000, 12.5 per cent, a progressive decline in unemployment by the creation of 60,000 jobs.

The Minister of Finance, Planning and Development told them where those jobs were created. They were created in the non-oil sector, and I am pleased that I

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. M. ASSAM]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

have been responsible in large measure for the development of the non-oil sector in Trinidad and Tobago—[*Desk thumping*—]—by some of the most modern industrial policies and trade policies and by attracting inward investment in most of the non-oil sectors. That is how we have done it. [*Interruption*] I could not care less if I am fired. Christ was crucified too, do you not know that? They took him to Golgotha and put him on a cross, because he was a good man. [*Crosstalk*].

Mr. Speaker, let us look at exports. In every year of exports, except for one year, we fell. In 1991 exports were \$8.4 billion. In 1992 under their watch it went down, \$7.9 billion; in 1993 it went up, \$8.8 billion. In 1994 it took a surge, \$11.6 billion; in 1995 it went up again, \$14.5 billion, and it continued; 1996, \$15.2 billion; 1997, \$15.9 billion. There was a dip in 1998 of \$14.5 billion, then it took a surge again in 1999, \$17.6 billion. Up to May this year, which is five months, \$8.7 billion. If you extrapolate that to the rest of the year, we expect to have over \$18 billion in exports. Progressive improvement and development of the export sector through the trade policies, market access and all the free trade agreements that we have negotiated during this period. [*Crosstalk*]

Not to speak, Mr. Speaker, of the foreign reserves. The foreign reserves of this country have gone up progressively every year under this administration as opposed to the previous administration. If we can go into every area of growth in terms of economic performance, this Government has performed, not only satisfactorily, but outstandingly. I do not know what the People's National Movement is going to tell the electorate when they go to campaign.

Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to just deal with the negatives of the Member for San Fernando East, because I think I have spent enough time rebutting some of the inaccuracies, the misleading information and the wrong interpretations. Perhaps, based on ignorance he made that very stupid presentation. It was the worst of the five years since I have been here. It was the worst presentation; it was so lacking in substance that he himself, as I said, did not believe what he was saying when he said it.

I want to give an account of my stewardship in the Ministry of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs, so that people can know what we have been doing. They come from time to time and talk about rising prices. How can you have rising prices when inflation is down to 3.7 per cent from a high of 7 per cent during your administration? How can you have rising prices when there is so much competition to the extent now that I see people are attacking a certain new company and a certain new investment that has entered the Trinidad and Tobago

market? How can you have rising prices when, in fact, all the indicators have shown that prices have fallen over the last five-year period?

Mr. Speaker, in 1996 this administration formalized its contract with the consumers of Trinidad and Tobago when it approved the National Consumer Policy. The policy was primarily aimed at creating an environment within which consumers maximized their economic resources. Therefore, we are charged with the responsibility, together with the Consumer Guidance Council, of ensuring that the various agencies under their charge monitor and implement the consumer policy.

The major action areas in the Medium Term Policy Framework for 1999/2002 is to create an appropriate environment to ensure consumer safety and equality; to develop a vibrant consumer movement, to promote the development of a regional consumer lobby and to enforce consumer protection laws; also to create an appropriate environment to ensure consumer safety and equality. That is why we are getting licks. The newspapers would not even publish—though we are paying for them—legal orders of the Ministry of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs, and they are being very unethical. When we give them orders to publish they get in touch with the business persons in advance and refuse to publish the orders, but we will deal with that in time.

We also did a lot of review of legislation and we are constantly reviewing the body of consumer legislation. We brought to this Parliament the Adverse Trade Practices Order 2000. We also have new orders being developed and we have been holding seminars with business organizations to apprise them of new orders. In particular, we came to the Parliament and we did an amendment to the Consumer Protection and Safety Act, No. 30 of 1985 and No. 22 of 1998, to make them more relevant and more effective to the economic environment in which we live, with respect to globalization and liberalization.

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

On the drawing board we also have to amend the Small Claims Tribunal, Bailiffs and Real Estate Brokers Bill, Alcohol and Tobacco Advertising Bill for Children, and the Supply of Goods and Services Act. We have also assisted in developing legislation with other ministries, such as the Homes for Older Persons Bill, the Adoption Act, the Education Act and the Children's Authority Act.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Trade and Industry and Consumer Affairs has also acted in testing and weighting of selected products and dissemination of information to consumers. We have done scientific tests on light bulbs, dairy milk

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. M. ASSAM]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

and bottled water, we also have a standing committee in a number of areas where we liaise with members of the various industries and we have what we call quarterly sectoral meetings.

Our duty in the ministry is to promote and develop a vibrant consumer movement and we do so through education and information. Individuals and non-governmental organizations recognize their role in public education, and the local book fair at the annual symposium which we hold every year educated consumers and the business community on legal and ethical business practices, facilitated discussions with consumers and traders and members of the public on consumer law. We trained Parliament officers to conduct consumer education sessions for the youths, we educated consumers in business and legal, ethical, business practices, facilitated discussion with consumers and traders and members of the public on consumer law.

We also tried to promote and develop a regional consumer lobby and our ministry has been in the forefront of doing so and collaborating with all the Caricom countries and liaising with what we call the CIL, which is Consumer International. Never before has this happened, a lot of legislation was on the books, but enforcement was never carried out and we are in the business of enforcing the laws to protect consumers. The application of the consumer protection legislation to the facts of actual consumer related issues, notifying the traders of their obligation with regard to consumer protection laws and what constitutes contravention of these laws and we recommend orders to deal with them.

Mr. Speaker, we intend to continue our work and collaborate with relevant agencies that are responsible for developing standards, make recommendations for development of legislation to address efficiencies in consumer law, to strengthen the access to consumer services through the refurbishment of existing sub-offices and to strengthen the system for monitoring commercial activities. Above all, we will be intensifying our role in various aspects of law enforcement, proper testing and evaluation during the coming year.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to trade and industry, we have had quite a record of achievement in this particular area as the Budget Statement indicates. The trade policy initiatives of the ministry are designed to diversify the non-oil sector and promote investment employment and sustainable development. Therefore it is no surprise that in the Budget Statement the Minister of Finance said that 60,000 new jobs were created during the period 1995—2000 as a result, mainly of the efforts of the non-oil sector. In fact, the small business sector came in for special mention

and it shows how the small business sector was equally responsible for generating the large proportion of the 60,000 jobs that were created.

The Small Business Company, as you know, guarantees loans to small businesses and as I mentioned earlier, we are moving into another area of the Small Business Leasing Development Company which will facilitate even further the development of the small business sector and we have just looked at a new paradigm with respect to venture capital, which the Member for San Fernando East talked about this morning. These things are not something that you can rush into, because he said we promised since 1996 and 1997. Of course, we had a task force—

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. M. Assam:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Member for Diego Martin Central.

Mr. Speaker, we will be soon having a new regime in venture capital and we would be having through the Small Business Task Force a reinvigorated and restructured Small Business Development Company. It is all in the pipeline and it is similar to the trade agreements that we had been negotiating. Every time I come here there is talk about them, but I want to report that we have concluded our trade agreement with the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and we are almost halfway through one with Mexico and we have started one with Costa Rica; and we have also signed a bilateral trade agreement with India. So we are moving at cosmic speed to ensure market access for all our manufacturers/exporters so that Trinidad and Tobago's market will not be the 1.2 million of Trinidad and Tobago or the 5 million of Caricom, but it will encompass all of Latin and Central America, Europe, the United States of America, the Middle East and the Far East. When we have concluded the free trade area of the Americas—and we have just finished the first stage of the new post LOMÉ agreement—Trinidad and Tobago's success in exports would be assured.

Mr. Speaker, the various areas that we have been involved in, the Caricom effort to establish the single market and the economy have been successful to date and I advise that we have in fact negotiated nine protocols which will be in force before long as we move towards the new Caricom single market and economy.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. M. ASSAM]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

Mr. Speaker, one of the most important developments in the—

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, I think the House would benefit if we could be informed of the protocols which have been negotiated with Caricom. The nine protocols.

**Hon. M. Assam:** You want to know about the nine protocols? All right, I will tell you about the nine protocols. No problem.

Protocol I is the legal framework for reviewing the Treaty of Chaguaramas;

Protocol II addresses the rights of establishment, provision of services and the movement of capital;

Protocol III addresses industrial policy;

Protocol IV addresses trade policy;

Protocol V addresses services;

Protocol VI addresses the question of movement of persons and capital;

Protocol VIII addresses rules of competition; and

Protocol IX addresses disputes settlement.

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Minister, would it be possible to lay those documents in the House?

**Hon. M. Assam:** I can lay them at a future date.

**Hon. Member:** You have not mentioned Protocol VII.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Additionally, we are involved in a complete review of our industrial policy. We have had the help of the Commonwealth Fund for technical cooperation in terms of industrial policy in order to make us more competitive and we have been working on that, and we hope to produce a new industrial policy over the next six months to make Trinidad and Tobago a more competitive country.

The point is we are moving into a new era, not only in terms of emphasis in the traditional industries, but we are moving into the area of knowledge-based industries, hence the reason that we have had two task forces: one on venture capital, and one on the science, technology and innovation park and we are trying to put all together and see how knowledge-based industries, particularly small and medium enterprises can benefit from this new regime in the whole area of venture capital.

Mr. Speaker, one of the very important things that the Ministry of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs has been doing is pushing the whole question of electronic commerce. We had a task force on electronic commerce, Cabinet has approved it and we have now set up a whole unit in the Ministry of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs to promote e-Government, e-commerce and e-business and we are hoping that this would come on stream before long.

We have also had an Events Management Centre developed in the Ministry of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs because we want to co-ordinate all the events, irrespective of whether they are in the private or public sector to the best of our ability to ensure that when we have these kinds of events in Trinidad and Tobago, we have specialized staff dealing with them at all times.

We also had in the Ministry of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs a unit dealing with small business and the creation of opportunities within small business so that they can service better and have a better liaison between the ministry and the Small Business Development Company.

We at the Ministry established a Secretariat responsible for the Y2K problem which we managed successfully together with the Ministry of Training and Distance Learning. So that the Ministry of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs has been very much involved in a number of areas which are very important to the development of trade and industry. We have been training our people and sending them to Geneva to take courses offered by the World Trade Organization, because as you know, we are now living in a rules-based economic environment and, therefore, it is important for us to understand how the World Trade Organization works and how it impacts on the trading regimes of our country *vis-à-vis* other countries of the world.

We are putting special emphasis on how the new World Trade Organization second round—which we would like to call the developers' round—should proceed in order for small countries to have special and differential treatment. Also, with respect to various areas of development we are moving post haste and you would be told about that even more with respect to the development of the telecommunications industry which is part of the whole e-commerce thrust. Because you cannot have e-commerce successfully promoted and developed in a society where telecommunications rates are high, so we have to bring a Bill, demonopolize it, increase and introduce competition within the telecommunications industry to drive down telecommunication rates so that the Internet, e-commerce, and e-Government would be made possible and universalized within the public and private sectors and particularly offering the Internet to schools, from primary

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. M. ASSAM]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

to tertiary levels, in Trinidad and Tobago. Training is going to play a very important role in all of this and, of course, the Minister responsible for Training and Distance Learning will advise you what the plans are for proceeding in this direction.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs also has the other role of attempting to collaborate all of these various projects and enterprises that impact directly on industry and would help to further integrate and going about balanced development to further diversify the economic base. So we are looking at services, the marine industry, telecommunications, and knowledge-based industries. We are looking at agro-processing which the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources will talk about and we are looking at all the areas in tourism and the various financial services and I am sure that the Minister of Tourism will talk about the tourism thrust that we are pursuing.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs has been playing a pivotal role in transforming the economy, in diversifying the economy; in creating market access; in improving trade in the non-oil sector; in bringing in investments in the non-oil sector, generating employment and creating wealth outside of the traditional energy sector.

Mr. Speaker, what has been happening is a new kind of paradigm shift in terms of the economy and the direction of the economy. At one time, Mr. Speaker, as you know, there was a lot of dependence on energy and we have moved significantly away from that dependence and we are now restructuring the entire economy to reflect a more balanced and integrated type of model so that we would be able to withstand any shocks of the future as opposed to what took place in the 1980s and indeed, that almost took place in the earlier part of this year when the price of oil dipped to under \$10.00 a barrel. It was because of the diversification process that was taking place that the non-oil sector was able to take up the slack. So when you talk about the revenue base falling, it was principally because of the price of oil that was so low in the first six months of the year 2000.

Mr. Speaker, my contribution cannot be complete because I feel I have a responsibility to talk about the constituency which I represent and so, I turn my attention for a few minutes to what I have been able to achieve, my record of service, not only of my achievement in the ministry, but in my constituency. There is so much misleading information that is being published that led the Member for Laventille East/Morvant to say that I have failed.

If what I have said in my contribution so far is failure, then tell me what is success? If what I am going to say now is failure, tell me what is success?



**2.25 p.m.**

In terms of St. Joseph road resurfacing I have had so many streets—Abercromby Street, Buena Vista, Longden Street, Albert Street, First Street, Second Street, Lower North Street, Wellington Street, Charlotte Street, Agostini Street, Savary Street, Freeman Street, Victoria Street, Nelson Street, King Street Extension Piccadilly Street, Richmond Street and Market Street—all resurfaced. *[Interruption]* They were in a boat. The constituency of St. Joseph was in the most dilapidated position, totally neglected by the former representatives. *[Desk thumping]*

In Petit Bourg the whole of Maloney Street—resurfaced. In Valsayn South—Aruac Road, Morequito Road, Parima Road, Lukini Road, Bimiti Road, Camaca Road, Igneri Road, Kairi Road and, as I stand here, Taguaria is being resurfaced. In Valsayn North—Gilwell Road, Prince Charles Street, Palm Road, Mayfield Road—*[Interruption]*

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

**Hon. M. Assam:**—Valsayn Avenue, Greenvale Avenue, Cedar Avenue, Woodlands Road and Windsor Road—all completely resurfaced during the five years of my stewardship. *[Desk thumping]*

In Aranguéz—Aranguéz Private Road, Ramgarib Trace, John Dulam Street, Coronation Street and Aranguéz Main Road—completely resurfaced. In Champs Fleurs—Hilltop Drive, Upper Mendez Drive, Quarry Drive, Palm Drive and Bamboo Drive, all of these places were in the most despicable and inhumanly possible—impassable. Mt. D’or—Second Private Road and the whole of Mt. D’or.

Bamboo Settlement No. 2—Mohan Trace, Hosein Circular, Persad Land and Temple Street. In Mt. Lambert—Temple Street, Sixth Street, Second Avenue and, as I am standing here, First and Third Avenues are being resurfaced. In 35 years Mt. Lambert has not seen it although they have seen it fit to support the other side. In Curepe—the Main Road in Curepe, Valsayn Trace, Southern Main Road and Farm Road Extension. That is road resurfacing.

In terms of drainage—dredging of the St. Joseph River; desilting and widening of the ravine in Farm Road; construction of three box drains in Caiman Road; construction of a bridge at Priest Hill—one of the most dangerous bridges there for 40 years with five schools that are contiguous to each other. It is the first time that we have had a proper bridge there—*[Desk thumping]* construction of two retaining walls in Caiman Road. In Valsayn—dredging of the St. Joseph River; the construction of approximately 100 feet of box drains in Valsayn.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. M. ASSAM]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

[*Interruption*] No, they were never there. [*Interruption*] Oh yes, I know, but they would not fall, not like the Member for Diego Martin Central.

In Aranguez—[*Interruption*] That has nothing to do with sending back. It is the UNC that will live on. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** I would like to suggest to several Members on the Opposition Benches that they should allow the Member for St. Joseph to make his contribution and not bait him. You would all have an opportunity, I assure you. Nobody would be denied an opportunity to speak. So please, allow him to make his contribution. [*Interruption*] I ask you please, allow him to make his contribution.

**Hon. M. Assam:** In Aranguez—construction of new weir at the San Juan River; desilting of the Satar Drain; cleaning of three cylinders running under the Churchill Roosevelt Highway; desilting of the Mullah Canal; widening and desilting of drain on the northern side of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway; construction of 300 feet of box drains on Aranguez Main Road and 150ft. of box drains on Aranguez Main Road—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Mt. D'or—400 feet of box drains at Spring Valley, Mt. D'or; construction of a new road at Hope Place; construction of retaining wall at Oliver Trace and at Hope Place.

Bamboo No. 2—2000 feet of footpath being constructed. Mt. Lambert—restoration of the weir at San Juan; desilting of the Bermudez drain; desilting of the Mt. Lambert Drain; 150 feet of pavement construction. Curepe Housing—desilting of the St. Joseph River and the main road to Caroni. Bamboo No. 3—rehabilitation of the drain parallel to the Uriah Butler Highway in Bamboo No. 3. Bamboo No. 1—repairs to sluice gates and pumps at Bamboo No. 1. Real Spring—200 feet of pavement construction on Nathaniel Crichlow Street.

Self-help projects in St. Joseph—water project, residents of Agostini Street; Upper Wellington Street, St. Joseph, construction of box drain. In Aranguez, the Roodal Mehelal Road, Aranguez. In Mt. D'or—all these are self-help projects. Hillview Lane, Mt. D'or; Oliver Trace, Mt. D'or; Oliver Trace Extension, Mt. D'or, construction of box drains; 1st Private Road, Mt. D'or, rehabilitation and 2nd Private Road, Mt. D'or, road rehabilitation. In Bamboo No. 2—Seewala Drive, Bamboo, the water project there is self-help. In Bamboo No. 1—construction of nursery school in Bamboo.

In St. Joseph—establishment of the St. Joseph Renaissance District and complete redevelopment of George Earl Park; establishment of the St. Joseph

Police Station, establishment of St. Joseph as the command centre for E-999 for the whole East-West Corridor; renovations of the St. Joseph Police Station; construction of the pre-school at Market Street in St. Joseph; provision of water mains at Caiman Road. Aranguez; new water lines along the Aranguez Main Road and the feeder lines; relocation of the fire hydrant; construction of a new Aranguez Hindu School, construction of a step pavilion at Aranguez Savannah; installation of street lights; establishment of the adult education centre in Aranguez; construction of a pre-school in Aranguez; construction of a community centre in Aranguez; rehabilitation of agricultural access roads in Aranguez and rehabilitation and establishment of an extension of the Aranguez health centre with dental facilities. [*Desk thumping*]

In Bamboo No. 2—upgrade of the step pavilion at Bamboo No. 2; construction of the Bamboo Grove Government Primary School and upgrade of the community centre, provision of water connections. In Mt. Lambert—provided funds to construct new back wall for the Mt. Lambert R.C. School; rehabilitation of the agricultural access road from The Garden to Mt. Lambert. Curepe housing—upgrade of the community centre of the Curepe Housing Settlement. In Bamboo No. 3—establishment of recreation ground at Bamboo No. 3; construction of step pavilion at Bamboo No. 3; installation of street lights through the adopt-a-community programme of the Ministry of Social Development and Nestlé.

In Bamboo No. 1—construction of step pavilion at Bamboo No. 1. San Juan Hill—construction of a co-ed San Juan School to replace two dilapidated schools that were there for over 60 years and we have one of the finest state of the art schools today; [*Desk thumping*] and total and complete renovation of the San Juan police station where policemen were living like subhuman beings. In Real Spring—completion of the community centre at Real Spring, Valsayn which the PNM had for 14 years and did nothing about, and construction of a step pavilion at Real Spring and the development of the recreation ground.

In Mt. Hope—a tank that was in disuse for about 17 years. The Minister of Public Utilities, the one who has been lambasted about “water for all” has now begun the restoration which will be completed very shortly of a 23 million-litre tank at the Mt. Hope Housing Development. [*Desk thumping*] Last but not least, the construction of a brand new step pavilion at Mt. D’or.

Mr. Speaker, this is merely a sample of the things in which I have been instrumental as the representative for the constituency of St. Joseph for the past five years. I am not beating my trumpet. I am happy to leave office having discharged my responsibilities in a manner that has improved the quality of life of

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. M. ASSAM]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

the people of St. Joseph. [*Desk thumping*] In my ministerial capacity as Minister of Trade, Industry and Consumer Affairs, I have discharged my responsibilities in every sector and sphere of my Ministry. I have [*Desk thumping*] brought better deals to the consumers of this country. Never before has consumer protection, never before has consumer awareness, never before has consumer education taken place to the extent that in 1999 the Ministry of Consumer Affairs won the Prime Minister's trophy for excellence throughout the public service. [*Desk thumping*]

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I feel a tremendous sense of satisfaction welling up in me.

**Miss Nicholson:** I feel grief welling up in me.

**Hon. M. Assam:** Mr. Speaker, the only sadness is if the person who replaces me in these ministries, will not continue the work that we have started, because I have attempted to motivate the public servants in those ministries and I thank them. They have been wonderful, professional, capable and competent; people of integrity and people who have worked hard, and I compliment them.

I compliment my colleagues who assisted me because if the Minister of Public Utilities did not assist me, if the Minister of Education did not assist me, if the Minister of Local Government did not assist me and if the former Minister of Agriculture and now the—oh, I forgot to mention that the present Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources assisted me and we have started to build a wholesale market in Macoya that will take care of all the farmers from [*Desk thumping*] Maloney straight down to Barataria. I forgot also, we are turning the sod next week for the complete renovation and expansion of the San Juan Market under the Minister of Local Government. [*Desk thumping*] So my list is incomplete, Mr. Speaker. As I speak all of them are coming back to me.

So that, Mr. Speaker, my cup runneth over. [*Interruption*] Nothing left to do. My cup runneth over, Mr. Speaker. I want to tell you that I have run the race to the finish, I have kept the faith and I have no regrets. I wish to thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*]

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

**Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds** (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Mr. Speaker, it behoves me, having heard my colleague, the erstwhile Member for St. Joseph, in his farewell address, to bid him farewell.

**Mr. Speaker:** No, you cannot refer to a sitting Member as “the erstwhile Member”. You cannot do that. He is and he remains the Member for St. Joseph.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** I am obliged, but from the sound of that contribution it sounds but for a short while. In any event, Mr. Speaker, there were several revealing things about his contribution, but certainly the national community listening to him as he sang his swan song would take note of the disparity and the inequity with which this UNC Government dispenses or disburses of Government's resources. [*Desk thumping*]

That is the point, because I have been trying desperately for five years to get a few roads sorted out in my own constituency. I have written to the Ministry of Local Government and other ministries and to this date, Mr. Speaker, we are still in need, we are still wanting. He ran through a list and it reminds me of another list about which the Minister of Local Government boasted a few months ago in a Ministry of Local Government monthly circular where 84 projects were done. His Ministry boasted, but 82 were in UNC-controlled areas and two otherwise. It simply demonstrates the way they do business and we have taken note. But in the colloquialism—[*Interruption*]

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

**Mr. F. Hinds:** I think I overheard the Prime Minister of our Republic saying that if he controls all of the seats in Trinidad and Tobago only that way will we get all of the roads sorted out across the country. That is the irresponsibility of the Member for Couva North. That is his thinking. But God is great. God is good and great. Mr. Speaker, I was about to employ a colloquialism. My friend from St. Joseph simply laid track for “gouti to run on”. Mr. Carlos John and Om Lala will walk upon those very smooth roads and represent those people perhaps better on the next occasion. That is the ingratitude of the Member for Couva North. I hope he takes note.

Mr. Speaker, my business today is to make a few comments in respect of the education function of Government activity. I listened this morning to the Member for San Fernando East and the proud, political leader of the People's National Movement and Leader of the Opposition. I listened to him, with laser beam focus, analyze and disassemble what was presented as Budget 2001 by the Minister of Finance. I suspect that the task of disassembling that budget was not at all difficult because its weaknesses, its flaws and its untruths were patent for all to see. I was proud of that contribution, if I may be permitted some self-praise, and want to congratulate the Member for San Fernando East. [*Desk thumping*]

The budget presentation, as I saw it from the Minister of Finance, was characterized by obfuscation, sneakiness and a well-intentioned brevity to escape

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. HINDS]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

public scrutiny—the bright light of scrutiny—but the Member for San Fernando East exposed it to the world and we are grateful. One such lie, one such untruth, if I may say so, Mr. Speaker, was an implication by the Minister of Finance. He implied, and of course the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education expressly stated on several occasions, that they have taken thousands of children in this country off the streets; that year after year in respect of PNM education policy and practices, 10,000 children per year were left idle on the streets of this country and many of them turned to crime. The minister's presentation was but a few days ago and therefore it is not necessary to quote him. I am sure that that untruth is fresh in the minds of all the Members of this House.

**2.40 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, what are the facts? Maybe it is that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education genuinely believe that 10,000 children fall by the wayside. I doubt. I do not see how they could do that or believe that, because the figures are there in the Ministry for them all to see. If they believe that sincerely, they are seeking to improve the situation by moving the children hurriedly from the primary school, all into secondary schools, according to them.

I want to ask, first of all, what about the children whose parents would have preferred that they repeat the examination? Every year, several of those children repeat the examination and oftentimes, they do better on the second occasion than they did on the first. Mr. Speaker, 10—12 per cent of the annual amount that did not get a place in Common Entrance actually repeated the exam.

The Government's policy on this occasion ensured that they would not have an opportunity to repeat, granted the Minister has said that the option is theirs if they want to move on to the secondary school and if they want to remain. How many will remain when she announced to the nation, untruthfully, that all the children would get a place, implying that everybody passed the Common Entrance Examination?

By forcing the nation's children forward in that horrible and ugly way, they have denied many of those children an opportunity, by way of repeating, to improve their performance the second time around. As I said in this honourable Chamber before, I myself have been a beneficiary of the repeat system, not having done well on my first attempt at Common Entrance many years ago.

**Sen. Kuei Tung:** You still not doing well!

**Mr. Hinds:** Mr. Speaker, if they believe that 10,000 of those children fell to crime, it means they are not appreciating that it is only 6—8 per cent of those

children who, according to them, fell through the cracks. That was not because of the examination, but because of their own, in many cases, learning difficulties.

Those children require very specialized tuition, specialized programmes, so that if the Minister is saying that she is putting them into secondary schools, many of them will be unable to enjoy or to benefit from the opportunity of secondary exposure because of those learning difficulties. Clearly, what is necessary are teachers who are specifically trained to deal with that type of child and a philosophy, if you like, or a government policy to deal with it. The Government clearly missed that boat.

By doing so, Mr. Speaker, what one will find is that they now run the risk of causing 10,000 children or more to really and truly fall through the cracks, because as I have said to the Minister before, and I must say again, unlike other types of mistakes, when one makes mistakes of that nature with the education system, they are impossible and, at minimum, very difficult to correct. Each of these mistakes conditions that which will happen later on down the road, and they remain with us for a very long time. I urge her to be careful.

I want to remind the Minister yet again, and I am doing this deliberately, because notwithstanding all of our protestations, notwithstanding all of my previous comments on these facts, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Education and more lately the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development, in his budget presentation, continue to mislead this country and to lend the impression that 10,000 children per year fell by the wayside.

The facts, Mr. Speaker—and I place it on the *Hansard* record again—and I crave and ask a favour of those who purvey this information to the national community to let it be known that the 1998/1999 statistics of the Ministry of Education demonstrate, and it typifies that which transpired every year, but I am using the most recent figure; it demonstrates clearly that 66 per cent of the children who wrote the exam would have gone to the public secondary schools, the state assisted secondary schools. Three per cent would have gone on to private secondary schools; institutions that have been filled with students for many years in this country, and right now continue to be filled under the Government's policy, the only difference being that the Government is now paying the fee rather than the parent or guardian of those children.

Mr. Speaker, 15 per cent went to or through the post primary system where they would have spent a year or so and done an examination and, if they did well at that point, they would have gone on to the Form I or the Junior Secondary

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. HINDS]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

School proper, and 10 per cent of those repeated. Those are the facts. A total of 94 per cent, leaving approximately 6 per cent, and those are the children who are identifiably those with learning difficulties, Mr. Speaker, whom I said earlier require specialist attention and who would be unable to benefit from secondary education.

In the course of a recent debate in the other place, the Minister, having come to the national community, she and her Prime Minister, having proclaimed that they have introduced universal secondary education for all, she was obliged in the Senate to reveal the truth, and then she told the national community at that forum that most of these children got between zero and 30 per cent in their Common Entrance Examination. It means that they did not pass the Common Entrance; they did not make the grade, but prior to her having to say so, she was giving the impression that they all passed the Common Entrance and went to secondary school. An attempt, no doubt, to fool people in this country, but she was cornered in the Senate and they did not stop. Since then, she has said 10,000. Since then, the Prime Minister has said 10,000. The untruths simply continue unabated.

If she accepts that the model school is the school that would take 487 or so children with learning difficulties, she must accept that that model school is not a secondary school. [*Desk thumping*] If she accepts that, she must logically accept, because she is also on *Hansard* saying in the Senate—an administrator, a technocrat from the Ministry of Education told us as well that the Form I Specials that are housed in the traditional Junior Secondary Schools are also a unit that takes in children that are similar to the children in the model schools. Therefore, the Form I Specials are not secondary school students proper. They are also so-called model school students.

The Minister tried to give the impression that all the children were going to secondary school. Why is she trying to do that? It reminds me of what the Member for San Fernando East said this morning in passing. Even the recommendation of the Salaries Review Commission—it recommended an increase in salaries for Ministers of Government. That which they are entitled to, they even take sneakily. No reason to try to sneak. It is theirs. No reason to tell us untruths.

Mr. Speaker, for the Prime Minister on those bases to claim that he has achieved universal secondary education is a farce. It is simply not true. [*Desk thumping*] I want the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education to put a stop to those untruths immediately. They could not claim to have achieved universal secondary education because the model school children and the children in Form I



Specials are not secondary school students proper. It is a post primary experience with another name in another place. *[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. Panday:** Take them out when you win!

**Mr. Hinds:** The scandalous behaviour of the Member for Couva North continues. Even informed people, people who are supposed to be informed. I read the newspapers and I saw a good and well-known citizen, a well-known friend, Mr. Kamaluddin Mohammed, applaud the Government for achieving universal secondary education in a meeting in San Juan. I heard Mrs. Erica Williams-Connell do the same thing. They do not understand the trickery of this UNC Government and the untruths they continue to tell us. They, too, were caught in that sound bite sensationalism which was designed for electioneering purposes.

The 10,000 image or concept took hold. Even members of the media from time to time, one approached me, and said “Mr. Hinds, how does the PNM respond to this situation where 10,000 children ended up on the street?” and I had to point out to the poor lady, “That was not true. The basis of your question was wrong. You were misled by the Minister of Education and the Prime Minister”, much as they misled my friend from St. Joseph who, having come to the end of his tether will recognize the ingratitude of the Member for Couva North as he marches forward, leaving political dead behind him. *[Laughter]*

**Mr. Panday:** A new PNM! A new UNC!

**Mr. Hinds:** I want to let the Minister of Education understand this very clearly. She cannot improve the education system by telling untruths. She cannot improve the education system by making declarations. Improvement in education cannot be done by a Minister in an office. It requires doing meaningful things and all the stakeholders participating.

There is a disgruntled set of teachers. They cannot expect to improve the education system if the teachers are demoralized, demotivated and totally unhappy, particularly since they want to increase their pay again, and they are seeing nothing in line for them.

The technocrats, when they speak, are treated in a certain way. I remember the Minister firing the transition team led by Mr. Clive Pantin. She made a comment to the press that there cannot be two Ministers of Education. There were two when the Member for Tabaquite was there. The Prime Minister gave him another Minister, a de facto Minister. She could not tolerate it, her ego is probably bigger, she feels a lot more confident and she fired them unceremoniously. He fired about

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. HINDS]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

three Permanent Secretaries in a short space of time, making the word “permanent” sound like child's play in the context of permanent secretary. None lasted more than a month around him, a Christian as he was.

**Dr. Nanan:** Is.

**Mr. Hinds:** I would like the Minister, when she intervenes in this debate—because this is serious business—to tell us what truly is the Government's plan. What is the Government's vision for education? Whenever we speak about the White Paper, they do not like it. She jeers, she and her Prime Minister, saying that we are only talking about white paper, white paper. Maybe they do not like the colour. White represents purity, we are told. They would prefer if it was a red paper which is bloody and represents sin and, more typically, UNC.

I would like them to tell us, because when they came to office, that White Paper represented a policy position for the advancement of education in this country. It was a programme that was designed to take us from 1993 to the year 2003, a 10-year programme. It came as a consequence of what we like to call the democratization of education, massive consultations up and down this country involving all stakeholders, and we came up with the White Paper, a blueprint for education development in this country.

When the Minister came to office, the Member for Tabaquite, he expressly said that he accepted it as his own, but they have not confined themselves to that White Paper and they must tell us what is their vision. The Prime Minister, his Minister of Education and the Government of the UNC, in respect of the education portfolio, can only be described as being totally irresponsible. After five years, one would have thought that they would have come and demonstrated, at least at this fifth year, the crowning glory in their activities in the education scenario, but they try to tell this nation about some revolution in education—free education and universal secondary education—when we know it is simply not true.

Every day we hear them saying, “We did this” and “We did that”. Mr. Speaker, all of the initiatives that this Government ought to have been applying, they met them on the table in that White Paper. All! Mr. Speaker, I submit that probably the only new initiative that this Government has come with for the last five years is the model school.

**2.55 p.m.**

The only new initiative is the model school and the model school was not even mentioned in the White Paper. It was clearly an afterthought. When they decided for election purposes that all the children would go to "secondary

schools", as they called them, then they realized that there were children who had made zero and 3 per cent, had learning difficulties and would not have been able to cope with it, so they established Form 1 Specials and model schools. That is the only new thing as a palliative for their failed policy.

Other than that, the White Paper proposed and enunciated all the other initiatives that were sitting there in the Ministry of Education. They cannot point to any initiative but what they have done very successfully is to derail that programme. We were up and running. Teacher training had begun. Sending principals and vice-principals to do the Bachelor of Education degree had begun and many of the other initiatives had been taking place. But you see, the Prime Minister likes to say "woulda", "coulda", "shoulda", again, to lend the unwary in the national community the false impression that nothing was being done.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, if one follows the Prime Minister and his Government, one would think that before 1995, Trinidad and Tobago was still a place where there were swamplands in Port of Spain; no buildings; no roads; no schools; no T&TEC; no anything; no established economy; nothing. Everything came with the United National Congress in 1995. That is the impression they want to give—the magician, the Member for Couva North. Now, we see a clear strategy where they are trying to write-off our proud history and contribution to this country and they are dealing with the so-called new PNM and old PNM. It is one PNM, from 1956 to now. [*Desk thumping*] The faces may change; the places may change; but the policies and the principles largely remain the same. That is why we have survived all these proud years while you went through all kinds of changes and you will go and change again.

We recognize that in respect of education, we have to move, to go beyond mere change, we have to find qualitative improvement and I am asking the Minister of Education to point out to this honourable House, when she gets on her legs later, what qualitative improvement they have brought to the education system as a consequence of their false claim to universal secondary education. No qualitative improvement. You do not improve quality by improving numbers. More places; pay for people to go to private secondary schools.

I want her to tell us, too: what is their Government attempting to achieve in the education sector? The Minister entered a debate—I said so last week and I want to say it again—in the Senate, the subject of that debate was: what is education and what is it for? Her contribution was revealing. I read it over twice and found nothing of substance.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. HINDS]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

Her contribution revealed that she and her Government are not possessed of any philosophy in education, much like the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development. He has been telling us year after year in budget statements that he has ended up with surpluses; he is budgeting for surpluses and every year, for five years, he wound up with a deficit. Minister Brian "Deficit" Kuei Tung. [*Desk thumping*] That is what he has come to be known for.

If the Minister had any understanding of the seriousness of the education sector, if she had any understanding of the importance of the last five years, if she understood the psychological violence that the UNC's conduct has brought upon educators, parents and students in this country—because when technocrats take months as they did in the White Paper and painstakingly chart out a course for our educational development in this country and a government comes to power, derails it, disregards it and treats it like nothing, it is frustrating. When teachers who are supposed to apply the principle—the ones who are supposed to teach our children, as it were—become frustrated, the psychological and structural violence that this Government has brought against the people, the students, the parents and the teachers of this country is phenomenal.

Mr. Speaker, to understand—[*Interruption*]I do not have money like you, and my wife does not walk around with \$400,000 worth of jewellery and boast about it.

**Mr. Panday:** That is why you are not paying your mortgage.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** That is right. We are poor people. Did you pay your accountable advance?

To understand, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education, because when I read her contribution in that debate, she really did not know what was happening. Through you, Mr. Speaker, the purpose of education is a multi-faceted one, or business. It involves understanding and utilizing whatever special gift God would have given to you as an individual. We all have some gift, some attribute or some strength.

Education is a liberating force to the individual and it is also, of course, the element that drives economic growth or development. It goes much wider and much deeper than the formal education that we know. We need to concentrate, as I tried to tell her before, on the informal elements of education more than anything else, perhaps.

I heard some person describe education as what remains after you have forgotten that which they taught you in school. Education is about values,

conscience, knowledge, skill. It is about creating inventions. It is about change. It is about learning to live well, learning to live decently. It is about self-esteem, self-confidence, adulthood and parenthood. It is the median through which people—future generations—are produced to take a leadership role in any given society. Education is serious business. It makes us better equipped to serve our communities. It hones our intellectual and manual skills. It is designed to sharpen our powers of reason and criticism. It gives a sense of social responsibility. Education is a serious business and it is too serious to be left up to government, especially that Government. Education is truly the people's business and we ought not to be playing politics with it.

As I said earlier, when you do wrong, when you make mistakes and warp the education system, these are mistakes that cannot be easily corrected. They impact for many years. Take for example, they establish the model school this year. If next year, we realize that it was a waste of resources. What do you do? Just close it down? What would happen to the other children who, on a yearly basis, yield signs of that? What do you do?

You put some children in a private secondary school—a two-room building. The school could afford to take 300 students in year one. It is a two-room building so they could take another batch next year. But what happens in year three and year four? You cannot continue to send students there but, for this Government, government is a business. It is an opportunity to do well and maybe the people who they are paying to take places in their private secondary schools, are seeing now education as a business, as an investment, so if we get a contract for 20 years with the Government for students, we could then afford to build a better school and so the programme goes. What is this Government's vision? Tell us.

I believe they simply do not understand and where they understand, they just do not care. That is why this Government behaves in the way it does. The Prime Minister continues to boast about universal secondary education. He made a statement in this House on Friday, July 14, 2000. Listen to what he said. I quote:

"I shall shortly have in place, a fully representative Project Team, to formulate the necessary transition strategy to enable the automatic passage of our nation's children from primary school to an appropriate secondary school;..."

There he goes again. As late as July 14, he is now going to put in place a team to facilitate the smooth transition of students from primary to common entrance. I tell you, education for this Government is an afterthought.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. HINDS]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

The PNM had planned education properly, well in advance for years. It was in 1992 that the then Prime Minister summoned a team that put the White Paper in place and the plan was for the next 10 years, from 1992—2003. We could not have claimed universal secondary education until we put the other prerequisites in place. So, when the UNC comes today and criticizes us and says we "coulda"; we "woulda"; we "shoulda"; we did not implement full universal secondary education, we know why. We are not irresponsible. We do not want an aborted baby. We do not want any force-ripe fruit. We want to do it in its proper time but because election has come upon them, they disregard all those prerequisites and claim universal secondary education for short-term political gains. That is the irresponsibility of the United National Congress. Just as they were exposed in budgetary terms, in financial and economic terms earlier, everyone on this side will expose them in the different facets of governmental activity for the nation to see, so that later this year, or whenever they call the election, they will know and operate from the facts. We reach people through their minds and their hearts; you reach them through their pockets. But we will continue on the road we have always taken.

Mr. Speaker, I continue the quote:

"...as we dismantle the Common Entrance process, before the start of the new millennium.

I will take up with my Minister of Education, the early establishment of a system of continuous tracking to evaluate the competence of our students across the school year; in order to end for all time, the horrific 11-plus trauma for children and for parents."

What is the implication of that? That concept of continuous tracking, that is known in academic circles in the White Paper as the Continuous Assessment Programme, so when the Prime Minister is saying he will put in place, that was there. He did not create anything. It was right there. That is one of the elements that they have absolutely disregarded.

I have in my hand the report of a pilot project of 53 schools for the Continuous Assessment Programme. When we restructured the Common Entrance, as is the case now, the examination was designed to be 80 per cent of the mark and the Continuous Assessment Programme to account for 20 per cent, but there would still be an examination. There was a pilot project of 53 schools to see how well the CAP was working. The Minister is in possession of this report which told the Minister, and I want to quote very briefly:

"It is recommended that an in-depth investigation be conducted to determine the reasons for the poor level of implementation of the elements of the programme."

The pilot project demonstrated that the CAP project failed. That is one of the essential prerequisites to moving the children from primary to secondary as we restructure the examination.

### **3.10 p.m.**

It failed and she knows that, or at least ought to know. She must—like the Member for St. Joseph—have been busy paving roads too, and she does not know. But it is right there. There was no in-depth investigation. She told the nation, about a week ago, that she will implement the CAP on a phased basis—nice euphemism. What does it mean? Nothing! They are going ahead with the transition and calling it “Universal Secondary Education” without the CAP and other elements in place, like an aborted baby, premature, and it will never be healthy. Long after you have gone, we will feel it in this country. Children, parents and teachers will suffer for years because, again I tell you, mistakes in education are not easily, if at all, corrected: they linger for years thereafter.

Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister talks about continuous tracking, that is what we are talking about. He talks again about the horrific trauma of the Common Entrance Examination. Every parent knows that there is some stress surrounding the examination. The results are, and the evidence is, that the stress had nothing to do with the actual examination: it is the parents who largely brought stress upon their little children who went about their business learning from prep-school throughout all their years in primary school. It is we who put all the stress on the children. The stress came because of concerns with two questions—because places were limited—will my child get a place and, if so, where? Because we all want our child to go to the school of our first choice, but those are limited. In fact, places in the schools are limited. That was the reason for the stress. The stress had to do with places. It had nothing to do with the exam. It had nothing to do with race or alienation, as the Prime Minister tries to untruthfully tell people in this country as well.

I heard him on the radio—I told him so the other day and I will tell him again so he must stop it and call 102 FM and tell them to take that lying advertisement off the radio station—saying: “No longer will any child be denied a place in a secondary school by reason of his race, religion, ethnicity...” and all kinds of nonsense. His own two daughters went to a Catholic School in Port of Spain: St

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. HINDS]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

Joseph's Convent. [*Desk thumping*] I challenge the Prime Minister, again, to show me one case where an 11-plus child was denied a place because of race, colour, religion, class or ethnicity. That is not the truth! The Prime Minister must stop it and behave like a Prime Minister, and stop inciting division in the country with those wanton and careless words. [*Desk thumping*]

He must show me one school in this country: even if it is a Hindu school, with only Hindus there. I am sure you will find a Christian or two or Muslims, and a Muslim school with only Muslims, or any school in Port of Spain with only African, Indian, Syrian or Chinese children. All the schools in this country have been mixed from our nationhood and they continue to be so. Regardless of the "Mr. Divider" tactics of the Prime Minister, it will continue. [*Desk thumping*]

He calls the name of the honourable and deceased—may his soul rest in perfect peace—Dr. Eric Williams in aid. Dr. Eric Williams did, in fact, say in 1969 we wanted to move to the level of universal secondary education, but it could not be done if you did not have the places. You have to look at that in the context of the economy and the circumstances at that time. As a matter of fact, you have not yet introduced universal secondary education but, from a financial standpoint, based on the contribution from the Member for San Fernando East this morning, you have the financial capacity so to do. As a matter of fact, all of you can afford to build two or three schools. [*Laughter*]

He comes here to say: "Dr. Eric Williams had a vision from 1969 and he did not do it", so it takes the hon. Mr. Panday to come and do it. It would not surprise me if he put on a dashiki and claims to have emancipated the slaves too. [*Laughter*] He claims everything! He behaves as though nothing existed in Trinidad and Tobago before 1995.

The Member for St. Joseph boasted this morning that he paved over 100 roads in St. Joseph. I cannot boast about two: they starved Laventille, Diego Martin and the non-UNC constituencies. [*Desk thumping*] He said he paved 100 roads. If he admits to paving roads, it means the roads were there before he came. Stop behaving like Columbus. Not because you did not know means that they did not exist. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, he boasted that he did it in the year 2000.

With respect to the Common Entrance Examination I want to tell the Prime Minister—because I am sure he takes advice from those who are paid to advise him: the many of them—the Minister of Education ought to know better: the Common Entrance Examination has not been abolished. Let me repeat it. The words "common entrance" came in 1961. Prior to 1961, to get into the schools



which were largely controlled by the denominationalists before 1956, each school had its own entrance examination. If one did the exam and passed, one may have gotten a place in that school. Dr. Eric Williams and the PNM said, in the words of their mantra; “To educate is to emancipate.” They took education as a flagship and said it should be for all in this country. To replace the very diverse set of exams for each school, they introduced the common exam, which they called the Common Entrance Examination. After 2000, all the children will be doing the SEA Examination, and it remains common nonetheless. *[Desk thumping]* The Common Entrance is not abolished.

Apart from that, since the examination was introduced in 1961, there has been a lot of restructuring to the examination. There was a time there was no essay component. There was a time—*[Interruption]* I am being disturbed.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

There was a time when there was no essay component. There was a time when it was not a multiple-choice examination. The examination has been restructured. Do you know something Mr. Deputy Speaker? The Government established a task force to look at the removal of the Common Entrance Examination. This is reported in 1998. Its own task force told the Government, under the rubric “Recommendation”—they picked it up from the *White Paper* because it was there before they came: they came before Columbus. I quote from the last paragraph at page 53 of their task force report:

“The Task Force also recommends that come the year 2001, the title ‘Common Entrance Examination’ should be terminated. In its stead, the Task Force recommends the final selected examination should be called The Secondary Entrance Examination’.”

It is just a change of name. This task force envisaged a situation where a common exam would continue. But the Government comes and says that it has abolished the Common Entrance Examination. That is not the truth! I want to ask the Minister—I command you—stop saying that the examination has been abolished, and the Prime Minister as well—in the name of God. *[Interruption]* I am not as wealthy as you. I do not have friends called Narinesingh and my wife does not boast of having at any one time, \$400,000 worth of jewellery.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member for Laventille East/Morvant—

**Mr. F. Hinds:** Mr. Deputy-Speaker, I am obliged.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** This is not personal.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** Mr. Deputy-Speaker, I am obliged.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The speaking time of the Member for Laventille East/Morvant 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. F. Hinds:** I am most grateful to you Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**3.20 p.m.**

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when persons in the national community: the teachers' union, Members of the Opposition, the PNM as a political party, the Chamber of Commerce, the Working Women for Social Progress and many other right thinking groups and individuals point out to this Government that they are derailing the process and hurting our nation, they regard us as opponents. They say we are trying to slow them down. I heard the Prime Minister say that we are trying to slow them down. [*Interruption*] Yes, the Minister said so too; if slowing them means leaving one child behind, they would not stop, they must continue. All a pack of untruths!

**Mr. Sudama:** You are obstructionists, that is what he said.

**Mr. F. Hinds:** The very task force report stated—and its here for all to see—that in 1998 the ministry fell short of universal secondary education by 6,963 places, and they had envisaged that by the year 2002/2003, because of the anticipated decline in the birth rate, there would be a shortage of only 3,500 places, so if there were no repeaters, we needed 23 more schools in order to accommodate all the children, but creating more places was not the only barrier or challenge on the way to universal secondary education.

The White Paper made it quite clear that the children in the transition from primary to secondary school had to be ready. [*Desk thumping*] They had to be able to absorb secondary education, otherwise we would be sending them into a mine field where psychological warfare will then be waged upon them. But this Government, disregarding the principle of readiness, disregarding everything else, sacrificing all the other prerequisites for political gain in an election year, wanting an election slogan, shoved the children like cattle wherever they could find a place and claim universal secondary education. [*Desk thumping*] Even if you found a place for every child in a secondary school proper, that too will not amount to universal secondary education in its purest sense. The focus has to be

on the primary school, and all the requirements are stated in the White Paper, but they do not want to see it, they do not want to hear it. Their elections are too important.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the universal transfer of all 11-plus students by the year 2003—this is what the task force is saying—there would be the need for 23 schools. The report is saying that we need 23 schools to achieve universal secondary education, and before the People's National Movement left office in 1995 we negotiated and signed for a loan to construct four schools in Trinidad and Tobago: one in Guaico, one in Mason Hall, Tobago, one in Cunupia and one in Diego Martin, and for the last five years—Cunupia is part complete—not one of those schools is at completion. We are seeing where we need more schools.

Secondly, they negotiated a loan to construct 10 schools. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you heard of it earlier this morning in the context of the Member for San Fernando East saying that the original budget eight months ago was \$138 million, and under the UNC, within six months of that date, it jumped to \$243 million, and today we have information that the very 10 schools will cost this country \$345 million. The Prime Minister said that the reason for that phenomenal increase was because of the fact that the architects increased the size of the schools. Well, even if you build 23 more it could not cost that, but they increased and doubled the cost, UNC economics; same size. That is why they can consider themselves prosperous.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need more schools in order to de-shift. It is quite clear now that the junior secondary school, which had its relevance at that time—because as we were expanding secondary places we needed to create, because we did not have the resources, so we created a situation where you had two schools in one in the junior secondary. Had it not been for the shift system, half of those children would not have gone to school at all. So instead of telling us untruths about 10,000, they would have been telling us 50,000, but we established the junior secondary system, because that is what Trinidad and Tobago in 1971 before the oil boom could have afforded.

So we need some more schools; they have undertaken to build 10. The Prime Minister told this country about a week and a half ago that of all the secondary schools only eight would not be completed. So he is saying that they have achieved it in large part, only eight would not be opened, some would be opened in October, some in December and one in January.

What the Prime Minister did, in his usual sly way, was to bundle the new schools in with the other schools that already existed, so the 10 schools will not be

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. HINDS]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

completed by September, but he did not identify only the 10 schools, he lumped them together with all the other schools that were not to be built at all, they are standing there. He said only eight out of the total number of schools; that is what they tried to do; but the logic continues, it is simple.

If you needed 23 schools to achieve universal secondary education, and you have undertaken 10, you have not even achieved the 10, how could you claim now to have achieved universal secondary education? "So dey put them upstairs rum shop;" "dey" put them wherever they could find places, and tell us that they went to secondary school. This is a travesty, and they will pay for it in the upcoming elections; we will ensure that you do. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Sudama:** Who will ensure? You?

**Mr. F. Hinds:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, for universal secondary education to make sense we have to get the entire package all together and in place, but what this Government has done is really to remove and reduce standards, and the effect of that will be seen in the years ahead; sadly. It is the children who would pay that price. It is all being done for electoral purposes, but that is all right, we will tidy it up as the Member for San Fernando East assured us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I read our policy documents; I read our vision document from 1956, and our most recent vision document. The PNM vision involves narrowing the gap between the prestige schools and the non-prestige schools, so-called; that way we will make each place in the secondary school count. We will remove the dichotomy, because if you upgrade the performance and standards of all the schools then people will not struggle, fight and be stressed out about sending the children to certain schools, all the schools ought to be prestige in that sense. Therefore, the transition will be much more rational.

We built schools all over this country. There are approximately 755 schools in this country, about 89 secondary schools. They are now trying to build 10 and making a song and dance about it. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I read the Public Service Investment Programme (PSIP) that came along with the Minister's document and I saw some rather euphemistic word; if I can say so. At paragraph 16 of the PSIP it says:

"The implementation of the World Bank-assisted Fourth Basic Education Programme will again be the main focus of this investment programme..."

This was stymied by the lack of construction management services for a significant part of the year. In addition the overall programme was subjected to a

midterm evaluation by the World Bank, the result of which was a significant amendment to the programme. Included among the more significant changes by the World Bank was the reduction in the number of primary schools to be constructed from 46 to 26. So the World Bank is whittling down the fourth basic programme, from 46 primary schools to 26, and the excision—they are taking out the testing and assessment, the reform and decentralization sub-components of the programme.

The loan was negotiated. The Fourth Basic Education Programme was settled, and here the World Bank intervenes to whittle it down from 46 to 26 schools, to take out the testing and assessment, to take out the reform and decentralization, all important components of that fourth basic education programme. This document is as tricky as everything else that they bring. As I said, it is euphemistic: they did not tell us the real reason.

Let me tell you the real reason, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] By way of letter dated April 5, 2000, the World Bank wrote to the Minister and the Government. The subject was the Tourism Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO) and MTS involvement with the fourth basic education project, and I quote the second paragraph of this letter. This is the World Bank speaking:

"We have performed a careful review of the issues involved and conducted in-depth consultation with the World Bank regional procurement advisors' office. We regret to inform you that without following a competitive process the bank cannot provide a non-objection to hire these two firms under the sole source selection. Our procurement advisors have recommended that an open competitive process be followed according to the procedures set out in the bank's consultant guidelines. The short list for this competitive process may consist of around six firms, including one public and one private firm from Trinidad and Tobago and others from the Caribbean region and/or abroad. If needed we can provide clarifications for the preparation of this competitive process should you wish to pursue this route."

What the bank is saying here in rather polite diplomatic language is that the Government was found trying to get two managers for the firm: the Tourism Industrial Development Corporation and Maintenance Training and Security, firms that the Government has a direct hand in and over; MTS largely operated by the current Minister of Works and Transport, the senior one, and TIDCO under the new Chairman, their good friend and financier, Mr. Jack Warner. They tried to get those two firms to manage the project without competitive tender, and the World Bank said, "If we are lending Trinidad and Tobago money and the taxpayers of

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. HINDS]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

this country must pay, we are not going to be involved in that distortion and corruption," and they rejected them. [*Desk thumping*] They rejected them.

The letter continues in the penultimate paragraph:

"We share your desire and hope to move the fourth basic education project ahead in an expeditious and successful manner. We hope that the unexpected delays that have stemmed from the sudden decision of replacing the construction and management firm of Watson and Associates with these government companies will be resolved with this letter and that we can now focus on delivering the promised outcome for the benefit of the children of Trinidad and Tobago." [*Desk thumping*]

So they created the delay by corrupting the process, trying to subvert the normal tendering procedures and to bring in their friends so that they could have control over the money. We could see another situation of 10 schools moving from 138,000,000 to 345,000,000 in less than a year, that we have to pay for.

**Mr. Narine:** Plan B, bobol!

**Mr. F. Hinds:** You know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they did not tell us that in the Public Sector Investment Programme; they just put it over as though it was normal delay, it was their own doing, and the World Bank would have none of it.

In response to that terse letter, that sharp letter of rejection from the World Bank, the Minister then went to Cabinet with a note, and she said in the note—and I quote from paragraph 3—well, the number is here dated April 20; I found it in my mail box:

"Cabinet will also recall that it was already advised..."

So before the World Bank had a chance to say what it was saying about our money, they had already put things in place for the Tourism Industrial Development Corporation and the Maintenance Training and Security Company.

They were already advised in note "E00" of February 19, 2000, that on October 6 the contract of Watson Construction Management Company Limited, which had been employed from October 7, 1996, to provide construction management services to the Education Project Coordinating Unit in respect of the construction of schools, expired, and that the contract was not renewed and no new contract was awarded. As a consequence the Construction Project Management Services hitherto provided by that company have not been available to the EPCU and there has been a project slippage, in a situation where the EPCU has had tight deadlines to meet from the World Bank.

**3.35 p.m.**

The letter continues:

“4. The bank has been written to, seeking its...’

Because they wrote the bank for the bank to say it has no objection and to go ahead with the new managers, but the bank refused as I told you a while ago.

The bank’s reply dated April 5<sup>th</sup> was what I read a while ago and that was the whole thing. Paragraph 5 says:

“5. In the circumstances, therefore, the most expeditious way of proceeding to obtain the requisite construction/project management services for the EPCU/4<sup>th</sup> Basic Project, and to secure a service provider who could hit the ground running...”

So they had to go right back to the same Watson Construction Management Company whom they tried to dislodge unceremoniously in favour of their friends. That is the behaviour of this Government and at the end of the note, the Minister asked Cabinet to rescind the earlier Cabinet Note and to take heed of what the World Bank was saying. If that was some local institution, they would not have taken heed, they would have granted the World Bank opponents, just like TTUTA, the PNM and the Opposition, just like the women working for social progress, just like the Chamber of Commerce. But they could not do that to the World Bank because “he who pays the piper calls the tune.” So they had to take that and that is the only constraint, and that is the point we made. The airport should have been done in a certain way, but they want to do it with local financing. But that is a matter for somebody else.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in all those circumstances, what revolution in education is the Prime Minister and the Minister talking about? What revolution? If there is any revolution in education in this country, it was when the PNM moved us from a situation where there were eight exhibitions and eight scholarships to a stage today, where 20,000 children could be accommodated in secondary schools. *[Desk thumping]* When they say we “coulda” and “woulda” and “shoulda”, what they did not tell us is that at one time, eight children if they were very bright and very lucky had a chance if they were poor, but in 1962—the report is right here—of 9,507 candidates, 3,368 could have gotten places. That was all that existed and it increased progressively through the years up to 1997, where of the 28,961 candidates for common entrance, 20,893 could get a place. So the PNM had been working fervently towards universal secondary education, but you can only do as much as you can and we were doing that.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. HINDS]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

You want to disregard the 20,000; you want to disregard the 750-plus schools; you want to disregard all the teachers' colleges that existed before you came; you want to disregard all the work that has been done in education in this country even your own education, because all of you would have been educated under the very education establishment that we built insofar as those of you who are educated. The point is, we have much to be proud about on this side of the House.

The PNM has a proud track record in education. It is we who initiated all the things that transpired for education in this country. The system is not perfect; no education system is perfect. I read recently that the German education position, the United Kingdom and some of the United States, were having difficulties. They have issues to grapple with. We are all grappling with perfecting an education system, but you are yet to point out any new initiative coming from you. [*Desk thumping*] I can demonstrate all the initiatives that you met on the table in the White Paper that you have falsified, bent, twisted and corrupted.

I want to tell you, if you did not know, that the Early Childhood Care and Assessment Programme, the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors are not levels. You see them as though they are separate issues. You have to see the thing as a whole, but you do not have a philosophy on education and, therefore, you see it as though it is segmented and you are violating everything. You just do not understand.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as for the model school, it behoves me to say that of all the countries' education philosophy I have looked at, they are moving away from what I would call community care and institutions. For example, if you have children with learning disabilities, they try as best as possible to incorporate them in the normal system. In the year 2000, this Government establishes a model school for children who the Minister told us scored between 30 and zero per cent in the examination. In effect, what is being done is establishing a labelling situation and stigmatizing those children. For the rest of their lives they would be taunted unkindly, but truly, as being model school students, and I could hear Trinidadians taunting and telling them: "You read 'Chicken Licken', you read the 'Ugly Duckling', and 'Goldilocks'." You all should be reading those books, not those children. It is not too late to rescind from that position. It requires some courage, but you ought to consider it again. I want to say again that shouting and not speaking correctly will not advance the education system.

The Government of the United National Congress has created a scenario for confusion and in a couple days you will see—because schools open in a couple days—the confusion and hysteria you would have caused. You have upset the



entire system and your approach has led us to a state again of overcrowded classrooms. I saw in your Cabinet Note where you asked schools to take more than usual. *[Interruption]* Do you want me to read the Note? I would not waste time, but it is right here in your Cabinet Note E0064, dated June 28, 2000. I do not want to waste time, but it is right there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government has achieved a revolution. It has taken us right back to where we were years ago prior to 1962. That is the revolution. It has institutionalized failure and, as I said, created a scenario for absolute confusion. It has been unable to demonstrate any qualitative improvement in our education sector; it has disregarded standards and we need standards: performance standards, curriculum improvement, the opportunity to learn standards, as it were, and it is approaching the education sector in a very haphazard manner.

What has become of the Prime Minister's one-book theory? It fired that team led by Sen. Prof. Ramchand unceremoniously after it worked on the one-book scenario. What has become of that? Next week children would have their heavy book bags as they always did trying to cope with education in this country. Parents still must spend upwards of \$1000 dollars to outfit their children with books for the new term. What has become of that one-book failed policy? One minute it is dealing with common entrance, the next minute, security.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, all the elements of the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP) were laid out in the White Paper. All the elements of the fourth basic education programme were in there. In respect of the Secondary Education Modernization Programme, the recommendations were: improved education in equity and quality; curriculum development; teaching and learning strategies; professional development which began long before they came; deshifting and rehabilitation; upgrade and infrastructure. Rather than do this, they went to upgraded gas stations around this country at \$7 million each and more. The recommendations continue: monitoring and evaluation—that is gone, based on what the World Bank wrote to tell the Minister—remuneration and incentives—that has to do with paying teachers properly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I approach my conclusion, I say yet again that we on this side are very proud of the contribution that the PNM has made to education and its development in this country. I do not need to list our achievements like the Member for St. Joseph. I ask the national community to just look. Every school in Port of Spain, San Fernando, Chaguanas or Couva today, we had something to do with it; every teachers' college, all the training of teachers. We increased sixth

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. HINDS]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

form places over the years; we thoroughly reviewed the tech-voc training which they are threatening to abandon.

Between 1991 and 1995, in those short, lean years for the PNM trying to rebuild the economy, we established 16 primary schools. But as far as they are concerned when they came, there were no primary schools and no secondary schools, the UNC did everything. My friend, the Member for Tabaquite, tells me he gave one computer to a school in my constituency. Before the UNC came into office, we gave 150 computers to schools in this country; we introduced the school feeding programme; we established food transportation for children in this country; books for necessitous students, but I trust they want people to think that the PNM did nothing before they came. But remember, they came before Columbus. *[Interruption]* No, just as a theme, just as we told you this morning, we just cannot go on that way, we just cannot go on the UNC way. It is just as a theme.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we heard from the Member for San Fernando East this morning that the Minister of Finance tried to obfuscate and shy away from the facts. They are trying to jolt themselves out of the reality, but let me bring them back to some sobriety. They have sacrificed the good and the gains we have made in education for political expediency. Decentralization, school-based management, curriculum and professional development, all those things had been abandoned and now we are at the stage in this country where one of their friends is promising to put \$55,000 here and another \$55,000 there. That is what they have brought education to in this country.

I want to tell the Minister one thing before I close. We, too, in the PNM's vision recognize that with the expansion of the secondary school system in 1971, prior to 1969 and 1971, there were many people who did not have the benefit of going to secondary schools. The expansion really started around 1969—1971 and it took off in the oil boom years from the mid-1970s along with the other things that we had done in this country. So that there are people who missed an opportunity at secondary school now in the age bracket of 40—45. Our vision envisages that we will set programmes for them. We will capture them and create institutions to bring them back into the fold. In addition, there are many who went to the secondary schools, but we say they were mis-schooled; some of them did not enjoy the full benefit of it. We have a vision to deal with those in our development programme.

So in conclusion, I was looking at some test cricket during the lunch break and I would like to say that in respect of education, this Government is behaving

like a drunken, Sunday morning fete match side in a test cricket arena. Education is serious business and I hope that the Government would sober up and recognize that the contribution that it ought to be making with the blueprint that it found, ought to be made and it has done severe injustice to the education system of Trinidad and Tobago. But great is the PNM. We will have an opportunity soon again and we will put it back on track and take Trinidad and Tobago forward in the education sector into the new millennium.

Thank you very much.

### **3.50 p.m.**

#### **The Minister of the Environment (Dr. The Hon. Reeza Mohammed):**

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise this afternoon to make a contribution to the Bill entitled, "An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2001". My role this afternoon is to make a contribution on the environment; but before I do so, I think there is need for me to first accept the apology of the Member for Laventille East/Morvant for such a poor performance as the representative of the people of Laventille East/Morvant in that he could not get one single road repaired in his constituency, [*Desk thumping*] and more so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the Chairman of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, as I understand it, is a member of the PNM. If that is the case, I cannot understand how the Member for Laventille East/Morvant can stand here this afternoon and cry, "I have not had a single road repaired in my constituency". So, Mr. Laventille East/Morvant, I accept your apologies.

I also accept his apologies for the failure of the PNM between the years 1991 and 1995 because, you see, in his presentation he fantasized so much that it had a soporific effect on the Member for Diego Martin Central and the Member for San Fernando East who are still asleep. I was wondering whether something was wrong with them, whether they were ill, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So with all the fantasizing that just took place over a period of 75 minutes, [*Desk thumping*] I want to let him know that just as he said, "Long live the PNM", I would say, "Longer live the UNC". [*Desk thumping*]

I will tell you something, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This UNC Government is going to "put such a licking" on the PNM come the next general election that they would not only walk, you know, they would have to run, and they will find chasing them their dedicated supporters whom they would have failed again. How many times have they failed their supporters? It is going to happen again. It is certainly going to happen again come the next general election. Watch and you will see.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. THE HON. R. MOHAMMED]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

I listened carefully to the presentation made by the hon. Member for San Fernando East earlier today and, subsequently, the presentation made by the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. I can come to only one conclusion in the case of the Member for San Fernando East in his reply to the presentation made by the hon. Minister of Finance. I was asked to rank him by some colleagues, as a former professor at the university. I said to the person who asked me the question, on presentation I will give him about a 7 out of 10; but you see content, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I will give him no more than 4. So, as an overall ranking for his presentation this morning I would give him roughly 4.5 per cent, because that is all it is worth.

We were presented with what I would prefer to call a PNM manifesto this morning in the Parliament as part of the debate—[*Interruption*—]10 promises, I am reminded by my colleague, made by the hon. Member for San Fernando East and political leader of the PNM—

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

—in rebuttal to the hon. Minister of Finance's budget presentation on Monday, Mr. Speaker. I listened very carefully to him, all that he had to say about the National Flour Mills, InnCogen and Caroni (1975) Limited and I will touch on those issues during the course of my presentation. However, let me comment first on the statements made by the Member for Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Speaker, if my memory serves me well, he made a statement to the effect that in the Common Entrance Examination held in 1961 there was no comprehension or composition component. I distinctly recall that I wrote the Common Entrance Examination in 1962, and in that 1962 Examination there was indeed and in fact a comprehension and composition component. I am not at all surprised that the hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant can make a statement to this House that when he wrote the Common Entrance Examination he failed. So there was indeed and in fact a comprehension and composition component of the Common Entrance exam.

Whilst he was making this presentation I asked him a question. Where did the Common Entrance Examination come from? Where did it originate? It was not the brain child of the first Prime Minister of this country, Mr. Speaker, it was lifted out of the United Kingdom system, and so was the secondary school system. It was lifted out of the UK and what happened eventually is that from 1961 under the stewardship of the PNM government it got worse and worse. So much so that out of the number of children coming from the primary schools after

having taken the Common Entrance Examinations, most of those who ended up in a secondary school to receive a secondary education were not literate nor were they numerate.

The initial Common Entrance Examination introduced in Trinidad and Tobago in 1961 was a very, very good examination. It was excellent. The reason for that is perhaps because it was lifted directly out of the United Kingdom system. Nobody can dispute that. However, the changes that were made to the Common Entrance Examination by the then PNM government made a mockery of it—it was so watered down. I am certain that if the Member for Laventille East/Morvant had to write a 1961 Common Entrance paper today he would fail, and many of them on that side would fail as well. It was an excellent examination. They spoiled it, Mr. Speaker.

Then the Member said, all the secondary schools in this country were built by the PNM. That is not important. What is important is, how many secondary schools were built by the PNM government of 1991—1995? [*Desk thumping*]. Zero, Mr. Speaker. Yet they come here and criticize this Government for finding a secondary school place for every child coming out of the primary school system. [*Desk thumping*] Is that fair? What have they done between 1991 and 1995 for the education system?

They keep talking about the White Paper and the White Paper. I heard the Member for Laventille East/Morvant make a statement to the effect that, and I quote, “White represents purity”. I wonder if their vision has not gone from 20/20 to 11/9; because that is almost blind, Mr. Speaker. If one’s vision goes from 20/20 to 11/9 one is almost blind and perhaps that is why they ended up on that side in 1995 because the people of this country recognized that the PNM have gone blind. What other assumption can one come to? He also said, and I quote, “Kamaluddin Mohammed and Erica Williams are stupid and do not understand the secondary education system”. Now come on, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*] He did say that! [*Interruption*] The problem is that he listens but does not pay attention. That is the problem on that side.

**Mr. Boynes:** He never said that.

**Dr. The Hon. R. Mohammed:** He did say that; Mr. Kamaluddin Mohammed and Erica Williams, daughter of the Father of the Nation, they are stupid and do not understand the secondary education system. Now, come on, Mr. Speaker, one cannot be praising an individual and praising a party on the one hand and criticizing them in the next breath. They aspire to get back into Government, Mr.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. THE HON. R. MOHAMMED]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

Speaker? What utter rubbish! You know, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant said that things were up and running as far as the White Paper was concerned. He mentioned the Bachelor of Education programme. The Bachelor of Education programme was launched by the former UNC Minister of Education in 1996. [Desk thumping] So he comes here with misleading information. What is the result? The Member for Diego Martin Central and the Member for San Fernando East fall asleep on him.

He went further, Mr. Speaker. He said, “The teacher-training programme was up and running”. The former UNC Minister of Education launched the teacher-training programme in 1997. As far as I understand it, this UNC Government was in office in 1997 and we will remain so until the year 3000. So that the nonsense that was spewed out by the Member for Laventille East/Morvant in an effort to mislead the population, Mr. Speaker, and to score political points, I do not know if he understands that people out there are smarter than he wants to believe; because they are, Mr. Speaker.

The PNM has managed the education system in this country in such a manner as to leave the people of this country in a state of confusion—[*Interruption*]—mismanaged, I am advised by my colleague. Yet every time they stand there—it happens every Friday in this Parliament, Mr. Speaker—they continue to purport false information in an effort to keep the people in ignorance. Now that this Government is making an effort to improve the education system in this country, what do we hear from the other side? “It is because it is an election year”. It is the same thing that has been said about the budget, “Election budget, election budget”.

You know, they do not understand up to today that every one of the six budgets this Government has presented in this Parliament has been an election budget, [Desk thumping] not only this one, Mr. Speaker. Every one of the six budgets presented by this hon. Minister of Finance in this Parliament under the watch of this Government has been an election budget. What nonsense when they get out there and try to inform the population, Mr. Speaker, “Election budget, election budget”! Who has done more in five years for the people of this country than this Government? [Desk thumping] Which government? This UNC Government under Mr. Basdeo Panday—[*Interruption*]—under the leadership of Mr. Basdeo Panday, and we respect him for that. We respect him for the leadership and the vision he has.

When we hear from that side, Mr. Speaker, questions being asked of the hon. Minister like, “Have you paid your accountable advances?” do you know from

whom that is coming? That is coming from the gentleman who has not paid the National Insurance Board the mortgage for the house which he owns [*Interruption*]*—*in which he lives, I understand*—*over a quarter of a million dollars. The deed has not been registered by his lawyer. Yet he asks my Prime Minister if he has paid his accountable advances! What nonsense! What rudeness! What utter stupidity! What disrespect for this Parliament! [*Interruption*] We have a special one coming for you, Eddie, especially the tape of that interview. It is coming [*Desk thumping*] and your leader will see it soon, so you had better keep quiet. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, you know, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant had the gumption to talk about the weight of the bookbags and he still does not understand that this Government dealt with the primary schoolbook issue. I do not know if it is even mentioned in the White Paper. This Government standardized the primary school textbooks, not that government. One book or two books per subject area is irrelevant. That is why we are taking this country from early childhood care*—*do you know how many early childhood care centres this Government has built and how many we have refurbished in five years? Mr. Speaker, we have built 18 new childhood care centres [*Desk thumping*] in this country and we have refurbished 20 of them. The philosophy and the policy is to take education from early childhood care level all the way to the tertiary level and that is how universal education is going to be achieved.

#### **4.05 p.m.**

What did we launch recently, Mr. Speaker? The Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology. Is that not one of the promises we heard from the PNM manifesto this morning*—*a technology centre? One of his 10 commandments! Careful that tablet does not fall down and break! Where education is concerned*—*my colleague, the hon. Minister of Education will deal in more detail when she gets on her feet to make a contribution to this debate*—*we take it from early childhood care, all the way to primary school education, secondary school education and tertiary education. The Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology, Mr. Speaker. That is what we are talking about. Not the nonsense we have heard from the two former speakers on that side. Nonsense!

Mr. Speaker, let me recap some of the issues dealt with by the hon. Minister of Finance during his presentation. In the area of promoting savings and investment and sustaining economic growth, the issue of National Enterprises Limited (NEL)*—*and the Member for San Fernando East brought it up this morning*—*that is expected to raise \$720 million. IPO for \$400 million is scheduled

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. THE HON. R. MOHAMMED]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

for the end of October, 2000, thereby strengthening the capital market. Also, all employees of TSTT, Tringen and NFM will benefit from a preferred allotment in the allocation.

With respect to stabilizing our revenue flows, allocating oil and gas revenues amounted to \$415 million to the revenue stabilization fund during the fiscal year 1999/2000. Allocating any oil and gas revenues in excess of US \$22 per barrel during fiscal year 2000/2001 to the Revenue Stabilization Fund. Making income from capital more readily available to owners, \$48 million and the 10 per cent tax on interest income is to be reduced to 5 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, in every budget presented by that Government between the period 1991—1995, they have always increased taxes. The policy of this Government has always been to reduce taxes and we continue to do so. That is why I am able to say that the six budgets presented by this Government have always been election budgets. Reducing tax liability of all taxpayers. An increase in the personal allowance from \$20,000 to \$25,000. Facilitating home ownership. Increasing the ceiling on approved mortgage loans from \$300,000 to \$350,000. Stamp duty exemptions will be adjusted to the new level of \$350,000. In the area of expanding small business, we will increase the tax credit for small businesses from 15 per cent to 25 per cent. Effective corporation tax rate is 10 per cent.

Increasing business investment. Reduction in the business levy from 0.25 per cent to 0.2 per cent. When we came into office, the business levy was .5 per cent and we have now reduced it, fiscal year 2001 to .2 per cent. Improving tax compliance by providing a one-off concession to those taxpayers with arrears with the Board of Inland Revenue as well as taxpayers who have not filed returns.

To complete the current phase of tax administration modernization, a one-off opportunity will be given to delinquent taxpayers to file returns and to settle all liabilities with the Board of Inland Revenue (BIR) without the imposition of penalties and interest if amounts due before December 31, 1999 are paid by April 2001. To reinforce this measure, interest on outstanding amounts will be increased to 20 per cent from May 1, 2001.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to those who have not been paying their taxes, there are reasons why that has not been happening. If the Minister of Finance, in his wisdom, sees this as a provision to present in his budget to encourage those who have been delinquent in not paying their taxes to pay their taxes, so much the merrier for Trinidad and Tobago, so much the merrier for our revenues, but after May 1, those who have not paid will have to pay an additional 20 per cent. What



is wrong with that? I heard the comments made by the Member for San Fernando East this morning. Is he saying that those who have paid their taxes should get some sort of remuneration or incentive for having paid their taxes? What utter nonsense, Mr. Speaker.

Focus on employers for tax collections, penalties for non-deduction and non-payment by employers of PAYE will be increased from 50 per cent to 100 per cent of the PAYE. If, in the wisdom of the hon. Minister of Finance, he finds it much easier to have the employers complete tax returns rather than the employees, so that we can begin to narrow down the issue of paying one's taxes so that the taxes will be paid when they are due, Mr. Speaker, so much the merrier for the revenues of this country. So much the merrier for that situation.

Modernizing tax administration by exempting persons with emolument income only from filing tax return. I have just spoken to this issue. Then there is the issue of the agriculture disaster relief fund, the sum of \$5 million provided for this. I expect my colleague, the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources will speak more to this issue when he gets on his legs.

With regard to protecting vulnerable groups, ensuring that old-age pensioners receive basic income. Mr. Speaker, with every budget presentation made by this Government, we have increased the pension for pensioners, and in the provisions made for the fiscal year 2000/2001, there is a further increase of \$100 per month per pensioner. What more can they expect? For 14 years, Mr. Speaker, the pensioners of this country remained with a fixed sum. Then they come here and ask us what we as a Government have done. I say shame on them!

They understand what we are doing. They have to understand what we are about. That is why the UNDP has now been able to rate this country as the fifth ranked country in the world that has put in place mechanisms towards the alleviation of poverty. Five per cent! Fifth place, Mr. Speaker. It is not Mr. Brian Kuei Tung who said that. It is the UNDP who said that! Standard and Poors, whatever it is. They are the ones who have reported these figures, not the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, just by way of clarification, the hon. Member said fifth place? Just for clarification.

**Dr. The Hon. R. Mohammed:** Number five in the world.

**Mr. Manning:** Okay. I just want to confirm.

**Dr. The Hon. R. Mohammed:** Among developing countries, that is. *[Laughter]* Ensuring that old-age pensioners receive basic incomes, increase old-

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. THE HON. R. MOHAMMED]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

age pension from \$620 to \$720 and the annual qualifying income ceiling for old-age pension from \$7,440 to \$8,640. Mr. Speaker, do you know how many senior citizens will benefit from this measure in this country? How many senior persons will benefit from this measure? About 70,000 senior persons in this country will benefit from this measure.

Reducing tax liability of individuals over the age of 60. Increase in personal allowance for individuals over 60 from \$20,000 to \$30,000. What more could they ask for? What more could the people of this country ask for? A caring government. That is what we are. They have not increased the pensioners' stipend for over 14 years. How have these people survived, Mr. Speaker? Who are the economists in this country? It has to be the pensioners! How can one survive on such a small sum of money for 14 years? When we do it, they object to it. What has this Government done? What have they done between 1991—1995? What can they tell the people of this country? What have they done?

Increase in public assistance programme to low-income households, Mr. Speaker. Increase in public assistance to individuals from \$171 to \$222. Two-person households to \$428; three-person households to \$625 and to four-person households, now \$720.

Introduce a training allowance of \$100 per month to single mothers who are on public assistance, up to a maximum of six months. Where has that measure ever been provided by any other government, Mr. Speaker? You tell me. We train them, empower them, but whilst we are training them and empowering them, provide them with some measure of subsistence. If, in the wisdom of the hon. Minister of Finance, he finds it convenient to provide a \$100 stipend to these mothers during the period of training, what is wrong with that? This is a Government of social conscience, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the PNM Government of 1991—1995 understood what social conscience meant?

Improving the pensions of retired public servants; a \$150 increase in monthly pension to retired public servants whose pensions are under \$2,500 per month. Do you know how many pensioners would benefit from this measure, Mr. Speaker? It is about 15,000.

Reducing the cost of health care; exempt from VAT and customs duties, wheelchairs, prescription spectacles and contact lenses. I think the members of the PNM on that side will certainly benefit from this, because their vision has gone from 20/20 to 11/9. They need contact lenses! They need spectacles! Most of them will be needing wheelchairs soon. They will most certainly on that side. Not

my colleagues from Fyzabad and Ortoire/Mayaro. I am speaking primarily to those on the PNM side. They will need it, because come the day of the elections, they will get such a sound licking from this UNC Government that, as I said before, they will not only walk; they will have to run.

Mr. Speaker, I come now to preserving the environment. This has been an issue of contention. *[Laughter]*

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

**Dr. The Hon. R. Mohammed:** Certain questions were asked when the Member for San Fernando East made his presentation this morning about the Green Fund measure. Let me first inform the Members of this House about what the fund is intended for, the purpose of the fund.

The fund is intended to enable grants to be made to individuals, community groups and organizations engaged in activities related to the remediation, reforestation and conservation of the environment.

**4.20 p.m.**

Secondly, to undertake or do all such things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above purpose, that is, restoration, remediation and conservation of the environment. That is the purpose of the fund.

Now, Mr. Speaker, how is this fund going to be managed? First, the importance of the fund—and let me say here that Trinidad and Tobago is not the only country in the world which has put in place an eco tax or an environmental tax. We are not the first. The majority of countries which belong to the European Union have put in place an eco tax or an environmental tax, because they have come to understand that the future of those nations lies in the hands of their children and that the environment and all environmental matters impact directly on the future of their children. We in Trinidad and Tobago must become aware of that; we must become cognizant of that fact.

What sectors of our economy impact on the environment? There are three major sectors of our economy which impact negatively on the environment. The manufacturing sector, the industrial sector and the agricultural sector. When I refer to the agricultural sector, I also speak about the forestry sector and the saw-milling sub-sector because each one of these three sectors of the economy can be further broken down into sub-sectors.

The concerns are being expressed. I heard them on television. Why are you charging us a 0.1 per cent tax on our gross receipt of sales? It would have been

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. THE HON. R. MOHAMMED]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

very easy to charge or impose a levy on your total production. But, do you know what would have happened then? A 0.1 per cent levy on \$1 million gross receipt of sales is \$1,000. If you were to put a monetary value on the damage caused to the environment by the manufacturers/industrialists/agriculturists of this country, it would be 10 to the power of six million. That is what it would be in the quarrying sector alone in this country.

The mining sector alone—and that is why we have presently before this House, a Bill entitled the Mining (No. 2) Bill. Part VII of that Bill speaks specifically about the environment.

Look at what has happened in Valencia. Look at what has happened in the counties of St. Andrew and St. David and my colleague here from Toco/Manzanilla would know very well what has been taking place with respect to quarrying operations, gravel operations and sand mining operations. We also have people in this country mining clay and they are doing tremendous damage to our environment. What is wrong with a business person having to pay a 0.1 per cent levy on his gross receipt of sales? What is wrong with that, when the majority of European countries, as well as the majority of states in Canada and the United States, have also imposed an eco levy, as well as an environmental tax? How do we generate the revenue which would enable the private sector to restore the environment? Because this is what this is designed for and I will explain further how this levy is proposed to be managed.

It is proposed to establish a fund to be known as the Green Fund. The Green Fund will be resourced through the introduction of a levy of 0.1 per cent on the gross sales of receipts of a company carrying on business in Trinidad and Tobago whether or not such business is exempt from the business levy. The levy will be payable on the gross sales of receipts of a business in each quarter ending March 31, June 30, September 30 and December 31, in each year of income and shall be paid over to the Board of Inland Revenue.

The provisions of sections 3(a), 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 of the Corporation Tax Act relating to business levy shall apply *mutatis mutandis* in relation to the environmental levy but with the necessary modifications and adaptations. Similar provisions in the Corporation Tax Act will also apply. This measure will apply to companies carrying on businesses in Trinidad and Tobago and will involve amendments to the Corporation Tax Act, Chap. 75:02 with effect from January 1, 2001.

**Miss Nicholson:** Minister, could you tell me how you will know their gross sales? How are you going to monitor that?

**Dr. The Hon. R. Mohammed:** Well, normally, people pay VAT on sales and then there is the system already in place to have an idea of the measure of the business levy. There is a system already in place which would allow the Board of Inland Revenue to have an idea of gross receipt of sales, *et cetera*.

The Green Fund shall be administered by a body corporate to be known as the Green Fund Board established by an Act of Parliament. The Green Fund Board shall consist of members appointed by the President for a period of three years.

When we look at the newspaper, particularly the front page of the Trinidad Guardian of Wednesday, August 30, where it says "The Green Fund is blasted", you will observe that concerns are expressed about government running this institution called the Green Fund Board. That is totally incorrect and I wish to put that on the record, if only for the reason of correction.

Mr. Speaker, the Green Fund Board, which is to be established by an Act of Parliament, will have a chairman appointed by the Minister with responsibility for the environment; three representatives from the Environmental Management Authority, one who shall be the Secretary; three representatives from labour, and three representatives from private sector organizations.

That shall be the proposed composition of the board, so that the concern expressed that this is going to be managed by the Government and the Government is now going to give grants to its friends and family out of this collection, this levy, is totally incorrect and erroneous.

**Mr. Sinanan:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for giving way. He said that the President will appoint these members. Will he appoint these members on his own, or on the advice of Cabinet?

**Dr. The Hon. R. Mohammed:** It is very unfortunate that you have never been a member of the Cabinet, otherwise you would have known that Cabinet makes the recommendation to the President and the President accepts or rejects. Mr. Speaker, I continue.

The Green Fund shall be a seal which shall be attested by the signature of the Chairman or the Secretary and shall be kept in the custody of the Chairman or the Secretary of the Fund and may be affixed to instruments pursuant to a resolution of the board in the presence of the Chairman or the Secretary.

All documents other than those required by law to be under seal made by the Board and all decisions of the Board may be signified under the hand of the Chairman or the Secretary.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. THE HON. R. MOHAMMED]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

What would be the duties and functions of the proposed board, Mr. Speaker?

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

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

**5.03 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed*

Mr. Speaker, when the tea break was taken, I was about to indicate the duties and functions of the Green Fund Board. They are as follows:

- (i) to determine the eligibility of individuals and organizations engaged in activities related to the remediation, reforestation, and conservation of the environment for financial assistance from the fund;
  - (ii) to process and determine applications for assistance from the fund;
  - (iii) to determine the feasibility of undertaking projects and enterprises;
  - (iv) to advise the Minister on the disbursement of grants to individuals or organizations engaged in activities related to the remediation, reforestation and conservation of the environment; and
  - (v) to perform such other functions as are prescribed by order of the Minister.
- Six members of the board shall constitute a quorum.
  - The board shall meet at such times as may be necessary or expedient, and at such places and days as the chairman may decide.
  - The chairman shall preside over the meetings of the board but, where the chairman is absent, the members present forming a quorum may appoint a member to preside over the meeting.
  - The decisions of the board shall be by a majority of votes of members present and, in the case in which there is an equality of votes, the chairman or member appointed to preside over the meeting, as the case may be, shall, in addition to an original vote, exercise a casting vote.
  - The board may co-opt any one or more persons to attend a particular meeting of the board for the purpose of assisting or advising the board, but no person who has been so co-opted shall preside over the meeting of the board or have a right to vote.
  - The board may, with the approval of the Minister with responsibility for the environment, make rules for the purpose of regulating and controlling its financial operations and disbursements.

- The remuneration and allowances payable to members of the board shall be determined by the Minister; and
- The board shall only disburse money from the Green Fund—  
*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, if the Member would give way. I know the Minister said that the legislation has to come to Parliament. I am wondering whether he would prefer that he wait until the legislation comes to Parliament rather than going through the draft Bill clause by clause this afternoon.

**Dr. The Hon. R. Mohammed:** Your comment is a good one Sir. What I was trying to do is to reiterate what was in the budget. Not only that, questions are being raised about this Green Fund. I feel it is my duty and responsibility to provide Members of this House with the proposed structure of the board, to manage the fund. It is being said out there—the perception is being created—that this is going to be a government-operated institution that is going to have members of a board who will favour their friends and families. It is my duty and responsibility as Minister of the Environment to dispel those concerns, because they are false. I feel it is incumbent upon me to put that on the record. That is why I am taking the time and effort to elucidate the proposed structure of the Green Fund to indicate how the revenue is to be collected, where it is going to be placed and how it is going to be managed, so that members of the private sector would know for whom and for what this fund is being provided—to do remediation works, to do reforestation, to do all that is necessary to ensure that our environment is protected. That is why I am taking this time.

Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding any other law to the contrary, the profits of the fund shall be wholly exempted from the payment of any tax. The board will be required to submit annual reports on its activities to the Minister with responsibility for the environment within four months after the close of the financial year, for laying in Parliament. At least there is some measure of transparency and accountability to the Parliament and, by extension, to the people of this nation. They would know what sums are being collected, how the moneys are being spent and for what purposes they are being spent.

Mr. Speaker, finally, the accounts of the Green Fund would be public accounts for the purposes of section 116(2) of the Constitution. The establishment of the Green Fund shall take effect from January 01, 2001. That speaks to the general framework within which this fund will be collected, managed and disbursed. All those out there who are of the opinion that this is going to be a

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. THE HON. R. MOHAMMED]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

government-managed institution, and that the Government would be responsible for the disbursement of the funds—that is totally incorrect.

I have now presented to Members of this House the proposed framework within which this levy is going to be collected, managed and disbursed for the purpose of environmental projects.

**5.10 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the previous budget, certain ministerial portfolios were changed, and they were announced in this very House. When it was said that the former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources would then hold the portfolio of Minister of the Environment, everyone was of the view that the Member of Parliament for Princes Town, the former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, was demoted. But you see I made the point there and then that that was certainly not a demotion; it was a promotion.

Today, after having been in that ministry for less than one year, the ministry has taken form, because I saw it as a challenge thrown to me by my hon. Prime Minister. Here is a Ministry of the Environment; you take it, frame it and develop the policy. It required human resource personnel: that was done; it required a particular kind of framework within which to operate: that was done. You know, Mr. Speaker, I have been involved in environmental matters even in my former capacity as Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. A very, very good and cogent case in point was the Hibiscus Pink Mealy Bug.

When this Government took office in November 1995, this country, Trinidad in particular, was being ravaged by the Hibiscus Pink Mealy Bug, *meneanellacouus heristus*. The former government knew of the incidence of the Hibiscus Pink Mealy Bug as early as July 1995, and what was their protocol to deal with this pest? You would be amazed, because it is shocking that a government could develop a protocol under the former PNM Minister of Agriculture, which was to spray, cut and burn. Mr. Speaker, you would not imagine how many people in this country lost their full-grown fruit-bearing trees because of that protocol; that is the protocol that was developed. You would not begin to imagine when I started to investigate the matter how much corruption was involved in the contracts awarded for those who were spraying as part of this protocol.

I was appointed Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources on November 14, 1995, and on December 19, 1995 I called all the ministry personnel to a meeting in Chaguanas at the borough corporation office, and I said that that had to stop. We cannot continue to pour this amount of chemicals into the



environment; we cannot afford to continue to destroy people's full-grown fruit-bearing trees with this protocol. Then we applied science to it, because thereafter we started developing what is referred to as an integrated pest management programme (CIPM) for the Hibiscus Pink Mealy Bug.

Ask yourself the question, Mr. Speaker, what has become of the Hibiscus Pink Mealy Bug? Do we hear anything anymore about the Hibiscus Pink Mealy Bug? Our policy even at that time was to reduce the incidence of the Hibiscus Pink Mealy Bug to zero economic tolerance, and this Government poured \$1.5 million into a programme developed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources under the stewardship of the Member of Parliament for Princes Town, who was the then Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, and we brought the incidence of the Hibiscus Pink Mealy Bug down to zero economic tolerance.

**Mr. Speaker:** The speaking time for the Member for Princes Town has expired.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Dr. The Hon. R. Mohammed:** Let me thank my colleagues for having my time extended, Mr. Speaker.

In 1997 after, I would say, two or three decades, the government of the day knew very well that one of the critical factors to sugar cane production was the incidence of the froghopper. In 1997 it was this former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources who took the initiative and consulted with the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations to develop an integrated pest management programme for the froghopper. What I said in 1997 still holds today, because whilst the programme was frustrated in 1997 it is the same programme that worked in 1998, 1999, and 2000. You reduce the use of your chemicals and increase the amount of bio-agent; that was the proposal, that was the policy, using a fungus, the metarhizium.

It was frustrated by the very management of Caroni (1975) Limited in 1997, because on an annual basis approximately 10 per cent of the total sugar cane production in this country, both by the private sector and Caroni (1975) Limited, is affected by the froghopper. What happened in 1998, 1999, 2000? I will tell you. We were able not only to incur \$7 million in savings from expenditure on chemicals, but we were also able to reduce that 10 per cent annually to 2.5 per cent of the annual affected sugar cane.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. THE HON. R. MOHAMMED]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

Now, let us calculate the savings incurred simply by putting in place an integrated pest management system for the froghopper and by the aerial spraying of the metarhizium. When we went in there we found that the carrier agent for the metarhizium that was being used was something called banana oil, and the cost of banana oil was \$183 per gallon. What did we do, Mr. Speaker? Under this Government, under this Minister we used the same rice upon which the metarhizium was being cultivated and we pulverized it in such a manner that we brought it to the size where it could then be used as the carrier medium for the metarhizium to be sprayed. That is what we did, and you would not imagine the savings that were incurred simply by replacing expenditure on banana oil by using the very rice upon which the metarhizium was cultivated.

In addition to that, there was ground application for certain stages in the metamorphosis of the life cycle of the froghopper. Those on that side laughed at me in 1997/1998, but today I can laugh at them because of the measure of success we have had with the froghopper operations in Caroni (1975) Limited. Who is laughing today? I am laughing today, because I made every effort to ensure that an integrated pest management system was put in place for the froghopper which plagued the sugar industry for more than three decades under their watch.

We heard from the Member for San Fernando East, "Oh, we wrote off a \$2.14 billion debt of Caroni (1975) Limited." Ask yourself the question, Mr. Speaker, under whose watch was that debt accrued? Caroni (1975) Limited.

**Mr. Narine:** What is that debt now?

**Dr. The Hon. R. Mohammed:** It was taken over from Tate and Lyle in 1975, \$2.14 billion; we wrote off the debt. Member for San Fernando East you reiterated that this morning in your presentation. What is more important is to ask the question: under which government was that \$2.14 billion debt accrued? The answer is simple \$2.14 billion sounds like a big figure, but there is no mathematics in it. That debt was accrued under the watch of the PNM government.

Maybe they had a duty and responsibility to write it off, but it got worse, because then came the Tripartite Agreement. The Tripartite Agreement made provisions for a sum of \$45 million to be provided to Caroni (1975) Limited in 1993, and a similar sum of \$45 million to be provided by Government to Caroni (1975) Limited in 1994. Mr. Speaker, they strangled financially that Tripartite agreement, because not a single cent of that \$90 million which was agreed to by the three parties to be provided by the then government was provided; none of it, Mr. Speaker.

How do they expect Caroni (1975) Limited to be lifted out of the kind of financial morass in which it finds itself, when it was agreed within the framework of the Tripartite Agreement that the then government would provide certain sums of money to assist through the Tripartite Agreement to lift Caroni (1975) Limited out of that financial situation? You do not agree to something and then you say for whatever reasons, “We came, we found the Treasury empty,” and so forth. It was a distinct effort by that government through the Tripartite Agreement to kill the sugar industry. I could come to no other conclusion; it was done so that the political demise of Caroni (1975) Limited would have come about. That is what was done. It is very unfortunate that the Member for Diego Martin West is not here to listen to what I am saying; very unfortunate!

In my few short minutes left to me, I would just like to inform this honourable House of what has happened in the Ministry of the Environment since its inception on October 22, 1999. In 1993 the then People's National Movement government became aware of a situation in Demerara Road in Wallerfield; in 1993. There were so many children who suffered from plumbism because of that situation, lead poisoning. Some of them died from lead poisoning; 1993. I do not know what efforts were made. I am certain that some efforts were made, but they were unsuccessful because it is this Minister in this Government who found \$1.5 million and in a matter of six weeks removed every square centimetre of soil contaminated with lead from the Demerara Road area. [*Desk thumping*] This Minister of the Environment and this Government did that.

Why was it not done before? Why? The same situation arose with the Environmental Management Act No. 3 of 1995. The first Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Environmental Management Authority was Sir Ellis Clarke. Sir Ellis Clarke was involved in the drafting of our Republican Constitution; somebody tell me if I am wrong. Even though he was involved in the drafting of the Constitution and he was Chairman of the Board of the Environmental Management Authority, the first Chairman of the Board, Part VIII of the Act was in contravention of section 4 of the Constitution.

That government brought the Act to Parliament and had it passed by a simple majority, and they knew very well that was wrong, because they were so advised. It is this Minister of the Environment, under this UNC Government, who brought the Act back to Parliament, had it repealed and re-enacted with a two-thirds majority. Part VIII of that Act which is now referred to as the Environmental Management Act No. 3, of 2000, is now in sync with section 4 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. THE HON. R. MOHAMMED]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

I have made every effort to put before the Cabinet the recommendations coming out of the interview panel comprising, a permanent secretary, retired High Court judge Jim Davis, retired High Court judge Zainool Hosein, and an advocate from Amoco, who shortlisted and interviewed the persons for positions on the Environmental Commission, the Chairman, Deputy Chairman and the four Commissioners.

The matter is presently before the Cabinet and that would not have been made possible if that Act had not been brought back to this Parliament, repealed and replaced with a two-thirds majority. I thank the Members on the opposite side for their contribution in having a two-thirds majority afforded to that Act. It is only now that the Environmental Management Authority would be able to enforce some of the laws once the commission is put in place.

**5.25 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, ongoing under the purview of the Ministry of the Environment is a programme which was launched on February 17, 2000, the E2K Programme. Mr. Speaker, \$6 million was provided for by the Minister of Finance when we came back to this Parliament for the review of the Public Sector Investment Programme for the fiscal year 1999/2000. It involves the 14 regional corporations in Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Ministry of Health, the Environmental Management Authority, the Solid Waste Management Company Limited of Trinidad and Tobago and guided by the Ministry of the Environment. It involves cleaning up in a two stage process: the first is collection of all consumer durables referred to as white waste; old fridges, old stoves, bed springs, air-condition units and what have you. People normally throw these white consumer durables in the watercourses and these objects are a major cause for concern and flooding in this country.

In addition to that, it involves the removal of all derelict vehicles from the scrap yards. We have started the process, we have started picking up the white goods in the Siparia Regional Corporation, Princes Town Regional Corporation, Chaguanas Borough, and I think San Juan/Laventille Corporation is the other one involved. How did we manage this? We approached the different corporations through the Ministry of Local Government and through consultation with them, they were encouraged to develop budgets, each of them was asked to submit budgets for this exercise. They came up with their budgets, they were finalised, moneys were provided for this exercise in the review of the Public Sector Investment Programme 1999/2000 and it is not a one-off thing because the major purpose of it is to institutionally strengthen the regional corporations so that the exercise will continue hereafter.

Concerning the scrap vehicles, we could not ask the scrap dealers to bring their scrap vehicles to the Beetham landfill site, or take it to the Forres Park landfill site, we had to go further and we did go further because, through a system of contract we were able to establish at the Beetham landfill site a mobile crushing and cutting unit.

**Mr. Boynes:** What about the Toco landfill?

**Dr. The Hon. R. Mohammed:** I will talk about that in a minute. Once these scrap vehicles are picked up in the E2K exercise—as I said we have already started—they will be brought to the Beetham landfill site, or taken to the Forres Park landfill site where the mobile compactor will now be able to move back and forth between these two landfill sites so that the scrap vehicles, the cadavers, will be compacted, cut up, crushed and fashioned in a particular manner whereby they are then sold to Ispat.

Mr. Speaker, that is how the contractor is being paid and even though it is C grade steel as I am told, the price it is fetching per tonne of this material is \$100 and it takes roughly two and a half vehicles to give you one tonne of steel. So the systems are in place. The ministry is slowly developing, the material is being taken up from the environment and little by little, as the Environmental Management Authority is vested with that authority, that greater power to enforce, I assure you that in our next term of government we are going to ensure that the environment is properly and well-taken care of.

Mr. Speaker, I think I have made the statements which I stood up here to make...

**Mr. Narine:** Thank you very much, for giving way. I was just interested to find out who are the contractors doing the compaction of these derelict vehicles for sale to Ispat?

**Dr. The Hon. R. Mohammed:** I will have to find out for you from the Solid Waste Management Company because, as I was explaining, there are two components to this exercise. The regional corporations would be responsible for the collection, and the Solid Waste Management Company Ltd. would be responsible for the disposal. They are the ones who were mandated to put in place a mobile compacting system that could move between the Beetham landfill site and the Forres Park landfill site to take care of these scrap vehicles. I hope I have answered your question up to this point, but I will certainly find out and let you know.

Mr. Speaker, I was saying in my winding up, I think I have cleared the air on many matters. The misconception created by the Member for San Fernando East and the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, and it is unfortunate that he is not here at this time because I distinctly recall hearing him in his winding up say that

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. THE HON. R. MOHAMMED]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

the PNM was there before Columbus. He said: "We were here before the time of Columbus." That confirms a lot in my mind, Mr. Speaker. What that tells me is that there is a better understanding now why their thinking is so archaic. If you are claiming that you were here before the time of Columbus, then I certainly believe that you have outlived your usefulness. That is my understanding of it.

My friend from Toco/Manzanilla wanted to ask a question.

**Mr. Boynes:** Yes, thanks for giving way, hon. Member for Princes Town. You had mentioned that you will address the situation at the Toco landfill site.

**Dr. The Hon. R. Mohammed:** I am glad you asked that question Member, because in the Ministry of the Environment we are presently developing a framework for the collection and disposal of solid waste in Trinidad. The proposal involves the establishment of recycling stations, six of them have been identified out of a consultancy and the establishment of a single landfill site in Trinidad. So eventually, the proposal is that there would be one landfill site in Trinidad and it would have been located geographically based on the amount of solid waste generated from a demographic standpoint; recycling stations will take care of all the materials coming in; the material will be recycled; that portion which can be sold will be sold, and only that which is left would find its way to the single landfill site. That is just at the proposal phase right now, it would need having to go to Cabinet for approval before I can say anymore.

**Mr. Boynes:** Do you know that particular landfill site is a health hazard that has been reported to the Environmental Management Authority police who have, in fact, indicated that the Environmental Management Authority would serve a notice on the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation for it to be closed down? I do not know if you know about that.

**Dr. The Hon. R. Mohammed:** No, I am not aware of that, but I can also tell you that the Toco landfill site is managed by the regional corporation, whilst the Beetham landfill site and the Forres Park landfill site are both being managed by the Solid Waste Management Company Limited which falls under the purview of the Ministry of the Environment. All the other landfill sites in this country are presently being managed by the Ministry of Local Government. Whether this is a concern, yes, I appreciate it, but in developing the new framework, i.e. recycling stations, i.e. one landfill site in Trinidad, I think it would slowly eliminate the problems that are being encountered as you have put it, at the Toco landfill site.

Thank you.

**Mr. Barendra Sinanan** (*San Fernando West*): Mr. Speaker, let me start immediately by setting the *Hansard* record straight by commenting on an allegation made by the hon. Member for Princes Town referring to the contribution of the hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant and I quote from his *Hansard* record. I quote:

“He also said, and I quote, ‘Kamaluddin Mohammed and Erica Williams are stupid and do not understand the secondary education system.’ Now come on, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*] He did say that! [*Interruption*] The problem is that he listens but does not pay attention. That is the problem on that side.

**Mr. Boynes:** He never said that.

**Dr. The Hon. R. Mohammed:** He did say that; Mr. Kamaluddin Mohammed and Erica Williams, daughter of the Father of the Nation, they are stupid and do not understand the secondary education system.”

This is a quote from the *Hansard* contribution of the Member for Princes Town. Now I will quote from Mr. Hinds’ contribution, taken from his *Hansard*. It says:

“I read the newspapers and I saw a good and well-known citizen, a well-known friend, Mr. Kamaluddin Mohammed, applaud the Government for achieving universal secondary education in a meeting in San Juan. I heard Mrs. Erica Williams-Connell do the same thing. They do not understand the trickery of this UNC Government and the untruths they continue to tell us. They, too, were caught in that sound bite sensationalism which was designed for electioneering purposes.”

It is not the first time the hon. Member has misled this House, and he is doing it again. Mr. Speaker, I thought it my duty to correct the *Hansard* record. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, listening to the Member for Princes Town’s contribution, it certainly gives me the impression that he was being screened. His whole contribution was a screening process. If one were to listen to the contribution, and I did listen to the contribution of the Member for St. Joseph, who says he is not going back up, he would have passed the screening test, but I want to indicate to my friend from Princes Town, “you have failed miserably.” [*Desk thumping*] You were not even environmentally friendly today. [*Laughter*] He talked about an “echo”-tax. You know that if an “echo”-tax were imposed in this Parliament, my good friend, the Member for St. Joseph would have difficulty in his financial affairs. [*Desk thumping*] It is an eco-tax.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. SINANAN]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

Mr. Speaker, thank God come January 2001 both the green tax of which the Minister speaks and himself would be history. *[Desk thumping and laughter]*

**Mr. Assam:** Truth sits on the lips of dying men.

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** I take the comment of the Member for St. Joseph that truth sits on the lips of dying men to mean that he knows of what I talk, both the Minister and the green tax would not be around for 2001. *[Laughter]*

**5.40 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, permit me now to respond to the budget presentation of the hon. Minister of Finance. Listening to the budget presentation and reading it, one cannot help but think that it is a blueprint for the UNC Manifesto. In doing so I would take my cue from the Minister and reply by way of comparison. To put it into perspective, however, it is important that one has an appreciation of the sacrifices of previous governments and what they had to do to enable the present Government to inherit a legacy that it has squandered.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall that with the collapse of oil prices in the early 1980s and the near collapse of the world economy, most countries in the developed world and even some of the more developed countries had to undertake stringent economic and structural reform programmes imposed by the lending agencies. In Trinidad and Tobago, prior to the collapse of oil prices, we used substantial sums of money gained from our oil income to improve the national infrastructure. We constructed the Solomon Hochoy Highway and the Priority Bus Route, built the Mount Hope Medical Complex, the Hall of Justice, the financial complex, numerous primary and secondary schools, established the Point Lisas Industrial Estate and many other things. One can ask, Mr. Speaker, what has this Government done with the legacy they have received?

In those days no one could foresee the early collapse of oil prices. The thinking then was to retain the commanding heights of the economy for the benefit of our citizens. It was an ambitious objective but one which was not played out on an economically level playing field because we were not seen as having international importance. By and large, our nationals were not ready to market the industries and the industrial products produced therefrom. The PNM as a government was much criticized for our thrust into the field of industrialization using our national resources. Mr. Speaker, today we can look back and recognize that without a vision to develop our country we will be forever Third World. It is those same industries, established with our oil dollars, that we were able to sell later on to repay debt.



The NAR government in 1986—1991, the Chambers government prior thereto and the PNM government in 1991—1995 had the burden of placing our country back on an economic growth path. It was not easy, Mr. Speaker. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank prescribed harsh economic measures. Our people suffered but were up to the task. They sacrificed. The last PNM government continued the adjustment process started by the Chambers government and continued by the NAR. The PNM government between 1991 and 1995 was largely responsible for building an economic platform of strength and, when it demitted office in 1995, left the country with a legacy, healthy and prosperous in most respects, but which this Government has wasted and squandered. Mr. Speaker, I tell you, it is definitely not too late to turn back from the wastage, squandermania and corruption that surrounds this nation. [*Desk thumping*]

How did this Government use this healthy economic legacy that was left to it through the sacrifice of the people and prudent management of the country? The UNC came into Government with a lot of goodwill. It was felt that the Prime Minister, the Member for Couva North, had laboured long and hard and it was fair to give him an opportunity to make a difference, to unite the people and to build on the foundation left by the PNM. The people were willing to chance it with the UNC to see whether they would unite the people, as was the dream of the NAR. Mr. Speaker, they squandered it.

Instead of uniting the people, this Government set out on a deliberate course of attempting to muzzle the press and anyone whose opinion did not square with their own. They fired and forced out of employment in state enterprises everyone they felt was not of like mind and kind. They developed a thinking and an attitude of, “It is we time now”. Mr. Speaker, this arrogance and total disregard for morality and transparency in government, this unequal governance of our country, can destroy all that the people have worked so hard to maintain and cause them to question the sacrifices they have made. I am today cautioning the people of Trinidad and Tobago to be ever vigilant in securing their rights as guaranteed by our Constitution, to think carefully about returning this Government to office and not to gamble with the country’s future. Prevention is better than cure. It is not too late to turn back, to return to government one which will ensure equality for all, good governance for all of its citizens, prosperity for all and not for some—Mr. Speaker, a PNM government.

The Minister of Finance said that he was here to explain how the money was spent, that the people of Trinidad and Tobago voted to fight crime, for schools that work and for taps with water. He boasted about increased police presence on

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. SINANAN]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

the streets and about being better off today than five years ago. I am sure you know of what he speaks. When he says that this budget is about what government has been doing so successfully for five years now, doing more and doing it better, I think the whole country knows that it has nothing to do with good governance, equality and prosperity for all but rather everything to do with wastage, squandermania, corruption and not doing the most that could have been done for the citizens with the healthy legacy that was left to it—a total disregard for the many sacrifices the citizens made in the hard times. Yes, Mr. Speaker, the country knows who are better off today than five years ago, who are getting more and what they are doing better. The people are not the beneficiaries of the Minister's boast.

Let us examine the Minister's boast by looking at some of the ministries. What better ministry to start with than the Ministry of Works and Transport? You would recall one of the first things done by this ministry was to paint two water tanks in Laventille, promising that it will be a tourist attraction. In short order the paint began to run and the tourists never came. This was how our money was spent. This ministry is responsible for the Piarco project. We need a new terminal building. No one argues against that. What we do not need is one costing twice as much as it should cost, where one contractor who happens to be a favourite son of the Government has a monopoly on most of the work.

I dare say, contracts were obtained under dubious tendering procedures where variations of contracts are custom-made to favour this one contractor, where the entire country, including the Attorney General, has expressed serious concerns about a project that has an uncertain completion date, a project that has surpassed all its budgetary allocations, one that will bring this country to shame because it is clothed in secrecy and corruption. Mr. Speaker, this is how our money is being spent. This is how this Government is doing more and doing it better; not for the people of Trinidad and Tobago but for the few favourite supporters.

What about the library project, now five years under construction; the Solomon Hochoy Highway, a project that tormented the citizens using that highway for the better part of two years and it is worse off now. This is a ministry that did not provide for a second ferry to service the sea transport link between Port of Spain and Scarborough and *vice-versa*. This is a ministry that paid over \$24 million in damages for breach of contract for a boat that never arrived—shades of the rice scandal, Mr. Speaker.

This ministry has spent money in attempting to prevent salt water from flooding Mosquito Creek, but the creek is still flooding. This is a ministry that has waited until an election year to announce the start of work on the San Fernando

waterfront, a project that should have started two years ago. This is a ministry that seems unable to prevent flooding in Chaguanas whenever it rains, despite millions and millions of dollars being spent, yet they talk about protecting their citizens, all the farming areas, all the people of Chaguanas. The Member for Chaguanas should know that. It rained sometime this week and the whole area flooded.

This is a ministry that seems incapable of seeing to the completion of the Cross Crossing Interchange; a ministry that builds a shifting wall and then some Member on that side wants to blame this side for it; a ministry that is unable to fix the road at the exit of the Solomon Hochoy Highway onto the link road opposite the technical school. All of us, Mr. Speaker, who have travelled on that road for the last five years, including the Minister of Works, have seen that road in a continual and continuous state of disrepair. [*Desk thumping*] Nothing has been done for five years now.

How ironic that this ministry is headed by a Minister who has been relieved of his portfolio for the URP programme, has been virtually sidelined by the Prime Minister with the appointment of a junior minister who perhaps is really the new Minister of Works and he, the new Minister, is charged with the responsibility of paving roads in the country, two months before the election, with a budget of about \$500 million. The money that the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre could not get, [*Interruption*] the new Minister of Works is getting it. Well, if it is not \$500 million, I stand corrected. Is it \$200 million, \$300 million? This is a Minister who was identified by the NATUC poll as being the most popular Minister. I know when the NATUC poll identifies this Minister as the most popular Minister his colleagues in Cabinet do not like it.

**Mr. Assam:** Which ones?

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** I would not identify them. This is a Minister who has been criticized openly by the Prime Minister on at least two occasions in public and who now comes to voters in San Fernando West asking them to disregard his performance and to vote for him. Mr. Speaker, I tell you, the Prime Minister does move in mysterious ways; because you see, this is how our money is being spent and better than before in the Ministry of Works and Transport.

The Minister says that the Government—this is the Finance Minister—was voted in to fight crime. If this is so then this is a serious indictment on the Minister of National Security and the Attorney General, because we are surrounded by all kinds of crime and they are unable to convince the citizens that they are safer today than five years ago. I need not tell you, Mr. Speaker, and

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. SINANAN]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

Members, that today sometimes we may say that the statistics do not show that but there is a real perception outside in this country that crime is horrendous. It is greater than it was before.

There are more crimes being committed in this country. [*Desk thumping*] There may be less petty crimes committed but there are committed certainly more of those criminal and demeaning types of crimes and that is very evident today. The attitude of persons outside committing the crime is, “If the priest can play who is we?” [*Desk thumping*] They are just following what the so-called exemplars are doing, and by the very behaviour of this Government I say that they, to a large extent, are encouraging what is going on outside. This Government’s answer to crime was 100 Cherokee jeeps leased from the favoured one. I would imagine all but 30 or 40 of these jeeps are at present on the roads. There is no money for tyres, batteries and other routine repairs. We will soon see the fate of the additional vehicles recently purchased by the Ministry of National Security.

Prior thereto, Mr. Speaker, you would recall that the Commissioner in charge of transport indicated that there were one or two motorcycles. Recently the Government purchased about 20, I think, motorcycles and about 42 Ford Taurus cars. I am warning the Minister and this Government that those cars—I happen to own one, Mr. Speaker—are very powerful and if the policemen are not trained properly in how to use those cars, in short order they will all be parked in the garage. They are very powerful cars. It is the first time I think that the police are being exposed to cars with that sort of speed.

Those cars are very fast and without proper training the cars will soon be in the garage. So I am appealing to the Minister to make sure that the police officers who will be using those cars are trained to use them properly. In that regard, Mr. Speaker, talking about cars, I have to agree with the Minister of Finance when he said that perhaps it is better to have these cars replaced every three years. It makes no sense keeping these cars until they are ready to go to the scrap heap. It would be prudent and financially wise to replace these police cars every three years.

**5.55 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, this Government cannot convince the citizens that they have solved the increase in crime. People live in fear, genuine fear in this country. If there are more police on the streets of this country and more police vehicles, as the Minister claims, certainly I must be blind. My doctor told me I have perfect vision. [*Laughter*] I do not see these policemen, I do not see these vehicles when they are most needed. I do not see them in San Fernando where they are needed. I

do not see them regulating traffic when they ought to be there. I do not know where these policemen are.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister talked about police stations. I recall the San Fernando police station being almost totally completed in 1995. It was opened in 1996. I was there. I was invited to the opening. So the statement of the Minister, when he talks about the Government building these two police headquarters—one in San Fernando and one in Sangre Grande—this was done five years ago.

When we consider the boast of the Minister of Finance, of how well the economy is doing, we do not see it reflected in an improved police service or in an improved standard of living in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, this Government has failed to properly implement the laws being passed in Trinidad and Tobago in this Parliament, and I can go on. When the Minister talks about how we are better off today than five years ago and they are doing it better, I can call ministry by ministry to demonstrate that that is not so.

Let us start with the Minister of Public Utilities. Mr. Speaker, I was very surprised that an honourable gentleman like the Member for Caroni East could foist on this country two very dubious projects in the form of InnCogen and the desalination plant. One will recall that when that InnCogen project was bandied about the place, it came in here on the basis that the company was going to establish four industries on lands that they purchased from Caroni. That was the basis for them setting up this electricity plant and it was supposed to be a co-generating plant.

The excess of the electricity produced was supposed to go on the national grid system. That was the way it was sold. I am not going to get into whose friend it was and whose friend it was not. I am not into that. I am into the principle of the thing. This is just but one year. We have seen no additional four plants there and we will never see them. It was a ruse! That is all it was. A means of getting something for nothing. That is what it was.

We have InnCogen producing electricity, not for the four plants that they say they need it for, because those plants are not there and will never be there. InnCogen is now making money. We saw recently that they made a profit of about \$80-something million. Whatever it was, they are making profit and T&TEC is losing money. This country is today purchasing electricity that it cannot use.

**Mr. G. Singh:** No, that is not true.

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** You will have your time. You will explain it to us. Then we have this desalination plant. Another project in the scheme of things; one like

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. SINANAN]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

InnCogen. I recall the Minister of Housing and Settlements, the hon. Member for St. Augustine, in 1986 when he spoke about solving the water problems in this country, and he spoke about building dams in the catchment areas. I can suggest to him that he can build one in Chaguanas because every time it rains, it floods there. To me, that would have been a simple thing to do: build dams; but no, what we are doing is going to build a desalination plant awarding a contract, again, under strange circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, my good friend, the hon. Member for Siparia, the Minister of Education. In fairness to her, I think she is trying her best in her Ministry. Having succeeded my friend from Tabaquite, I know she has a very hard task ahead of her, but again, do not fool the people, recognize that there are problems in the system. Do not, in an election year, come and attempt to fool the people by talking about universal education and that all the children coming out of primary schools will get a place in the secondary school. Yes, they will get a place in a secondary school, but what about the quality of education? This is what we must be concerned about. Putting every child who sat the Common Entrance Examination in a secondary school—whether it is a model school or a Form I Special, whatever it is—does not solve the problem if they are not given quality education.

What about the teachers? We have seen teachers in this country lament and call for a better wage. This Government is boasting about how well it has done. They are doing it better, but they cannot give the teachers a proper salary. What is the point? If they are saying that they are doing all these things so good and better, what about the teachers and the police? Do not study yourselves.

With respect to agriculture, the Member for Princes Town spent a lot of time on agriculture. I think he is missing that Ministry, let us put it that way. He is circumscribed in the Ministry of the Environment. This is what it is. The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, I think, is the Member for Oropouche but he spent a lot of time, the Minister of the Environment, talking about agriculture.

**Dr. Mohammed:** I also spoke about education!

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** Mr. Speaker, do you know that in Caroni (1975) Limited, the moneys collected for national insurance and PAYE are not remitted to the appropriate ministries? At most times, when they are remitted they are out of time, breaking the law. We see that this is a government which is formed from, for want of a better expression, the sugar land, but yet they treat their own supporters with disdain.

Then there are the farmers. Every time we have a sugar crop, they keep clamouring for their money. They are now threatening to march. The farmers have not received their money; \$58 million, but they have money to do everything else. They have money to waste at Piarco, but the farmers who have grown the sugarcane to earn some of that same foreign exchange of which they boast, cannot get paid \$58 million.

Mr. Speaker, Dhanpur Mill, in fact, I think my colleague from San Fernando East, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, made reference to that. If they have to buy a mill, buy a good one. They have bought a mill that is giving trouble, according to the same workers in the factory. It is giving trouble from day one. They have the last tangible asset in Caroni, and I was happy when I saw a programme recently on television with the Minister of Finance. I am talking about the rum at Caroni (1975) Limited. I am begging this Government, do not for once, sell it to a favoured one. Let the experts come, value the rum and sell it openly. Let transparency prevail in your last days of government.

The Minister of Finance said that as long as he is in the Cabinet, that rum that Caroni (1975) Limited has there will not be sold to any favoured one. The Government is going to get an expert to come and value the rum and it will be sold according to open tender with some degree of transparency.

The Minister of the Environment spoke about \$2 billion in debt left by the PNM for Caroni (1975) Limited. He spoke about Caroni, from 1975 to 1995, 20 years. What did he want us to do? Lay off the people there in Caroni? We had to carry them along and then we wiped out the \$2 billion. What they did in less than five years, was they have taken that debt from zero to \$1 billion. From 1975—1995, \$2 billion, but in five years they have taken it up to \$1 billion.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about doing it better. I had accepted an invitation. *[Mr. Sudama on his feet]*

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** You will have your chance. I had gone to the Miss Universe pageant and I will say to you, Mr. Speaker, that I enjoyed the show. The reports coming out were that it was a well-organized show, fair enough, but what was promised, was never fulfilled. Where are all the benefits that have been promised? I recall the Minister getting up sometime ago and indicating some things about some contracts, but I do not think honestly that that had anything to do with the Miss Universe pageant.

Here it was that we have wasted—he said \$71 million, some say it is \$100 million; he laid papers in the House indicating the figure—\$71 million to host a

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. SINANAN]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

show, and we are yet to get any tangible benefits. All the NGOs that were promised money from this show are still asking where is the money. Mr. Minister, where is the money you promised them? None.

What about the rice scandal? Mr. Speaker, \$30 million on a boat that never arrived, carrying rice. Then, \$24 million-plus on a boat to solve the shipping problem between Port of Spain and Scarborough. The boat never arrived. This is how the Government is working, how they are doing it best. They are doing it better than before. They are boasting about how they are doing it better, and how are they doing it better? By wasting money.

Mr. Speaker, they have taken this country handed to them by the people or, I should say not by the people, but by the then Members for Tobago East and West. They are the ones who handed it to them, and now look at Tobago how they are suffering from that accident they have caused: that burden that has been inflicted on this country.

Mr. Speaker, look at the salary increases.

**Mr. Partap:** Which one?

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** Yours that is hidden in the estimates. The Government came to this House before and they presented the Salaries Review Commission's report. Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the Government should be man enough. If they accept the report, say they accept the report. They have the authority to implement it. Why do they not implement it? [*Desk thumping*] Why come and hide the figures in the estimates? I see that now that it has been exposed, the Prime Minister is distancing himself. They come here, according to my friend, stealing what they are entitled to. They are so desperate! [*Laughter*] They are stealing what they are entitled to. An act of desperation.

**6.10 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, let me read from the *Trinidad Guardian* of Thursday, August 31, 2000—Independence Day—under the caption, "Budget's little secret":

“‘Like a thief in the night’ might not be the appropriate analogy. But the way in which the recommendations of the Salaries Review Commission to increase the pay of Government Ministers and senior public officers was sneaked into Budget 2001 would suggest that Finance Minister Brian Kuei Tung believed he had something to hide by not levelling with Parliament and the nation on this subject.”



Sneaking; hiding. It goes on:

"And the SRC recommendations remained buried in obscurity until Tuesday when close examination of the 2000/2001 Estimates of Expenditure disclosed the pay raises had been neatly packaged among the parcels relating to spending allocations for the various ministries and departments.

Significantly, in his 72-minute speech, the Finance Minister made not the slightest reference to the fact that the SRC recommendations were once more on the national agenda."

He never alluded to that in his presentation.

"Political intrigue in this period of pre-election campaigning is to be expected. But by behaving in this way, the Government is making a nonsense of the Bill recently approved in Parliament to promote transparency in governmental operations.

Indeed, this development confirms the existence of the 'credibility gap' which this newspaper exposed in our immediate post-Budget editorial."

That is what this Government is suffering from.

**Mr. Assam:** That is mischievous journalism.

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** You have not gotten the increase because we have not agreed to it, but you put it in the estimates hoping that no one would see it and when the thing backfired on you, the Prime Minister is now distancing himself.

**Dr. Mohammed:** It was there in 1999 and 2000 as well.

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** Mr. Speaker, it is sneaky. That is what it was. [*Crosstalk*]

Let me turn now to some of the fiscal measures that the Minister presented to this House. It always amazes me at every budget presentation how Ministers of Finance give the impression that we are all little children and they are handing out goodies. You have behaved well for the year so we are handing out goodies.

**Mr. Manning:** We will give you a "sweetie".

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** Mr. Speaker, the citizens are taxpayers and are entitled to some form of benefit for the taxes they have paid and the contributions they have made. Let me get to his fiscal measures.

The Minister of the Environment spoke about the green tax. Mr. Speaker, let me say this, if the Minister of the Environment was doing his job properly, there

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. SINANAN]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

would be no need for a green tax. If the Minister of the Environment was enforcing the laws, there would be no need for any green tax. There are two state companies mentioned by the Member for San Fernando East—Caroni and Petrotrin. They are only two. There are many others in the public and private sector—companies that are polluting this country—and your answer to this is a green tax. It is a dereliction of duty that you have to come now and suggest and impose a green tax when all you had to do was enforce the environmental laws. You are not enforcing the laws, but you are imposing a tax and this is a government that boasts they have not imposed any new taxes on us. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Minister talks about health care. He wants to introduce a pilot system—national insurance system—and he is saying that every single citizen who is a member of that scheme would be entitled to go to a doctor and a hospital of his choice. Can you imagine that? It is here in his Budget Statement. On page 39, it says:

"We can make sure that every citizen of our country has national health insurance and the freedom to choose a doctor and a hospital."

Well, I would imagine if citizens of this country who are members of this scheme are entitled to choose a doctor and a hospital, then you would have certain doctors—the specialists—being swamped and certain hospitals would be overcrowded. How can that be? You cannot put in the scheme where everybody would be entitled:

"... to choose a doctor and a hospital."

—of their choice. Then, everybody might want to come to Port of Spain or everybody may go to San Fernando. [*Interruption*] That is a private scheme. You are talking about a national health insurance system. How can you say that you would have the choice to go to a doctor or a hospital of your choice. It does not make sense. What will happen to all the other hospitals and health centres that have been built all over the place?

This is why, to me, the General Hospital in Port of Spain and the one in San Fernando are always overcrowded and always under stress and pressure. What we need to do in the health system is to beef up and make more functional and more friendly to the people in the particular areas, the health centres. That is what we need to do. We need to get the health centres functioning properly and once we do that, it will relieve, to a great extent, the burden on the general hospitals.

The next thing the Minister spoke about was the approved mortgage facilities. He said:

"In order to facilitate the acquisition of housing accommodation by first-time homeowners, I propose to increase the ceiling on loans under the approved mortgage-lending programme from \$300,000 to \$350,000 with effect from January 1, 2001.

Accordingly, I propose that the Stamp Duty exemption be increased to the new level of \$350,000."

Now, Mr. Speaker, you being a lawyer in private practice and a conveyancer of note will know that right now, the stamp duty exemption on the purchase of a residential property—and I am not talking about residential land; I am talking about residential property, that means, one on which there is a residential building—the exemption there is \$300,000. So, if your building costs \$300,000 you pay no stamp duty. Between \$300,000—\$400,000 you pay 5 per cent. Between \$400,000—\$500,000 you pay 7½ per cent and over \$500,000 you pay 10 per cent in stamp duty. That is what it is.

The exemption on mortgages at the moment is \$270,000 whether it is an approved mortgage facility or not. So, is it that the Minister is only going to increase the stamp duty for mortgages to \$350,000 and not have a corresponding increase? I am suggesting to him that he needs to have a corresponding increase for the purchase of the property. So that if you are taking this \$350,000 on which you do not pay stamp duty, you could have a situation where you are paying 5 per cent on the excess over \$300,000 and no stamp duty on a mortgage of \$350,000. I am sure he would wish to correct that when we get further.

Mr. Speaker, on the support for art, culture and sports, the Minister is proposing:

"...a tax allowance of 150% of the expenditure incurred, up to a maximum of \$300,000..."

Again, it is good but it indicates a failure of the Government to support art, culture and sports.

Here it is the Minister is relying on the private sector to assist. There is nothing wrong with that. There is nothing wrong with the Government, through a tax benefit, asking the assistance of corporate Trinidad and Tobago to help support art and culture. I support this measure.

School to Work Apprenticeship Programme. Again, a very good measure.

Internet Access—good measure.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. SINANAN]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

Senior citizens. Again, as I said, Ministers of Finance come and they do like when they give you \$100, it is like they are giving you a lottery. Senior citizens have laboured and they are entitled to it. They are taxpayers and, as the opposite side would say, we did not give it. We did not give it, perhaps, because we could not afford to give it, but you can now afford to give it. You are boasting about the reserves so do not make it out that this \$100 a month is some great, great thing that you are giving to the senior citizens.

Again, when you look at the concession for penalty on interest. Why should I and others who pay their taxes according to a proper audit and timely, be made to suffer? Here it is that we are made to suffer, but we are put at a disadvantage. People who have not paid their taxes have been given an advantage, a benefit. No interest, no penalty. The way this Government has conducted its affairs, I am seriously concerned whether, knowing full well that they would not be here soon, they are putting this measure in place to help and favour some of their favourite ones. That is the only explanation I could come up with. Why is this Government doing this?

Another reason could possibly be that by April 2001, God forbid that this Government were ever to get back into power, they know full well that they are short on money and they are hoping that by giving this amnesty, people will pay their taxes and they will get money. But the people of Trinidad and Tobago are wiser than that; they are wiser than that.

Mr. Speaker, yes, some of the fiscal measures are good but I am saying, do not sell it as if you are doing some big favour. When we look at the business levy—

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and I thank Members of the House for supporting the Motion.

Business levy. The Minister of Finance, Planning and Development is reducing the business levy from 0.5 to 0.25 per cent and he is talking about revenue foregone of \$16 million. A sum of \$16 million, in the scheme of things with this Government, is peanuts. It is pocket change. They have said it before when it was introduced that it is a nuisance tax. This measure was introduced by

the last Minister of Finance and that side, when in Opposition, lambasted it, claiming it was a nuisance tax. They are now five years into government and they have retained it; they have reduced it by 0.25 per cent. If it was a nuisance tax five years ago, why have they retained it? You are talking about a savings revenue foregone of \$16 million, which, as I said, is pocket change to those on that side. I think corporate Trinidad and Tobago would be very happy if this tax is abolished.

Again, you want to encourage savings. Somebody said you have brought it down from 15 to 10 to five—tax on interest income. If you want to encourage savings in this country, why not remove it? Remove this 5 per cent tax.

**Mr. Sudama:** What did the PNM do?

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** You are claiming that we are better off today than five years ago. If we are so better off, you are talking about revenue foregone of \$48 million; between the rice boat that is somewhere in Brazil, or wherever it is and the boat that had to return to Sweden, that is more than \$48 million.

**6.25 p.m.**

You are talking about \$48 million and I am suggesting that even this could come down to zero. It can come down to zero simply by just saying to the people who will benefit from it: "If you want to benefit from no tax on your interest, then put it into some interest-bearing instrument where you cannot touch it for five years, or three years as the case may be". *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Assam:** When you get into office abolish all taxes.

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** We would certainly look at this one. I am saying that we want to encourage savings in the country. The big thing is that we are short on savings: people do not save in this country. If you want to encourage savings, encourage people to save. All you need to do is to say: "Okay put it on some instrument; whereby you cannot touch it for five years." For five years an institution would have this money to promote business, tourism—everything that the hon. Member for St. Joseph wants to see promoted. This is how it could be promoted. *[Interruption]* Yes, take it off completely.

Mr. Speaker. let me now address a couple points about the constituency of San Fernando West. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Sudama:** That is why you are not going back.

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** I am not going back because of choice. You had to beg to go back. You were in a state of distress. *[Desk thumping]* You were a very

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. SINANAN]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

distressed person up to last Friday. The hon. Prime Minister has relieved you from your distress.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please! Member for Oropouche, order please.

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, Members on that side ought to look at Standing Order 40, read it. Let me address a few points about my constituency. Let me start by saying that come the election day—whenever that is, we suspect it will be soon—the dislike that those Members on that side have for their colleagues will be no more. He will be passé. [*Desk thumping*] He will be out of Government. He has been circulating letters—I do not know if my hon. friend from Naparima has seen one—soliciting support from every businessman: Tom, Dick and Harry from San Fernando.

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

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** The Minister of Works and Transport. But the people of San Fernando West are a very strange people: they are very wise. They will look at the track record of the Minister and will see and take note and they will vote him out. He will lose. This is why I said that the hon. Member for Couva North is a very smart and mysterious fellow: when he wants to destroy you he puts you in a seat that you cannot win. [*Desk thumping*]

When I listened to my friend from St. Joseph about all those roads, Mr. Speaker, I must confess I was envious. I was envious when I listened to him about all those roads that were paved. For five years I have begged my friend: the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, the Minister of Local Government, to pave one road in Gulf View. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the new Minister of Works and Transport, Senator Carlos John. I wrote to him when he asked for roads—that was a priority road—and the road was paved. For five years I have asked for that road to be paved.

**Hon. Member:** And you got what you asked for.

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** One road in Gulf View. For five years I have asked the Minister of Works and Transport to pave roads in Palmiste, they are now paving them. They are now paving roads in Palmiste. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Partap:** “Ah” could see why "yuh" run.

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** But San Fernando West is not only Gulf View and Palmiste. There is an old San Fernando and there are extended boundaries to San Fernando West, which include places like Bel Air, Gulf View and Palmiste.

**Mr. D. Singh:** All "de" roads "dey" pave. *[Laughter]*

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** Mr. Speaker, do you know what is happening? In the residential areas like Gulf View, Palmiste and Bel Air, there are persons of a certain standard, class, of the society living there. There are the upper-middle, and top-class people living there, but where the masses live in San Fernando—*[Interruption]* I live in Sumadh Gardens and the roads there need paving too.

**Mr. D. Singh:** But you never asked for Sumadh Gardens.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, may I please appeal for order. The business of the House cannot be conducted by six Members on the Government benches shouting at the Member for San Fernando West, as he attempts to make a point, when the six that are shouting are yet to speak. Please continue.

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps, if I had as many daughters as there were roads in San Fernando West, my constituency would be perfectly paved, but I am not so lucky. *[Desk thumping]* I do not have as many daughters as there are roads in San Fernando West.

Mr. Speaker, I am appealing to the Government, that San Fernando West is not only Bel Air, Gulf View and Palmiste, there is another part of San Fernando West. The Minister of Works and Transport, who is now begging people for their support and their vote—for five years did nothing. Every month I have written to him about those roads and nothing was done.

He claims he is an engineer. I think in the *Hansard* records he stated that he is an engineer. On some UNC thing the other day, he said that he is an engineer. *[Interruption]* No, the hon. Minister of Works and Transport. If he is an engineer in charge of the Ministry of Works and Transport, then he should not have had a problem with that shifting wall.

Let me tell you I have learnt something about that wall which I did not know before—that famous "Berlin Wall" as we call it in San Fernando West in Green Acres, which the Minister of Housing and Settlements wants to acquire. It is a piece of land in Green Acres that he wants to acquire. Why do you not acquire the homes of those people that abut that wall? That is what he should be doing. That is what they are asking for.

This Government maybe a year or so ago—when they excavated the area on which that wall was erected—was not paying the contractor, Seereeram Brothers. For nine months that contractor was not paid and the whole thing was exposed to the elements. It rained and rained and became waterlogged and the whole

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. SINANAN]

*Friday, September 01, 2000*

foundation was compromised, because the contractor was not paid. The area was dug out and left exposed and became waterlogged because the contractor did not continue to work, because he was not paid for nine months. That is one of the reasons, if not the main reason, why the wall has shifted and will continue to shift.

The Member for St. Augustine is an architect. He wants to design a flyover. I saw it in the newspapers the other day. If that is it, it looks pretty. It looks good. I would have thought if you want to build a ramp, build one like what is in Baratania and all over the country. Why put this big wall and the embankment? That is a waste of time and money! You have piled the whole street. The whole street was piled with I-beams and now they are digging up all the earth on the other side—money again. They talk about the thing, that is wastage. Mr. Speaker, that is how they are doing it better.

I have appealed to the relevant Minister and to my friend and colleague from Caroni East. We have a couple of NHA apartments in the constituency of San Fernando West and when water comes, the pressure is only sufficient to service the first floor of these apartments. These buildings are four storeys. The second, third and fourth storeys do not get water at all. There are elderly people and retired pensioners who have to pay young boys to carry water up to them. That is what it is. And we talk about water for all. Yes, I am happy that areas that did not receive water are now receiving water. I am very happy and I congratulate the Government for that. But what about San Fernando and Port of Spain? Somebody mentioned today that Port of Spain is not getting water. I can tell you where I live, we get water twice a week.

**Hon. Member:** Sumadh Gardens?

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** Yes, Sumadh Gardens. We get water twice a week. I can tell you further that the truck-borne system brings water to me. It is working. Whoever is operating that truck-borne system in San Fernando West—*[Interruption]* I am getting water by the truck. I do not know who it is—*[Interruption]* No, I think it is WASA, but we are not getting water in San Fernando. I have spoken to the Minister about it. He knows it. I do not know what the problem is, but we are not getting water. Areas that, perhaps, had water before are not getting water now.

**6.35 p.m.**

Is it that it is “we time”? You had a time to get water, so now it is our time to get water? I do not know. Mr. Speaker, I am begging this Government. Please, in your last dying days in office, see if you can give the people some water.



Mr. Speaker, let me tell this Government that San Fernando West has had good representation over the past couple years. [*Desk thumping*] I can start with my friend from Naparima, prior to him there was Errol Mahabir; we always had good representation. One time in the 1986 period when the whole country voted 33/3 we were out of office. San Fernando West would always remain PNM. The Prime Minister knows it, that is why he has sent the Minister of Works and Transport to help and appease those on that side, so that he would get rid of Sadiq and they would all be happy; Barataria, Pointe-a-Pierre, all of them. [*Laughter*]

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, let me say that this Government has wasted the inheritance it was given; wasted the sacrifices of the people made for the last 15 years. From the fall of the oil revenue in this country, people sacrificed. You heard about public servants not getting a wage increase since 1983. You would recall, Mr. Speaker, when the National Alliance For Reconstruction government was in office, public servants sacrificed 10 per cent of their salary, and now this Government is boasting about all this money that they have, they are doing it good and better, but for who?

Mr. Speaker, the population, the country is not benefiting from this. Who is benefiting? How is it that you can favour just a few? You must govern for all, not govern for some.

**Hon. Member:** Tell yourself that!

**Mr. B. Sinanan:** Their time will come soon. This Government in 1995 when it carried on its campaign its slogan was, "If you do the crime, you will do the time". I am saying to you and indicting you; you have done the crime and you will do the time in Opposition. [*Desk thumping*]

Thank you.

#### WELCOME—VISITING MP

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I wish to recognize in the House this evening, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of India and the Member of the Lok Sabha in India, Mr. Ajit Kumar Panja. [*Desk thumping*] On your behalf, I wish to welcome him to the House of Representatives of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Ganga Singh):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Monday September 4, 2000, at 10.30 a.m.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 6.38 p.m.*